

DePaul University – School for New Learning

HC 113 MidWinter Rituals: The Light in the World

Faculty: Rebecca Armstrong

Term: December 2009

Days: Dec. 1, 3, 8, 10, 15

Time: 6:30 to 9:30

1. General Information

Faculty:

Dr. Rebecca Armstrong

847-707-1781

rarmstr1@depaul.edu

Location: Naperville Campus

2. Course Description

This course uses methods of comparative religion and cultural anthropology to explore the specific manifestation of religious, ethnic and family traditions during the winter season of the northern hemisphere. The similarities between the winter celebrations of Christmas, Hanukkah, Hogmanay, Diwali, Soyal, Las Posadas, Zigmuk, Loi Krathong, Santa Lucia's Day, Saturnalia, Yule and (more recently) Kwanzaa have been noted by scholars and laypersons alike. In some way, all these ritually based festivals relate to the common astronomical fact of the winter solstice – the shortest day and longest night of the year and the slow “return of the light” to the world.

The two central motifs celebrated in story and ritual at this time of year are:

- 1) the birth of the hero god, and
- 2) the great battle between darkness and light (or “evil and good.”)

Using these two motifs as the backdrop for our exploration of different cultural celebrations we will attempt to answer several questions about human nature and society:

1. In what ways does the natural world influence the narrative structure of meaning?
2. How is mythic/religious narrative translated into ritual dress, food and behaviors?
3. What is the function of these types of ritual to the maintenance and renewal of society?
4. What is the pedagogical and psychological function of these types of ritual to the individual within society?
5. How has our modern society impacted the ability of the community to sustain its mythic, religious and ethnic holiday traditions?

In light of the mood of the season, the final class project will be to create a modern midwinter myth and design a holiday complete with ritual, song, special foods and music.

3. Faculty Bio

Rebecca Armstrong has graduate degrees from the University of Chicago Divinity School, where her focus was on ethics and the history of religions, Meadville-Lombard (Unitarian seminary) where she received her Masters of Divinity and Chicago Theological Seminary where she earned her doctorate studying the role of ritual and pilgrimage in contemporary spirituality. She worked for twelve years with the Joseph Campbell Foundation lecturing and leading seminars in comparative mythology and contributing a monthly article to the online journal. She has served congregations as a minister of religious education and continues in private ministerial practice creating rituals for life passages. She has taught as an adjunct faculty member at Mundelein College, National Lewis University, Prairie State College, and Purdue University.

4. Competencies Earned in this Course

A-3-X Written by student/faculty.

H-1-E Can explain the concept, function, and expression of culture and illustrate the explanation with one or more cultures.

H-2-X Written by student/faculty.

5. Learning Outcomes

After completing this course, the student will be able to:

- Recognize the relationship between the natural world and the mythic or religious structure of meaning for the society;
- Identify the winter holidays in their specific detail and link them to their corresponding historical and cultural contexts;
- Explain the social function of at least two midwinter holidays in specific time periods or geographic areas;
- Explain the pedagogical and psychological function of at least two midwinter holidays in specific time periods or geographic areas;
- Locate one's own family or ethnic holiday tradition within the wider field of cultural comparisons and analyze the influences that shaped that tradition;

8. Criteria for Assessment

The following are criteria for receiving a passing grade:

- You participate consistently and constructively by completing the readings and assignments by their due dates.
- You submit your final paper by the due date.
- You consistently, actively, and in a timely fashion participate in classroom discussions. You will receive periodic comments from the instructor, regarding your assignments and your level of participation in the course.

Assessment Criteria for Classroom Discussion Participation

- In discussions, you clearly and consistently link what you are learning in the course to your real life experiences.
- You are able to contribute to the classroom discussions in a collegial fashion.
- You regularly demonstrate good “listening” skills and active inquiry skills in the classroom discussions. This means that you pay attention with openness to the commentary of others and you offer constructive and interested commentary, whether in the form of questions or statements.
- You contribute your own original ideas to the classroom discussion in ways that facilitate learning for other people.
- You discuss critically, give support to your peers, provide own ideas and experiences, challenge ideas of others and receive challenges with good humor.

Assessment Criteria for Reading and Writing Assignments

- Your comprehension and mastery of textbook content will be assessed in the weekly classroom discussions.

For your written assignments it is important that the paper:

- topic has been approved by your course instructor;
- demonstrates that you can apply knowledge learned from the texts and discussions to your topic’
- organizes your supporting evidence into relevant paragraphs that address your subject;

- takes into account a variety of points of view;
- demonstrates your ability to express differing points of view about the values and philosophies that form the basis of your topic;
- demonstrates that you are able to integrate the evidence derived from your chosen sources in standard English, using proper grammar, syntax and vocabulary. *Please* run a spell check before turning the final paper in;
- uses proper quotation form, including introduction of your quotation as well as your commentary following the quotation;
- has an introduction and a conclusion;
- contains a thorough review of literature, uses sourced references and a bibliography at the end of the paper. References can be sourced in the body of the paper using author and year in parentheses, e.g. (Jones, 2003);
- uses the proper APA or MLA citation form for in-text references as well as for the bibliography;
- Final paper should be approximately 8 -10 typed pages in length (2000 – 2500 words), double-spaced. Essays should be 5-7 typed pages in length. Students seeking an “A” in the class may be asked to write additional or lengthier papers.

9. Course Grading Policy

This course offers students the opportunity to engage in a Learning Contract.* This means that each student decides what grade he or she wants from the investment in the class and draws up a learning contract with the instructor for the grade of “A,” “B,” or “C.” The breadth and depth of involvement and productivity in the class and assignments justifies the grade earned. Specific objectives, strategies, outcomes and evidence will be tailored to each learning contract.

*[One of the most significant findings from research about adult learning (e.g., Tough, 1979) is that: When adults go about learning something naturally (as contrasted with being taught something), they are highly self-directing. Evidence has accumulated, that what adults learn on their own initiative they learn more deeply and permanently than what they learn by being taught (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). Therefore, by participating in the process of assessing personal goals, deriving objectives, identifying resources, choosing strategies and evaluating accomplishments the learner develops a sense of ownership of and commitment to the planned learning. Learning contracts also are a means for making the learning objectives of any field or practical experience clear and explicit for both learners and facilitators. Dr. Roger Hiemstra]

10. Class Schedule – TBD

11. Attendance and Participation

A typical four credit hour “face to face” course at SNL involves three hours of classroom meeting per week in addition to three to six hours of study and homework per week. Please schedule sufficient time and resources for your involvement in the class.

It is not possible to receive a passing grade without consistent attendance and participation. If you know you will be on an extended leave of absence for health or personal reasons, you must contact the instructor. Missing more than three classes jeopardizes your chances of earning a passing grade.

12. Academic Integrity Policy

All members of the DePaul community are bound by the University’s guidelines on academic integrity found in the Student Handbook at (<http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/handbook/code16.html>).

The Handbook’s definition of plagiarism is as follows:

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a major form of academic dishonesty involving the presentation of the work of another as one's own. Plagiarism includes but is not limited to the following:

- The direct copying of any source, such as written and verbal material, computer files, audio disks, video programs or musical scores, whether published or unpublished, in whole or part, without proper acknowledgement that it is someone else's.

Copying of any source in whole or part with only minor changes in wording or syntax, even with acknowledgement.

- Submitting as one's own work a report, examination paper, computer file, lab report or other assignment that has been prepared by someone else. This includes research papers purchased from any other person or agency.
- The paraphrasing of another's work or ideas without proper acknowledgement.

Plagiarism, like other forms of academic dishonesty, is always a serious matter. If an instructor finds that a student has plagiarized, the appropriate penalty is at the instructor's discretion. Actions taken by the instructor do not preclude the college or the university from taking further punitive action including dismissal from the university.

13. University Incomplete Policy

The intent of the INcomplete grade is to allow students extra time to complete their final assignments. This need arises because, in the closing weeks of the course, they have an event of significant magnitude (think “Hurricane Katrina”) adversely impact their ability to complete the course,

You must request an incomplete grade in writing two weeks before the end of the quarter. Incomplete grades will be considered only after you have satisfactorily completed at least 75 percent of the coursework, and you have an event of “Katrina” magnitude that prevents you from completing your course. Do not assume that you will qualify for an incomplete. Students who are failing the course at the point where they request an incomplete will not receive one, nor will they be granted after the end of the quarter. Incomplete grades are given at the discretion of the instructor.

If you do receive permission from the instructor to take an incomplete in the course, you will be required to complete a contract with the instructor, specifying how you will finish the missing work within the next two quarters. Incompletes not finished by the end of the second quarter will automatically become an F grade on your transcript.

14. Disability & Accessibility Policy - (*Does DePaul have one?*)