

AFRI 222: African Cultural Traditions

Course Description: This course seeks to equip students with critical skills that would allow them to identify, analyze and appreciate African culture, customs and traditions as constructed and institutionalized by African people. The course encourages a systematic approach to the understanding of culture, examining broader political and social effects on the changing cultural traditions of Africa. In particular, we will consider the effects of colonialism and missionization in Africa on the political, social, religious, and cultural practices of contemporary Africa. Because of the wide variety of cultures on the continent we will seek to better understand these processes by focusing particular attention on the countries of Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa.

While the continent of Africa has had an enormous influence on the shape of the world today, often it is seen as marginal in the minds of many Americans. An introduction to the history and cultural practices of Africa can help to illuminate what is still too often seen as the "dark continent."

Required Readings:

Khapoya, Vincent B. *The African Experience: An Introduction*, Prentice Hall & Upper Saddle, NJ.

Achebe, Chinua *Things Fall Apart* Oxford; Portsmouth, N.H., USA: Heinemann Educational 1996.

Sobania, Neal. *Culture and Customs of Kenya*. Culture and Customs of Africa Series Westport, CT : Greenwood Press, 2001.

Salm, Steven J. *Culture and Customs of Ghana*. Culture and Customs of Africa. Greenwood, Westport, CT, 2002.

Supplemental Readings: Available on the Blackboard site

Learning Objectives:

The learning objectives for AFRI 222 reflect those articulated in the Foundational studies program in general and in the category of Global Perspectives and Cultural Diversity in particular. The cultural traditions of Africa provide particularly good sites for the growth of students' understanding of the issues at the heart of the study of Global Perspectives and Cultural Diversity.

Global Perspectives and Cultural Diversity Objectives (GPCDO 1-4, noted later)

1. Demonstrate knowledge of cultures and worldviews. This class is dedicated to the understanding that people have a wide variety of approaches to and attitudes about the world around them. Africa, with its thousands of languages and ethnic groups may seem to us Westerners to provide an endless variety of viewpoints of the world. In this class, we will examine in brief this tremendous variety and in detail a very small group of cultures, focused on the inhabitants of three African countries.

2. Identify social, economic, political, and environmental inter-relationships between cultures and worldviews. The continent of Africa has gone through enormous upheaval and conflict in the past few centuries, much as a result of the social, political, and cultural clashes between Western colonizers and the indigenous inhabitants of the continent. In this class, we will examine how fundamental differences in one's view of the world and of others' cultures lead to massive cultural change.

3. Use multiple lenses such as race and ethnicity, gender, social class, regional culture, and religion to evaluate one's culture in comparison to those studied. Even in situations in which we share certain aspects of our backgrounds with others (such as our nationality), we are all affected by many aspects of our identity. In Africa, individual countries may have as many as 25 different ethnic groups, each with their own languages, religions, and cultural practices. In this class we will examine the role of each of these aspects of identity in the shaping of the individual's worldview.¹

4. Articulate how the social construction of culture and worldviews shapes contemporary social and political issues. In this class, we will question the notion that any cultural practice is "natural" or "normal" or, conversely, "odd" or "unacceptable." Groups of people have important reasons for their cultural practices, many of which can be illuminated by a greater understanding of their context. Nevertheless, misunderstandings about each others' cultures can lead to many types of social and political conflict.

Foundational Studies Objectives (FSO 1-10, noted later)

Because this course is part of the larger Foundational Studies Program, it is important to place its goals within the context of the program's goals. AFRI 222 will in help students develop skills in several of these areas, in bold below.

- 1. Locate, critically read, and evaluate information to solve problems.** In this class you will learn to critically apply the ideas in the course readings to the understanding of larger issues in the course.
- 2. Critically evaluate the ideas of others.** Particularly in their critical response papers, students will learn to follow the line of an argument and critique it.
- 3. Apply knowledge and skills within and across the fundamental ways of knowing (natural sciences, social and behavioral sciences, arts and humanities, mathematics, and history).** African Studies is an interdisciplinary field, requiring you to think in a variety of ways. In this class students will combine several of these "ways of knowing" and think across traditional disciplinary boundaries, including the arts (e.g. music, art, and other expressive culture), social sciences (e.g. political science, sociology, and anthropology), and humanities (e.g. history and literature).

¹ In the class, examples are brought in which help students situate cultural practices of African cultures in terms of their own. For example, the racial categories of South Africa, which are inherited from Apartheid (White, Coloured, Black, and Asian) differ quite a bit from the racial categories used in America. Students are asked to interrogate how these categories came to be so different based on the quite different political histories of the US and South Africa.

