Office: 309 Biological Sciences Building; lcronk@anthropology.rutgers.edu; 848-932-9285.

Office hours: Mondays and Thursdays, 11:45am - 1pm, Livingston Student Center, and by appointment.

Description: This is a special section of Advanced Issues in Evolutionary Anthropology focusing on evolutionary biological and cognitive scientific approaches to the study of religion. Seminar format.

Required books:


Requirements:

In-class discussions: Each class will be divided into two roughly equal periods separated by a brief break. Both periods will consist of critical discussions led by class members of articles and book chapters selected from the list below. We will try to work through, on average, three articles or chapters each week. The exact number of discussions each class member will lead will depend upon the number of people in the class, and every effort will be made to ensure that everyone leads the same number of discussions. The primary job of the discussion leader will be to teach the article to the class, highlighting its strengths as well as its weaknesses, rather than to criticize the article. Your contributions as leaders of discussions will be worth 30% of your grade for the semester.

In-class group projects: Beginning in week 5, toward the end of each class period we will break up into small groups to discuss ways to apply the lessons learned from the day’s readings to an artificial religious tradition. Your contributions to these discussions will be worth 10% of your grade for the semester.

Class attendance and participation: 10% of your grade for the semester will be based on your attendance record and your record of participation in class discussions.

Research paper: You are to write a ten-page research paper in which you apply the concepts and findings discussed in class to a specific religious tradition. Which specific religions you work on will be decided through an in-class discussion and negotiation with other students. Students are encouraged to choose religious traditions with which they are not already familiar. The paper is due on the last day of class (i.e., 12/10/14). The ten page requirement is for the body of the paper only, which should be double-spaced, with a font size of 11 or 12 and margins no wider than one inch all around. A list of references cited should also be included.
In-class presentations of research findings: The last two meetings of the semester will be devoted to students’ in-class presentations of the main findings from their research papers. These presentations will be worth 20% of your grade for the semester.

Optional trip to Umbanda temple in New York City: The professor is seeking funding from the university so that we can visit an Umbanda temple in New York City on some Sunday during the semester. Participation in this trip, if it occurs, is strongly encouraged by not required.

Evaluation: Grades will be assigned according to the usual system of ten percentage points per passing grade (A=90-100%, B+=88-89%, B=82-87%, B-=80-81%, C=70-79%, D=60-69%, F=0-59%).

Class structure: The first week will be devoted to introductions and a general discussion. During the next three class sessions we will provide ourselves with a common empirical foundation by reading and discussing three recent ethnographies of very different religious traditions. During subsequent weeks, we will work our way through the relevant literature, organized by topic as you see below.

Schedule and readings (subject to change; unless otherwise noted, the articles listed are available through the library’s web site or the class’s Sakai site; also please note that we will not be reading everything listed here, but we will be selecting our readings from this list):

9/3 Introduction

9/10 Readings: the Luhrmann book, plus:


9/17 Readings: the Cohen book, plus:


9/24 Readings: the Zuckerman book, plus:


10/1 HADD, god concepts, etc.


Superstition and magical thinking


Soul and afterlife beliefs


Counter-intuitive concepts and supernatural belief


10/29 Ritual


11/5 Supernatural beliefs, prosociality, and group selectionist perspectives


11/12 Signaling, part one: Manipulation


11/19 Signaling, part two: Costly or hard-to-fake signals


11/26 NO CLASS; REDEFINED DAY; ATTEND YOUR FRIDAY CLASSES

12/3 and 12/10: In-class presentations based on research papers

Research papers due in class on 12/10.