

## DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

### REL 3118 SACRED DANCE/SACRED RITUAL

**Instructor:** Niurca Márquez

**Time:** Wednesdays 1:00 – 2:15pm

**Email:** [niumarqu@fiu.edu](mailto:niumarqu@fiu.edu)

#### REQUIRED TEXTS :

Articles and additional resources will be provided via Canvas.

#### Course Description

*Sacred Dance/Sacred Ritual* investigates the religious/spiritual context in which a variety of sacred dance complexes occur throughout the world, and explores the significant cultural, political, and historical events that shaped the dance rituals and their related religious traditions. The course will cover the structure and order of the ritual process, the relationships between the body and worship and some of the latest research on the body and ritual. We will study in detail stigma around the body and why in many cases the connection between the body and worship has been taboo. Additionally, we will engage with a variety of contemporary sources via 21<sup>st</sup> Century technologies that are shifting the conversations on this topic. This course bridges religion, ritual and the arts in an ongoing conversation of who we are as a society and the ways in which we express our collective experience.

#### Course Objectives

- Students will assess personal filters forming their worldviews.
- Students will be exposed to the diversity of aesthetic expressions in global cultures
- Students will expand their appreciation and understanding of sacred dance and ritual in world cultures from both a historical and contemporary perspective
- Students will engage in critical inquiry into the religious and spiritual context of expressive movement and ritual from a cross-cultural perspective
- Students will enhance their intercultural understanding, global learning, and racial tolerance
- Students will gain an introductory understanding of major analytical paradigms from the academic study of dance, especially those useful for interpreting cultural praxis and ritual
- Students will gain deeper self-knowledge and spiritual understanding through the lens of dance and expressive movement
- Students will identify ways other cultures construct knowledge about their worldviews: e.g. the myriad ways dance can create, reinforce, protest, challenge, or change social constructs in relation to ritual practices.

- Students will discuss, analyze, and assess the meaning and effects of colonization on ritual practices, as well as the effects of cultural appropriation in contemporary society.
- Students will experience learning through 21<sup>st</sup> Century technologies.

## **Learning Outcomes**

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Students will identify and examine a variety of sacred dance and rituals within their specific religious, social, historical, political and cultural contexts
- Students will gain experience in assessing and discussing the use of dance as a way of transmitting culture, language, religion, and history.
- Students will explore the interrelations of music, ritual and dance.
- Students will articulate and demonstrate skills in using written and oral language to analyze and describe selected sacred rituals and movement expressions and the religious or spiritual context within which they occur
- Students will demonstrate skills in kinesthetic and aesthetic identification of individual and cultural variations in human movement behavior within the context of world religions
- Students will demonstrate an expanded appreciation for variances and commonalities in sacred human movement expressions within a variety of global societies.
- Students will engage in a creative process to research, assess, and inform their knowledge of a dance/ritual tradition that exhibits syncretic or hybridized elements and expressions.
- Through in-class synthesis activities, students will develop ways to critically reflect on another's perspective; suspend personal preconceptions; and provide peer feedback.
- Students will differentiate ways of learning: auditory, visual, tactile.
- Students will research and reflect on the benefits of kinesthetic engagement activities on an individual's well-being.

## **Course Requirements**

### ***Connections Journals and In-Class assignments (20%)***

The intent of this assignment is for you to demonstrate comprehension of the course content through personal, critical analysis. You will make one journal submission per topic (week) covered in class. We will collect the journal three times during the semester, as indicated on the course calendar. Each collection will be graded on a scale of 0–5.

Journal submissions must contain the following:

- Summary of the professors' presentations, activities, and in-class discussions. One entry per week.
- Connections between the assigned readings, the professors' presentations/in-class content and connections you are making from the supplementary visual materials provided. One entry per week.

- 1 image that relates to the content per entry (week). Images should demonstrate your own critical analysis and have a brief description, along with three hashtags for the image that synthesize why you chose it and why you think it is relevant. They should not be ones shown in class but ones which you find on your own.

Additional in-class assignments will be required as determined by CANVAS shell. Please check back regularly.

This assignment meets the requirements for: Leadership and Community Engagement SLO (a); Interdisciplinary and Connectivity SLO (a), (b)

***Dance and Music as Cultural Threads (15%)***

In many cultures dance and music are inseparable and the power of one can only be considered in relation to the other. You will be given a list of potential traditional/folk forms that fit this category. You will choose one to investigate and observe. In some cases, you will have an opportunity to view it live. In others, you will need to rely on video. Either way, you will write a two-page double-spaced reflection considering the following:

- What are the most essential elements of the link between the dance and music of this culture?
- Who gets to dance this dance?
- What is its main purpose/function?
- How is this important to understanding the role of this form for the culture to which it belongs?

Please utilize the Guidelines for Reflective Writing provided in your Canvas shell to complete this assignment.

***Syncretic Forms Story Web (20%)***

No other historical event shifted the practices around dance and ritual as extensively as the Transatlantic Slave Trade. For this assignment, you will consider the direct effects of colonization and the Slave Trade on the danced and ritual practices of both the Diaspora and the continent. You will create a visual story web of African Diaspora rhythmic traditions and will include the elements most pertinent to the portion or tradition you are focused on.

Your story web will address the following questions:

- How did African dance and ritual evolve in the New World?
- What strands of the dance and/or ritual were maintained and which ones were not?
- What factors contributed to distinct stylistic genres and/or ritual practices?

Formats to consider for this assignment are Prezi, animation and other such technologies that allow you to engage with the kinesthetic elements of this topic. Please be sure to include a separate page for bibliography (MLA/APA).

Further detail will be provided during class meeting times.