4. **Demonstrate an appreciation of human expression through literature and fine and performing arts.** A particular focus of this course will be the variety of expressive culture on the African continent, including music, art, clothing, architecture styles, and other artistic pursuits.
5. Demonstrate the skills for effective citizenship and stewardship.
6. **Demonstrate an understanding of diverse cultures within and across societies.** With its focus on cultures that are unfamiliar to most American students and its emphasis on the wide variety of cultures within Africa, AFRI 222 places particular emphasis on this learning objective.
7. **Demonstrate the skills to place their current and local experience in a global, cultural, and historical context.** The experiences and practices of Africans have had a massive effect on the culture and history of the United States, yet it is typically treated much less systematically in all levels of education in this country. An introduction to the effects of colonialism and the slave trade on the world as well as the important influences of African cultures on American cultures can help contextualize students' own practices and experiences.
8. Demonstrate an understanding of the ethical implications of decisions and actions;
9. Apply principles of physical and emotional health to wellness;
10. **Express themselves effectively, professionally, and persuasively both orally and in writing.** AFRI 222 contributes to the continued development of critical writing skills through class assignments and of oral communication skills through thoughtful, critical class discussion.

The program is also designed to build skills for applied learning. These Skill and Applied Learning Objectives (SAO 1-3, noted later) require that the course contribute to

1. Developing critical thinking skills
2. Developing information literacy skills
3. Developing your writing skills (by including a graded writing component)

Course Requirements: Class attendance and active classroom participation are essential. There will be attendance sign-in sheets for every class session. Excessive absences will lower your grades and jeopardize your overall performance and success. Please inform if you need to be excused from class. Everyone is expected to complete assigned readings on time and participate in class discussions. We are expected to create a courteous and intellectually stimulating learning environment in which we show respect for and appreciation of the rigors of academic cultures. All written exams, including quizzes, a midterm, class presentation, final paper and regular attendance will be taken into account for the final grade. Critical response papers will be turned in on specified dates. A final exam paper will be due APRIL 10. All exams are from material previously covered. No make-up exams without prior notification of and approval by me, arising from emergency situations fully documented by the student.

EXAMS AND SCORES:

The Mid-term, Final Paper and Final examinations will constitute a total of 300 points. The final exams will focus on material covered since Mid-term exam. You are expected to sit for the exam on the day and time it is offered. In case of an avoidable emergency, you must show documented proof of that emergency in order to be considered for a make- up exam.

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS:

Each student is required to write two 3-page critique/critical response papers expressing the student's reaction to the central theme/argument and back it up using material covered. The papers will each deal with a single scholarly article or book chapter on the topic they plan to take up in the final paper. The critical response papers are an opportunity to examine in detail and critically react to the writing you are reading.

QUIZZES:

You will have up to three quizzes, which will be averaged in with critical response paper, Mid-term, final paper, attendance and participation. You are able to drop your lowest quiz score (missed quizzes automatically count as lowest grade and you may drop only one.) Quizzes will almost always be given within the first five minutes of class and completed within the next fifteen minutes.

RESEARCH PAPER:²

Topics for research paper will be specified by instructor. You will write a final paper (5-7 pages). Each student will present a 5-10 minute talk on a topic they plan to write a research paper on. Your paper must be typed, well organized with all the requirements of an academic research paper (i.e. references, endnotes or footnotes, bibliography, etc.).

GRADING:

Critical Response Papers (two) 3 pages each	10%
Quizzes (three)	10%
Midterm Exam	20%
Presentation	10%
Class Participation (includes attendance)	10%
Final Paper	20%
Final Exam	20%

In general, there is no extra credit policy. However you are encouraged to attend presentations, lectures, or discussions organized by African American Cultural on campus during the semester.

² Papers in the class allow students to choose a particular cultural practice of a single ethnic group in the context of a broader understanding of the worldview of that group. Short critical response papers assist the students in beginning the research for their papers and require students to assess an article's main arguments and respond critically to them (ALO 1,3; FSO 10). In addition, after an introduction to scholarly database searching, students are required to locate an indexed article to write about, an exercise that helps build students' information literacy skills (ALO 2). The multi-step process from critical response papers to final paper is intended as a developmental approach to writing in the course, which helps students break down the research and writing process into multiple parts.

You may write a critical review (1-2 pages) on any event you attended and it can earn you credit points that can be added to your attendance and participation points.

