

**Florida International University**  
**Course Syllabus**  
**RELIGIOUS STUDIES RLG 5384:**  
**Rasta, Vodou, Santeria**  
**Spring Semester 2015**  
**THURS., 5:00 PM-7:40**  
**Graham Center Room 114**

Instructor: Dr Albert Kafui Wuaku  
Office: Room DM 309  
Office Hours: Monday,  
(305) 348-0112  
email: wuakua @fiu.edu

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course involves a critical historical, socio-anthropological and phenomenological study of the beliefs, rituals, and significance of three Caribbean religions. These are Vodou, Santeria, the Rastafari movement, and their extensions in the United States and other parts of the globe. We will explore the historical foundations and the salient cosmologies and ritual forms of these religions and examine critically their roles in the shaping of the histories and cultures of their Caribbean communities and the extensions in the United States and other parts of the globe. The mix of political, religious, social and historical forces in shaping Caribbean societies calls for a multi-disciplinary approach in this course. Throughout the seminar, we will draw on a number of modern and post-modern socio-anthropological-political-historical-religious analytical frameworks for ideas as we seek an intellectual understanding of the relationship between religion and society in the Afro-Caribbean and migrant Afro- Caribbean communities.

**Pre-requisites: None**

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Regular attendance at seminar

**Three** seminar presentations based on the readings. The format will be discussed in class.

Final research paper on a topic to be decided after consulting with the professor. This must be related to the course content [issues pertaining to Rasta, Vodou, and Santeria, or African centered religions of the Caribbean generally. I rate an essay as being of high quality if it shows a potential for acceptance by a peer-reviewed academic journal.

2-3 page Weekly reactions to readings [to be posted on black board]

One 2-3 page review of a book on either Vodou, Santeria, or the Rastafari tradition, to be decided after consulting with the professor

**Evaluation:**

Research/Term Paper: 40%  
Weekly reactions to readings-10%

Seminar Presentations based on Assigned Readings: 30%  
Attendance: 10%

Book Review: 10%

**REQUIRED TEXT BOOKS**

Desmangles, L.G. *The Faces of the Gods: Vodou and Roman Catholicism in Haiti*. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992.

McCarthy Karen. *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University Of California Press, 2001.

Brandon G. *Santeria: From Africa to the New World: The Dead Sell Memories*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1997.

Barnett Michael [Ed] *Rastafari in the New Millennium*. Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, New York, 2012.

**List of some other relevant Books in the Area. Some Extra readings will be taken from these sources. You do not need to purchase these books.**

Dale Bisnauth. *History of Religions in the Caribbean*. Kingston: Kingston Publishers Limited, 1989.

Rey Terry. *Our Lady of Class Struggle: The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Haiti*. Trenton, NJ: Africa Word Press, 1999.

McAlister E. *Rara! Vodou Power and Performance in Haiti and its Diaspora*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

Hebblethwaite. *Vodou Songs in Haitian Creole and English*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012.

Bellegard-Smith, P. and Michel C. *Haitian Vodou*. Bloomington/Indianapolis, 2006.

Richman Karen E. *Migration and Vodou*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2006.

- Metreux Alfred. *Voodoo in Haiti*. New York: Schocken Books, 1972.
- Richman Karen E. *Migration and Vodou*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2006.
- Cros Sandoval Mercedes. *Worldview, the Orichas, and Santeria: Africa to Cuba and Beyond*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2006.
- Ayorinde Christine. *Afro-Cuban Religiosity, Revolution and National Identity*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004.
- Nicholas De Mattos Frisvold. *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones*. Scarlet Imprint, 2010.
- Barrett, Leonard E. *The Rastafarians*. Boston: Beacon Press, Boston
- Chevannes, Barry. *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1994
- Murphy, J.M. *Santeria: An African Religion in America*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1988.
- De La Torre Miguel. *Santeria: The Beliefs and Rituals of a Growing Religion in America* Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans publishing Company, 2004
- Bellegarde-Smith. *Fragments of Bone: Neo-African Religions in a New World*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005.
- Maya Deren. *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*. New York: McPherson and Company, 1953
- Bellegard-Smith, P. and Michel C. *Haitian Vodou*. Bloomington/Indianapolis, 2006.
- Richman Karen E. *Migration and Vodou*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2006.
- Olmos, M.F. and Pavarisini – Gebert, L. *Sacred Possessions: Vodou, Santeria, Obeah, and the Caribbean*, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press 2000.
- Falola T Genova (eds) *Orisa: Yoruba Gods and Spiritual Identity in Africa and the Diaspora*. Trenton NJ African World Press, Inc. 2005
- Barnet Miguel. *Afro-Cuban Religions*. New Jersey: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2006.
- Badejo, Deidre. *Osun Seegesi: The Elegant Deity of Wealth, Power and Femininity*. Trenton: African World Press, 1996
- Asare Opoku Kofi. *West African Traditional Religion*. Singapore: FEP International Private Limited, 1978

Osun across the Waters: A Yoruba Goddess in Africa and the Americas. Murphy JM & Sanford MM. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001.

Rey Terry *Bourdieu on Religion: Imposing Faith and Legitimacy*. London, UK and Oakville, CT: Equinox Publishing, Ltd., 2007.

### **Some Relevant Articles and Book Chapters**

Falola, T. and Genova, A (Eds). "Introduction." *Orisa: Yoruba Gods and Spiritual Identity in Africa and the Diaspora*. Trenton NJ African World Press, Inc. 2005

Olmos, M.F. and Pavarisini – Gebert (Eds) "Introduction : Religious Syncretism and Caribbean Culture. In *Sacred Possessions: Vodou, Santeria, Obeah, and the Caribbean*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press (2000), pp.167-186..

Erwan Dianteill. "Pierre Bourdieu and the Sociology of Religion: A Central and Peripheral Concern." In *Theory and Society*, Vol. 32, No. 5/6, Special Issue on the Sociology of Symbolic Power: A Special Issue in Memory of Pierre Bourdieu (Dec., 2003), pp. 529-549.

Robin Law. "Dahomey and the Slave Trade: Reflections on the Historiography of the Rise of Dahomey." In *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 27, No. 2, Special Issue in Honour of J.D.Fage. (1986), pp. 237-267.

Andrew Apter: "Herskorvit's Heritage: Rethinking Syncretism in the African Diaspora. In *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* Volume 1, Number 3, Winter 1991, pp.235-260.