***Final Oral Group and Individual Presentations (25%)***

Evolving out of classroom experiences, group discussions and activities, the final oral report is a project that will be developed out of course work. Final assignments will be negotiated following the mid-term point.

Selected topics must be approved by instructor and related to course content. The report requires a minimum of three scholarly bibliographic sources in addition to required readings. You should prepare a minimum of a 2-page typed outline of their presentation. A date for the oral presentation will be scheduled prior to final exams week. This date MAY NOT be changed except in the event of serious illness or family problems.

Projects may focus on the life and work of an ideology, movement, religion, important figure, or movement tradition. The focus must address relevant political, gender, religious, social, identity, or other contexts. Topics must be approved of by the instructor. Be sure to time your presentation precisely. Presentations will be graded on content, presentation, depth, timing, and delivery.

***Participation/ Discussions/Attendance (20%)***

Participation/attendance is assessed via effort and motivation expressed through consistent engagement in classroom discussions and exercises, assignments, demonstration of critical thinking, and preparation for and participation in class discussion. There will be a series of these throughout the semester and some may be devised as peer reviewed in-class assessments.

**Sample Grading Scheme**

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

**Useful Links**

- [JVC Video Anthology of Music and Dance of the World \(Links to an external site.\)](#)
- [World Religions: Belief, Culture, and Controversy \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

**Important Information**

Before starting this course, please review the following pages:

- [List of Musical Terms](#)

- [Accessibility and Accommodation](#)
- [Academic Misconduct Statement](#)
- [Attendance and classroom Etiquette](#)
- [Course Requirements](#)
- [Guidelines for Written Work](#)
- [Honors College Requirements and Policies](#)
- [Religious Observances](#)
- [Off Campus Library Log-in \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

**NOTE:** The professor reserves the right to change or modify the syllabus at any time during the semester.

## **Course Outline**

### **Module 1: Introduction/Overview of Course Requirements**

Week 1:

- Overview of course requirements
- Introduction to course materials
- Structuring of course

What is *dance*? What is *sacred*? What is *ritual*?

### **Module 2: Dance? Ritual? Sacred? What of the experience? What of the Practice?**

Week 2:

- Introduction of group (who is in the room and what are our shared interests)
- Overview of basic principles of what makes up sacred dance and its ties to cosmology and worldviews
- Observing space: Practical observation (class will take place outside)
- Begin assignment "Blueprint for a Ritual"

\*No readings this week. All work will be in practice.

### **Materials**

Farima Berenji on Sacred Dance and Tradition:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vKZjsVdsfyl>

Week 3:

- Trance and Ecstatic Dance
- Revisit conversation on what makes us “sacred dance” and consider its implications in contemporary society

**Reading:**

“Trance and Ecstatic Dance” by Erika Bourignon

**Module 3: Space, Time and the Cosmos**

Week 4:

- Field Experience #1: Axis Mundi (visit to the Ceiba on 1300 Block and Tamiami Trail)

Week 5:

- Sacred Dance and Ritual as Resistance – Asynchronous assignment on Indigenous Dance practices in the US and understandings of “space,” the case of the Sun Dance and the Ghost Dance

\*All links available on CANVAS

Week 6:

- Lecture on “What Makes Sacred Space”: review of various philosophical perspectives (from Newton to Einstein and why it’s important)
- Discussion of Space vs. Place

Week 7:

- Understanding conceptions of “sacred space” in Religious Studies

**Reading:**

“Sacred Space and Making the World Sacred” in Mircea Eliade’s The Sacred and the Profane.

**Module 4: Ritual and Performance and why it matters**

Week 9:

- Field Experience #2: Observing Ritual

Week 10:

- Structure and Anti-Structure in Ritual
- Ritual as Performance and Performance as Ritual

**Reading:**

Turner, Victor. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Chapters 1 and 3  
Schechner, Richard. “The Fan vs. The Web” (Graphics)

Week 11:

- Ritual Structure in Practice
- Discussion on Ritual as Performance and Ritual as site of experiencing cultural coding

**Reading:**

Kaepler, Adrienne. "Interpreting Ritual as Performance"

[https://repository.si.edu/bitstream/handle/10088/18891/anth\\_Vol80\\_No3\\_Kaepler.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://repository.si.edu/bitstream/handle/10088/18891/anth_Vol80_No3_Kaepler.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

Àjàyí, Omofolábò S. *Yoruba Dance: The Semiotics of Movement and Body Attitude in a Nigerian Culture*. Introduction.

Week 12:

- Contemporary Society and the Collective Experience
- Discussion on raves and ecstatic dance
- **Video:** Dances of Ecstasy by Michelle Maherer (VIMEO in class only)

**Module 5: Invocation and Evocation**

Week 13:

**Reading:**

Marquez, Niurca. "The Arará in Cuba: Dance as a Repository of Religious Cosmology" Chapter 3.

Walker, Sheila. "African Gods in the Americas: The Black Religious Continuum." *Black Scholar*, Nov./Dec., 1980. 25-36.

**Video** by Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen*

Additional Videos on Afro-Cuban Dance in ritual and secular settings

Week 14:

In-class discussion and workshopping of Final Presentations

Week 15:

**Final Presentations**

"Who's Dancing and Why?" by David Arron Murray:

<https://adoremus.org/2000/03/whos-dancing-in-church-and-why-by-david-aaron-murray/>

**Additional sources of interest:**

Gupta, Abhidha. "Devadasi System: An Ancient Practice or Casteism and Sexism Redefined.

"The Magic of Khmer Classical Dance" TED Talk:

[https://www.ted.com/talks/prumsodun\\_ok\\_the\\_magic\\_of\\_khmer\\_classical\\_dance?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/prumsodun_ok_the_magic_of_khmer_classical_dance?language=en)

Nrityagram Dance Village: <https://nrityagram.org/>