

RELG 473: Religions, Medicines, and Healing

Professor Stephanie Y. Mitchem

Course Overview:

When serious illnesses arise, belief systems often adapt in search of healing. Religions' and medicines' relationships are exposed when healing practices are considered. Religions may struggle to understand the workings of medicines in light of their belief. Tensions might surface. Examples of tensions between medicine and religion occur when some churches forbid members' participation in the older medical forms of addiction treatment, spousal abuse, blood transfusions or more recent forms of gene therapy or in vitro fertilization. The relationships between religions, medicines, and healing are further complicated when cultures are considered. Is a chicken foot in the pocket efficacious for healing? Religions themselves may promote their own forms of healing by those they believe endowed with divine powers: laying on of hands, blessed handkerchiefs, or a sacred text in one's shoe may be promoted by some religious communities.

Students will explore the interdisciplinary dimensions of this growing field in Religious Studies. These dimensions may include: religious meanings assigned to illness; physical/mental suffering and religion; wellness and healing concepts across cultures. We will consider differences between allopathic and traditional healing systems as well as interactions between them as components of religious systems. While this study can have significant international aspects, as an introductory course, we will focus on situations in US contexts.

Required texts:

R. Scott, *Miracle cures*

S. Mitchem, E. Townes, eds, *Faith, health, and healing in African American life*

C. Young, *Spirituality, health, and healing*

C. Brown, *Testing prayer*

Suggested text: R. Spector, *Cultural diversity in health and illness*

Learning Outcomes:

Upon completion of the course, the student should:

- Distinguish between allopathic, traditional, and alternative medicines with awareness of positive and negative aspects of each;
- Understand some of the religious dimensions of healing practices and recognize how these dimensions are used in order to make medical decisions; and
- Begin to envision an integrated approach to religion, medicine, and healing

Grading scale:

A	100-91
B	90-81
C+	80-75
C	74-65
D	64-55
F	54 and below

Class requirements:These influence your final grade:

1. The readings selected for this class are demanding. Students must maintain the reading schedule.
2. Participation in class discussions
3. Attendance: we follow the university's attendance policy, which limits the number of absences. Your grade will be lowered significantly if you are absent more than 4 times.

University of South Carolina policy: "Absence from more than 10 percent of the scheduled class sessions, whether excused or unexcused, is excessive and the instructor may choose to exact a grade penalty for such absences. It is of particular importance that a student who anticipates absences in excess of 10 percent of the scheduled class sessions receives prior approval from the instructor before the last day to change schedule as published in the academic and refund calendars on the registrar's Web site.

It must be emphasized that the "10 percent rule" stated above applies to both excused and unexcused absences. Faculty members should notify classes, specifically in the course syllabi, the attendance policy which they intend to follow in each class. It is also recommended that the faculty include a policy statement in their syllabi requesting students to meet with the instructor early in the semester to discuss the consequences of potential excessive absences due to participation in University-sponsored events." (<http://registrar.sc.edu/>)

Writing and Research requirements:

College level writing is critically important for this class. Your grade for the class will be at risk if you hand in late assignments, un-typed papers (except for in class assignments), plagiarized, undeveloped, etc. In particular, make sure you know

what plagiarism is and is not!! If you have any concerns about your own writing, make an appointment at the writing center.

For this course, the following are **NEVER** considered valid resources for research papers:

- Dictionaries
- Wikipedia
- Most encyclopedias (exceptions are specialized and discipline specific encyclopedias)

****When using on line sources, going through the USC library in order to locate scholarly articles is strongly suggested.**

Papers must be typed, double-spaced. Handwritten papers will not be accepted. Citations of sources are required. When needed, you must use a notation format -- MLA, Chicago, APA -- consistently throughout any paper. In addition, poor grammar and spelling can be grounds for lowering a grade. The aim in these restrictions is to develop college level, critically sharp papers that (really!) say what you mean them to say.

Assignments:

Because of the relationship between reading, class work, and group discussions, late papers are *seldom* accepted.

1. Students design “test” for religious cures: after reading and discussion, this proposed scientific test of religious cures is **ONLY** a thought experiment—developing the hypothesis and test are the only portions allowed in this course. A discussion of the Institutional Review Board and the ethics of such experiments will take place in class. **(10% of final grade)**
2. Map of local churches’ healing services or pilgrimage places; further explained in class **(10% of final grade)**
3. Midterm exam **(20% of final grade)**
4. Bring in information on one culturally derived healing practice; should be typed, ready to hand in, for class discussion **(10% of final grade)**
5. Final research paper (7-10 pages), should draw on other ideas (testing cures, mapping). To be further discussed in class **(25% of final grade)**
6. Final exam **(25% of final grade)**

Class Schedule:

Date	Topic
M, 1/14	Introduction
W, 1/16	Lecture: Defining healing and types of medicine Students design “test” for religious cures Lecture/discussion: IRB and ethics. Example, Hottentot Venus and Henrietta Lacks

M, 1/21	MLK Day, no classes
W, 1/23	Lecture/ discussion: Connecting religion to healing practices, across cultures
M, 1/28	Testing prayer reading assignment pp. 1-125 – class discussion, to include parameters for design of hypotheses and experiments
W, 1/30	Testing prayer reading assignment and discussion, pp. 126-245
M, 2/4	Testing prayer, reading assignment, conclusion of text
W, 2/6	Results of student hypotheses /experiments' design
M, 2/11	Miracle cures reading assignment and discussion, chapters 1-4
W, 2/13	Map of local churches' healing services or pilgrimage places – students discover by interview
M, 2/18	Miracle cures reading assignment and discussion, chapters 5-8
W, 2/20	Miracle cures reading and discussion, chapters 8-9
M, 2/25	Midterm review
W, 2/27	Continue mapping healing services or pilgrimage places Discussion of and preparation for final paper
M, 3/4	Lecture: Cultural diversity in health, healing, illness, and religion
W, 3/6	Lecture/discussion, cultural diversity in health, healing, religion.
M, 3/11	Spring Break, no classes
W, 3/13	Spring Break, no classes
M, 3/18	Continue discussion, cultural diversity in health, healing, religion.
W, 3/20	Students' information on one culturally derived healing practice
M, 3/25	Continue discussion on student information on culturally derived practice
W, 3/27	Mitchem/Townes, Part II
M, 4/1	Continue discussion of culturally derived healing practices and concepts of health and illness
W, 4/3	Mitchem/Townes, Part I
M, 4/8	Mitchem/Townes, Part IV
W, 4/10	Townes' essay and discussion of culturally related dying and funerary practices as part of healing
M, 4/15	FINAL PAPERS CAN BE TURNED IN TODAY IF A PRELIMINARY REVIEW REQUESTED
W, 4/17	Mitchem/Townes, Part V
M, 4/22	LAST DAY FOR PRELIMINARY REVIEW OF FINAL RESEARCH PAPER
W, 4/24	Religion, medicines, and healing: framing questions, comparing ideas
M, 4/29	Final class discussion: drawing conclusions, or not?
Tu, 4/30	Reading Day
Final Exams	