

**REL 3185, RVAA #51607, Summer A, 2014 "Healers and Mediums," Online  
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This fully online course investigates healing through mediumship, channeling, PSI (paranormal psychological phenomena), shamans, animals and plants (ethnobotany) and offers a unique experience through some alternative global practices in that are studied through the use of texts, electronic readings, video streaming, art and other resource information. In addition, the skeptics viewpoint—questions regarding the validity of such healing—is included. An overview of accepted global alternatives in health and religious practices often considered taboo in Western medicine for many years, is currently being investigated and implemented by institutions of higher learning, universities and research laboratories in the US and world-wide. "Healers and Mediums" (through religious and cultural practices) treat diseases, maladies, and physical-emotional-spiritual problems encountered by human beings; many practices have been used for hundreds or thousands of years, and lie outside the normative acceptance of Western science, technology and medical practices.

**COURSE OVERVIEW**

The texts (these are not novels) include a first-hand account of healing and paranormal phenomena written by Miamian Philip Smith, *Walking Through Walls, A Memoir*. Shamans, possibly the oldest of known healers on Earth in religious and cultural communities, and many of their practices are presented in Piers Vitebsky's *Shamanism* and two narratives, *Life Before Life* by James B. Tucker, and *Of Water and the Spirit* by Malidoma Patrice Somé. DVD's/videos and electronic readings enhance the texts. PPT's are presented to supplement student learning. All texts, DVD's and electronic readings are required reading for the course.

Electronic readings include excerpts about animals as healers (from Susan McElroy and Jeffrey Masson), nature and Earth-based religions that use alternative healing methodologies, American tribal peoples use of plants, (ethnobotany), a look into vision quests from some American Indian groups, an overview of the ancient Chinese practice of acupuncture and acupressure, herbal remedies, and Spiritualism in the US (the séances that attempt to contact the dead).

Students use texts, online readings, videos, art, music, resources and web links to pertinent sites.

## **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

Upon successful completion of this course through readings, media presentations, active learning and exam exercises, the student should:

1. Define the terms: “healer/s,” “medium/s,” and the glossary of terms that relate religious and cultural practices in alternative healing methods used by healers, mediums and shamans globally
2. Discuss and define PSI and the believers who support the PSI experiences
3. Identify and distinguish the global perspectives that have shaped the trends and systems of diverse cultures in healing methods from the past and through current concepts
4. Recognize patterns of evolutionary change from rituals and practices that may reshape the future while preserving the traditions of aesthetics and cultural values of the past globally in some locations
5. Demonstrate knowledge of the cultural and cross-cultural dynamics involved in these alternative methods of healing and how they may be incorporated into healing practices used today by many varying methodologies
6. Identify healing plants (ethnobotany) used globally
7. Analyze and debate whether animals are important in healing humans
8. Define skepticism and the terminology or glossary terms that accompany the skeptics’ viewpoints; relate and synthesize why the skeptical viewpoint is important
9. Gain an appreciation for the diversity of healing methods for life on Earth as well as concluding ways to heal the maladies of the body from global perspectives the lie outside the Western medical practices

## **NOTE**

**THIS IS A SHORT SUMMER SESSION that requires similar reading, viewing, written material and assessments usually presented in a full 16-week semester; therefore, it is IMPERATIVE that you prepare your schedule accordingly to meet the rigorous schedule that has been compacted from 16 weeks into 6 weeks**

## **UNIVERSITY REQUIREMENTS**

### **Academic Honesty and Plagiarism**

### **FIU Academic Misconduct Statement**

Florida International University is a community dedicated to generating and imparting knowledge through excellence in teaching and research, the rigorous and respectful exchange of ideas, and community service. All students should respect the right of others to have an equitable opportunity to learn and honestly to demonstrate the quality of their learning. Therefore, all students are expected to adhere to a standard of academic conduct that demonstrates respect for themselves, their fellow students, and the educational mission of the University. All students are deemed by the University to understand that if they are found responsible for academic misconduct, they will be subject to the Academic Misconduct procedures

and sanctions, as outlined in the Student Handbook.

Academic misconduct includes:

Cheating – The unauthorized use of books, notes, aids, electronic sources, or assistance from another person with respect to examinations, course assignments, field service reports, class recitations or other work; or the unauthorized possession of examination papers or course materials, whether originally authorized or not. Cheating violates both University and College codes.

Plagiarism – The use and appropriation of another’s work without any indication of the source, and the re-presentation 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, commits plagiarism. Plagiarism violates both University and College codes.

Unacceptable behavior – Students will be disciplined accordingly if they show repeated or egregious disrespect for classmates or instructors or are disruptive.

