

1-2014

# NASX 304E.01: Native American Beliefs and Philosophy

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**NASX 304E-01: Native American Beliefs and Philosophy**  
**Spring 2014, M-W 10:10am-11:30am, PFNAC 103**

**Instructor:** Heather Cahoon  
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**Office:** NAS 203B  
**Office Hours:** M-W 9:00-10:00am  
Th 2:30-3:30pm

**Course Description**

“A study of selected ethical systems; origins, worldviews; religious ceremonies and the way they have been affected by western civilization.” Traditional Native 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 religions and efforts to suppress those religions 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 Indian tribes today.

**Course Objectives**

1. Ability to discuss analytically philosophy and worldview from an intercultural context;
2. Understanding of roles and manifestations of spirituality, philosophy and religion in Native American life, past and present;
3. Understanding of Western impacts on Native American worldview;
4. Understanding of contemporary issues related to spirituality and worldview;
5. and an understanding of various related ethical issues.

**Required Readings**

**NOTE:** All reading assignments and discussion questions should be done by the day they are first listed on the syllabus. You are required to bring these readings to class.

**Books:**

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).

**Articles, Excerpts and Discussion Questions:** These items will be available through electronic reserves (ERes) at <http://www.lib.umt.edu/students#eres> (select NASX304-01 and enter the **password NASX304**).

**Book Reports & Group Presentation**

Each student will be required to draft a total of three 1-2-page (500 words maximum) book reports throughout the semester. The first book report will be on *The World We Used to Live In*. For this assignment, the class will be split into eight small groups that will each report, present on, and lead a discussion of one chapter of the book. Book reports should be informative, discussing your section 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. Each person in the group must write and submit a book report. Individual book reports are due one week prior to the day your group presents.

**Presentation Requirements:** Using your collective book reports as a guide, your group will be required to develop a **20-minute presentation** that is a systematic, detailed review of the main ideas and events in your assigned section of the book. Be sure to include excerpts from the book. All presentations should also include references to relevant connections from previous sections/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 that you will use to lead a whole-class discussion of your section following your presentation. Discussion questions should relate directly to your group's presentation, which should relate directly to the text. 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. Group discussion questions are due one class period prior to the day your group presents. **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 20-minute time limit and the overall quality of your discussion questions.

The remaining two books reports will be on *Walking in the Sacred Manner* and on one essay of your choice from among the other assigned readings for this course. All book reports must be typed, double-spaced, and 1-2 pages in length (500 words maximum). Please include the word count beneath your name.

### **Midterm**

The midterm exam will consist of both essay questions and short answer questions relating to material covered in class up to that point.

### **Term Paper**

Your term paper will compare *Walking in the Sacred Manner* with any other single work we read during the course. The paper should address the following two questions: What key themes in the two works are similar and what do they teach us about Native American religion? Term papers must be typed, double-spaced, and 5-6-pages in length and are due at the last regularly scheduled class period.

### **Course Policies**

**Attendance and participation:** 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 attendance and participation 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: This is called attendance AND participation.** Your contribution to the class is important and you must be prepared for and actively participate in every class.

**Papers/Late Papers:** Late papers will lose 5 points per class period; 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](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 with the instructor. 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>.

**Points:**

Attendance & participation	10
Books reports (3)	30
Group presentation	10
Presentation disc. questions	10
Midterm exam	15
Readings disc. questions	5
Term paper	+20
	100

**Grading:**

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 OUTLINE

***Week 1: Introduction to American Indian Beliefs and Philosophy***

- 1/27 Introduction to course  
 1/29 Discuss ERes article by Walter R. Echo-Hawk, "Five Hundred Nations Within One: The Search for Religious Justice"

***Week 2: Exploring tribal worldviews: Place-centered (vs. time-centered) religious traditions***

- 2/3 Film, *In the Light of Reverence*  
 2/5 In-class discussion of (1) *In the Light of Reverence* and (2) ERes article by Vine Deloria, Jr., "Secularism, Civil Religion, and Religious Freedom of American Indians"

***Week 3: Exploring tribal worldviews: Place-centered... (continued)***

- 2/10 Discuss ERes articles by Vine Deloria, Jr., (1) "Thinking in Time and Space" and (2) "The Problem of Creation"  
 2/12 Discuss ERes article by Leslie Marmon Silko, "Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit"

***Week 4: Exploring tribal worldviews: Tribal oral traditions***

- 2/17 **No class/President's Day Holiday**  
 2/19 Discuss ERes articles by Leslie Marmon Silko, "Interior and Exterior Landscapes: The Pueblo Migration Stories"

***Week 5: Tribal oral traditions: Expressions of values and beliefs***

- 2/24 Discuss ERes articles: (1) Keith Basso, "Quoting the Ancestors"  
 2/26 Discuss ERes articles by (1) Gregory Schrempf, "Distributed Power: An Overview—A Theme in American Indian Origin Stories" and (2) "Four American Indian Origin Stories"

***Week 6: Art and Songs: Expressions of the sacred***

- 3/3 Art; Discuss ERes article by Joe Feddersen and Elizabeth Woody, "The Story as Primary Source: Educating the Gaze" (**\*Groups 1 and 2 Book Reports Due**)  
 3/5 Songs; **Guest speaker (\*Groups 1 and 2 Discussion Questions Due; Groups 3 and 4 Book Reports Due)**

***Week 7: The power and validity of indigenous spiritual experience***

- 3/10 Whole class reads Vine Deloria, Jr., *The World We Used to Live In*, p. xiii-xxxii; **Groups 1 and 2 Present** on chapters 1-2 of *The World We Used to Live In* (**\*Groups 3 and 4 Discussion Questions Due; Groups 5 and 6 Book Reports Due**)  
 3/12 **Groups 3 and 4 Present** on chapters 3-4 of *The World We Used to Live In* (**\*Groups 5 and 6 Discussion Questions Due; Groups 7 and 8 Book Reports Due**)

***Week 8: The power and validity of indigenous spiritual experience (continued)***

3/17 **Groups 5 and 6 Present** on chapters 5-6 of *The World We Used to Live In* (**\*Group 7 and 8 Discussion Questions Due**)

3/19 **Groups 7 and 8 Present** on chapters 7-8 of *The World We Used to Live In*

***Week 9: Plains Indian Medicine Women***

3/24 **Midterm Exam**; Discuss Mark St. Pierre and Tilda Long Soldier, *Walking in the Sacred Manner*, p. 7-58.

3/26 Discuss *Walking in the Sacred Manner*, p. 59-104

***Week 10: No class/Spring Break***

3/31 **No class/ Spring Break**

4/1 **No class/ Spring Break**

***Week 11: Plains Indian Medicine Women (continued)***

4/7 Discuss *Walking in the Sacred Manner*, p. 105-155

4/9 Discuss *Walking in the Sacred Manner*, p. 156-209; **Book Report 2 Due**

***Week 12: Invasion/Colonization: Impacts on tribal worldview***

4/14 Discuss ERes article by Peggy V. Beck, Anna Lee Walters and Nia Francisco, "The Changeable Earth: The Colonizers and Genocide"

4/16 Discuss ERes article by Suzanne Crawford, "Defending Sacred Ground: Assimilation and Resistance in the Colonial Era"

***Week 13: Assimilation/Boarding Schools: Impacts on tribal worldview***

4/21 Film, *Where the Spirit Lives*

4/23 Discuss ERes article by Brenda Child, "Train Time"; **Book Report 3 Due**

***Week 14: Native American religion and Christianity: Specific instances explored***

4/28 Discuss ERes articles by Suzanne Crawford, (1) "Indigenous responses: Reconstructing religious and cultural life" and (2) "Contemporary and Traditional: Native American Religious Traditions Today"

4/30 Film, *The Peyote Road: Ancient Religion in Contemporary Crisis*; Discuss ERes article by Peggy V. Beck, Anna Lee Walters and Nia Francisco, "The Peyote Spirit"

***Week 15: Modern Issues: American Indian Religious Freedom***

5/5 Discuss ERes article by Jack F. Trope and Walter R. Echo-Hawk, "NAGPRA: Background and Legislative History"

5/7 Discuss ERes article by Lisa Aldred, "Plastic Shamans & Astroturf Sun Dances: New Age Commercialization of Native American Spirituality"; **Term Paper Due**