

Course Syllabus

AAST2450/REL2450 Traditional African Religions

CH, G (USP 2014)

Fall 2014



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Office Hours: Tuesday, 2-4 p.m., (by phone, Skype, iChat, appointment if you're near Cody)

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View the University of Wyoming's vision for student and teacher working relationships at:

<http://www.uwyo.edu/pols/courses/students-teachers.pdf>

Pre-requisites: None

Course Description

The traditional religions of Africa are dynamic and have developed from pre-historical time through the impacts of “the scramble for Africa” (late 1800s) into our contemporary world. Our textbook describes African Traditional Religions (ATRs) with examples drawn from across Africa, giving us categories of analysis appropriate to the role that religion plays as a cultural force in Africa. After this overview of ATRs, we focus our studies on the Igbo (ee-bo) of Nigeria using the novel *The Arrow of God* by Chinua Achebe to learn about the utter collision of cosmologies that happened in the early days of British colonialism (approx. 1880). With that historical background we move into a contemporary ethnography, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought*, to study current issues in Igbo religious life. Throughout the class we will focus on methodological questions (How do we discern what is “religious” in African culture?) as well as learning data (overarching cosmologies and daily practices) regarding specific African cultural traditions. Through this study students will gain a greater appreciation for cultural context and a broader perspective on global issues regarding colonial and postcolonial encounters between diverse religious identities.

Disability statement

The University of Wyoming is committed to providing all students the equal opportunity for academic success by providing courses that are accessible and fair to all students. If you have a physical, sensory, cognitive or psychological disability that may require accommodations in order to fully participate in this class please notify me as soon as possible. You must also contact University Disability Support Services, by e-mail at udss@uwyo.edu or by phone at 307-766-6189, or by TTY at 307-766-3073. You may also call the Outreach School toll-free at 800-448-7801 and ask to be transferred to University Disability Support Services. Through your consultation with UDSS staff, I will be advised of any necessary accommodations.

Course Objectives

- To develop a historical appreciation of African Traditional Religions (from pre-colonial to post-colonial time, approximately 1000 to 2000 C.E.). Mastery of this history will be demonstrated in quizzes and in your final take-home essay exam.
- To develop in-depth knowledge about Igbo traditions. Mastery of this material will be demonstrated in quizzes, your participation in the discussion threads, and in your final.
- To become aware of the impact of colonization on ATRs. Mastery of this material will be demonstrated in quizzes, your participation on the discussion thread, and the final.

- To apply our methodological tools to current events in Africa with the special “current events” discussions.
- To understand and apply gender theory to our study of ATRs in a contemporary context. Mastery of this approach will be demonstrated in your participation on the discussion thread and final.

Textbooks

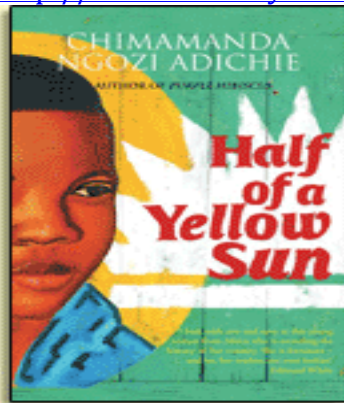
- Course materials can be purchased from the University Book store (<http://www.uwyobookstore.com>), Phone (307) 766 3264, (800) 370 2676

- Required Reading:

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1. <i>African Religions and Philosophy</i>, 2nd edition. John S. Mbiti (Heinemann, 1999). • 2. <i>The Arrow of God</i>, Chinua Achebe (Anchor Books, 1989). |
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- All other readings are available online.

For those of you who delight in novels, let me suggest:

- 4. *Nervous Conditions* by Tsitsi Dangarembga (The Women's Press, 1998).
- 5. *The Collector of Treasures* by Bessie Head (Heinemann, 1992).
- 6. *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Anchor 2007). See <http://www.halfofayellowsun.com/>



- **Let the class know on the discussion threads if you’ve found an African novel or film or recording artist that you think helps to**

Cultural Context-Humanities (CH) USP 2014

This course fulfills the Cultural Context-Humanities (CH) requirement of the 2003 University Studies Program. Cultural Context-Humanities (CH) courses address ideas we have about our nature, our place in the world, and the ethical dimensions of our actions. Inherent in the humanities is a values driven examination of human life. Through the study of written, oral, performative, and visual texts, CH courses help us to understand and think clearly about human beliefs and imaginative ideas.

