

Plants, Health, and Spirituality

Fall 2008

COURSE NUMBER: Geo 3427

SECTION:

INSTRUCTOR: Nigel Smith

LOCATION: 3012 Turlington

CLASS MEETS: Tuesdays 7-9th Periods (1:55-4:55 PM)

OFFICE: 3127 Turlington

OFFICE HOURS: MWF 10:30 AM-2 PM, Tuesdays 1:00-1:55 PM.

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COURSE CONTENT

Plants used in treating the sick and enhancing health, both organic and spiritual, are explored with examples drawn from around the world. The course thus surveys plants used in healing, communicating with the supernatural, and in bringing aesthetic pleasure. The scope is international with an emphasis on understanding the sacred origins of many of today's "drug" plants such as marijuana and how cultural and ecological diversity have contributed to a rich array of plants domesticated for their ability to help users achieve altered states of consciousness. The role of traditional healers, their practices and perspectives, is discussed. Public health surprises occur with some frequency, such as the emergence of AIDS as a global threat to human health in the last few decades, so the course underscores the importance of conserving plant biodiversity and indigenous knowledge to enhance options for tackling future challenges to human health. The emerging market for "organic" foods is also explored within the context of a desire for "healthier" food and reducing damage to the environment. Political, economic, and environmental issues surrounding the development of transgenic foods (derived from crops that have been developed with the use of recombinant DNA technology) are analyzed since movements have arisen in some countries to ban such foods on health grounds. The growing demand for plant-based dietary supplements, such as energy boosters, is examined along with regulatory issues.

COURSE OUTLINE

“Frankenstein” Foods

Concerns about the safety of bioengineered foods with respect to human health and the environment are explored. The agendas of groups that oppose or support the growing of crops that have been altered by recombinant DNA technologies are analyzed.

*PowerPoint Presentation: *Frankenstein Foods*

Organic Farming

The growing market for organic and "green" foods is explored as well as the certification issues that it raises.

The push for environmentally friendly agriculture and its benefits, as well as costs, to society.

*PowerPoint Presentation: *Organic Food*

Dietary Supplements

Health food stores and even mainstream supermarkets are now offering a wide array of plant-based dietary supplements, such as guaraná pills.

The safety of some of these products is explored within the context of the existing regulatory environment.

*PowerPoint Presentation: *Guaraná*

Medicinal Plants

A global overview of medicinal plants, both domesticated and wild, including several that have recently emerged in international trade: Andiroba, unha de gato, pau d'arco, and St. John's Wort.

The pressure on populations of wild plants gathered for medicinal purposes and the need for conservation and management.

Ethnobotany and intellectual property rights.

* PowerPoint Presentation: *Medicinal Plants of the Brazilian Amazon*

The Supernatural and Curing

A need for plants used in curing, rather than for food production, as the main impetus for plant domestication.

*PowerPoint Presentation: *Amazon Healers*

Ways in which plants are used in treating disorders ascribed to the supernatural are examined, including tobacco, which has been transformed into a commercial crop for hedonistic purposes, and chili peppers now widely used as a spice.

*PowerPoint Presentation: *Chili peppers*

The purpose of hallucinogenic plants, such as ayahuasca and coca, in indigenous cultures and their adoption by some segments of western society are examined.

Traditional healers/shamans and their continued importance both in industrial nations and developing countries.

*PowerPoint Presentation: *Plants and Altered States of Consciousness*

TEXTBOOKS

Davis, Wade. 1999. *Shadows in the Sun: Travels to Landscapes of Spirit and Desire*. Broadway Books, New York (ISBN 0767904028).

Schultes, Richard Evans, Albert Hofmann, and Christian Ratsch. 2001. *Plants of the Gods: Their Sacred, Healing, and Hallucinogenic Powers*. Inner Traditions International (ISBN 0892819790).

Castaneda, Carlos. 1991. *A Separate Reality: Further Conversations with Don Juan*. Pocket Books (ISBN: 0671732498)

LECTURE NOTES

My copyrighted lecture notes are available online without charge via a link for the course website (www.geog.ufl.edu). At the geography website click on “current course syllabi”, then click on “Fall Semester”, then go to Geo 3427. You will see the link to the notes there.

CLASS PRESENTATIONS

All students must make at least one presentation in class on a topic related to the course and of interest to them. A seminar requires active participation by all the members of the class. Student presentations account for 20 % of the grade.

TESTS

Three take home exams are given throughout the semester and are each worth 10% of the grade. Students will have one week to return the tests. The take home exam is composed of four questions requiring short essay responses. No multiple-choice exams or quizzes are administered during the course. The students must come to my office to pick up their take-home exams and to learn how they did on the exercise. The take-home exams will be marked up by me for you to learn how to improve your essay writing.

No make-up tests are given. A student must have a documented reason for not taking an exam, otherwise the score on the missed exam is zero. The three take home exams are worth 30% of the grade.

TERM PAPER

In addition to the three take home exams, students are required to produce a term paper approximately 12-20 pages long with citations and a list of references (web site addresses as footnotes or endnotes whereas journal articles and books to be cited in separate literature cited section). Students select the topic of the paper as long as it falls within the domain of the course and you have discussed the topic with me in advance.

Please note that the term paper is due on the last day of class.

Term papers handed in after that date will not be graded. Students are encouraged to submit an early draft or drafts of the paper so that it can be improved.

The term paper is worth half the grade.

GRADING POLICY

The final grade is based on class participation (20%), the three take home exams (30%) and the term paper (50%). Grades are not curved. No incomplete grades are given.

Grades are assigned as follows:

Grade	%
A	90
B+	85-89
B	80-84
C+	70-79
C	60-69
D+	55-59
D	50-54
F	<50

PROVISIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

I will be happy to accommodate students that need special assistance in taking notes or exams. However, students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to me when requesting accommodation.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

Students are reminded that the University of Florida Honor Code states: "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity."