

REL 103—Religion and Sports

Syllabus

Spring 2015 Online Course



Course Instructor:

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It would be more accurate to call this class “Religion **AS** Sports” or “Sports **AS** Religion.” Nearly all sports have their origins in religious ceremonies. Olympic Games, Hockey, Sumo Wrestling, and the Martial Arts are obvious examples, but also more popular games like Football, Basketball, Soccer, and Golf connect directly with ancient ceremonial practices. This class focuses on the most important local example of this with the Haudenosaunee (i.e., Iroquois) game of Lacrosse. Even more important than their ceremonial history, however, sports are currently understood by enthusiasts and critics alike as a “religious activity.” The course will take the perspective that *it is clearer to understand the current popularity and appeal of sports (including games of all types) as ceremonial activities rather than as business or entertainment activities.*

In the first part of the class we will define religion as **exchange** in order to include sports. This follows from my work on Indigenous religions. For this class religion will be understood as a series of exchanges between different beings (gods, ancestors, animals, stars, plants, people, players, fans, announcers, cheerleaders, referees, etc.). We’ll ask several questions. What makes a *gifted* athlete or coach? Why are fans so devoted to their teams? What is sacred about sporting venues? While reading the required book and supplemental readings, we will look at how sports can strengthen cultural and ethical values. How are sports a vital force in the development of youth and communities? Do sports help disenfranchised groups of people (women, African Americans, and Native Americans, for example) overcome their social situation or do they keep them trapped in their social roles? My position is that a greater diversity and inclusiveness in sports eventually improves them. We will also think about the difficult issues facing sports today and will go through some of these issues thematically, including racial issues, mascots, money, drugs, and women in sports.

Required text:

Philip P. Arnold, *The Gift of Sports, Indigenous Ceremonial Dimensions of the Games We Love*, (<https://titles.cognella.com/the-gift-of-sports-9781621310471.html>)

(Other short readings posted on Blackboard)

Requirements

The intention of this online class is to get students to engage the readings, instructional videos, and supplemental videos in a constructive and enriching way. To do this, each student will be responsible for weekly posts and a final presentation that other students will respond to through Blackboard's conversation board. You will be responsible for two short-paper exams and an outline illustrating the scope of the final project. Here is how each assignment breaks down within the 100-point grade scale for this class. You will also have an opportunity to do 2 Extra Point assignments of 3 points each, which will give you a potential of 6 extra points to be added onto your 100-point total grade scale, meaning that 106 points are possible.

1. Throughout the semester, each student will make seven (7) original posts responding to a prompt by the instructor. This original post will be done every other week (for example, if you do one the second week, you will do another original post during week three, etc.). Each post is worth a possible 6 points and a grand total of 42 points, or 42% of your grade.
2. Throughout the semester and on alternating weeks from the seven (7) original posts, each student will be expected to post a response to two (2) other student's original post – for a possible total of 4 points and a grand total of 28 points, or 28% of your grade. Responses should not begin with “I agree” or “I like what you said.” Try and be as creative and insightful with your responses as with your original papers.
3. Your final project will consist of three components: (1) an abstract/outline posted on Blackboard, (2) two responses to other student outlines posted on Blackboard, and (3) a final video presentation posted on Blackboard.
 - a. The outline will clearly establish (and in narrative fashion) the scope and trajectory of your final project addressing an important sporting event that you see as being significant for this class and containing religious dimensions. This will be worth 6 points or 6% of your final grade.
 - b. The response to a classmate's outline should be a well-developed paragraph constructively responding to the outline's argument, clarity, and appropriateness for the course. Constructive suggestions should be included to help the student develop her/his video presentation. This will be worth 4 points or 4% of your grade.
 - c. The actual presentation will be a video taped and posted to Blackboard; it is to be between 4 and 5 minutes in length. This will be worth 20 points or 20% of your final grade.

Assignment	Possible Points Per Assignment	Total Possible Points Per Semester
Seven (7) Original Posts	6	42
2 Responses to 7 Posts	2 pts/res = 4	28
Outline: Final Project	6	6
Outline Response to 2 Posts	2 pts/res = 4	4
Video Presentation	20	20
Total Possible Points		100
2 Extra Credit papers	3	6
Total Possible Points with extra credit		106

Grading (calculated on a 100 point scale):

- A 94-100 points
- A- 91-93 points
- B+ 87-90 points
- B 84-86 points
- B- 81-83 points
- C+ 77-80 points
- C 74-76 points
- C- 71-73 points
- D 60-70 points
- F 59 points and below

Week to Week Schedule:

SECTION I: SPORTS AS RELIGION

Week 1: Introduction to *Religion and Sports* (12-18 January)

- 1) Introduction to “Religion as Sports”
 - a. Reading: Arnold (1-4)
 - b. **Video: Becoming Orange at Syracuse University**
- 2) Sports for Religion or as Religion
 - a. Reading: Arnold (5-9)
 - b. Reading: Jackson (1-7)
 - c. **Video: Sports as Religion vs. Religion as Sports**
- 3) **Post #1: What is your experience of sports as religion?**
Due by 11:59 pm, Sunday 18 January.