Global Awareness (G)

This course fulfills the Global Awareness (G) requirement of the 2003 University Studies Program. Global Awareness (G) courses strive to broaden our perspectives through the exploration of viewpoints from other societies, cultures, religions, or geopolitical regions. With an eye on both historical and contemporary experience, G courses are designed to challenge our assumptions about the ways of the world and to help us understand and embrace global cultural diversity.

I consider this syllabus to be our contract. The terms of the contract are designed to build a challenging and supportive on-line learning environment.

I expect:

Consistent participation throughout the week. While some online courses allow you to proceed at your own pace, this course is designed to mimic the experience of an on-campus class. Where you would be expected to participate in class for three hours per week, you should expect to work on-line 3 times per week demonstrating your knowledge of the assignments through your participation in the discussion threads. You might check in early in the week to use the discussion questions to focus your reading and note taking, and then you will be able to contribute very effectively to the discussion. Do not wait until the last day of each week to participate because: 1) we lose the potential energy of the course if you do not reflect on the material throughout the week; and 2) your grade will suffer. As you can see in the discussion of grading below, your participation grade depends upon your three visits to the discussion thread. Expect to be intrigued and surprised by the discussions. They could be one of the highlights of your University experience.

You can expect:

I will be checking in (at least) every other day to assess the discussions, participate as I deem helpful, and answer questions and queries. You can also expect your colleagues to help produce a lively and dynamic learning environment. I hope to learn from you throughout the semester, and as I keep watch of the class I look forward with anticipation to see what I might be learning each day.

I expect:

All students will practice Netiquette--that is, etiquette for the on-line environment. Posts need to be appropriate for the university environment, which means they need to be well written (grammatically correct, correct punctuation, and constructive engagement). Discussion threads are not chat rooms. They cannot be written like txtmsgs 4 U, LOL.

If not practiced carefully, e-mail and other on-line forms of communication can lend themselves to a style that is called "flaming." As the name flaming implies, people in online environments can get angry and their words start flying fast and furious. Usually, flaming is initiated by miscommunication. Words are not transparent—they can express multiple meanings to different readers. When flaming occurs, people write *ad-hominem* attacks (attacking the person). Be cool and be professional. If you disagree with someone, ask them for clarification first. For example, "When you wrote that the head priest Ezulu was manipulating the people, did you mean that he was a "bad" guy? I see this differently and wanted to check out your meaning before I argued with you." [A little humor goes a long way in online communication as well.]

For further expansion of Netiquette see:

<http://www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html>

Check your spelling and check your tone before submitting posts. I will intervene as quickly as possible if I see flaming or other inappropriate exchanges. If you write without proper grammar or punctuation, expect me to make note of it in the discussion thread, with humor if I can, in order that I can quickly maintain the quality of communication. I will not be attacking you personally. I will be noting the need for greater care in posting so that everyone is clear about what will and will not pass.

[Enter Voice of Doom]: If I think a post is grossly inappropriate I will send it to the chair of the Religious Studies department and also to the Outreach administrators and ask them to deal with discipline, which could lead to your dismissal from the course.

You can expect:

I will respond to questions in a supportive manner and will promote a challenging but safe environment in which people will not experience discrimination. Disagreement is a fundamental element of university work and I encourage you to develop arguments that you can support with evidence from our readings, including disagreeing with me and other students. Such engagement will be conducted with respect and promote a sense of inquiry and debate that will make the class a great learning experience.

I expect:

All students to contact me if you encounter difficulties or can foresee future difficulties. Let me know why you cannot participate. If I have advance warning I can be very flexible. If not, it makes it difficult for me to maintain a fair practice with respect to other students. We all lead very busy lives and often life hands people challenges that they must negotiate during the semester. It is your job to let me know as quickly as possible if you need extra flexibility.

