



Ritual Craft as Transformative Practice
RALS-4301
Residential Course, 3 Units
Starr King School for the Ministry - Graduate Theological Union
Fall 2017

Instructor Information

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Office hours by request

Meeting Dates and Times

Wednesdays 2 pm - 5 pm

Location: Starr King Round Chapel

Course Description and Objectives

Ritual Craft as Transformative Practice is an exploration into the art and technology of ritual craft. This course supports students in developing a nuanced understanding of successful ritual structures and empowers students in cultivating skills to create and guide ritual. The course itself is a ritual immersion, with each course meeting structured as a ritual experience. Students are encouraged to deepen their own resonant ritual practices, to experience rituals in contexts new to them and to craft and guide ritual for the community. Students will identify their strengths and edges in ritual craft and leadership, and will receive structured support in enhancing their existing ritual strengths and in nurturing arenas in which they seek additional growth and experience.

Course Expectations

- * Ritual experiences are deeply affected by the presence, attention and care of each participant. To best support the learning of each student and also the depth of the container of the class, students are expected to arrive on time, and to participate fully in class discussions, exercises and assignments. Students are expected to complete any assigned readings in advance of class, to attend all classes or communicate with instructor promptly regarding any absences.
- *Sessions of Ritual Craft as Transformative Practice will be structured as ritual, with ritual roles regularly assigned to class members. After an orientation to these roles, students are expected to participate in each ritual role over the course of the semester.
- * The Ritual Craft as Transformative Practice class leads one SKSM chapel service (on a Tuesday afternoon 1 - 1:45 pm, likely in November). Students are expected to participate in

planning for this chapel and to be present in support of or in leadership at our assigned chapel.

* Over the course of the semester, students are expected to attend two rituals outside of class over the course of the semester - one in a setting that is familiar to them, one in a community that is new to them - and to create or co-create one ritual outside of class. Students are expected to write three reflection papers (approximately 5 pages each) - one on their experience of the two rituals they attended, one on the ritual they create, and one on their strengths and growing edges in ritual, as informed by the exploration of Ritual Craft as Transformative Practice. Papers are due on October 28, December 2 and December 9. Students are expected to turn in one paper by each due date - in any topic order.

Course Schedule

Session 1: Ritual Craft Form & Flow

Welcome to RitualCraft as a Transformative Practice. We will outline the ritual structures for our course, choose ritual roles and explore core concepts of ritual form and flow.

Session 2: Ritual Intention and Communication

Setting clear intention is paramount in ritual craft. We will explore common categories of ritual intention as well as processes for clarifying ritual intentions and aligning ritual structures and content accordingly.

Session 3: Ritual and the Body

Whether a ritual is designed toward immanence or transcendence, ritual begins in the body. We will explore the embodied nature of ritual as a radical act, as well as practices of inhabiting the body, leaving the body and tending the body in ritual space. We will explore ways of crafting ritual so that all bodies - of varying strengths and capacities- are welcome and well-met.

Session 4: Ritual and the Earth

Working with elementals - earth, water, air and fire - is of great support in ritualcraft. We will explore how the literal and energetic elements of earth, water, air and fire are engaged, explicitly and implicitly, in ritual craft and technology.

Session 5: Ritual and the Divine

Ritual supports us in connecting with, honoring and being transformed by Divinity. We will explore a range of ritual practices of engaging divinity and how these practices well-meet the theologies they serve and embody.

Session 6: Ritual and Liturgy

What are the words and prayers and offerings that most deeply support ritual? How do we choose the language we speak to the divine and to our ritual participants or co-creators? How do our choices affect the power of the rituals we create and how can we give voice to our ritual language in a way that roots us in resonance?

Session 7: Ritual and Revolution

How is ritual a radical act? How can we integrate counter-oppressive theory and practice into our ritualcraft and how can we weave ritual to powerfully support political and social action.

Session 8: The Rhythm of Ritual: Sacred Time and Pulse

How does ritual orient or shift our experience of time? How do we keep track or lose track of time in ritual space? We explore ways the rhythms of ritual shape our experience of the sacred.

Session 9: The Temple of Ritual: Tending Sacred Space

How does the physical setting of ritual impact the ritual experience? We will explore elements in choosing resonant ritual locations, practices and customs of clearing, setting and tending sacred space, as well as creative practices for enhancing an experience of the sacred in spontaneous ritual settings. We will also explore the practice of setting and tending altars as a ritual tool.

Session 10: Ritual and Rite of Passage, Initiation and Life Cycle Ceremony

How do rituals that occur regularly in time or place differ from rituals in service to initiation, life-cycle or rites of passage? We will explore cross-cultural initiation theory, impacts of initiation and rite-of-passage in our own lives, and how to tend rite-of-passage work with care and consciousness.

Session 11: Empowering Ritual Leadership and Next Steps In Ritual Practice

We will inventory our own ritual craft and leadership strengths and edges. We will offer feedback to each other and experience a ritual playground to explore new ways of leading. We will identify next steps in ritual practice and leadership and craft structures and accountability toward meeting these next steps.

Session 12: Ritual Completion

How we complete and seal a ritual experience and close ritual space greatly affects the impact of a ritual. In this session, we will explore practices of ritual completing and sealing, and also embody the practice of ritual completion by tending the completion and sealing of the ritual container of our course.

Core Texts:

Ritual by Malidoma Some

Deeply Into the Bone: Re-Inventing Rites of Passage Ronald Grimes
pages 1-13 & 88-148

Optional Reading:

Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion by Mercia Eliade

The Water of Life: Initiation and the Tempering of the Soul by Michael Meade

Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions by Catherine Bell “Basic Genres of Ritual Action”
pages 91-137

Ritual Symbols, Syntax and Praxis p. 61-89

173-252 “Ritual Density and Ritual Change”

Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice by Catherine Bell

(PDF available online)

Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual by Tom Driver (pages p xi-xvii, pages 1-33, on googlebooks) / Priest and Shaman: Two Pathways of Religious Ritual
p 52-71

The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure by Victor Turner