Class Policies

Attendance is Required. Students who miss more than five classes will fail the attendance and participation portion of the class. Attendance in this class is mandatory and will be monitored. A significant portion of your grade will depend on your active participation in this class. You must let me know **at the beginning of the semester** if you must be absent for religious holidays. Other absences may be excused at the discretion of the instructor.

Laptop Policy: Laptops are often distracting to other students and discourage active participation. Laptops will be permitted in class for **taking notes only**. I reserve the right to change this rule if I suspect it is being abused. It is possible that I may occasionally require laptops for class.

Cell Phones: Cell phones must be off during class. Texting is not allowed. Students caught texting will be given an absence for the day.

Email Policy: It is your responsibility to check your email on a regular basis and in a timely fashion. Email sent to the instructor will normally be answered within 48 hours. Please do not send last-minute emails.

Email Format: All emails should contain in the subject line the course number and a descriptive subject (e.g. Subject: AFRI 325, Question about Study Guide). Emails should contain a greeting (i.e. Dear Prof. Ryan), use proper capitalization, grammar, and punctuation (i.e. no textspeak), and a signature line with the student's full name.

Academic Honesty: It is expected that each student will follow the guidelines set forth in ISU's policy on Academic Honesty. It is the student's responsibility to examine these rules. Cheating or plagiarism of any kind will not be tolerated in this course. **Signing another student's name to attendance sheets DOES constitute cheating.**

ADA: Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, students with diagnosed disabilities are entitled to evaluation and consideration in their coursework. All accommodations, however, including those for students with learning disabilities, must be made through the Student Academic Service Center (<http://www1.indstate.edu/sasc/dss/index.htm>). Any accommodations must be made known to me **at the beginning of the semester.**

COURSE SCHEDULE AND READINGS

WEEK 1³ Introduction to Africa: Geography, People, Language and Culture

JAN. 8: Introduction: Course Expectations and Assignments

JAN. 10

Reading: Khapoya Chapter 1 Africa: The Continent and its People

Assignment: Take the map quiz at: <http://www.maps.com/games/africa.html>, and begin to learn the locations of each country in Africa

WEEK 2⁴ Traditional Institutions of Africa and Traditional Belief

JAN. 22

Reading: Khapoya Chapter 2 pp. 27-52: African Traditional Institutions

JAN. 24: QUIZ ONE: Geography of Africa

Reading: Khapoya Chapter 2 pp. 53-65

WEEK 3⁵ Africa's Pre-Colonial and Colonial Past

JAN. 15⁶

Reading: Khapoya Chapter 3: Political Development in Historic Africa

Supplementary Reading: Walter Rodney, "How Africa Developed Before the Coming of the Europeans" (on Blackboard)

JAN. 17⁷

³ In the first week, the students learn the major cultural regions of Africa: North, South, East, West and Central (GPCDO 1; FSO 6,7). They are introduced to the variety of cultures and language groups of the continent (GPCDO 1,2; FSO 6,7). They also begin the process of learning the location of each country in Africa, using an interactive online quiz to assist them Central (GPCDO 1; FSO 6,7)

⁴ Week three considers structures of traditional African institutions, including kinship practices, marriage practices, family life and socialization as well as traditional religious beliefs such as those around spirits and ancestors (GPCDO 1,3; FSO 3,6,7). Discussion centers on examples of a variety of approaches to the formation of family and applying basic terminology to understanding the structures of family.

⁵ During the second week, students are introduced to an overview of African history, both pre-colonial and colonial. (GPCDO 1,2,4; FSO 3,6,7)

⁶ The first day considers the pre-colonial period from approx. the fifteenth century to the eighteenth century. Students are introduced to the archeological evidence of Africa's earliest civilizations. The class then considers case studies of medieval-period kingdoms including the Malinka Kingdom of Mali and the Songhay Kingdom of Sudan.

⁷ The second day considers the transformative effect of colonialism on the continent of Africa. The cases of French and British colonies are compared in their approaches to colonialism. Discussion centers around: geography and the arbitrary drawing of boundaries by the colonizers; legal and political ramifications of colonialism, including a comparison of Direct, Indirect, and Company rule; the approach to labor and taxation under colonialism; and

Reading: Khapoya Chapter 4: Colonialism and the African Experience
Assignment: Continue to learn the countries of Africa

WEEK 4⁸ The African Independence Struggle and Decolonization

JAN. 29⁹

Reading: Khapoya Chapter 5: African Independence and the Struggle for Freedom

Assignment: Begin Reading *Things Fall Apart*

JAN. 31¹⁰

Reading: Khapoya Chapter 6: African Independence and After

WEEK 5 *Things Fall Apart*¹¹

FEB. 5

Reading: Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, pp. 1-110

FEB. 7

Reading: Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, pp. 111-end

comparison of the political and cultural boundaries of Africa before and After colonialism (GPCDO 1,2,4; FSO 3,6,7).