Heike Drotbohm. " Haunted by Spirits: Balancing Religious Commitment and Moral Obligations on Haitian Transnational Social Fields." In Huwelmeir and Krause [Eds] *Traveling Spirits: Migrants, Markets and Mobilities*. New York: Routledge (2010), pp.36-51.

Gerdes Fleurant. " The Music of Haitian Vodou." In Olupona Jacob(Ed) *African Spirituality: Forms Meanings and Expressions*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000, pp.416-449.

The Fon of Dahomey. In Dary Ford (Ed) *African Worlds: Studies in the Cosmological ideas and Social Values of African Peoples*. Oxford: James Currey Publishers, 1999, pp210-234.

Robert Nodal and Miguel Ramos. " Let the Power Flow: Ebo as a Healing Mechanism in Lukumi Orishna Worship." In Olmos, M.F. and Pavarisini – Gebert (Eds) *Sacred*

*Possessions: Vodou, Santeria, Obeah, and the Caribbean.* New Jersey: Rutgers University Press 2000, pp167-187.

Brandon George. "Ochun in the Bronx". *Osun Across the Waters: A Yoruba Goddess in Africa and the Americas.*" In Murphy J.M & Sanford M.M (Eds). Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, (2001) pp 155-164..

**Attendance Policy:** Attendance and participation are important to success in this course, and attendance will be taken at each meeting.

Plagiarism Policy: The following is the definition of plagiarism in the University's CODE OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Plagiarism: The deliberate use and appropriation of another's work without any indication of the source and the representation of such work as the student's own. Any student, who fails to give credit for ideas, expressions or materials taken from another source, including internet sources, is guilty of plagiarism. Any student helping another to plagiarize may be found guilty of academic misconduct.

Topics/ Readings/ Dates

**Week 1:**

Class introduction and discussion of some Relevant concepts/approaches

Andrew Apter: Herskorvits Heritage Rethinking Syncretism in the African Diaspora in *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* Volume 1, Number 3, Winter 1991, pp.235-260.

Religious Syncretism and Caribbean Culture. Introduction of *Sacred Possessions: Vodou, Santeria, Obeah, and the Caribbean*, Eds Olmos, M.F. and Pavarisini – Gebert, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press 2000.

Pierre Bourdieu and the Sociology of Religion: A Central and Peripheral Concern  
By Erwan Dianteill *Theory and Society*, Vol. 32, No. 5/6, Special Issue on the Sociology of Symbolic Power: A Special Issue in Memory of Pierre Bourdieu. (Dec., 2003), pp. 529-549.

*Rey Terry Bourdieu on Religion: Imposing Faith and Legitimacy.* London, UK and Oakville, CT: Equinox Publishing, Ltd., 2007

## **Week 2:**

Foundations of Caribbean Religious Cultures- [religion and life of communities in The Caribbean before Columbus, and the Indigenous African Religions and communities.  
Movies- “Hunters of the Caribbean Sea” and the Slave Kingdoms

### **Readings**

Robin Law Dahomey and the Slave Trade: Reflections on the Historiography of the Rise of Dahomey. In *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 27, No. 2, Special Issue in Honour of J.D.Fage. (1986), pp. 237-267.

Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4 of A history of Religions in the Caribbean, by Bisnauth D

Badejo, Deidre. *Osun Seegesi: The Elegant Deity of Wealth, Power and Femininity*.

Trenton: African World Press, 1996

Asare Opoku Kofi. *West African Traditional Religion*. Singapore: FEP International Private Limited, 1978

“The Fon of Dahomey” by Mercier in *African Worlds* by Daryl Fordes

Chapter 1 of The Faces of the Gods: Vodou and Roman Catholicism in Haiti. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992.

## **Week 3:** The Term “Vodou” and its meanings.

Reading: Metreux Alfred. *Voodoo in Haiti*. Introduction New York: Schocken Books, 1972.

**Week 4:** Vodou: Cosmology and Ritual Structure [Reading: Desmangles, chapter 3, 4 and

: Metreux Alfred. *Voodoo in Haiti*. Chapter 4

*Guest Lecture on the nature of Vodou rituals by Mambo Ingrid Lela?????*

**Week 5:** Music and Dance in Haitian Vodou-

Reading: “The Music of Haitian Vodou” by Gerdes Fleurant

### **BOOK REVIEWS DUE**

Hebblethwaite. *Vodou Songs in Haitian Creole and English*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012

Class visit to ounto of Halouba Hounfo in Little Haiti

**Week 6:** - Secondary Migrations and Vodou in the Diaspora

McCarthy Karen. *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University Of California Press, 2001.

Richman Karen E. *Migration and Vodou*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2006

McAlister E. *Rara! Vodou Power and Performance in Haiti and its Diaspora*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002

Heike Drotbohm. Haunted by Spirits: Balancing Religious Commitment and Moral Obligations on Haitian Transnational Social Fields. in Huwelmeir and Krause[ed] *Traveling Spirits: Migrants, Markets and Mobilities*. New York: Routledge

**Week 7:** Santeria – Expressions of Afro-Cuban religiosity [Santeria’s strands] and their African linkages

[Readings, Excerpts from Badejo’s *Osun Seegesi: The Elegant Deity of Wealth, Power and Femininity*,

Nicholas De Mattos Frisvold. *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones*. Scarlet Imprint, 2010.

Chapter 1 of Ayorinde Christine’s *Afro-Cuban Religiosity, Revolution and National Identity*.

**Week 8: feb 23,** Santeria: it’s History in Cuba, Cosmology, and rituals

[Reading: Brandon 79-185.

Read part 1 of Sandoval’s *Worldview, the Orichas, and Santeria: Africa to Cuba and Beyond*. Gainesville:].

**Week 9: March 1.** The concept of Health, healing and Divination in Santeria [Reading: “Let the power flow: Ebo as a Healing Mechanism in Lukumi Orishna Worship” by Robert Nodal and Miguel Ramos.

Read on Illness and death in part 1 of Sandoval’s *Worldview, the Orichas, and Santeria: Africa to Cuba and Beyond*.