You can expect:

I will be discreet and as flexible as I can while maintaining a fair environment for all students.

I expect: Students to check their UW mail addresses every week for class announcements.

_____ (Are you ready to sign this contract?)

If you don't agree to this contract, drop the course. If we were in a room together, I would review this part of the syllabus in a very funny, very serious way. One year I received the following explanation for why a student gave me a very low evaluation: "because the professor expected me to attend class more than once during the week." My jaw dropped as I wondered: "Which part of the expectations did you think were not going to apply to you?!" I'm as clear as I can be up front so that you can be clear about your responsibilities in the course.

Grading Policies

The course will run with the plus/minus

Grade	GPA Points	Catalog Definition	Percentages
A	4.00	Exceptional	93-100
A-	3.67		90-92
B+	3.33		88-89
B	3.00	Very Good	83-87
B-	2.67		80-82
C+	2.33		78-79
C	2.0	Fair	73-77
C-	1.67		70-72
D+	1.33		68-69
D	1.00	Poor	60-67
F	0	Failure	59 and below

We will use a grading scale of 1000 points total. The total points are divided into four forms of assessment: participation on the **discussion threads** (300 points, 25 points per week for twelve weeks of the semester), **quizzes** (400 points, 100 points for each of four quizzes), **current events posts** (100 points, 10 points for 10 posts) and the **final take-home essay exam** (150 points for your essays and 50 points for your review of another student's essays).

Quizzes	400 points (4 x 100 points each)
Discussion Thread/Participation	300 points (25 x 12 weeks)
Current Events	100 points (10 x 10 weeks)
Final Take-Home Essay Exam	200 points (150 + 50)

Grading the Quizzes.

The four quizzes will be multiple choice questions that test your knowledge and recall. They will appear for you during the week they are assigned and you will have a 48 hour period between the Sunday and Monday of the end of the week in which you can enter the quiz, and a very tightly-limited time frame in which to take the quiz once it is started. This short time frame is meant to reward those students who prepare thoroughly and have committed the material to memory. Once you enter the quiz, you have to complete it within the prescribed time. There will be advice on the quiz links describing the process for taking an on-line quiz. You need to be prepared ahead of time, just as you would if you walked into class to take a quiz.

Grading the Discussion Threads:

The discussion threads are the most interactive part of the course. Think of the discussion thread as our classroom experience. With steady and informed participation, I have found that discussion threads are often *far more interesting* than many in-class discussions. This is because everyone in the class will post to the discussion, often drawing explicit quotes from the readings to support their claims. The online setting makes for a very democratic classroom.

Under each weekly unit you will find a link to the discussion. Each discussion has a two topics to raise important issues from the readings. You can raise questions and develop your thoughts as you go, but you should still consider yourself to be "handing in" your work to the professor because indeed you are! Hence, you should check each post to make sure it is coherent, informed, grammatically correct, and respectful in its tone.

Unlike a chat room, the discussion threads should be focused, related to the readings, and written with care. Students are expected to participate fully each week. At the beginning of the week, check out the discussion topics. They will help you to focus your note taking. We might expect the first day or two of the week to be "quiet", but after that, get in there and start working out your ideas.

Remember, weeks start on Tuesday and end on the following Monday. I do this because most online students hold jobs of some sort and need weekends to complete their work. Your comments will be graded on a scale from 0 to 25. Discussions run from week 1-12, The discussion requirement for those twelve

weeks will be challenging, but the rewards in terms of retaining the material and developing your ideas is well worth it. Students who love my classes, in general, are students who work hard in the discussion threads. I'll be there and I'll work hard with you.

If you miss two weeks of discussion without contacting me, I may initiate an administrative withdrawal. **If you miss three weeks of discussion, you will fail the class.** That is how important consistent participation is for the success of this class.

23-25 Equivalent to an A. Reserved for particularly insightful comments, or the pursuit of extra research that contributes to our discussion, once the requirements for a B have been met.