#### Policies

Please review the [policies page](#) as it contains essential information regarding guidelines relevant to all courses at FIU and additional information on the standards for acceptable netiquette important for online courses.

#### Technical Requirements & Skills

One of the greatest barriers to taking an online course is a lack of basic computer literacy. By computer literacy we mean being able to manage and organize computer files efficiently, and learning to use your computer's operating system and software quickly and easily. Keep in mind that this is not a computer literacy course; but students enrolled in online courses are expected to have moderate proficiency using a computer. Please go to the "[What's Required](#)" page to find out more information on this subject.

For detailed information about the technical requirements, please [click here](#).

#### Accessibility And Accommodation

For detailed information about the specific limitations with the technologies used in this course, please [click here](#).

For more information about Blackboard's Accessibility Commitment, [click here](#).

For additional assistance please contact our [Disability Resource Center](#).

#### Course Prerequisites

There are no pre-requisites for this course.

Registration in this course implies an acceptance of and compliance with the Religious Studies and University policies for students and the FIU Code of Academic Integrity. Please refer to the following documents for additional information:

FIU Code of Academic Integrity –  
<http://www.fiu.edu/~dwyere/academicintegrity.html>

### **Religious Observances**

Every effort will be made, where feasible and practical, to accommodate students whose religious practices coincide with class requirements or scheduling. Please make sure to notify your instructor at the beginning of the semester you will not be available to complete course work; however, the list of due dates/times are listed so that you may submit assignments or assessments in advance.

### **Professor Biography**

Prof. Mary Lou Pfeiffer:

- Holds advanced degrees: LL.M (law) in Intercultural Human Rights from St. Thomas University School of Law and MA in Religious Studies from Florida International University;
- Currently a Faculty Fellow and Senior Instructor in The Honors College at FIU; adjunct instructor in Religious Studies
- Undergraduate degrees include religious studies, biology (minor-geology) and allied health breast care;
- Owns and operates an art glass studio specializing in stained/etched glass, stone and wood sculpting; studied architectural glass in Germany with renowned glass artists and sculpting with Elliot Miller;
- Specialty and research areas include American Indian cultures, biomedical and earth ethics, human rights law: rights of women, rights of the child, internally displaced persons/refugees, global indigenous peoples, the Everglades, gender issues and breast cancer.
- Attended the UN Sub-Commission on Human Rights for Indigenous Working Peoples in Geneva, Switzerland for several years (known today as the UNPFII);
- Completing a project of her uncle's original "V" mail letters from WWII, and two current manuscripts - the Miami Circle, and a work taken from her life participating in a "seagull society" as the wife of a Naval fighter pilot during the Vietnam years;
- Served as past President of Women's Studies Advisory Board and currently sits on the Overtown Youth Center Board;
- Is a recipient of the FIU Alumni Torch Award and has received two Outstanding Service Awards from Religious Studies
- Her family included two sons- both avid surfers- one, a paramedic firefighter, the other a chef and café owner on Oahu's and five grandchildren
- Her "other" family includes 2 dogs, 2 cats, an Umbrella cockatoo, and an aviary of finches.

### **IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

## TEXT BOOKS (REQUIRED)

- 1) *Shamanism*, Piers Vitebsky, University of Oklahoma Press: 2001 ISBN 0-8061-3328-7
- 2) *Walking Through Walls, A Memoir*, Philip Smith, Simon and Schuster, ISBN-10: 1416542949 or ISBN-13: 9781416542940
- 3) *Life Before Life*, Jim B Tucker, MD, St. Martin's Griffin, 9780312376741
- 4) *Of Water and the Spirit* Malidoma Patrice Some, Penguin Group, ISBN-14-019496-7,

## COURSE DETAILS

Coursework consists of the following:

1. **Written assignments:** 3 essays (300 words or more), **25%**, and listed as Essays #1-#3; an outline and abstract of 200 words for the critical book review that replaces a final exam, **5%**; critical book review: 800-900 words, **30%**; **total written assignments = 60%**
2. **Assessments:** 4 quizzes (matching/multiple choice, True/False), **10%**; 1 midterm exam, (matching, multiple choice), **20%**; **total assessments 30%**
3. **Discussions** (4) **10%**
4. **Critical Book Review (See written assignments above)**

**Total percentage points for Summer "A" 100 %**

## DISCUSSIONS

4 discussions topics are listed. You are expected to post your initial response by the due date and time; follow up with a respond to at least 3 others' initial posts by the due date and time (total possible score for each discussion, 10 points). See the Discussion Rubric posted in Course Content. A zero grade is posted for late or missing assignments or assessments. All work must be submitted by the due date and time (note: I use a 24-hour clock; most assessments and assignments are due by 23:55, 11:55 PM) usually on Sunday unless otherwise stated.