⁸ Week four focuses on the struggle to decolonize Africa and the political, cultural, and economic changes brought about during this period. (GPCDO 1,2,4; FSO 3,6,7)

⁹ The first day looks in particular at institutions that were successful in organizing freedom struggles and which served as models for other countries seeking independence.

¹⁰ The second day considers both positive and negative effects of decolonization: Africa's changing relationship with the rest of the world, the economic struggles of newly independent countries and political instability. Case studies for the process of decolonization include Tanzania, Ghana, Guinea, and Senegal.

¹¹ The first part of the semester is wrapped up with a discussion of Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*. (GPCDO 1,2,4; FSO 3,4,6,7). The discussion centers around how the novel depicts the changes the Igbo people face when colonialism and the slave trade tear apart their community. The novel is considered in light our earlier discussion of traditional culture, kinship, religion, and political divisions.

WEEK 6¹² **Case Study: South Africa**

Part I: Apartheid

FEB. 12: The Establishment of Apartheid¹³

Reading: Khapoya Chapter 7: South Africa pp. 220-248

FEB. 14: The US Role in the End of Apartheid¹⁴

Reading: Khapoya Chapter 7: South Africa pp. 249-275

WEEK 7 **Case Study: South Africa**

Part II: Syncretic Traditions¹⁵

FEB. 19 Quiz 2

Supplementary Reading: Muller, *Music of South Africa*

Listening: "Muller Listening" on Blackboard

In-Class Viewing: selections from *Amandla!*

¹² Week 6 begins the first of our three case studies, South Africa. Each of these case studies spans several weeks, and considers specific cultural and political topics around one African country. The rationale behind this approach includes several factors. First, it allows students to gain more than a superficial understanding of the continent of Africa, a result that would be likely if the case study approach were not taken. Second, by choosing a country from each of the three major geographical and cultural regions of sub-Saharan Africa, students are introduced to regional variation on the continent as well as variation in practices within each country. Although each case study considers many of the same topics (music, kinship practices, and religious practices for example), the approach is only implicitly comparative. As is the practice in anthropological fields, regions are understood as a larger whole with internally logical practices which are consistent across all areas of life. For example, a culture such as that of the Zulu people, whose traditional religious practices center around ancestors creates musical practices that center on using music to communicate with those ancestors. Thus, case studies allow students to see culture not as a series of unrelated and "unusual" or "odd" practices, but within the logic of the broad worldview of an ethnic group.

¹³ The first week of the South Africa unit treats the establishment, administration, and dismantlement of Apartheid, with particular attention to the unusual circumstances of South Africa among African countries. In particular, students are introduced to some of the largest ethnic groups of the area and to the different approaches of South Africa's two colonizers—the British and the Afrikaners—to the rule of South Africa. (GPCDO 1,2,4; FSO 3,6,7)

¹⁴ On the second day of the unit, students are introduced to the role of US policy on the ending of Apartheid, including Reagan's "constructive engagement," student protests, and the imposition of sanctions. (GPCDO 1,2,4; FSO 3,6,7)

¹⁵ Syncretism is a term for the blending of aspects from two or more cultures that comes about as a result of contact between those groups. It is particularly common among groups who have been colonized or enslaved as the embattled group struggles to retain as much of their original practices as possible. For example, in Africa and the African diaspora traditional African deities have been recast as Catholic saints. The new revered figures are endowed with the attributes of the original deities, but are represented in iconography in a way that is palatable to church authorities. The rest of the South Africa unit considers syncretic music and religious practices in South Africa, particularly how Apartheid's unique approach to race, missionizing, the retention of cultural traditions, and "homelands" led to the development of particular types of syncretic practices. (GPCDO 1,2,3,4; FSO 3,6,7)

FEB. 21

Discussion of *Amandla*; South African syncretic music and protest

WEEK 8 South Africa, cont'd and Midterm

FEB. 26: South African Syncretic Religion

Reading: Thomas, *Under the Canopy*, selection (on Blackboard)

