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NASX 304E.01: Native American Beliefs and Philosophy

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**NASX 304E.01: Native American Beliefs and Philosophy
Spring 2022 – M, W 10:30am-11:50pm, PFNAC 105**

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Office: NAS 203B
Office Hours: Wednesdays 12-1:00pm
by appointment only

PLEASE NOTE THAT WEARING A MASK IN CLASS IS REQUIRED

Course Description

“A study of selected ethical systems; origins, worldviews; religious ceremonies and the way they have been affected by western civilization.” Traditional Native American philosophy and worldview differs markedly from Euro-American or Western philosophy and worldview, providing a spiritual grounding for Native societies, in contrast to the secular basis of contemporary American culture. This course will provide students with an understanding of the historical and contemporary basis of Native philosophy and worldview, how that is expressed in various societal contexts, including everyday life, social institutions and rituals, and how that has both remained consistent and changed from ancient through modern times. Ethical practices and questions related to both Native American spiritual beliefs and practices and efforts to suppress them will provide a focus for discussion throughout the term. The course concludes with a review of contemporary religious and philosophical issues of greatest concern to American Indians today.

Course Objectives

- Demonstrate an understanding of the diverse ways humans structure their social, political, and cultural lives
- Interpret human activities, ideas, and institutions with reference to diverse cultural, historical and geopolitical perspectives and physical environments
- Understand roles and manifestations of spirituality, philosophy and religion in Native American life, past and present
- Understand Western impacts on Native American life, culture and worldview
- Understand contemporary issues related to spirituality and worldview
- Understand various related ethical issues

Required Texts

1. Vine Deloria, Jr. *The World We Used to Live In: Remembering the Powers of the Medicine Men* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Press, 2006).
2. Mark St. Pierre and Tilda Long Soldier, *Walking in the Sacred Manner: Healers, Dreamers, and Pipe Carriers—Medicine Women of the Plains Indians* (Simon and Schuster, 1995).

Assignments

Readings:

Reading assignments are specified in the course outline below and should be completed by the day they appear for discussion. You must bring a digital or hardcopy of these readings to class. All assigned readings outside of the above books are available on [Moodle](#).

Chapter Overview, Discussion Questions & Group Presentation:

For this assignment, the class will be split into eight small groups that will each report, present on, and lead a brief discussion of one chapter of *The World We Used to Live In*. (Please note that the entire class is required to read each of the other chapters in addition to the one they will present on; see Paper 1: Book Report below for more details.)

Chapter Overview - Your first paper is an overview of your assigned presentation chapter of *The World We Used to Live In*. Chapter overviews should be informative, discussing your chapter from an objective stance; this is not a book review (which evaluates the book) so be sure to give an account of the thesis and main ideas. Working separately, each person in your group must write and submit a chapter overview, which must be typed, single-spaced and no more than 500 words in length. Please indicate a word count beneath your name.

Presentation Requirements - Using your collective chapter overviews as a guide, your group will be required to develop a **30-35-minute presentation** (including the time for discussion questions) that is a systematic, detailed review of the main ideas and events in your assigned chapter of the book. Be sure to include excerpts from the book. All presentations should also include references to relevant connections from previous chapters/presentations of the book, as well as from related concepts presented in previous classes.

Discussion Questions Requirements - After developing your presentation, your group needs to develop a series of **10 discussion questions AND ANSWERS** that you will use to lead a whole-class discussion of your chapter following your presentation. Discussion questions should relate directly to your group's presentation, which should relate directly to the text. They should also link information from the reading to broad, general themes and information from previous class periods and readings. (Note: Try to develop questions that refer back to information from your presentation, but also feel free to direct people to read and analyze excerpts from the text itself. Remember that good discussion questions are open-ended and invite people to engage in further, meaningful discussion of important topics and information presented in the text.)

Chapter overviews and discussion questions and answers are due to me via email one week prior to the day your group presents. Discussion questions will be emailed to the class one class period before the presentation. Students must come to class prepared to discuss these questions. Finally, remember that this is a group assignment. All group members must participate in the planning and development of the presentation and discussion questions. Your group will be graded on your adherence to the 30-35-minute presentation time limit and the overall quality of the discussion provoked by your questions.

Book Report:

For this assignment, you are required to write a book report that discusses the content of *The World We Used to Live in: Remembering the Powers of the Medicine Men*. The book report should provide a factual outline or overview of the book that summarizes the major themes, key points, and ideas presented in the book. Your book report should be typed, single-spaced and 500 words in length. Please indicate a word count beneath your name.

Comparative Analysis:

This assignment is a comparative analysis of two works—Silko's "Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit" (week 3) and St. Pierre and Long Soldier's, *Walking in the Sacred Manner* (weeks 7-9). Your paper should include a brief synopsis of each work and answer the following two questions: What key themes in the two works are similar and what do they teach us about American Indian spiritual beliefs and philosophies generally and those of the Laguna Pueblo and Lakota in particular? Papers must be typed, double-spaced and 3-4 pages in length.

Term Paper:

Using the readings from weeks 10-15 as the basis of your paper, explain the impacts of the boarding schools on tribal spiritual beliefs and practices. Include a discussion of the challenges that contemporary practitioners of American Indian religions face and how these challenges are similar or dissimilar to those they faced historically. Term papers must include 2 sources from outside of this class and must be typed, double-spaced, and 5-6-pages in length. Papers are due at the last regularly scheduled class period.

Grading Information

Possible Points:

Attendance & participation	10
Chapter overview	5
Group presentation	10
Group discussion questions	10
Book report	15
Comparative analysis	20
Term paper	<u>+30</u>
	100

Grading Scale:

A 93-100	C 73-76
A- 90-92	C- 70-72
B+ 87-89	D+ 67-69
B 83-86	D 63-66
B- 80-82	D- 60-62
C+ 77-79	F 0-59

Course Policies

Covid-19 Precautions: In accordance with University of Montana policy, all students are required to wear a mask while in class. We will also practice social distancing if or whenever possible, as well as sit in assigned seats to help with contact tracing.

Attendance: Three unexcused absences are allowed. You do not need to notify me if your absence is **unexcused**, but you should find out what you missed from a classmate and see me if you have any questions. Your grade will drop 2 points for every unexcused absence thereafter. Excessive tardiness or leaving early will be considered as an absence. If you come to class but sleep, talk to friends, listen to head phones, text, email, etc. you will NOT receive credit for attending that day. Use common sense and be respectful. Cell phones and headphones may not be used in class. **Please note that your participation and contribution to the class is important and you must be prepared for and actively participate in every class.**

UM has a Culture and Ceremonial Leave Policy, which states, “Cultural or ceremonial leave allows excused absences for cultural, religious, and ceremonial purposes to meet the student’s customs and traditions or to participate in related activities. To receive authorized absence due a cultural, religious, or ceremonial event the student or their advisor (proxy) must submit a formal written request to the instructor. This must include a brief description (with inclusive dates) of the cultural event or ceremony and the importance of the student’s attendance or participation. Authorization for the absence is subject to approval by the instructor. Appeals may be made to the Chair, Dean, or Provost. The excused absence or leave may not exceed five academic calendar days (not including weekends or holidays). Students remain responsible for completion or make-up of assignments as defined in the syllabus, at the discretion of the instructor.”

(<https://catalog.umt.edu/academics/policies-procedures>)

Papers/Late Papers: Late papers will lose 5 points per class period. Unless prior permission is secured by a student, I do not accept papers via email or papers more than three class periods past due.

Code of Academic Integrity: Work submitted for written assignments must be your own work. Submitting another person’s work (either borrowed language or ideas) as your own may be grounds for expulsion. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code, which is available at http://life.umt.edu/vpsa/student_conduct.php.

Incompletes: Incompletes will only be granted in the case of an extreme circumstance or university or medical excuse. Students must have completed at least 80% of the course to receive an incomplete and must get permission from me before finals week.

Students with Disabilities: This course is accessible to and usable by otherwise qualified students with disabilities. To request reasonable program modifications, please consult me. Disability Services for Students will assist the instructor and student in the modification process. For more information, visit the Disability Services website at <http://www.umt.edu/disability>.

COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1: Introduction to American Indian Beliefs and Philosophy

1/19 Introduction to course

Week 2: Exploring Tribal Worldviews: Place-Centered (vs. Time-Centered) Religious Traditions

1/24 American Indians 101: FAQs; American Indian Spiritual Beliefs and Practices: An Overview

1/26 Discuss Vine Deloria, Jr., "Thinking in Time and Space"

(Presentation Groups Assigned)

Week 3: Exploring Tribal Worldviews: Tribal Oral Traditions

1/31 Discuss Keith Basso, "Quoting the Ancestors"

2/2 Discuss Gregory Schrempf, "Distributed Power: An Overview—A Theme in American Indian Origin Stories"

Week 4: Art: Expressions of the Sacred

2/7 Discuss Leslie Marmon Silko, "Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit"

2/9 Discuss Joe Feddersen and Elizabeth Woody, "The Story as Primary Source: Educating the Gaze"

Week 5: Songs: Expressions of the Sacred; The Power and Validity of Indigenous Spiritual Experience

2/14 Songs - Guest speaker (tentative)

(Groups 1 & 2 Chapter Overview & Discussion Questions DUE)

2/16 Review; Discuss Vine Deloria, Jr., *The World We Used to Live In*, p. xiii-xxxii

Week 6: The Power and Validity of Indigenous Spiritual Experience (continued)

2/21 **No class/Presidents Day holiday**

2/23 **Groups 1 & 2 present** on chapters 1 & 2 of *The World We Used to Live In*

(Groups 3 & 4 Chapter Overview & Discussion Questions DUE)

Week 7: The Power and Validity of Indigenous Spiritual Experience (continued)

2/28 **Groups 3 & 4 present** on chapters 3 & 4 of *The World We Used to Live In*

(Groups 5 & 6 chapter Overview & Discussion Questions DUE)

3/2 **Groups 5 & 6 present** on chapters 5 & 6 of *The World We Used to Live In*

(Groups 7 & 8 Chapter Overview & Discussion Questions DUE)

Week 8: The Power and Validity of Indigenous Spiritual Experience (continued); Plains Medicine Women

3/7 **Groups 7 & 8 present** on chapters 7 & 8 of *The World We Used to Live In*

3/9 Discuss Mark St. Pierre and Tilda Long Soldier, *Walking in the Sacred Manner*, Intro-Chapter 1

(Book Report DUE)

Week 9: Plains Medicine Women

3/14 Discuss *Walking in the Sacred Manner*, Chapters 2-3

3/16 Discuss *Walking in the Sacred Manner*, Chapters 4-6

Week 10: Spring Break

3/21 **No class**

3/23 **No class**

Week 11: Plains Medicine Women

3/28 Discuss *Walking in the Sacred Manner*, Chapters 7-9

3/30 Discuss *Walking in the Sacred Manner*, Chapters 10-11
(Comparative Analysis DUE)

Week 13: Assimilation/Boarding Schools: Impacts on Tribal Worldview

4/4 Discuss Peggy V. Beck, Anna Lee Walters and Nia Francisco, "The Changeable Earth: The Colonizers and Genocide"

4/6 Discuss Brenda Child, "Train Time"; Watch and discuss the film, *Unspoken: America's Native American Boarding School*

Week 14: Native American Religion and Christianity: Specific Instances Explored

4/11 Discuss Suzanne Crawford, "Defending Sacred Ground: Assimilation and Resistance in the Colonial Era"

4/13 Discuss Walter R. Echo-Hawk, "Five Hundred Nations Within One: The Search for Religious Justice"

Week 15: Modern Issues: American Indian Religious Freedom

4/18 Review Peggy V. Beck, Anna Lee Walters and Nia Francisco, "The Peyote Spirit"; Watch and discuss the film, *The Peyote Road: Ancient Religion in Contemporary Crisis*

4/20 Discuss Jack F. Trope and Walter R. Echo-Hawk, "NAGPRA: Background and Legislative History"

Week 16: American Indian Religious Freedom (continued)

4/25 Discuss Peter B. Campbell, "Those are our Eiffel towers, our pyramids": Why Standing Rock is about much more than oil"; Watch and discuss the film, *In the Light of Reverence*

4/27 Discuss Lisa Aldred, "Plastic Shamans & Astroturf Sun Dances: New Age Commercialization of Native American Spirituality"

Week 17: American Indian Religious Freedom (continued)

5/2 Discuss Stephanie Beran, "Native Americans in Prison: The Struggle for Religious Freedom"

5/4 Discuss Vine Deloria, Jr., "Secularism, Civil Religion, and Religious Freedom of American Indians"
(Term Paper DUE)

Finals week: No class