## ESSAYS/CRITICAL BOOK REVIEW

All essays, the critical book review and abstract should be written in academic style (3<sup>rd</sup> person- avoid 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronoun [you]) unless otherwise stated and must contain proper referencing for quotations or concepts from any author or resource. **Double-line space your essays, you may title your work but including a title page is not necessary, list your name, date, course and properly list all references, even in the case of a personal reflection essay.** The first essay will be returned to you with tracked changes for your information that allows a dialogue between us to occur, and offers to each an example of what I expect in written work. There are information sheets posted in the course content for "Academic Papers/Essay Recommendations," "Critical Book Reviews" and a "Grading Rubric."

For the critical book review, the books are listed in the Course Content. Again, as a reminder, no late work past the due date and time will be accepted!

**IMPORTANT INFORMATION:** The instructor reserves the right to make any changes deemed necessary to the course regarding assignments, assessments and/or course information. Please note that the syllabus is listed in weekly increments with the objectives and review questions for each week; completion dates and times are included. Because this is an online course, it often requires more diligence than a classroom course. Check each assignment or assessment for due date and time to ensure you submit in a timely manner. **Again, a zero will be assigned to any item submitted late or missed. NO EXCEPTIONS unless a dire emergency occurs. There are no offerings** for a reduced grade for late or missed assignments or assessments because you have the course requirements, due dates and times posted online! **Again, a reminder: I use a 24-hour clock; all assignments and assessments close at 12:00 [noon, not midnight] on the due date.** Some musical presentations will be added for your listening pleasure that should be of interest

## **GRADING**

Grades are assigned with the following weights:

Discussions, 10%

Essays 25%

Midterm 20%

Quizzes 10%

Final critical book review (Part A- 5%, Part B- 30%) total 35%

Grading scale: 93 and above, A; 90-92 A-; 87-89 B+; 84-86 B; 81-83 B-; 77-80 C+; 74-76 C; 71-73 C-; 67-70 D+, 64-66 D; 61-63 D-, <61 F

## **SYLLABUS**

### **Week 1 May 11-17 “Introduction to the course, Introduction to PSI”**

Objectives (1-2) Define the terms: “healer/s,” “medium/s,” and the glossary of terms that relate religious and cultural practices in alternative healing methods used by healers, mediums and shamans globally; discuss and define PSI and the believers who support the PSI experiences

Reading assignments

- Introduction- read all the required material for the course under the “Introduction” folder
- Glossary for New Age Religions
- PSI (Paranormal Psychological Phenomena)
- Vitebsky, *Shamanism* pp 6-77

- Electronic PDF/Word documents to complete your first essay: 1) PSI PPT and glossary; 3) "Heaven to Earth," the Leichtman/Cayce Interviews; 4) Association for Research and Enlightenment- ARE, Edgar Cayce Foundation; 5) New Age Glossary; 6) *Best Evidence*, information taken from Michael Schmicker's book
- PPT Reincarnation and Psychic Healing

View:

- PPT presentation: "Healers and Mediums Introduction"
- PPT on PSI

Written assignment-

- Introduce Yourself: Post student biography with a photo of yourself by May 17 at 23:55
- Please take the practice quiz to ensure your computer is compatible with the course
- Essay #1 "Channelers and Mediums;" this is a personal reflection essay that serves as part of the Global Learning Initiative; it can be written in the 1<sup>st</sup> person narrative. Write your ideas regarding channelers and mediums to transmit information from other realms to a live person. The word count should be approximately 300, double-line spaced with a list of references, a bibliography, due May 17 at 23:55 (submitted through the assignment drop-box tool); use the electronic readings for your essay; you may access or use websites like the Long Island Medium <http://www.tlc.com/tv-shows/long-island-medium/>
- Complete the pre-course global learning survey by Sunday, May 17 at 23:55
- Discussion #1 (submit under the Discussion Tool) Post "A PSI experience you or someone you know may have had." Use the PSI glossary for defining a psychic experience; write your initial post due May 14 at 12:00; respond to 3 others posts by Sunday, May 17 at 23:55 (Review the discussion etiquette)

Study questions:

A shaman needs a community. (\*True/False)

Americans do not believe in life after death. (True/\*False)

Channelers are the vessels (person, psychic, medium) for communicating or messages from the spirit world. (\*True/False)

A healer from a local indigenous community is called a

- lawyer
- \*b. shaman
- tribal chief

## **Week 2 May 18-24 "Healing through mediums, PSI, Animals and Ethnobotany"**

Objectives (1-4, 6) Define the terms for the course from the glossary of terms; discuss and define PSI and the believers who support the PSI experiences; recognize

the evolution of shamans globally including rituals and practices in healing; identify plants used in healing and the ability of animals to heal

