

ANTH 2667: THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF RELIGION

A GUIDE TO THE UNIT



Figure 1: A page from a Jack Chick tract, "This Was Your Life" (1988), translated into Papua New Guinea Tok Pisin.

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By appointment.

WELCOME TO ANTH 2667

Welcome to ANTH 2667: The Anthropology of Religion! This advanced class which will introduce you to the main ways that anthropologists have thought about the relationships between religion and society, and the debates that are happening in anthropology about this and related questions. Religion has been a central topic for anthropologists since the beginning, and so this class also introduces you to several key paradigms of anthropology.

More importantly, like any senior anthropology unit, **this class encourages you to think for yourself**, and teaches you how to make use of ideas from anthropology to develop your own ideas about religion in particular places, investigate them, question them, and make an argument for your own conclusions.

This guide is not the "unit outline" for this class. Faculty policy has recently changed, and now a unit outline is automatically generated based on data from the Handbook and from official University and Faculty policies. **You can find the unit outline on Blackboard.** It contains the deadlines for assign-

ments in this class, the schedule of class meetings, the learning outcomes for this class, and the policies that govern our work in this class, including policies on special consideration, extensions, plagiarism, and attendance in lecture and tutorial. It also has information on services for students, like when you get behind or need academic advice.

This guide is about how this class actually works in practice. It gives you the full information about what we will discuss in class each week. It also has all of the deadlines for written work. **You should read the official unit outline, the policy statements, and this guide from beginning to end.**

If you have any questions at all about the policies for this class, or how this class works, get in touch with Ryan right away. You can ask anything you want. No document, guide, or outline will have all the information, so you should always feel free to ask any kind of question.

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HOW THIS CLASS WORKS

This class is based on a weekly cycle we will follow for the whole semester. The steps in the weekly cycle are:

- **Read** the required readings (and, if you want to know more, read recommended readings), **think** about what they say to you.
- **Write** something about what you think is important about them.
- **Refresh your mind.** Get up from the computer and walk around. Issues we discuss in class are all around you. Observe them, take note for later.
- **Further your research** in your chosen topic for the semester. **Go to the library** and find ethnographic books to read on your topic.
- **Ask** questions, **discuss**, and **listen** in lecture and tutorial.
- **Receive feedback** from me.
- Lather, rinse, repeat...

In other words, all of parts of the class—lecture, tutorial, readings, and your ideas—fit together. By completing this cycle each week, you can be sure that each week builds to the next, and by the end you will have constructed an edifice of knowledge rather than collected bits and pieces of information. For all the pieces to come together, **you have to do something for this class every week** for the whole semester.

WHERE TO GET THE READINGS

A class reader containing the required readings is available from the Copy Centre on campus and from Publish Partner (at <http://publishpartner.com.au>).

Each week has one or more common readings, as noted in the [weekly plan](#). Required readings are available in the unit reader and on eReserve. Occasionally, there is a required online reading or video. I will post links to this on the unit's web sites. The other listed readings are all recommended, indicated with an asterisk (*). They are also on eReserve and, where on-

line copies are not available, on 2-hour loan in Fisher Library.

Students must ensure they have access to the required readings, so please ask the lecturer or a librarian if you can't get the assigned readings.

ASSIGNMENTS

There are three types of assessment in this unit. First, in Weeks 2 through 12, you will submit a short writing assignment on the class LMS site. These short responses are not graded. You receive credit for submitting them on time, by Tuesday 11:59 p.m. before lecture. They are meant to encourage you to think about the reading and prepare for the class discussion each week. By doing these short assignments on time, you can be sure you are preparing for each step in the weekly cycle.

Second, you will be working on an independent research project on a topic of your choice. You will be seeking out ethnographic sources of information about this topic and formulate your own argument about it. Along the way, you will submit several elements of your research process and thinking as it develops. Each of these assessments has its own instructions, posted online. Unlike essays, though, they are graded based on how much progress you have made on the process of research, and how much effort you've made to develop your thinking. They are all due on a Tuesday at 11:59 p.m. (before Wednesday's lecture).