**Week 10: March 8** Rastafarianism: History and Development [Reading: Barrett 1-101]

**Week 11- march 15<sup>th</sup> SPRING BREAK**

**Week 12: March 22.** Rastafarianism: Belief and Ritual [Reading: Barrett 103-145].

**Week: 13 March 29.** Rastafarianism: Belief and Rituals [Reading: Barrett 103-145].

Week: **14 April 5<sup>th</sup>** Rastafarianism: its Global Spread

**Week 15 April 12 th Term Paper Presentations and submissions**

This syllabus is subject to revision at the discretion of the professor.



Florida International University Course Syllabus  
RELIGIOUS STUDIES:4937/5038 / ADVANCED FIELD WORK IN RELIGIOUS  
STUDIES/RELIGIOUS ETHNOGRAPHY  
Spring Semester 2011-2012 TUESDAY 5:00-9 PM  
The Arena. Room 119  
Instructor: Dr Albert Kafui Wuaku  
Office: Room DM 309  
Office Hours: Monday, 11-12:30 IN DM 309  
Tel: (305) 348-0112  
email: wuakua @fiu.edu  
REL: 4937/5937

### **General Description of the Course**

How do we study what religious persons and communities are doing and saying? How do we transform what we hear and observe in religious communities into texts through writing? What ethical issues can arise in the course of doing such studies? The study of Religions is a deeply interdisciplinary field in which students must use theories and methods drawn from many other disciplines in their understanding of the experiences, beliefs, and ritual forms of religious people. In this course we will learn to apply techniques used in ethnography to the study of lived religious experience. We will learn how to design research, participate in religious rituals for the purpose of observing and recording religious behavior, ask questions, write field-notes, interpret and transform our primary field observations into ethnographic documents through the use of a variety of writing styles. We will also focus attention on ethical issues that might arise in the course of doing research in religious communities and the appropriate ways of dealing with such issues. Although the course is designed to meet the academic needs of students interested in field research in religious communities students interested in field research in related disciplines will also benefit from taking it.

### **Course Objectives**

Religious traditions are not only integral aspects of cultures. They are “subcultures” or “worlds” themselves. The experiences of religious people can thus be studied through the use of ethnographic methods. At the end of this course students will be familiar with the practical skills they will require to successfully immerse in religious communities or “worlds” in order to understand the experiences of members from their own perspectives. Students will also learn skills in writing and in appraising ethnographies on religious and other related human experiences.

### **A note on Textbooks and essays**

This course is about practical techniques and skills used in studying human communities and how they can be applied in the study of religious communities. The text and essays on which lectures and class discussions will be based are not necessarily on religious phenomena but a diverse range of human experiences and settings. Students will be expected to glean from these readings insights that they can apply in the study of

religious phenomena.

**Textbooks:**

1. Hammersley, M & Atkinson P. *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. Second Edition. Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2005.
2. William B. Shaffir and Robert A. Stebbins (Eds.). *Experiencing Field Work: An Inside View of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications, 1991.
3. James P. Spradley. *The Ethnographic Interview*. Canada: Wadsworth Group, 1979.
4. Robert M. Emerson; Rachel L. Fretz and Linda L. Shaw. *Writing Ethnographic Field Notes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
5. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Eds.). *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1986.

**Course Requirements**

Class attendance and participation: All must attend class regularly and punctually. Only three unexcused absences will go without penalty. Any additional unexcused absence will cause a drop in your final grade, A to an A-, an A- to a B+, etc. Habitual lateness will also impact your grade negatively. If you cannot come to class, let the professor know beforehand via email and explain why. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class.

There will be two take home exams

Students will be expected to design, conduct and report on mini research projects.

Students will review a religious ethnography of their choice

**Grading and weights.** The progress of students and their understanding of the course material will be determined based on attendance and participation in class discussions, tests, presentations based on projects and a final report.

Below are the percentage weights:

**Attendance and Class participation: 10%**

**Research Proposal/and presentation: 5%**

**Bi weekly Reports on progress in Fieldwork: 15%**

**2 Exams- [mid Term and Finals [20 each]**

**Review of Religious Ethnography-10%**

**Final Research report/presentation: 20%**

**TAKE-HOME EXAMS**

**Each exam will comprise 4 essay questions, out of which a student would be expected to answer two questions. Students have one week to complete the exams and submit them on Turn it in. Questions for the undergraduate take home exams will be different from those of the graduate exams.**

## **THE RESEARCH PROJECT**

Each student will design and implement a small fieldwork project based on observation and interviewing. This project can be done individually or in a team with one or more partners. Students will submit a research proposal. In this proposal the student must state the project topic, provide a summary of what the project will involve, and state the research questions. Topics are open but students must focus on a religious phenomenon, e.g. local constructions of religious identities [that is, a specific religious community], experiences and the life histories of particular individuals associated with specific religious communities, the life history and daily life of a key religious personality etc.

Bi weekly Submissions- individual students or groups will keep a field note book during the course of the semester and samples of entries about their research projects, both as they are formulating them and as they are conducting the research will be submitted to the professor bi weekly for grading. This should include notes taken during field interviews, transcribed interviews if any or simply summaries, data interpretations and analyses, and other relevant experiences. The final report will be presented in class at the end of the semester.

## **REVIEW OF RELIGIOUS ETHNOGRAPHY**

Students can choose their own ethnographies, but must consult with the professor first. Below is a short list of a few I have enjoyed reading. Of course they are all in my areas of expertise.

McCarthy Karen. *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University Of California Press, 2001.

Masquelier A. *Prayer has Spoiled Everything: Possession Power and Identity in an Islamic Town of Niger*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001

Meyer Birgit *Translating The devil: Religion and Modernity Among The Ewe in Ghana* Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 1999.

Narayan Kirin. *Story Tellers, Saints and Scoundrels: Folk Narrative in Hindu Religious Teaching* Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989. .

Richman Karen E. *Migration and Vodou*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2006.

## **SCHEDULE OF TOPICS**

**Week One:** Introductions, description of course and course requirements and other matters.

**Week Two:** On ethnography: theoretical questions, the difference between quantitative and Qualitative research, Designing research.

Readings: Chapters 1&2 of *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. Introduction of *Experiencing Field Work: An Inside View of Qualitative Research*. Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 10 of *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*.