Week 2: What is *Religion*? (19-25 January)

- 1) Definitions of Religion
 - a. Reading: Arnold (11-19)
 - b. **Video: Definitions of Religion**
- 2) Academic Study of Religion: Ambiguity and Orientation
 - a. **Video: Examined Life—Cornell West**
 - b. **Video: 3A What is Religion?**
- 3) **Response #1: Respond to two (2) other posts.**
Due by 11:59 pm Sunday, 25 January.

Week 3: Gift and Profit Economies (26 January-1 February)

- 1) Religion as Habitation
 - a. Reading: Arnold (17-19)
 - b. **Video: 4: Indigenous Religions: Religion as Habitation**
- 2) Religion as Exchange
 - a. Reading: Arnold (21-30)
 - b. **Video: 5 Gift Economy**
 - a. **Video: Mayan Ball Games**
 - c. **Video: Wade Boggs**
- 3) **Post #2: What are differences between gift and monetary economies in sports?**
Due by 11:59 pm Sunday, 1 February.

SECTION II: SPORTS AS ORIENTATION

Week 4: The Spectacle of Sport (2-8 February)

- 2) Money, Religion, and the Profit Economy
 - a. Reading: Arnold (31-34)
 - b. **Video: 6 Money & Religion**
 - c. **Video: Are NCAA Players Uncompensated Employees?**
- 3) Human Limitations
 - a. Reading: Arnold (35-45)

- b. **Video: 7 Human Limitations**
 - c. **Video: Team Hoyt**
 - d. **Video: Terry Fox**
 - e. **Video: Murder Ball**
- 4) **Response #2: Respond to two (2) other posts.**
- 5) **Extra Credit: Super Bowl as spectacle**
Due by 11:59 pm, Sunday 8 February.

Week 5: Olympic (and the Super Bowl) Spectacle (9-15 February)

- 1) Super Bowl and American Culture
 - a. **Video: Consumerism, Commercialism and Capitalism**
 - b. **Video: Super Bowl and Declaration of Independence**
 - c. **Video: Native American Advertisement**
- 2) Mythic Origins of Olympics
 - a. Reading: Arnold (47-50)
 - b. **Video: 8 Olympic Morality**
 - c. **Video: Beijing Opening Ceremony**
 - d. **Video: Riefenstahl "Olympia"**
- 3) **Post #3: What values and symbols of the ancient Olympics are still expressed through modern sport?**
Due by 11:59 pm, Sunday 15 February.

Week 6: Olympic Lessons and Gifted Athletes (16-22 February)

- 1) Olympics Lessons
 - a. Reading: Arnold (57-62)
 - b. **Video: Lance Armstrong Documentary**
 - c. **Video: Ancient Olympia**
- 2) Gifted Athletes
 - a. Reading: Arnold (51-55)
 - b. **Video: 9 Philosopher Coach**
 - c. **Video: Paavo Nurmi**
- 4) **Response #3: Respond to two (2) other posts.**
Due by 11:59 pm, Sunday 22 February.

Week 7: Responsibilities: Talents, Gifts and Coaching (23 February-1 March)

- 1) The Philosopher Coach
 - a. Reading: Arnold (63-66)
 - b. Reading: Jackson (171-182)
 - c. **Link: Simmons family at Syracuse University**
 - d. **Video: Interview of Coaches**
- 2) Talents and Gifts
 - a. Reading: Arnold (67-69)
 - b. Reading: Coyle (11-29)
 - c. **Video: 10 Talents and Gifts**
 - d. **Website: <http://thetalentcode.com>**
 - e. **Video: Todd Marinovich Training Session**
- 3) **Post #4: What are the responsibilities of a Gifted Athlete/Coach?**
Due by 11:59 pm, Sunday 1 March.

Week 8: Football as a Substitute for War (2-8 March)

- 1) Origins of Football and Indian Wars
 - a. Reading: Arnold (71-75)
 - b. Reading: Jenkins (9-17)
 - c. **Video: 11A Native American History**
 - d. **Video: After words with Sally Jenkins**
- 2) Native American Boarding Schools
 - a. Reading: Arnold (77-81)
 - b. Reading: Adams (5-27)
 - c. **Video: 11B Indian Boarding Schools**
 - d. **Video: Jim Thorpe (1-4)**
 - e. **Video: Unseen Tears (1-3)**
 - f. **Video: America's Prisoners of War**
- 3) **Response #4: Respond to two (2) other posts.**
- 4) **Final Project abstract/outline.**
Due by 11:59 pm, Sunday 8 March.