Third, at the end of the semester, you will submit a 10-page research essay on your topic. In the essay, you will pose a debatable question and offer your own argument in support of your answer. This essay will be based on all the work you've done over the whole semester. It will be graded as a finished product.

For all of your work for this class, be sure to save a copy for yourself before you submit it online, and also regularly back up your work to a separate disk. Fun fact: losing or accidentally deleting your written work is not a 'misadventure' and cannot be used as grounds for special consideration.

ASSIGNMENTS AT-A-GLANCE

Assessment	Due	Length	Worth
Weekly writing assignments	Tuesdays by 11:59 p.m. in Weeks 2-12.	100 words	20%
Possible topics and sources	March 14 by 11:59 p.m.	300 words	10%
Progress report	April 11 by 11:59 p.m.	300 words	15%
Thesis statement and outline	May 2 by 11:59 p.m.	300 words	15%
Research essay	June 6 by 11:59 p.m.	3000 words	40%

THE WEEKLY PLAN

W	Date	Topic	Research
1	8.3	Why is religion interesting?	Read The Quest and start thinking about what you want to know more about.
2	15.3	Bring an example of a religious practice to tutorial Read: Unit outline, unit guide, Durkheim	Have you met a librarian who knows something about your interests? Go to the library and introduce yourself.
3	22.3	Why do so many societies all have religion? Read: Douglas, Ortner	Find the locations in the library stacks for ethnographies on topics you're interested in. Possible topics due (on Tuesday) .
4	29.3	Why would someone join a religious commune? Read: Palmer	Think about why you are interested in your topics. What is compelling your attention? What do you want to explain?
5	5.4	Can you learn to hear God? Read: Luhrmann	What are the 'why' questions anthropologists have asked about your topic?
6	12.4	Do religions mix? Read: Romberg	How would the authors of class readings see your topic? What would they pay the most attention to and why? Progress report due (on Tuesday) .
–	19.4	Spring break	
7	26.4	Is African Christianity just 'African culture'? Read: Meyer, Newell	If you had to illustrate your research question with an image, what would you use?
8	3.5	Is Christianity singular or plural? Read: Robbins, Cannell	Use EndNote or Zotero to store all of the references you've read, and attach your annotations on each source as notes. Thesis statement and outline due (on Tuesday) .
9	10.5	Can you buy salvation? Read: Jones, Brenner*	This is a good week to make an appointment with Ryan to discuss your paper.
10	17.5	Do all societies become secular? Read: Mahmood, Deeb*	Start writing a rough draft this week. This is also a good week to see Ryan.
11	24.5	Do liberal societies need beliefs? Read: Mahmood, Keane*	When you can't think of what to say next, get up and walk around the block.
12	31.5	Can religion can change the world? Read: Gravers, Hertzberg*	Now is a good time to exchange drafts with a friend.
13	7.6	To be revealed	Is your thesis statement clear? What does your Parthenon look like? How would you answer someone who rejected your thesis, and how do you respond? Your final paper is due on 6 June by 11:59 p.m.
14	8.6	Reading period	
15	15.6	Finals week	

Nb. A bibliography for the class follows. You can look up the full reference by the author's last name. Recommended readings are marked with an asterisk (*).

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF CLASS READINGS

All readings are found in the reader in the order they are assigned. Recommended readings are marked with an asterisk (*). These and the required readings are also available on eReserve. Other items are linked from Blackboard and/or Ryan's public site.

- *Brenner, Suzanne. 1996. "Reconstructing Self and Society: Javanese Muslim Women and 'the Veil.'" *American Ethnologist* 23 (4): 673–97. doi:10.1525/ae.1996.23.4.02a00010.
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- *Deeb, Lara. 2009. "Piety Politics and the Role of a Transnational Feminist Analysis." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15 (January): S112–26.
- Douglas, Mary. 2002. "The Abominations of Leviticus." In *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, 51–71. London: Routledge.
- Durkheim, Emile. 2008. "The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life." In *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, edited by Michael Lambek, 34–47. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing.
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- Robbins, Joel. 2001. "God Is Nothing but Talk: Modernity, Language, and Prayer in a Papua New Guinea Society." *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 103 (4): 901–12.
- Romberg, Raquel. 1998. "Whose Spirits Are They?: The Political Economy of Syncretism and Authenticity." *Journal of Folklore Research* 35 (1): 69–82.

USEFUL TEXTBOOKS ON RELIGION

- Bell, Catherine. 2009. *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions--Revised Edition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bielo, James S. 2015. *Anthropology of Religion: The Basics*. London: Routledge.
- Bowie, Fiona. 2006. *The Anthropology of Religion: An Introduction*. Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons.
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- Lambek, Michael. 2001. *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*. Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons.
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- . 2006. *Eight Theories of Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

STARTING POINTS FOR YOUR RESEARCH

For your research project, you should [choose a topic](#) that you would like to learn more about, and is related to religion as a cross-cultural and diverse phenomenon. This can seem a little daunting, but there are a lot of books written by anthropologists who have worked all over the world, in many different cultures, and with people who are part of many different religious traditions both large and small. Below are several highly recommended starting points. Most of these books are in Fisher Library. This list is somewhat selective; you are not limited to what is here. If you have a specific place, community or tradition that you want to explore, and you are having trouble finding a good starting point, you should immediately email Ryan for advice. (Librarians are also good sources of research help too!)

- Appadurai, Arjun. 1981. *Worship and Conflict under Colonial Rule: A South Indian Case*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
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- Deeb, Lara. 2008. *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Elisha, Omri. 2011. *Moral Ambition: Mobilization and Social Outreach in Evangelical Megachurches*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press.
- Eskridge, Larry. 2013. *God's Forever Family: The Jesus People Movement in America*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Falk, Monica Lindberg. 2007. *Making Fields of Merit: Buddhist Female Ascetics and Gendered Orders in Thailand*. Singapore: NIAS Press.
- Fuller, Christopher John. 2003. *The Renewal of the Priesthood: Modernity and Traditionalism in a South Indian Temple*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
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STILL LOOKING?

Need a new place to look for sources of ethnographic information? Try the following:

If you can't acquire a copy of a book you'd like to read, **look for other publications by the same author**.

Choose one of your class readings you thought was useful, and go to [ISI Web of Knowledge](#) and perform a cited reference search for it. This will give you a list of scholarly publications which have cited this work.

Look for the books above in the [Fisher Library catalogue](#) and see what **subject headings** the catalogue uses to classify them. There may be other, similar works in the same or nearby headings, and you will also pick up on the controlled vocabulary used for subject classifications.

Look in the [BONUS+ catalogue](#), which allows you to request books from other libraries in the Sydney area. The [National Library of Australia's catalogue](#) and [Worldcat](#) are good places to look too.

A GUIDE TO THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Be sure to read [The Quest](#), Ryan's guide to research at http://anthro.rschram.org/the_quest. The Quest introduces you to

- the concept of a research topic, and how to specify your interests in the form of a topic.
- the kinds of questions that researchers ask about their topics.
- the concept of a claim, or thesis statement, and how to develop an argument for it.
- the cycle of drafting, feedback and revision.
- what it means to be a researcher, and why research is the higher form of learning.

The assignments in this class assume you're familiar with its key ideas.

ANOTHER GUIDE TO RESEARCH

Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. 2009. *The Craft of Research*, Third Edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

REFERENCE

Chick, Jack T. 1988. *Laip Bilong Yu I Bin Olsem [This Was Your Life]*. Ontario, Calif.: Chick Publications, Inc. <http://chick.com>.