20-22 Equivalent to a B. This will be awarded for having posted significant comments in a week's discussions on three visits to the discussion (early, middle, and later in the week). That is, you need to make your presence known by posting three times during the week similar to attending class three times a week. Correct punctuation and grammar are required. Each post needs to be relevant to the question and needs to refer to the expert opinion you have read in the assignments with page number or other citation when appropriate. Additional posts are welcome, especially if they raise areas of interest to you, promote lively discussion, or contribute additional web research you may have pursued.

18-19 Equivalent to a C. Given for those whose posts meet the criteria for a B listed above, but who do not establish a consistent presence throughout the week. That is, if you posted well, but only appeared on the discussions twice later in the week, then your discussion is considered to merit an average participation grade of C.

16-17 – Equivalent to a D. You wrote something relevant at some point during the week.

0 – 15 [Voice of Doom] Equivalent to an F. For those who make no relevant comments demonstrating knowledge of the reading assignments or if participation does not show significant effort to write grammatically correct sentences.

I will be evaluating the posts at the end of each week to give you a grade for your participation. This weekly feedback should help you to learn my grading style quickly.

TIP: Grade your peers' posts as you read them. This will develop your "editor's eye"—the skill to judge writing for its clarity and relevance.

Grading the Current Events:

Find a current event that relates to our study of ATRs. This element will be available for all 15 weeks of the course so that students may select whichever 10 weeks they wish to make a current events post. For one of these current event posts, you will use the video tool within the course shell to upload your three minute discussion of your current event in which you will relate the event to our reading selection. Classmates will reply to your video upload providing constructive feedback as follows: How well did the video analysis of a current event convey a natural, confident, and conversational manner, and display nonverbal communication that is consistent with and supportive of the oral message.

Each of the current event posts is worth up to 10 points as follows:

9-10 Excellent analysis of the current event, integrating two or more quotations from our readings, with a clear thesis-driven argument, 250 words or more. Student has either selected a reliable and appropriate current event from a respected news source, academic blog, or peer-reviewed article, or the student clearly identifies the best way to understand the source, such as “This video of a marriage ceremony in a Protestant Evangelical church in Nigeria nevertheless illustrates three elements of a traditional Igbo marriage ceremony as described by Agbasiere .(list three elements with page numbers) . . While the priest in the video condemns Igbo traditions, it is clear that the community is nevertheless integrating references to the ancestors, such as pouring the first drink of wine on the ground. The sacrifice of the chicken at the crossroads near the bride's family's compound, just as we saw in Chapter 11 of *The Arrow of God* also indicates the enduring presence of traditional ritual.”

8 Good analysis of the current event, integrating one or more quotations from our readings, describing how the event relates to the class, 200 words or more. Student has either selected a reliable and appropriate current event from a respected news source, academic blog, or peer-reviewed article, or the student clearly identifies the best way to understand the source,

7 A fair discussion of the current event with general reference to our readings as it relates to our course concerns, 150 words or more. Student has selected a biased or questionable item, and does not identify its purpose and audience.

6 Underdeveloped discussion of the current with vague or inaccurate reference to our readings, 125 words or more. Student has selected a biased or questionable item, and does not identify its purpose and audience.

0-5 Inadequate discussion of the current event with little to no reference to our readings and little to no discussion of the source.

Grading the Final Take-Home Essay

Students will have Week 13-14 to complete their final, comprehensive take-home essay exam worth 150 pts. Excellent essays will clearly and fully answer the questions using proper citation of research materials from the class. During week 15, each of you will be given (electronically) another student's un-graded exam which you will review according to a three-part grading rubric that will be clearly described during the semester. Your review is worth 50 points.

Academic Honesty Statement

The following are forms of academic dishonesty. These practices will not be tolerated.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism consists of using another author's words without proper identification and documentation of that author. Plagiarism takes the form of direct quotation without the use of quotation marks and/or documentation, or paraphrasing without proper identification and documentation. The fabrication of sources, or the act, deliberately or unconsciously, of passing another author's work off as your own are also considered to be plagiarism.

Falsification: Falsification consists of deliberately changing results, statistics, or any other kind of factual information to make it suit your needs. It also consists of deliberately changing a sources' intent by misquoting or taking out of context.

Multiple submissions: If you wish to turn in the same work or use the same research, in whole or in part, for more than one course, you must obtain permission to do so from all professors involved. Failure to obtain this permission constitutes academic dishonesty. This course is a chance for you to explore your own creativity. Do so.

Academic dishonesty is an action attempted or performed that misrepresents one's involvement in an academic endeavor in any way, or assists another student in misrepresenting his or her involvement in an academic endeavor; e.g., cheating, fabrication of information, plagiarism etc. A student who plagiarizes at minimum will receive an "F" in the course and may go before a University board for a hearing on the matter. At maximum the above can occur and you can be dismissed from the University. Please see UW Reg 802.

The University of Wyoming follows University Regulation 802 found at <http://uwadmnweb.uwyo.edu/legal/uniregs/ur802.htm>

This regulation guides my response to plagiarism.



Schedule

Week 1. Sept.3-8.

- Read “African Religion” David Chidester, from Religions of South Africa, ed. David Chidester (New York, London: Routledge, 1992) found in Module 1 of the online classroom.

This is a 28 page document. You want to take notes carefully on the first two paragraphs and then beginning with the bottom of page 3, move forward thinking about the spheres of power on the cultural landscape. . Chidester is a very kind, very smart man. I wish you could meet him so that you would be that much more inspired to read the chapter carefully. The chapter might throw you around a little bit at first. He has some new ways of putting things, and those of you who enjoy a challenge will likely enjoy getting your head around his way of describing religion.

- Read “Keller’s Survival Guide” in Module 1. This shortish lecture will give you a sense of how Keller (that’s me) thinks about religion. You will find that I refer back to the ideas of “work,” “power,” and “body” throughout the semester. The sooner you read this mini-lecture the sooner you will understand the mini-lectures that appear weekly throughout the course.
- Read “Week 1 Keller and Chidester Lecture,” found in Module 1.
- Begin Discussion on the Discussion thread.
- Practice quiz, available Sunday and Monday covering the syllabus, plagiarism, and the Keller and Chidester readings. In order to move on to week 2, you must receive a score of 100% on the quiz. You may take it as many times as you need.

Week 2. Tuesday Sep. 9 – Monday Sept. 15

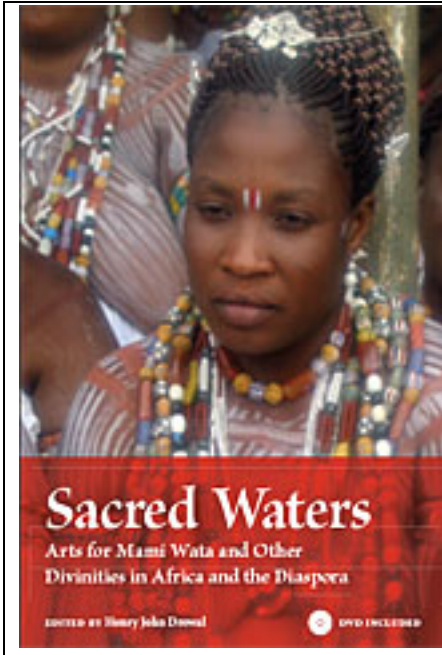
- We begin with our major text, John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*
- Mbiti, Chapters 1-4, pp. 1-38.
- Graded participation on the discussion list.
- Current event idea: Find a BBC article about Traditional Religions

Week 3. Tuesday Sept. 1-Monday, Sept.22.

- Mbiti, Chapters 5-8, pages 39-89
- Graded participation on the discussion list.
- Current event idea: Find a contemporary African activist who draws on traditional philosophy.

Week 4. Tuesday, Sept. 23-Monday, Sept.29

- Mbiti, Chapters 9-12, pp. 90-129.
- Graded participation on the discussion list.
- Have you begun posting your Current Event posts yet?
- **Quiz #1 on Chidester, Keller, and Mbiti chapters 1-12 available Sept. 28-29.**
- **Early Alert** In late September, you can view a progress report in WYOWEB for your classes. When you click on the Students tab in WYOWEB, you will see Quick Links on the left side bar, go to EARLY ALERT grades. You will see either a P for pass, or a D or F grade for each of your courses. If you have withdrawn from the class you will see a W. Be sure to talk to your instructor if you have a D or F grade. Remember, this is a progress report—not a final grade! This is an ideal time to visit with your instructor and/or your advisor to talk about your options and avenues for support in the class (call 766-2398 for the Center for Advising & Career Services).



Week 5. Tuesday Sept. 30-Monday, Oct. 6

- Mbiti, Chapters 13-15 and a half, pp. 130-173.
- Participate on Discussion list.

You are now 5 weeks into a 15 week semester. How many Current Events posts have you made?



Week 6. Tuesday, Oct. 7 – Monday, Oct. 13

- Mbiti, Chapter 15 and a half-18, pp. 174-216.
- Graded participation on the discussion list.
- Current event idea: Find out about a traditional cloth, pottery, ironware, or other manufacturing item that is still being produced.

Week 7. Tues, Oct. 14- Mon. Oct. 20

- Mbiti, Chapters 19- Conclusion, pp. 223-finish.
- Graded participation on the discussion list.

Quiz#2: Mbiti and African Traditional Religions, Chapters 13-Conclusion, Oct. 19-20

Data: Key borders, Spirits, Families, Lifecycle Rituals, Healing

Week 8. Tuesday, Oct. 21-Monday, Oct. 27 Introduction to Nigeria and Igbo Traditional Religion

- Read “Introduction to African Traditional Religion in Nigeria” by Mary Keller (Module 8)
- Read *The Arrow of God*, Chinua Achebe, chapters 1-5
- Study and learn the vocabulary from the vocabulary link on the web page.
- Graded participation on the discussion list. Suggestion: use 20 vocabulary words from our reading to familiarize yourself more thoroughly with the Igbo words.

Week 9. Oct. 28- Nov. 3 Igbo Traditional Religion in Literature.

- Read *The Arrow of God*, chapters 6-14.
- Graded participation on the discussion list.—Ahhh! Great literature and great colleagues to discuss it with! Does life get any richer than this?
- Current event idea: post your video with a presentation on Chinua Achebe, and read a selection from the text that illustrates his tragic/comic brilliance.

Week 10 Nov. 4-10

- Read *The Arrow of God*, chapters 15-19.
- **Quiz #3 *The Arrow of God* Nov. 9-10-**
- Data: Significant vocabulary, names, analysis of the narrative.

Week 11. Nov. 11-17 Gender in Igbo Traditions.

- Read Chapter 4 and 5, “Igbo Women: socio-political and religious status,” and “Igbo Cosmology” in *Women in Igbo Life and Thought* by Joseph Therese Agbasiere. These are pdf files found in Module 11.
- Graded participation on the discussion list.
- Current Event idea: Define gender and bring in a contemporary news story on Gender in Africa, relating it to Agbasiere’s discussion.

Week 12. Nov. 18-24

- Read Chapters 6, “The Igbo Idea of a Person.” This is a pdf file found in Module 12
- Graded participation on the discussion list.
- Current event idea: Find an Igbo news story and discuss it in terms of the Igbo Idea of a person.
- **Quiz # 4 on Agbasiere. Available Nov. 23-24.**

Week 13 Nov. 25-Dec. 1 Prep Week for Final Take Home Comprehensive Essay Exam. Dr. Keller is at national conference. Thanksgiving Break. Take Home Exam will be available for those who want to begin working on it.

Week 14 Dec. 2-8 Final Take Home Comprehensive Essay Exam final take home for those who requested extensions.

Week 15. Dec. 9-15, but why not hand in your review on Dec. 6? That’d be a great plan!

Review a peer exam following the instructions in Module 15.