FEB. 28 MIDTERM EXAM

**WEEK 9 Case Study: Kenya¹⁶
Part I: Introduction and Religion**

MAR. 4¹⁷

Reading: Sobania Chapter 1, Introduction

MAR. 6

Reading: Sobania Chapter 2, Religion and Worldview

SPRING BREAK MARCH 10-14: NO CLASS

**WEEK 10 Case Study: Kenya
Part II: Expressive Culture¹⁸**

MAR. 18

Reading: Sobania Chapter 3, Literature, Film and Media (pp. 61-85)
and Chapter 4, Art, Architecture and Housing (pp. 85-101 only)

MAR. 20

Reading: Sobania Chapter 8, Music and Dance

¹⁶ Week 9 begins a two-week case study on the cultural traditions of Kenya. Both the Kenya and Ghana Case studies focus on similar topics, ranging from literature and religion to music and dance. (GPCDO 1,2,3,4; FSO 3,6,7)

¹⁷ In the introduction to the Kenya unit, students are introduced to the geography and political history of East Africa, and the role that Kenya played as a crossroads for trade with the Arab world. Particular attention is paid to the Swahili language, and interesting case study of a non-European lingua franca. (GPCDO 1,2,3,4; FSO 3,6,7)

¹⁸ The second week of the Kenya case study concerns a broad range of expressive culture in Kenya through an interdisciplinary consideration of larger aesthetics of the area. Students examine how particular aspects of an aesthetic system can carry over from one art form to another. For example, an aesthetic of asymmetry is audible in uneven numbers of musical beats, in the weaving of fabric with deliberate interruptions in pattern, and in approaches to architecture. (GPCDO 1,2,3,4; FSO 3,4,6,7)

CRITICAL RESPONSE PAPER DUE (MAR 20)

- WEEK 11¹⁹ Case Study: Ghana**
Part I: Introduction, Cuisine, and Traditional Dress
- MAR. 25 QUIZ** on Kenya, Beginning of Class
Reading: Salm Chapter 1, Introduction
- MAR. 27**
Reading: Salm Chapter 5, Cuisine and Traditional Dress
- WEEK 12 Case Study: Ghana**
Part II: Life at Home
- APR. 1**
Reading: Salm Chapter 6, Gender Roles, Marriage, and Family
- APR. 3**
Reading: Salm Chapter 7, Social Customs and Lifestyle
- WEEK 13 Case Study: Ghana**
Part III: Religion and Literature
- APR. 8**
Reading: Salm Chapter 2: Religion and Worldview
- APR. 10**
Reading: Salm Chapter 3: Literature and Media
- WEEK 14 Case Study: Ghana**
Part IV: Expressive Culture
- APR. 15**
Reading: Salm Chapter 4: Art, Architecture, and Housing
- APR. 17**
Reading: Salm Chapter 8: Music and Dance

¹⁹ Week 11 begins the final case study of the course, which is focused on Ghana. The unit on Ghana comprises the largest of the three case studies, allowing the students to become quite familiar with the cultural traditions of one particular area of West Africa. In addition, a great deal of the unit is focused on just two ethnic groups, the Ewe and the Ashanti, who speak related languages and share a number of cultural practices. The students learn to study two closely related ethnic groups as a way of understanding more subtle variation in culture. For example, although the musical traditions of the Ewe and the Ashanti share a great deal (such as similar or identical instruments, vocal styles and musical form), the more rigidly hierarchical society of the Ashanti results in some major differences in performance practices, such as the employment of musicians in the court. The topics covered in this unit are similar to those in the unit on Kenya, with more depth to the treatment of expressive culture. (GPCDO 1,2,3,4; FSO 3,6,7)

WEEK 15 **Wrap-up and Review²⁰**

APR. 22

Reading: Khapoya Chapter 8: Africa in World Affairs

APR. 24 Final Exam Review

LAST DAY OF CLASSES THURSDAY APR 24

WEEK 16 **Final Paper due to my office Monday April 28, Final Exam May 2**

²⁰ The final day of the semester focuses on the views on and representations of Africa in the rest of the world. The specifics of Africa's history as a colonized continent, still feeling the effects of that colonization long after independence are broadened to include the global context. The course wraps up with a discussion that centers on the role that learning about unfamiliar cultural practices, as we have done in this class, can challenge long-held stereotypes placed on "others" around us. (GPCDO 1,2,3,4; FSO 3,6,7)

Supplemental Readings on the Blackboard Site:

Carol Muller, *Music of South Africa*. New York: Oxford, 2004.

Walter Rodney, "How Africa Developed Before the Coming of the Europeans: Up to the Fifteenth Century," from Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Howard University, 1982.

Linda Elaine Thomas. *Under the Canopy: Ritual Process and Spiritual Resilience in South Africa*. Charleston: University of South Carolina Press, 1999, selection.