#### Reading assignments

- Vitebsky, pp 65-159;
- Electronic readings/PDF's "In the House of Animals PDF from Susan McElroy's *Animals as Healers* and Jeffrey Masson's *When Elephants Weep*
- "Healing Plants, Ancient Arts, Nature's Medicine" by Emma Sans and Alice Micco Snow (PDF)
- Long Island medium: <http://www.tlc.com/tv-shows/long-island-medium/>

#### Written assignment

- Essay #2 Discuss the difficulties involved in becoming a shaman from Vitebsky's text. Present your findings in an essay of 300 words or more due May 24 at 23:55
- Discussion #2 "Can animals play a role in healing?" Write your initial comments by Thursday, May 21 at 23:55; respond to at least 3 others post by Sunday, May 24 at 23:55

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#### Assessment

- Quiz #1 (covers material from Week 1 electronic readings, PSI and New Age PPT'S, Vitebsky pp 6-77) opens May 21 at 08:00, closes May 24 at 23:55

#### Study questions

The Seminole tribe uses specific plants in healing that must be accompanied by secret rituals. (\*True/False)

### **Week 3 May 23- 31 (Memorial Day Observed May 25) "Psychic Healing"**

Objectives: recognize patterns of evolutionary change from rituals and practices in psychic healing; demonstrate knowledge of the cultural and cross-cultural dynamics involved in these alternative methods of healing and how they may be incorporated into healing practices; identify some healing plants (ethnobotany) used globally like mint, sage, hoodia; analyze whether animals are important in healing humans- use examples from McElroy and Masson

#### Reading assignment

- Philip Smith's *Walking Through Walls, A Memoir*

#### Assessment

- Quiz #2: Material from week 2 Vitebsky and electronic readings from McElroy, Masson on animals, and healing plants from Sans/Snow PPT,

multiple choice, True/False, matching); opens May 28 at 08:00, closes May 31 at 23:55

#### **Week 4 June 1- June 7 “Psychic Healing, Past Life Regression and Reincarnation”**

##### Reading assignment

- Complete Smith’s *Walking Through Walls, A Memoir*
- Read Jim B. Tucker’s *Life Before Life*
- Reminder- none of the books in this course are novels

##### Written assignment

- Discussion #3: Regarding Lew Smith’s psychic healing abilities: believable or not; write your initial post by Thursday, June 4 at 23:55; respond to at least 3 others by Sunday, closes June 7 at 23:55
- Essay #3: Using plants (ethnobotany) in healing. Select one plant from the list the following list of those with healing powers: belladonna, alfalfa, mint (hyssop), sage, St. John’s wort; acai, lemon grass (Yerba Luisa), hoodia, fenugreek, tea tree oil, ginseng; research it, and present your findings in an academic style essay of 300 words, due Sunday, June 7 at 23:55. Please include an image of your selection with your essay.

##### Assessment

- Midterm Exam (material presented in weeks 1-3 (100 points: multiple choice, matching, True/False), opens Thursday, June 4 at 08:00, closes Sunday, June 7 at 23:55

#### **Week 5 June 8- June 14 “Skeptics, Past Life Regression-Reincarnation”**

##### Reading assignment

- View DVD *Secrets of the Psychics*, Parts 1-IV and electronic information from the skeptics
- Complete *Life Before Life* by Jim B. Tucker, MD
- Read ***Of Water and the Spirit...*** Malidoma Patrice Somé
- Skeptics Viewpoint
- Begin book for Critical Review

##### Written assignment

- Discussion #4: “Reincarnation: is it believable?” From Tucker’s book *Life Before Life*; post your initial response by Thursday, June 11 at 23:55; respond to at least 3 others by Sunday, June 14 at 23:55

##### Assessment

- Quiz #3- Smith's memoir , Tucker's book and psychic healing; opens Thursday, June 11 at 08:00, closes Sunday, June 14 at 23:55

### **Week 6 June 15- 21 "The life of shamans"**

Reading assignment for final book critique:

- Review shamans from Vitebsky notes

Written assignment:

- Abstract of 200 words for your final book critique (review Critical book review) due Monday June 15 at 23:55
- Final critical book review, 800-900 words due Saturday, June 20 at 12:00 (Noon)

Assessment

- Quiz #4- Past life regression, reincarnation. Somé's book (matching, True/False), opens Tuesday, June 16 at 08:00, closes Saturday, June 20 at 12:00
- Complete the post-course survey for the Global Learning Initiative
- Grades are due June 22