

REL 4937-U03 Spiritual Power & Spiritual Abuse  
Fall 2022 Syllabus

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY



Instructor: Eric Isaac

## **When and Where do we meet?**

Owa Ehan 105 TuTh 12:30-1:45PM

Contact: Please use Canvas Messages. Alternatively use: Eisaac@fiu.edu

Office Hours: By appointment.

**What is this course about?** This course takes a mixed methods social science approach to analyzing the phenomenon of spiritual power and spiritual abuse in religious communities. In this course we will rely on theories offered by Luckmann, Peter Berger, and other prominent social scientists to analyze both spiritual power and the abuse of that power in religious communities. This course will also rely on historic accounts from the Caribbean and Colonialism, as well as modern accounts from local, national, and international sources to help better understand the phenomenon. Our fundamental aim will be to better understand the connection between the symbolic spiritual power held by individuals and how that power is used to abuse others.

## **I. How will you succeed in this course?**

### **1. Read the assigned readings from academic sources throughout the semester!**

These will serve as a theoretical and practical foundation for understanding both spiritual power and spiritual abuse.

All articles/publications will be posted in canvas.

## **2. Buy your Groups assigned book:**

1. Johnson, David. VanVonderen, Jeffrey. *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse* Winnipeg: Media Production Services Unit, Manitoba Education, 1991.
2. Dr. Diane Lanberg, *Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church*.
3. Dr. Wade Mullen, *Something's Not Right: Decoding the Hidden Tactics of Abuse--and Freeing Yourself from Its Power*
4. Chuck De Groat, *When Narcissism Comes to Church: Healing Your Community From Emotional and Spiritual Abuse*

## **2. Take good notes in class & show up! so you can do well on the exams, and discussion portions!**

In-Class Group Discussions (30%)

In-Class Group Book Presentation (10%)

Written Reflections (15%)

Attendance (15%)

70% of total course weight

## **3. Do not procrastinate on the writing assignments!**

First Draft Research Essay (15%)

Final Draft Research Essay (15%)

30% of total course weight

## **II. Course Objectives, Plagiarism Statement, Academic freedom statement**

### **Objectives**

As a course, students will meet the following objectives through text readings, assignments, and class discussions:

1. Students will be able to analyze topics such as power, abuse, religious communities, and religious governance of communities from multiple academic perspectives.
2. Students will be able to assess how global issues and trends are interrelated with the development and practice of religions specifically in the space of spiritual power and abuse.
3. Students will be able to demonstrate willingness to think and respond creatively and compassionately about religious issues in the contemporary world.
4. Students will be able to articulate a working definition of spiritual power and spiritual abuse informed by data, theory, and history.

### **Statement on Plagiarism**

You are expected to understand the definition of plagiarism. See the [University Code of Academic Integrity](#) if you need further clarification. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Plagiarism, or attempting to pass off another's work as your own, falls into three different categories:

1. A written work that is entirely or partially stolen from another source;
2. Using quotations from another source without properly citing them; and
3. Paraphrasing from another source without proper citations.

Students are expected to understand the definition of plagiarism. See the University Code of Academic Integrity at <http://www.fiu.edu/~oabp/misconductweb/2codeofacainteg.htm> if you need further clarification. Offenders will receive a grade of F (0 points) for the plagiarized assignment, and possibly for the course. Please be aware: Previously submitted papers are not allowed, even if it is your own work and even if you are retaking this class. You may not “reuse” papers.

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### **Statement on Academic Freedom & Neutrality**

Academic freedom and responsibility are essential to the integrity of the University. The principles of academic freedom are integral to the conception of the University as a community of scholars engaged in the pursuit of truth and the communication of knowledge in an atmosphere of tolerance and freedom. The University serves the common good through teaching, research, scholarship/creative activities, and service. The fulfillment of these functions rests upon the preservation of the intellectual freedoms of teaching, expression, research, and debate. We affirm that academic freedom is a protected right in addition to a faculty member's constitutionally protected freedom of expression and is fundamental to the faculty member's responsibility to seek and to state truth as he or she sees it.

Students are encouraged to employ critical thinking and to rely on data and verifiable sources to interrogate all assigned readings and subject matter in this course as a way of determining whether they agree with their classmates and/or their instructor. No lesson is intended to espouse, promote, advance, inculcate or compel a particular feeling, perception, viewpoint of belief.

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### **Late Assignment Policy**

I may accept late assignments, however, if you turn in late work the highest grade you can get for that assignment is an 75%. This even includes first drafts that are 'replaced' by final draft grades.

No, you cannot turn in all of your assignments at the end of this course I will not accept assignments more than 10 days after the due date.

No assignments will be accepted after the last day of the semester with the exception of the final exam. No exceptions.

### **III. Course breakdown**

| Course Landmarks   | Items | Scale In points | Percentage of Final Grade |
|--|-------|-----------------|---------------------------|
| In Class Discussion  | 6     | 50              | 30                        |
| Book Presentation  | 1     | 100             | 10                        |
| Attendance   | 1     | 150             | 15                        |
| Written Reflection   | 3     | 150             | 15                        |
| First Draft Research Essay I: (First Draft)                | 1     | 100             | 10                        |
| Final Draft Research Essay I: (Final Draft after revision) | 1     | 100             | 10                        |
| Total  | 12    | 1000            | 100%                      |

### **IV. Assessment Descriptions**

#### **A. Final Essay**

The essay must have a thesis, and adequately support that thesis using data. The essays must be organized clearly and logically. Each paper will be 1,000-1,200 words and will be submitted through Turnitin. All source material must be cited correctly using Chicago style formatting. Please be aware that papers with an originality score of over 35% similarity will be subject to additional scrutiny and may incur additional penalties, up to and including receiving an F (0 points). Please do NOT send any writing assignments as email or message attachments!

All writing assignments must be submitted in the proper drop box in Canvas; there are no exceptions. Late papers may be accepted with a legitimate excuse and the maximum score will be 75%.

#### **B. In-class Group Discussions/Presentation**

The bulk of the coursework will be done within the course in one of two forms. The first of which are in-class group discussions based on prominent texts or publications relating to the subject matter. The second of which are reflections based on interviews which will be done in class.

- 1. In Class Group Discussion:** Each group will be assigned a source material: An academic publication or a publication disclosing or discussing spiritual abuse. The groups will each take 10 minutes presenting their assigned material and then 10 minutes discussing their material with other groups.
- 2. Book Presentation:** Each group will be assigned one book to present in class that addresses the subject matter. The group will present the book, and then the class will discuss and engage with the material.

### **C. Written Reflection**

Throughout the class, we will have the privilege of hearing from individuals working to combat and overcome the phenomenon of Spiritual Abuse. In response to these guests, each student will write a 300-word reflection on canvas. Students will then respond to two posts from their peers with 75-word responses.

### **D. Participation/Attendance**

Your attendance will be monitored and makes up 15% of the final grade of the course. If you are not in class (physically or virtually depending on circumstance), your grade will be affected. You will also be lacking critical information to complete the assignments.

**Everyone gets 3 days they can miss. Do not abuse them.**

**Attendance will be calculated at the end of the semester, if I calculate it before hand it will not calculate correctly.**

### **F. Extra Credit Opportunities**

Extra credit can account for up to 5% of your final grade. You get one opportunity to do this.

- 1. Proof that you went to the writing center.** You must go and have them help you write one of your essays. You automatically get 5% for doing this. Make the appointment early and show up. Do not email me proof of this. Upload it on canvas.

2. Participate and complete the ICF coaching. You will get credit for this upon completion of 6 sessions, and filling out the perceptions survey at the end.

## **V. Grading Scale**

| <b>Letter</b> | <b>Range (%)</b> | <b>Letter</b> | <b>Range (%)</b> | <b>Letter</b> | <b>Range (%)</b> |
|---------------|------------------|---------------|------------------|---------------|------------------|
| A             | 95 or above      | B             | 83 - 86          | C             | 70 - 76          |
| A-            | 90 - 94          | B-            | 80 - 82          | D             | 60 - 69          |
| B+            | 87 - 89          | C+            | 77 - 79          | F             | 59 or less       |

## **VI. Course Calendar**

| Week    | Activities  |
|---------|---|
| Week 1  | <p><b><u>Syllabus + Definition</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introductions, syllabus review, class plan</li> <li>• Lecture 1: Defining Spiritual Abuse</li> </ul>  |
| Week 2  | <p><b><u>Definition + Group Discussion</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lecture 2: Examples of Spiritual Abuse</li> <li>• <b>ICF Coaching Presentation</b></li> </ul>   |
| Week 3  | <p><b><u>Group Discussion 1</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Group Discussion 1: BBTB SEPT 6-8</b></li> </ul>  |
| Week 4  | <p><b><u>Theoretical Frameworks: A social science foundation for symbolic power</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lecture 3: Theoretical Frameworks for Symbolic power (Luckmann + Berger)</li> <li>• <b>Interview 1: (Reflection post 1 due)</b></li> </ul> |
| Week 5  | <p><b><u>Spiritual Power</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lecture 4: Spiritual Power</li> <li>• <b>Interview 2: Legal &amp; Personal LST (Reflection Post 2 Due)</b></li> </ul>   |
| Week 6  | <p><b><u>Spiritual Abuse</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lecture 5: Abuse of Spiritual Power</li> <li>• <b>Group In-class Discussion 2: South Florida</b></li> </ul>   |
| Week 7  | <p><b><u>Experiences of Abuse</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lecture 6: Experiences of Abuse</li> <li>• <b>Book Presentation Preparation *Th*</b><br/>--I will work with you to prepare in class.</li> </ul>  |
| Week 8  | <p><b><u>Presentation Week</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Book Presentations (All Groups)</li> </ul>  |
| Week 9  | <p><b><u>Experiences of Abuse</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lecture 7: Experiences of Abuse: <u>Intersectionality</u></li> <li>• Paper Explanation &amp; Review</li> <li>• <b>Group In-class Discussion 3: National Experiences</b></li> </ul>           |
| Week 10 | <p><b><u>Historical Accounts of Spiritual Abuse</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lecture 8: Spiritual Abuse in History: Ancient//Classical</li> <li>• <b>Interview 3: (Reflection Post 3 Due)</b></li> </ul>  |

**Historical Accounts of Spiritual Abuse**

**Week 11**

- Lecture 9: Spiritual Abuse in History: Caribbean//Reformation
- **Interview 4: LORI Nov 1(Reflection Post 4 Due)**

**Writing Week**

**Week 12**

- Extra Credit Due
- **First Draft of Essay Due Fri: Nov 11**
- **Any Makeup Work Due w/ 25% penalty.**
- **No Class Veterans Day: Nov 11**

**Spiritual Power and Abuse Across Varieties of Religious Experience**

**Week 13**

- Lecture 10: Spiritual Power and Abuse in World Religions
- **Group In-Class Discussion 4: Varieties of Religious Abuse**

**Week 14**

**Non-Abusive Faith Communities**

- Lecture 11: Healthy Expressions of Spiritual Power
- **Interview 5: (Reflection Post 5 Due)**



**Final Interview and Discussion**

**Week 15**

- Interview: 6 (Reflection Post 6 Due)
- **Discussion 5: Future Research**

**Week 16**

- **Final Paper Due: Dec 5**