**Week Three:** Continuing On ethnography.

**Week Four:** Students present research proposals in class  
[Note-proposal should not be more than 3 pages-font 12 double space]

**Week Five:** Doing research in religious communities-entering, observing, asking questions and

Establishing and maintaining relationships with members

Readings: Chapters 3, 4, 5&6 of *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. Essays 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 13 & 14 of *Experiencing Field Work: An Inside View of Qualitative Research*. *The Ethnographic Interview*. [Students expected to begin fieldwork on their projects]

**Week Six:** Doing research in religious communities-entering, observing, asking Questions and establishing and maintaining relationships with members-Contd

**Week Seven:** Doing research in religious communities-entering, observing, asking Questions and establishing and maintaining relationships with members-Contd

First Take home exam-

**Week Eight:** Writing what we see and hear---field notes-

Readings: Chapter 7 of *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. *Writing Ethnographic Field Notes*.

**Week Nine:** Analyzing our observations

Readings: Chapter 8 of *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*.

**Submission of Review of Religious Ethnography**

**Week Ten:** Writing the text-

Reading: Chapter 9 of *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*.

Review of Religious Ethnography Due.

**Week Eleven:** Ethical issues

Reading: Chapter 10 of *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*.

Second Take Home

**Week Twelve:** Class Presentations based on fieldwork

**Week Thirteen:** Class Presentations

**Week Fourteen:** Class Presentations

**IMPORTANT NOTE:**

**The professor reserves the right to amend this syllabus as determined by the demands of the course during the semester.**

REL. 3383 RELIGIONS OF THE CARIBBEAN [ON-LINE]

Spring 2011.

**Instructor:** Dr. Albert Wuaku **Phone:** 305-348-0112

**Office Hours:** By appointment **E-mail:** Please use the Blackboard course email.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The Caribbean region stands out as one of the world's most pluralistic religious zones. It is a meeting-point of almost all of the world's religious traditions, with African Derived religious expressions and worldviews playing an important role in shaping religious thought and action. In this course we will learn about these religions and the historical, political and socio-cultural circumstances that have shaped their trajectories in the Caribbean region. Our main focus will be on (a) the indigenous religious traditions of the people who lived in the Caribbean basin before the arrival of Columbus, (b) the introduction of Christianity and the Caribbean experience with and of Christianity, and (c) the African Derived Caribbean Religious traditions, namely Vodou in

Haiti, Santeria in Cuba, and the Rastafarian Religion in Jamaica. In our discussions, we will pay particular attention to the histories of these traditions, their beliefs, and ritual forms. Also, we will familiarize ourselves with relevant intellectual concepts and approaches from religious studies, history, sociology and anthropology that can help us understand the place of religion in the lives of Caribbean people.

The course will

- Familiarize students with the origins (both historical and philosophical) of Caribbean religious expressions.
- Enhance student appreciation of the plurality and diversity of Religious beliefs and practices of the Caribbean World
- Help students to understand the role of history, culture and politics in Caribbean religious life and also how religion in turn shapes these dimensions of life.
- Help students to develop the ability to use intellectual tools from history, sociology anthropology, and religious studies to explain the dynamics of religion in Caribbean Societies
- Contribute to the dispelling of the myths surrounding these religions

## **LEARNING OUTCOMES**

By the end of the semester students will

- Gain an intellectual understanding of the role of religion in Caribbean Culture and history
- Improve on their writing skills through the writing of essays
- Develop the culture of participating in intellectual conversations through the interchanges discussion questions require of them.
- Learn to appreciate religious experiences from the point of view of practitioners
- Be excited about Caribbean religions enough to want to pursue their study further

## **Required Texts**

An account of the Antiquities of the Indians.

Author: Pane Ramon.

Publisher: Duke University Press, 1999

*History of Religions in the Caribbean*

Author: Dale Bisnauth.

Publisher Kingston Publishers Limited, 1989.

The Rastafarians

Author Barrett, Leonard E

Publisher: Beacon Press, Boston

Santeria from Africa to New World: The Dead Sell Memories.  
Author Brandon, George  
Publisher: Indiana University Press, 1997.

The Faces of the Gods: Vodou and Roman Catholicism in Haiti  
Author: Desmangles, Lesley G.  
Publisher: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992.

(Textbooks are available at FIU book store)

Readings from these texts will be supplemented with readings from other relevant texts. These excerpts will be available to students on Blackboard. These texts include but are not limited to the following:

Cros Sandoval Mercedes. *Worldview, the Orichas, and Santeria: Africa to Cuba and Beyond*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2006.  
Ayorinde Christine. *Afro-Cuban Religiosity, Revolution and National Identity*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004.  
Nicholaj De Mattos Frisvold. *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones*. Scarlet Imprint, 2010.  
Olmos, M.F. and Pavarisini – Gebert, L. *Sacred Possessions: Vodou, Santeria, Obeah, and the Caribbean*, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press 2000.  
Murphy, J.M. *Santeria: An African Religion in America*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1988.  
De La Torre Miguel. *Santeria: The Beliefs and Rituals of a Growing Religion in America*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans publishing Company, 2004  
Vodou  
Bellegarde-Smith. *Fragments of Bone: Neo-African Religions in a New World*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005.  
Maya Deren. *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*. New York: McPherson and Company, 1953  
Rey Terry. *Our Lady of Class Struggle: The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Haiti*. Trenton, NJ: Africa Word Press, 1999.  
Metreux Alfred. *Voodoo in Haiti*. New York: Schocken Books, 1972.  
McAlister E. *Rara! Vodou Power and Performance in Haiti and its Diaspora*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002  
Hebblethwaite. *Vodou Songs in Haitian Creole and English*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012  
Bellegard-Smith, P. and Michel C. *Haitian Vodou*. Bloomington/Indianapolis, 2006.  
Richman Karen E. *Migration and Vodou*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2006.  
Chevannes, Barry. *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1994

**Note:** Additional readings will be placed on Blackboard as needed.

There are no prerequisites for this course.

### **E-MAIL**

All students are expected to use their FIU e-mail address/account for course correspondence. Like Blackboard, you are expected to check your FIU e-mail at least every other day for the duration of this course.

All e-mails sent to the instructor should reflect a professional manner and adhere to the following format:

Subject Line/Heading: Place your question/comment in the subject heading.

Also identify this class (Web Class ),

Text: The text of the message should begin with Dear Dr. Wuaku. The message should follow and end with the student's full name.

Example E-mail: Below is an example of the format I expect from e-mail inquiries.

From: Joe Doe doee@fiu .edu (Use FIU email address/account)

To: Albert Wuaku wuakua@fiu .edu

Subject: Textbook (Web Class 3100)

Dear Dr. Wuaku,

I have a question about the textbook. Do we have to buy it from the bookstore or can we order it online? I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Joe Doe.

Please remember you can also call me on 305-348-0112 if you need to speak with me.

**ESSAYS AND QUIZZES:** There will be a multiple choice quiz or essay assignment after each topic or combination of topics. Each assignment will be worth a total of 25 points. Each essay assignment will consist of 1, 2, 3 or 4 essay questions out of which a student will be required to answer a specified number of questions. If the chosen question has sub-divisions [e.g questions 1 a, 1 b, etc] the student must address all questions in the subdivisions to be awarded full points for the question. The essay questions will be based on the lectures, class discussions, and assigned readings. The purpose of these essays is to test the student's knowledge of the vocabulary, issues, theoretical perspectives and ability to apply the ideas covered to the understanding of lived religious experience. A student has only 2 attempts at answering the multiple choice questions. The highest score will be recorded.

**DISCUSSION BOARD ASSIGNMENTS:** Throughout the semester the instructor will post messages to the discussion board that require a response or activity from each student. Each post will be graded. Each discussion is worth 25 points. To receive all possible points, a posting must be on time, be easy to read, free of careless mistakes and appropriately address the issue(s) or question(s) presented by the instructor. Also each student must address or respond to viewpoints of at least three others in the class. The Final Grade will be determined by a tally of points scored throughout the semester. These points will be converted into percentages [**that is, Points scored by student/total number**



**of points [200] x 100].** Please keep printed copies of all assignments and graded material. If you cannot produce your class material in a grade dispute, the grade recorded in the instructor's grade book will take precedent. Students are required and responsible for all assigned text readings and material from Blackboard. Students are expected to check the Announcement and Assignment sections of Blackboard for this class at least every other day. Students who take this course are expected to have the skills necessary to complete all assignments.

### **Essay**

**Assignments must not be sent as attachments to the professor. They must be posted in the Assignment drop box. I will not grade them if you send them to me as attachments.** If you have computer technology questions during the semester, you should contact the FIU Computer Help Desk.

Note:

**I reserve the right to alter this syllabus if and whenever necessary.**

Essays and Multiple Choice Quizzes 70%

Discussion Assignments 30%

**Total 100%**

A above 93 B- 81 – 83 D+ 67 – 70

A- 91 – 92 C+ 77 – 80 D 64 – 66

B+ 87 – 90 C 74 – 76 D- 61 – 63

B 84 – 86 C- 71 – 73 F – 61 or lower

Every student should create his/her own student homepage using the course's Discussion Forum, which can be found on course's left navigation menu. For help on how to use the HTML Creator to develop a Student Homepage,

This is a fully online course, meaning that all course work (100%) will be conducted Online. Expectations for performance in fully online courses are the same as for traditional courses; in fact, fully online courses require a degree of self-motivation, self-discipline, and technology skills that can make them more demanding for some students. Fully online courses are not independent study courses. You will be expected to interact online with the professor and your fellow students; to do assignments; to meet deadlines; and in many classes, to work in virtual groups. In some fully online courses, you may be required to come to campus to take midterms and exams, but in most like this one, you will take your tests online. In the course content portion of blackboard Power-point notes

on some of the topics are posted. Also required readings are posted in this portion of blackboard. Power points are not substitutes for readings. Both complement each other. Students need to be familiar with the material in both sources if they expect to do well in this course.

Tips for Success in your online course.

Online Etiquette, .

### **Academic and Classroom Misconduct**

Students are expected to conduct themselves appropriately at all times. Behavior defined by the instructor as disruptive will not be tolerated. For a Web class, the above statement includes flaming, which is writing or sending inappropriate messages to the web areas of this course. All interaction with your instructor and your fellow students is expected to be appropriate. If any activity becomes disruptive, the instructor reserves the right to take appropriate action.

In addition, if a student turns in an assignment where the authorship is questionable (plagiarism), the instructor reserves the right to discuss this situation with the student, and if she/he is not satisfied that the assignment is the work of that student, a grade of "0" will be assigned.

### **Week 1**

#### **Jan. 10-16**

Class introductions and acquisition of textbooks: Exploration of some relevant theoretical concepts. Power-point notes on blackboard

### **Week 2**

#### **Jan. 17 - 23**

#### **TOPICS:**

The Tainos and the Caribs : The indigenous People of the Caribbean and their Religious traditions [ Reading : by Bisnauth posted on blackboard.: Pane Ramon. *An account of the Antiquities of the Indians*]

#### **Movie-Hunters of the Caribbean Seas**

#### **Quiz 1**

**Due 11:55 pm Jan. 23rd**

### **Week 3**

#### **Jan. 24-30**

#### **TOPIC**

The Christian Presence in the Caribbean, the Transatlantic Slave Trade, and the Colonial Culture of Caribbean Societies

Reading : Brandon 37-55; Desmangles 17-59.]

Reading : Bisnauth-On Christianity in the Caribbean [poste on blackboard].

Power-point notes on blackboard-

Multiple Choice quiz 2

**Due Date 11:55 pm Jan 30th**

## **Week 4**

**Jan. 31-feb 6**

### **Foundations of The African Derived Caribbean Religions-**

Reading: The general features of African Religions [by kofi Asare opoku [titled as “African Traditional Religion, a General introduction” on black board]

Reading from the prescribed text on Santeria by Brandon, 9-31

[reading on Yoruba Religion entitled “Osun Seegesi...”-on blackboard]

[reading on Dahomean Religion entitled “The Fon of Dahomey” by Mercier, on black board]

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

What in your opinion are the salient attributes of indigenous African religious cultures? What are your views about how earlier scholars described African religions? - What do you make of the view that African religions are polytheistic because of the belief in numerous deities?

**Due Date 11:55 feb 6<sup>th</sup>**

## **Week 5**

**Feb. 7 – 13**

There will be two topics this week

### **A) Haitian Vodou : its meanings and phenomenology**

**Reading: Alfred Matreux- “Voodoo in Haiti” chapter 2 [on blackboard] and power point notes]**

**B) The origins and development of Vodou in Haiti [Reading : Desmangles, 131-181; ] And power point notes [ Multiple Choice Quiz 3**

**DUE DATE 11:55pm Feb. 13<sup>th</sup>**

## **Week 6**

**Feb. 14 -20**

Vodou: The worldview and selected Rituals [Reading: Desmangles, 60-169].

