

**COLLEGE OF THE HOLY CROSS**

**DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

RELS 299-03: S/T: Symbol and Ritual

SPRING 2008

Joanne M. Pierce, Ph.D.

Office: Smith 423

Office Hours: M 3:15-4:00; R 1:00-1:50; F 11:00-11:50; and by appointment

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**Class Hours:** MWF 1:00-1:50; Stein 132

**Course Description:**

Symbol and ritual are important elements in human culture. This intermediate course will offer students the opportunity to explore these concepts using the methodology of ritual theory as a framework. Both religious and secular ritual and “ritual-like” activity will be addressed.

**Course Objectives:**

By the end of this course, students should understand basic theories of symbol and ritual, and should be able to apply them to their other work in religious studies and related disciplines. They should then be able to extend these insights in discussion of their own experiences of religious, secular, and personal ritual in terms of various methodological and theoretical constructions offered in the area of ritual studies. Finally, students should be able to relate aspects of ritual studies to wider social and cultural issues.

**Course Requirements:**

A. Each student will write two analytical reflection essay (4-5 pages) on certain of the selections from the focus readings covered in the Friday discussion groups. Students may choose which one of the topics to analyze further, but **MUST** turn on one essay before the spring break, and one after. Each essay assignment will have its own guide sheet and its own due date, made available to students in advance of the essay due date. Additional details will be given in class.

B. Each student will be expected to write one longer paper (7-10 pages) on a ritual or ritual event (for example, a film). Additional details will be given in class.

C. Each student will take a final (essay) exam, which will be comprehensive (i.e. cover the entire course). This will be a take-home final. Additional details will be given in class.

D. With a few exceptions, Friday classes will be reserved for small group discussions.

**Discussions:** Students will be divided into small groups for the discussion classes. The Grimes book **MUST** be brought to class for discussion assignments. Each discussion topic will have its own guide sheet: that guide sheet will list the specific readings for that day. One student will be chosen to be recorder in each discussion group: this student will take notes on the day's discussion and write up a summary of the group's thoughts. This summary **MUST** be emailed to me by the following Monday, and will be posted so that all students may read it. Different students will act as recorder for each discussion Thursday. **Important:** Students are responsible for the material generated in discussion groups.

### **Class Policies:**

A. Class attendance is expected. If at all possible, students are asked to please notify me ahead of time by email or by calling my office and leaving a message if they expect to be absent from a class. The student is responsible for making up work (class notes, hand-outs, etc.) if a class is missed. More than two unexcused absences may cause serious problems in understanding course material and in class participation.

A. Essays and papers are due on the day assigned; unexcused late work will receive grading penalties. All assignments are to be typed using standard margins; font sizes of 11 or 12 are acceptable. Essays and papers **MUST** be handed in **both** in hard copy **and** by email as an attached electronic file.

B. Class material, a course calendar, and announcements will all be available on **Blackboard**. More details will be given in class.

### **Grading/Evaluation:**

25%	=	Essay 1
25%	=	Essay 2
25%	=	Paper
<u>25%</u>	=	<u>Final Exam</u>
100%	=	Final Grade

Class participation will also have an influence on the final grade, especially in the case of borderline grades.

## Readings

### Bookstore:

Bell, Catherine. *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*.

Grimes, Ronald. *Readings in Ritual Studies*.

Mitchell, Nathan. *Liturgy and the Social Sciences*.

Van Gennep, Arnold. *Rites of Passage*.

Additional readings may be assigned and will be available on ERes.

## Course Outline

Week of:

- 1) Jan. 14                    **First Class: Wednesday 1/16:** Topic: Introduction  
**Part I: Ritual Theory**  
Topic: Theories of Ritual I: Phenomenology and Psychoanalytic  
Text Reading: Bell, Chapter One, pp. 3-16, 20-22;  
Focus Readings: Eliade, Freud, and Girard selections in Grimes
  
- 2) Jan. 21                    **Monday 1/21: MLK Holiday [No class]**  
**Part I: Ritual Theory** (continued)  
Friday: Discussion 1 on Focus Readings
  
- 3) Jan. 28                    Finish Topic: Theories of Ritual I (if necessary)  
Begin Topic: Theories of Ritual II: Functionalism and Structuralism  
Text Reading: Bell, Chapter Two, pp. 23-33;  
Focus Reading: Durkheim selection in Grimes
  
- 4) Feb. 4                    Continue Topic: Theories of Ritual II  
Text Reading: Bell, Chapter Two, pp. 33-42;  
Focus Readings: Van Gennep, Chapter I; second Turner selection in Grimes  
Friday: Discussion 2 on focus readings
  
- 5) Feb. 11                    Continue Topic: Theories of Ritual II  
Text Reading: Bell, Chapter Two, pp. 42-52, 59-60;  
Focus Reading: Douglas selection in Grimes

- 6) Feb. 18                    Begin Topic: Theories of Ritual III: Symbolic-Cultural  
Text Reading: Bell, Chapter Three, pp. 61-72;  
Focus Readings: Levi-Strauss and Geertz selections in Grimes  
Friday: Discussion 3 on focus readings
- 7) Feb. 25                    Continue Topic: Theories of Ritual III  
Text Reading: Bell, Chapter Three, pp. 72-89  
Focus Readings: Company selection in Grimes
- 8) Mar. 3                      **[Spring Break Week: No Classes]**
- 9) Mar. 10                    **Part II: Ritual Action**  
Topic: Types of Ritual Actions I: Rites of Passage, Calendrical Rites  
Text Reading: Bell, Chapter Four, pp. 93-108;  
Focus Readings: van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, IV (all), V (to p. 57);  
Davis-Floyd and Handelman selection in Grimes  
Friday: Discussion 4 on focus readings
- 10) Mar. 17                    Topic: Types of Ritual Actions II: Rites of Communion and Affliction  
Text Reading: Bell, Chapter Four, pp. 108-120;  
Focus Reading: van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, VIII; Turner (first) and  
Bynum selection in Grimes  
**[No class Friday, 3/21: Easter Break]**
- 11) Mar. 24                    **[No class Monday, 3/24: Easter Break]**  
Topic: Types of Ritual Actions III  
Text Reading: Bell, Chapter Four, pp. 120-137;  
Focus Reading: Kertzer and Goethals selections in Grimes  
Friday: Discussion 5 on focus readings
- 12) Mar. 31                    Topic: “Ritual-Like” Activities I  
Text Reading: Bell, Chapter Five, pp. 138-150; Mitchell TBA  
Focus Reading: Wallendorf/Arnauld selection in Grimes

- 13) Apr. 7                    Topic: “Ritual-Like” Activities II  
Text Reading: Bell, Chapter Five, pp. 150-169  
Focus Readings: Bergesen selection in Grimes; Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, ch. I (ERes)  
Friday: Discussion 6 on focus readings
- 14) Apr. 14                    Topic: Ritual Density: Systems and Tradition, Religious and Secular  
Text Reading: Bell, Chapter Six  
Focus Reading: Rappaport selection in Grimes
- 15) Apr. 21                    Topic: Ritual Change: Transformation and Invention  
Text Reading: Bell, Chapter Seven  
Focus Readings: Mitchell, TBA; Driver and MacAloon selections in Grimes  
Friday: Discussion 7 on focus readings
- 16) Apr. 28                    Conclusion: What is Ritual?  
Text Reading: Bell, Chapter Eight  
Focus Reading: Mitchell, TBA; Grimes selection in Grimes

**[Study Period Begins Wednesday, April 30]**

**\*Take-Home Final Exam: due Monday, May 5, 5:30 p.m. \***

NOTE: The above schedule and procedures in this course are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances.