

Spring 2019  
**Shamanism**  
ANT 4953.001



Time: Tuesday and Thursday, 2:30 – 3:45pm  
Place: TBA

Professor Michael Cepek

Office: MH 4.03.34

Email: Please email me through Blackboard for all course purposes

Phone (office): 458-5700

Office hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 9:30 – 11am

TA: Alesia Hoyle

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

(From the catalogue) “In this course, we will analyze the practice of shamanism both globally and with a specific focus on indigenous traditions in Amazonia. Much of the course will center on shamanic healing using the hallucinogenic brew *ayahuasca* or *yaje* (*Banisteriopsis caapi* with

various plant admixtures). We will read ethnographic case studies, focused articles, and regional comparative analyses, and we will also watch documentary films on shamanism in Amazonia and elsewhere. The course materials will examine how indigenous and nonindigenous peoples conceptualize and experience illness, how they diagnose the ailments that afflict them, and how they use shamanic curing techniques to return to a state of health. We will also discuss the psychopharmacology of various plants used in shamanic curing and the ways in which shamanic traditions have become part of indigenous peoples' struggles to confront the political, economic, and environmental problems that threaten their collective wellbeing."

What is shamanism? What is a shaman? And what do shamans do? Over the course of the semester, we will explore these questions through readings, discussions, and research projects that will take us from Siberia to the Amazon, including a stop in San Antonio. The word "shamanism" is associated with many supposedly exotic phenomena: hallucinogenic drugs, spirits and ghosts, hysteria, ecstasy, psychosis, magic, witchcraft, transvestites, sexual taboos, shape-shifting into animals, and the strange connection between curing and killing. Anthropologists have defined shamanism in many ways. We will consider these conceptualizations at a global level. Over the majority of the course, though, we will focus on shamanic practices in Western Amazonia, the region in which healing with the vision-inducing plant brew ayahuasca is most prevalent in cultural, geographic, and historical terms. A general theme and mission of the course is to inspire us to question our own romanticizing and exoticizing assumptions concerning other people's religious and spiritual practices. At the same time, engaging with shamanism will provide us a critical perspective from which to examine the specificities of our own religious beliefs and practices.

After a general introduction to the meaning and practice of shamanism, we will consider a number of specific themes in the anthropology of the topic:

1. Ayahuasca and its shamanic uses
2. Shamanic practices in Western Amazonia
3. The moral ambivalence of shamans
4. Gender and sexuality in shamanism
5. Neo-shamanism and shamanic tourism

## **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

This course will provide students with an opportunity to develop a deep understanding of shamanism, including its meaning, its practice, its history, and its relationship to the larger study of religion, cosmology, and indigenous peoples. Students will be able to answer the following questions:

- What is shamanism?
- How do shamans heal people?
- In what ways might shamanic healing be therapeutically effective?
- How do shamans relate to the nonhuman world, including supernatural beings, animals, and plants?

- What is religion?
- What is magic?
- Is shamanism only practiced by indigenous peoples, or do nonindigenous peoples practice shamanism, too?
- How is shamanism becoming an important element of religious movements around the world in both urban and rural contexts?

At a more general level, by taking this course students will improve their skills in:

- Critical thinking
- Critical reading
- Oral communication
- Written communication
- Internet and library research

## REQUIRED READINGS

Most readings are posted as PDF's on Blackboard. The following required book is available for purchase at the university bookstore:

Beyer, Stephan (2009). *Singing to the Plants: A Guide to Mestizo Shamanism in the Upper Amazon*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

## ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

This course demands intense engagement with assigned texts. ***All students must read the material before coming to class.*** Regular attendance is mandatory, and students are required to contribute to class discussions with questions and comments. I have structured the course around the approach known as “active learning,” which holds that students only learn to the degree that they employ ideas and information in an active process of thinking, talking, and writing. Accordingly, you should view your involvement with the course as much more than “listening to lectures.” As you all have heard before, there are no “dumb” questions, and all queries are appreciated. Lectures, discussions, films, and in-class exercises are essential aspects of the course—30% of your grade involves showing up prepared and participating actively. In addition, failure to attend and/or participate will significantly affect your ability to succeed on tests and out-of-class assignments.

***The use of cell phones and laptop computers is not allowed during lectures.*** From anthropologist Will Robertson, of the University of Arizona (2017): “I have carefully considered the use of technology in class. While I recognize that laptops make it easier to take notes quickly for some people, research on the use of laptops in class shows that students spend considerable amounts of in-class time multitasking rather than taking notes and that multitasking causes students to retain less information during class. Multitasking has been shown to cause distractions for both the student doing the multitasking as well as for nearby peers, even when

peers do not think they are being distracted. Further research has shown that, even when students only use their laptops for note-taking and resist the temptation to multitask, students retain more information when they handwrite notes in class because they tend to try to transcribe lectures verbatim when typing instead of processing information and reframing it in their own words when handwriting.” Documentation on the negative consequences of using laptop computers in class can be found at <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/> and <http://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/laptop-use-lowers-student-grades-experiment-shows-1.1401860>. Exceptions will only be made for students who must be accommodated for medical or other reasons, as verified by an official letter from Student Disability Services.

## ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

**Daily reading responses:** Most of the course readings are academic in nature, and they will be difficult to understand for many students. It is essential that all students devote significant time to them. At times, you will be frustrated by how confusing some of the texts seem, but this is to be expected and embraced. In order to compensate for the complex nature of the texts, I am assigning short readings and including a number of films, for which no out-of-class preparation is necessary. Although the readings are minimal in size, you should be prepared to devote **AT LEAST THREE HOURS, AND PREFERABLY MORE**, to each day’s assignment. As part of your active engagement with the texts, you must come to class each day with a written response on the assigned reading(s), which will be handed in for credit. Responses must consist of **TWO PARTS**:

*Part I) What is the basic “point” of the reading?* In as short a space as possible—preferably one sentence, but possibly more—tell us what the main idea, argument, or topic (at the very least) of that day’s reading is. Why did the author write the piece? What did s/he argue in it? What “stuck with you” after reading the text?

*Part II) What is the most important question, confusion, or critique you have concerning the reading?* In as short a space as possible, compose a question concerning the reading that will help foster a productive class discussion. Tell us what you did not understand. Tell us what you did not like or agree with. Or, create a question that relates the reading to an earlier reading, a personal thought, or something you saw or read in the media. Make us think. Rest assured that if you did not understand something, many other students felt the same way. Help us bring these issues into the open.

As long as you make an honest attempt to complete the two parts for each reading, you will receive full credit for your response. Although I may call on you to share your response with the class, **DO NOT BE AFRAID TO BE “WRONG.”** The best students are those who continually share their perspectives with the class, *especially* when they are uncertain of their grasp of course materials and discussions. Only by hearing what you think can we figure out, as a class, where we need to devote our energies. One of my main goals as a professor is to cultivate an environment in which we are so comfortable with each other that we delight in expressing our

concerns, our confusions, our mistakes, and our “ignorance.” You will hear me slip up many times during the semester, and I expect to hear the same from you!

***In-class assignments:*** Although this class is officially a “lecture” course, I intend to make it as interactive and discussion-oriented as possible. In order to foster engagement with texts and course topics, I will regularly break up students into small groups for peer discussion on questions and assignments. After working with their group, students will introduce their ideas into a more general class discussion. Each group’s notes will be turned in. If you show up regularly, pay attention, and have your name and ID number on the notes, you will get full credit. If you fail to attend, your course grade will suffer. (In addition, if I feel that students are not devoting sufficient energy to the course readings, I will give “pop quizzes,” which will be graded on a pass/fail basis.) Finally, I will distribute quizzes to be completed while we watch films.

***Tests:*** There will be two short tests over the course of the semester. All will focus on readings, films, and class discussions and activities. They will include true and false, matching, multiple-choice, and essay questions. (The second test will **NOT** be cumulative.)

***Short papers:*** Over the course of the semester, you will write two short papers. The first will be an attempt to answer the question of whether “shamanism” is a term that fits various religious practices in San Antonio and the broader South Texas region. The second will ask you to evaluate the ethical and political aspects of nonindigenous peoples who claim to be shamans and tourists who travel to such places as Amazonia to take ayahuasca and participate in shamanic rituals.

***Research paper:*** At the end of the semester, you will hand in a six-page research paper based on the use of books and peer-reviewed articles that will examine the shamanic practices of an ethnic group of your own choosing, whether they are from Asia, North America, South America, or Europe.

***Grade breakdown:*** Your overall course grade will be calculated as follows:

*Reading responses* 15%

You are allowed to miss TWO responses without having your course grade suffer. For each response that you fail to turn in after your three “passes,” I will deduct FIVE percentage points from this section of your grade. For example, if you miss five responses, your grade for this portion will be 90 (i.e.,  $100 - 3 [x 0] - 2 [x 5] = 90$ ).

*In-class assignments* 15%

You are allowed to miss TWO in-class assignments without having your course grade suffer. For each in-class assignment that you fail to turn in after your three “passes,” I will deduct FIVE percentage points from this section of your grade. For example, if you miss five in-class assignments, your grade for this portion will be 90 (i.e.,  $100 - 3 [x 0] - 2 [x 5] = 90$ ).

<i>Test 1</i>	20%
<i>Test 2</i>	20%
<i>Shamanism in San Antonio paper</i>	5%
<i>Neo-shamanism paper</i>	5%
<i>Research paper</i>	20%
TOTAL	100%

Grading scale:

A+	97-100%
A	93-96%
A-	90-92%
B+	87-89%
B	83-86%
B-	80-82%
C+	77-79%
C	73-76%
C-	70-72%
D+	67-69%
D	63-66%
D-	60-62%
F	<60%

## STUDENT COURSE EVALUATIONS

Near the end of the semester, you will have an opportunity to provide an online evaluation of this course and its instructor (i.e., me). I encourage you to complete the evaluation, as it will allow me to improve the course for future students. In addition, it will help the university evaluate my teaching effectiveness.

## IMPORTANT POLICIES

For an explanation of UTSA policies concerning counseling, student conduct, academic dishonesty, disability and medical issues, supplemental instruction, and tutoring, please consult the information at <http://utsa.edu/syllabus>.

## CLASS AND READING SCHEDULE

Under the main topic for each class is the required reading for that day. It is important that you do the readings before coming to class, as we will engage in in-class exercises that assume a basic familiarity with the texts. During the course of the semester I may ask you to focus on certain parts of the assigned readings and skim others.

**\*\*\*THE SYLLABUS (INCLUDING THE COURSE SCHEDULE) IS OPEN TO CHANGE. IF I DECIDE TO MAKE CHANGES, I WILL NOTIFY YOU VIA BOTH LECTURE AND EMAIL\*\*\***

(WEEK 1)

## *What Is Shamanism, and What Do Shamans Do?*

1/15 Introduction

1/17 Vitebsky, Piers. "The Shamanic Worldview" (BLACKBOARD)  
Langdon, E. Jean. "Introduction: Shamanism and Anthropology" (BLACKBOARD)

(WEEK 2)

1/22 Monnig Atkinson, Jane. "Shamanisms Today" (BLACKBOARD)  
Webb, Hillary. "Expanding Western Definitions of Shamanism: A Conversation with Stephan Beyer, Stanley Krippner, and Hillary S. Webb" (BLACKBOARD)

1/24 DuBois, Thomas. "Shamans, Clients, and Healing" (BLACKBOARD)

(WEEK 3)

1/29 DuBois, Thomas. "Music and Entheogens: Pathways to Ecstasy" (BLACKBOARD)

## *Ayahuasca and Its Shamanic Uses*

1/31 In-class activity on shamanism in San Antonio papers (PAPERS DUE TODAY)

(WEEK 4)

2/5 Levy, Ariel. "The Drug of Choice for the Age of Kale" (BLACKBOARD)  
Beyer, Stephan. "An Introduction to Ayahuasca" (Ch. 20)

2/7 Beyer, Stephan. "Vomiting" (Ch. 21) and "Questions in the Study of Ayahuasca" (Ch. 22)

(WEEK 5)

- 2/12 Beyer, Stephan. "Phenomenology of the Ayahuasca Experience" (Ch. 23) and "Mechanisms of Ayahuasca Hallucinations" (Ch. 24)
- 2/14 Beyer, Stephan. "Other Psychoactive Plants" (Ch. 25)  
Barbira Freedman, Françoise. "Tobacco and Shamanic Agency in the Upper Amazon: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives" (BLACKBOARD)

(WEEK 6)

### ***Shamanic Practices in Western Amazonia***

- 2/19 Beyer, Stephan. "Two Healers of the Upper Amazon" (Ch. 1) and "The Ayahuasca Ceremony" (Ch. 2)
- 2/21 Beyer, Stephan. "Shamanic Performance" (Ch. 3) and "The Shamanic Landscape" (Ch. 4)

(WEEK 7)

- 2/26 Beyer, Stephan. "Learning the Plants" (Ch. 5), "Sounds" (Ch. 6), and "Phlegm and Darts" (Ch. 7)
- 2/28 Beyer, Stephan. "Initiation" (Ch. 8), "Sucking and Blowing" (Ch. 9), "Spirits" (Ch. 10), and "Protection" (Ch. 11)

(WEEK 8)

- 3/5 Beyer, Stephan. "Sex" (Ch. 12), "Harming" (Ch. 13), and "Healing" (Ch. 14)

- 3/7 Beyer, Stephan. "Spirit Possession" (Ch. 15) and "Magic Stones" (Ch. 16), and "Shamanic Herbalism" (Ch. 17)

(WEEK 9)

3/12 SPRING BREAK

3/14 SPRING BREAK

(WEEK 10)

- 3/19 Beyer, Stephan. "Plant Medicine" (Ch. 18) and "Types of Shaman" (Ch. 19)

### ***Curing and Killing: The Moral Ambivalence of Shamans***

- 3/21 Brown, Michael. "The Dark Side of the Shaman" (BLACKBOARD)



Whitehead, Neil and Robin Wright. "Introduction: Dark Shamanism" (BLACKBOARD)  
(WEEK 11)

3/26 Cepek, Michael. "Valueless Value: The Question of Production in Cofán Shamanism" (BLACKBOARD)

3/28 Taylor, Anne-Christine. "Healing Translations: Moving between Worlds in Achuar Shamanism" (BLACKBOARD)

(WEEK 12)

### ***Gender and Sexuality in Shamanism***

4/2 Bacigalupo, Ana Mariella. "Ritual Gendered Relationships: Kinship, Marriage, Mastery, and Machi Modes of Personhood" (BLACKBOARD)

4/4 Bacigalupo, Ana Mariella. "The Mapuche Man Who Became a Woman: Selfhood, Gender Transgression, and Competing Cultural Norms" (BLACKBOARD)

(WEEK 13)

4/9 Bacigalupo, Ana Mariella. "The Creation of a Mapuche Sorcerer: Sexual Ambivalence, the Commodification of Knowledge, and the Coveting of Wealth" (BLACKBOARD)

### ***Shamanism and Political Struggle***

4/11 Hugh-Jones, Stephen. "Shamans, Prophets, Priests, and Pastors" (BLACKBOARD)

(WEEK 14)

4/16 Cepek, Michael. "Bold Jaguars and Unsuspecting Monkeys: The Value of Fearlessness in Cofán Politics" (BLACKBOARD)

4/18 Beyer, Stephan. "Shamans Fight Back" (Ch. 34)  
Conklin, Beth. "Shamans vs. Pirates in the Amazonian Treasure Chest" (BLACKBOARD)

(WEEK 15)

### ***Neo-Shamanism and Shamanic Tourism***

4/23 Beyer, Stephan. "Ayahuasca Meets Global Modernism" (Ch. 31) and "Ayahuasca Tourism" (Ch. 32)

- 4/25 Davidov, Veronica. "Shamans and Shams: The Discursive Effects of Ethnotourism in Ecuador" (BLACKBOARD)  
Fotiou, Evgenia. "The Globalization of Ayahuasca Shamanism and the Erasure of Indigenous Shamanism" (BLACKBOARD)

(WEEK 16)

- 4/30 Brabec de Mori, Bernd. "From the Native's Point of View: How Shipibo-Konibo Experience and Interpret Ayahuasca Drinking with 'Gringos'" (BLACKBOARD)

- 5/2 In-class activity on neo-shamanism papers (PAPERS DUE TODAY)

**5/7 Research papers due on Blackboard by 5pm**

**5/9 Test 2 (12:30–3PM)**