### **Power point notes**

Essay Questions:

What does Vodou teach about God and his relationship the Lwas [Loas]?

How are Catholic saints conceptualized in the vodou conceptual scheme?

What does Vodou teach about the nature of the human being? How does this notion affect post mortem rituals in vodou praxis?

**Due Date 11:55 pm Feb 20<sup>th</sup>**

## **Week 7**

**Feb. 21 – 27**

The Haitian Revolution and Vodou

Reading: Desmangles, 28-47.

### **Power point notes**

Discussion Question:

What was Vodou’s role in Haiti’s struggle against slavery ?

There are people who are of the view that the strong influence of Vodou in Haiti is to blame for many social and economic challenges facing the nation. What do you make of this view? Would you say Vodou is Haitian or African?

**Due Date 11:55 pm Feb 27<sup>th</sup>**

## **Week 8**

**Feb. 28 –  
march 6**

### **AFRO-CUBAN SANTERIA**

Topic: Afro-Cuban Religious Expressions,-

Reading: “African Religions in Cuba” by Ayorinde [on blackboard] and power point notes

What is Santeria – reading: “Santeria: what is it”? By De La Torre [on black board]

**Multiple Choice Quiz 4**

**DATE DUE 11: 55 pm march 6<sup>th</sup>**

## **Week 9**

**Mar. 7-13**

**Topic: The historical background of Santeria and the colonial context of Santeria’s evolution in Cuba**

Readings Entitled “worldview chapt 1 and world view chapt 2” on blackboard  
ESSAY QUESTION

1. Identify and describe one of the contexts in which life in colonial Cuba contributed to the retention of African religious beliefs and practices.

**Due Date 11:55pm march 13<sup>th</sup>**

## **Week 10**

**Mar. 14-20 SPRING BREAK-NO CLASSES**

## **Week 11**

**march 21-27**

Santeria’s religious culture, Cosmology and some Key Rituals  
[Readings: Brandon 79-185].

Readings: De La Torre-

ESSAY QUESTIONS-answer only ONE of the following questions. If the question has sub-sections, address all of them

1. What does the term Oricha mean in Santeria?

1b .Identify and describe the main characteristics of Orichas.

1c. Mention and describe three elements associated with an Oricha of your choice

2. Write Short notes on the following identifying their importance in Santeria

a. The Babalawo

b. The Oriate

c. Madrinas and Padrinos

d. The Santero/ Santera

3. Provide a detailed analytical account of a Santeria ritual you have either observed been involved in, or read about.

**DUE DATE 11:55pm Mar. 27<sup>th</sup>**

**Week 12**

**Mar. 28 -**

**Apr. 3**

**SANTERIA'S RELIGIOUS CULTURE, COSMOLOGY AND RITUAL**

Discussion Question: On the basis of your readings on Santeria's cosmology and rituals how would you compare Santeria to the more commonly known religious traditions such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism etc

Why do you think Santeria attracts such negative popular and official evaluations in the USA?. Is there a justification for treating Santeria in that way?

**Due Date 11:55pm April 3<sup>rd</sup>**

**Week 13**

**Apr. 4 -10**

**Santeria's religious culture, Cosmology and some Key Rituals- Illness, Health, healing and Sacrifice in Santeria**

Readings: " Fragments of Bone: Let the power flow: Ebo as a healing mechanism in the Lukumi Orisha worship" on black board

Read power point notes

Essay Question: Answer all questions

1a What does it mean to be healthy in Santeria?

1b What is Ache and how would you explain the connection between Ache and health in Santeria?-

1c Why is sacrifice a crucial component of healing in Santeria?

**Due Date: 11:55 pm, April 10<sup>th</sup>**

**Week 14 /15**

**Apr. 11 – 24**

**THE RASTAS : ORIGINS, REIGIOUS CULTURE AND GLOBAL EXPANSION**

Readings: The Rastafarians by Barrett[read entire Book]

PowerPoint Notes[on black board]

ESSAY QUESTIONS-answer all questions

1. How did the conditions of life among descendants of African Slaves in post colonial Jamaica contribute to the origins of the Rastafarian tradition?

2. Mention and describe into details two ritual processes associated with the Rastafarian tradition.

3. In what ways are the Rastafarians counter-hegemonic?

DISCUSSION ON RASTAS AND THE GLOBAL SPREAD

What about the Rasta tradition accounts for its global expansion?

**Due Date 11:55pm April 24<sup>th</sup>**

**Albert Wuaku**

**Statement of Research**

My research focuses on the roles African agents play in the global circulation of religious ideas and practices. Continental Africa, the Caribbean, and North America are my primary geographical areas of research. Since my appointment at FIU in 2006 I have been researching the agency of Ghanaian actors in the rooting of Hinduism in southern Ghanaian communities. Recently my focus has shifted to the transfer of vodou healing practices from Haiti to Miami. The general context of this experience is the religio-

cultural flows occurring in tandem with secondary African migratory movements from the Caribbean Islands to other parts of North-America. My method of data collection is fieldwork and my analytical approach is interdisciplinary, drawing on perspectives from the history of religion, the sociology of religion and the anthropology of religion. As a field researcher I believe it is important to represent the voices of those to whom I speak. For this reason re-producing recorded conversations and my respondents' views extensively throughout my work is one approach that marks my work. Another reason for doing this is that I want to emphasize that the end product of my research is not a result of my efforts only, but the outcome of my interactions with my respondents. Also in reporting the voices of respondents with whom I interact my goal is to extend an invitation to my readers to be part of the field encounters so that they will be empowered to evaluate how valid my interpretations are.