Spring Break: 9-15 March

Week 9: Sports and Inequality (16-22 March)

- 1) Racism and Sports: Conveyor Belt System
 - a. Reading: Arnold (83-89)
 - b. Reading: Rhoden (231-246)
 - c. **Video: 12A Racism & Sports**
 - d. **Video: Donald Sterling interview**
- 2) **Post #5: Does racism/sexism exist in modern sports?**
- 3) **Final Project Response: Respond to two (2) separate final project abstracts**
Due by 11:59 pm, Sunday 22 March.

Week 10: Native American Mascots (23-29 March)

- 1) Indian Mascots and Racism
 - a. Reading: Arnold (91-94)
 - b. Reading: Black (605-622)
 - c. **Video: 12C Mascots**
 - d. **Video: In Whose Honor?**
 - e. **Video: Congress Wants the Redskins Name Change**
 - f. **Video: Washington Redskins Piece on the Daily Show**
- 2) **Response #5: Respond to two (2) other posts.**
Due by 11:59 pm, Sunday, 29 March.

Week 11: Woman and Equality (30 March-5 April)

- 1) Beyond Title IX: Women and Sports
 - a. Reading: Arnold (95-99)
 - b. Reading: Brennan (xxi-xiii)
 - c. Reading: National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education (337-345)
 - d. **Video: 12B Women & Sports**
 - e. **Video: Women Who Make America, Part II**
 - f. **Video: Katherine Switzer**
- 3) **Post #6: Why is gender equality important in sports?**
Due by 11:59 pm, Sunday 5 April.

SECTION III: NATURE RELIGION AND INDIGENOUS SPORTS AS RELIGION

Week 12: Sports, Religion and the Environment (6-12 April)

- 1) Nature Religion
 - a. Reading: Snyder (667-669)
 - b. Reading Von Stuckrad (1119-1120)
 - c. Reading: Johnson (1398-1400)
 - d. **Video: 13 Sports & Nature**
- 2) **Response #6: Respond to two (2) other posts.**
Due by April 11:59 pm, Sunday 12 April.

Week 13: The Haudenosaunee Confederacy (13-19 April)

- 1) Creation, The Great Law of Peace, and Thanksgiving Address
 - a. Reading: Great Law of Peace
 - b. **Video: Wooden Stick Info**
 - c. **Website: <http://www.onodaganation.org/history/>**
- 2) Onondaga Lake: From Hierophany and Superfund Site
 - a. Reading: Vennum, selections from *American Indian Lacrosse*
 - b. **Video: Alf's Talk**
- 3) **Post #7: What is the relationship between lacrosse, religion and responsibility according to the Haudenosaunee?**
Due by 11:59 pm, Sunday 19 April.

Week 14: The Sacred Game of Lacrosse (20-26 April)

- 1) From the Creator's Game to the Final Four: History of Lacrosse
 - a. Reading: Arnold (105-109)
 - b. **Video: 14A Lacrosse**
 - c. **Website: <http://iroquoisnationals.org/the-iroquois/the-story-of-lacrosse/>**
- 2) Mythic Legacy of Lacrosse: From Creator to Crooked Arrows
 - a. Reading: Arnold (111-115)
 - b. **Video: 14B Lacrosse**
 - c. **Video: America's First Sport**
 - d. **Website: <http://www.onodaganation.org/culture/sports/lacrosse/>**
- 3) **Response #7: Respond to two (2) other posts.**
Due by 11:59 pm, Sunday 26 April.

Week 15: Final projects (27 April-3 May)

- 1) **Extra Credit #2.**
- 2) **Final Video Project.**
Due to be posted by 11:59 PM, Sunday 3 May.

Course Goals, Academic Integrity and Disabilities Services

The Department of Religion has articulated three goals that shape its teaching and its expectations of what students in its courses and programs may expect to gain from this study:

1. To understand better the nature and diversity of religious expressions in the contemporary world and in history, and their power in peoples' personal and collective lives;
2. To think more deeply and critically about religious experience and its modes of expression and forms of interpretation;
3. To recognize and appreciate the difficulties and possibilities in a disciplined study of religion; and to become aware of a diversity of approaches and methods within that study.

Academic Integrity:

Syracuse University's Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about course-specific expectations, as well as about university policy. The university policy governs appropriate citation and use of sources, the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, and the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verification of participation in class activities. The policy also prohibits students from submitting the same written work in more than one class without receiving written authorization in advance from both instructors. The presumptive penalty for a first offense by an undergraduate student is course failure, accompanied by a transcript notation indicating that the failure resulted from a violation of Academic Integrity Policy. The standard sanction for a first offense by a graduate student is suspension or expulsion. For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>."

Disability Services:

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), located in Room 309 of 804 University Avenue, or call (315) 443-4498 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented Disabilities Accommodation Authorization Letters, as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.