My initial fieldwork was on the local expressions and usages of Hinduism in Ghana. I became interested in this topic when I was an undergraduate Religious Studies student at the University of Ghana in the late 80s and early 90s. Growing up in the 70s in my home town of Peki (in the Volta Region of Ghana), I had witnessed market-day performances by itinerant "magicians" (actors), many of whom claimed they acquired magical powers from Hindu spirits they encountered during their visits to India. I also knew individuals in the village who claimed they worked with *djo* [spiritual power] from Hindu spirits they had imported from India. As a student in at Legon [the University of Ghana] I noted many Hindu religious groups operating in the city of Accra. Yet, upon reading the literature on religion in Africa I observed that the practice of Hinduism by African worshippers hardly attracted the attention of scholars of African religion. The

research on Hinduism in Africa focused only on the immigrant Hindu temples in East and South Africa. With respect to Ghana no scholar had written about Hinduism in Ghana at that time. I felt that a complete picture of the contemporary religious situation in Ghana and other African societies must include an account of the presence of Hinduism, its various expressions, and the activities of the indigenous agents and practitioners involved in its dispersal. The quest to fill this gap was a crucial driving force behind my research on Ghana's Hinduism.

My fieldwork on the activities of worshippers of Krishna and Shiva, two Hindu gods with a rising appeal in southern Ghana formed the basis of my doctoral thesis, entitled "Tapping into Hindu Powers; The Local factor in Krishna and Shiva worship in Ghana." I documented the histories of these gods in Ghana, how their worshippers receive, frame, and use them, and the ways in which the worship of these gods in Ghana have transformed them and the Ghanaian religious field. A summer research grant of \$5000.00 US from Florida International University enabled me to return to Ghana in 2009 to expand the initial research and develop it into a monograph. During this visit I explored other aspects of the Ghanaian Hindu religious landscape aside from the worship of Krishna and Shiva and updated the data I had gathered during the initial field work. My book, "Hindu Gods in West Africa: Krishna and Shiva Devotees in Ghana" is currently in press with E.J Brill publishing. I have also published essays based on this research. These include "Hinduizing from Above, Indigenizing From Below, Localizing Krishna Rituals in Ghana, in *the Journal of Religion in Africa*, "Selling Krishna in Ghana's Religious Market Place :Proselytizing Strategies of The Radha Govinda Temple," in *the Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, "Using Marta Durga in Ghana



: Empowering Women in the Hindu Monastery of Africa,” which will appear in *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, “Folk Beliefs about Spiritual Power and Hinduism in Ghana” in *African Traditions in the Study of Religion in Africa*, eds, Adogame, Chitando, Bateye [Ashgate] and E “From South to South: Reflecting on the Origins of Ghana’s Hinduism” in *Religions on the Move*, eds Adogame and Shankar [E.J Brill in press]. I have presented other essays on Ghana’s Hinduism as papers at several academic conferences.

My work represents the most comprehensive research on Hindu religious practice among indigenous worshippers in a sub-Saharan African community, so far. It sheds considerable light on how African/Indian encounters have contributed to religious beliefs and practices in local African societies.

The uses and meanings of Hindu symbols and practices as they are adopted and adapted in Ghana provides not only a fascinating window on cultural appropriations and transformations, but also an example of creative agency and imagination in postcolonial African religious thought which contributes to our understandings. The book makes an important contribution to an emerging literature on African appropriations, interpretations and representations of India in art, film, music and other intellectual and social activities. My work also contributes to the research on overseas Hinduism by shedding light on the recent developments in its African portion.

My current research concerns religious healing in modern Africa and the transfer of African religious healing practices by African migrants to their new homes in the newly emerging African Diaspora communities. The growing importance attached to healing in Ghana’s religious institutions, especially Pentecostalism, and their diaspora extensions,

and my personal encounters with local Ghanaian healers co-opting Hindu ritual techniques such as yoga into their religious healing practices encouraged me to explore the question of how changes triggered by globalization [e.g., the increasing interaction of religions, the migration of African/African diaspora populations, the development of transcontinental religious linkages] are affecting religious healing discourses and practices of communities in Africa and the African Diaspora in the Caribbean and North America. Presently I am involved in two projects on this topic. One project is on the healing rituals of Halouba, a Vodou Hounfo [Temple] in Little Haiti, Miami's self-contained Haitian immigrant city. From the summer of 2011 I have, with the assistance of my graduate student, been investigating how the Vodou Mambos [priestesses] and Houngans [priests] of Halouba deal with the health concerns of Haitian migrants in south Florida. In focusing on Haitian Vodou I am taking advantage of my easy access to Haiti, which is not far from Miami, and the strong presence of the Haitian migrant community in South-Florida. This project is supported by a \$3000.00 US grant awarded by the American Academy of Religion [2011-2012] and a \$1000.00US dollar grant from the Morris and Anita Broad Research Fellowship of the School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) at FIU. The research will form the basis of my second book, "Mambos, Houngas and Vodou Healing Practices in Miami." I have completed a significant aspect of the fieldwork and I am close to finishing the first draft of the manuscript, which I plan to submit to the New World African Press, for a publication review. I will present part of my findings from this research as a plenary speaker on the theme "Migrants' religions under imperial duress," at the presidential panel during this year's AAR meeting in Chicago. This research also forms the basis of my presentation entitled "Health and

Religion in the Caribbean: The Role of Vodou ritual as diasporic gnosis in alternative health practice” on the “Diaspora and Linkages in the New Global Architecture of Caribbean Development,” panel at a Conference in the University of the West Indies UWI (Mona campus, Jamaica) in August 2012. The theme of the conference is “Critical Reflections in a Time of Uncertainty”. My essay “Who Cares about Haiti Anyway?” which appears in *Christian Ethics: A case Method approach* Eds Stivers, Gudorf, Martin-Schramm [Orbis 2012], and my talks “Reworking African Religious Discourse in the Caribbean Religious Field: God, Gods and Personhood in Haitian Vodou,” at Bloomsburg University, P.A, in May 2010 and “The Concept of the Person in Ashanti and Yoruba Religion: An Analysis of the Epistemological Foundation of African Indigenous Medical Practice,” at the University of Miami [2008] were based in part on this research on Afro - Caribbean migrant religio-cultural and health related experiences.

The other project on healing, a collaborative research with two scholars from Nova southeastern University in Ft Lauderdale, explores how or whether diverse religious discourses converge or compete with each other in informing individuals’ approach to questions of health and illness in rural Ghana. We received a Chancellor’s Faculty Research and Development grant of 10, 000 dollars from Nova Southeastern University, which enabled us to travel to the field, Agate, a village in the Volta region of Ghana in the summer of 2012 to interview 29 elders about their recent (in the past two years) illnesses, how they coped with the illnesses, to what they attributed the illnesses, whether/how they sought treatment, as well as the accessibility and effectiveness of treatments. We are presently transcribing our interviews. We will publish results of this study in a co-authored manuscript entitled “Religious Pluralism, Medicine and Healing in

the Volta Region of Ghana.” I have a number of future projects. I will publish my monograph on Vodou healing by the close of next year. I am writing a proposal for grants from xxx to enable me to compile a volume of essays on African migrant religious healing and related practices globally to complement the rich collection of essays on African immigrant religious practices in the USA compiled recently by Jacob Olupona. I am in the early stages of planning a co-edited volume on contemporary changes on the indigenous religious landscapes of African communities as they respond to globalizing processes impacting them thoroughly, with Afe Adogame.

Part of my research activities involve my serving on the steering committee of the African Religions group of the AAR. I see my roles on this committee, which include selecting papers and panels each year as a way of staying abreast with the current scholarship in my field.

**Albert Wuaku**  
**Statement of Teaching Philosophy**

**As a professor in the liberal Arts and Humanities professor I view a student's years in the University as a unique time spent in a place set aside to allow them to critically examine, consider, and question taken-for-granted meanings and practices of everyday life so that they develop sensitivity to societal issues, and contribute better to society's advancement, when they graduate.** I perceive my role as a teacher in the University to involve fostering a conducive learning environment, imparting knowledge, stimulating critical reflection among students, and nurturing the interest necessary for continuous learning throughout their lives. As a teacher I am a facilitator, motivator, provocateur, counselor, guardian, and a role model, all rolled into one.

I understand that different circumstances and contexts shape the process of learning, and that although every person is capable of learning, the desire of a student to learn is a sine qua non for effectively mastering new concepts and skills. I also know that students have unique abilities and capabilities which translate into them having different learning styles: some students learn best in lecture atmospheres, some are motivated by discussion, and others are at their best when they read and reflect independently on what they have read. Depending on the dominant learning style of each student the classroom setting can encourage or inhibit learning and accommodating different learning styles creates an atmosphere that is conducive to learning. As a teacher, I believe that the essence of learning is for students to understand concepts and ideas in their own way. Because students take many of their learning habits from the professor, the instructor must show interest in the subject and a passion for learning for students to put forth the effort to learn in that class. It is important that students are convinced of the professors' knowledge and expertise as this has a positive effect on their willingness to learn. My passion for my subject matter and for guiding students through the learning process is a driving force behind my decision to become a professor. As a professor I strive to create an atmosphere that fosters learning. One of the best ways to foster learning is to share these feelings with my students. I encourage learning by creating a relaxed environment for students, stimulating conversation about concepts being presented and organizing material in a way that makes it easiest to understand. I view learning as something that should be full of fun – something that students should always look forward to doing. I make my lessons as interesting as possible so that my students will look forward to coming to my classes. I share jokes, dramatize events, and illustrate my lessons with practical day-to-day scenarios that might generate laughter in class. For me this helps to nurture and sustain interest in the subject matter.

I take cognizance of students' varying abilities, capabilities and learning styles, and to accommodate these differences I employ different teaching techniques. I use lectures, videos, photography, power point slides etc.. I also use media such as photographs,

videos and documentaries on African and Caribbean religious beliefs and practices heavily so that students can see for themselves and form their own opinions on the issues we read about in the texts we use.

I view learning as a sharing experience. By my training, I have a great deal of knowledge in a subject matter, which I have to impart to students. However, I view my students too as repositories of practical knowledge from which I could also learn something of value. My classroom is highly participatory. I ask a lot of questions, encourage dialogue, and introduce topics that generate open discussions. Students note my classes for their lively exchange of views between them and me and among themselves. For me, dialogue holds the key to successful participation of individuals and groups in society and I view college as a place where such skills should be nurtured.

My lessons are very clear and organized I adopt a step-by-step approach. I break down topics to the very basics and present my lessons in such a way that students are able to build on what they had previously learned, so that they are able to identify the flow in the chain of ideas and concepts. I stress how the topics we treat in class are interconnected and even related to issues in other disciplines, so that students will see how everything they are learning fits together into a holistic understanding of the world, from which they develop their personal worldview. . My exams and assignments are designed in such a way that they call on students to demonstrate their own understandings and to reflect critically on socio-religious questions.

I view learning as something that should be full of fun – something that students should always look forward to doing. I try to make my lessons as interesting as possible so that my students will look forward to coming to my classes. Through sharing of jokes and stories and dramatizing practical day-to-day scenarios to illustrate my lessons I make my classes fun to be in. I try to develop among my students a sense that they have some measure of control over what goes on in the class in terms of what I teach, how I do it and how I evaluate them. I ask for feedback on how lessons were taught, what they did or did not understand and ask for ways in which to improve upon my teaching. Together we review past examination questions and I take into serious consideration their opinions and concerns in subsequent lessons. As a teacher of religious traditions I believe that respect for my students is one of the most important things I can show - not only to encourage their openness to the material I am presenting, but also to inspire them to respect each other and all other humans and their religious orientations.

Lastly my Ghanaian background, experience of, and insight into traditional religious beliefs and practices, and my first-hand experience of afro-Caribbean religious rituals through my research are advantages I have in teaching African and Afro-Caribbean religions in an American university where most students are unfamiliar with these religio-cultural terrains. I share my own religious experiences, and lessons learned from my fieldwork in Ghana and Miami with students in my in classes, and invite ritual specialists I have personal contacts with, to provide insider perspectives on beliefs and rituals to my students.

For me, the learning process includes improving myself professionally. I want to read more about formal learning theories to expand my understanding of how learning takes place. As I continue to instruct classes, I also aim to enhance my ease and confidence in front of classrooms and audiences. Finally, I plan to experiment with different methods and means of presenting information to classes in order to improve the learning atmosphere I create for students. As a professor in a major research University, my aim in postgraduate teaching and supervision is to equip a new generation of young scholars with sharp analytical, methodological and multidisciplinary skills they need in researching, exploring, understanding and interpreting religious phenomena in our fast-changing, and thoroughly globalizing world. This is why I Created a program in 2007 under which the most accomplished BA graduates of the University of Ghana in Religious Studies is selected by faculty there and referred to the FIU Department of Religious Studies and receives a TAship. These graduate students have been among the best in the department over the last 6 years. The first two are currently in Phd programs.