



Hartford International
UNIVERSITY FOR RELIGION & PEACE

Rites of Passage (WS-605)

A Hybrid Synchronous Course
Fall Semester 2026
SYLLABUS



Classroom: 77 Sherman Street, Room TBD, AND via Zoom (link to be provided)

Meeting Dates and Times: Tuesdays, 7:00-8:50pm

Course Format: Hybrid Synchronous and one hour each week Asynchronous

Instructor:

Lisa E. Dahill, Ph.D.

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Office Hours: By appointment (in person or Zoom)

Course Description:

Rites of passage are the hinges of human life, allowing individuals and communities to negotiate complex transitions meaningfully in relationship to one another, to the roles and responsibilities of one's community, to the land and creatures among whom one lives, and to the transcendent dimension of human experience. Yet as traditional cultural and religious traditions erode, many individuals, families, and communities are left without the psychic/ communal structures these rites once provided. This course will examine the importance of rites of passage in human development, the impact of their widespread loss in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood today, and the creation of new or renewed forms of such rites for healthy and resilient human-ecological flourishing.

Required Textbooks (*also regular readings posted in Canvas*):

Carson, Timothy, ed. *Neither Here nor There: The Many Voices of Liminality*.

London/Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2019. **Available in the DTL**

Course Learning Outcomes (*correlating assignment numbers noted after each*): Students completing this course will be able to

- Articulate the role of rites of passage in facilitating human growth across complex life transitions, using examples from a range of cultural contexts;
- Analyze particular rites and larger social phenomena involving the successful or unsuccessful negotiation of life transitions, drawing appropriately on interdisciplinary resources from the fields of anthropology, ritual studies, developmental and/or evolutionary psychology, indigenous studies, religion, ecology, sociology, and/or literature and the arts;
- Analyze a specific life context or transition calling for new or renewed rites of passage and design a ritual meant to help individuals or groups move through this transition;
- Reflect on the role of rituals (as complex enacted symbols) in one's own life experience, including the presence or absence of effective rites of passage to date.

HIU Learning Outcomes this course meets:

MAIRS:

- Articulate your own worldview or religious belief system while empathically and respectfully engaging people whose worldviews, religious practices, and religious beliefs differ from your own.
- Conduct research on the Masters' level.

MAC/BCCI Competencies:

- ITP3: Incorporate the spiritual and emotional dimensions of human development into one's practice of care [or other spiritual leadership].
- PIC3: Attend to one's own physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing.
- PIC4: Function in a manner that respects the physical, emotional, cultural, and spiritual boundaries of others.

MAP:

- Build the internal resources necessary to engage conflict constructively.
 - Investigate your own inner world, including your motivations for participating in peacebuilding work, the mindsets you bring to conflict, your loyalties and biases, your reactions to complexity and ambiguity, and important components of your identity.

- Practice and model skills which build empathic relationships with the goal of nurturing communities that foster inclusivity and compassion.
 - Demonstrate the skill of active listening
 - Demonstrate the skill of eliciting and sharing stories.
 - Demonstrate multi-partiality by holding safe-enough space for diverse perspectives.

Assignments and Means of Assessment:

- 1) **Attendance/Participation (20% of final grade).** See policy below.
- 2) **Attention to Transitions in Nature (Sit Spot).** This contemplative practice takes place across the semester. Because our synchronous time together on Tuesday evenings comprises only two of our three weekly hours of class time, you will have an hour of asynchronous “class time” each week in the form of this ongoing outdoor attention to a particular place, as well as your responses to classmates’ blogs. Please take at least one photo each week of what you are observing; these will come together at the end of the semester in a **short presentation to the class in Week 14. Choose a place close to home** (to make it easy to visit readily, even in so-called bad weather) that you think can teach you something about passage; the guiding question is, **“What can I learn about transition** (my own life transitions or those of the world) **from this place and its creatures?”** Keep a journal of what you are noticing, to provide quotes and insights for your presentation of what your place has taught you. **10% of grade.**
- 3) **Discussion Boards (Initial Post + One Response):** Please complete five of the six weekly posts (~ 800 words each) on the assigned readings for the week, due on Sundays by 11:59pm in the weeks they are assigned (see calendar), plus a response to one classmate, due by Monday 11:59pm. Sometimes I will give you a particular prompt; other times you can simply reflect on what stirs in you. In either case, please provide at least one quote from each of the readings, including page number, plus a new quote (that neither of you has yet used) in your response to your classmate. You can choose which week you wish to skip blogging. Each blog is worth 6% of the final grade (x 5) = **30% of grade.**
- 4) **Narration of a Meaningful Life Transition** of your own, **due at the beginning of class on September 15.** Describe the transition in terms of all that was going on for you at the time, what/who helped you make the transition, what would have helped make it easier or more successful in some way (if applicable), what you felt and noticed along the way, where you got stuck (if you did), what the liminal period at the core of this transition felt like, how the self/world reality

emerging through this process differed from what had preceded it. Length = 5 minutes *spoken aloud*. Read out loud in class on 9/15 and turn in. **5% of grade**.

- 5) **Design and Presentation of New Ritual (35% of final grade)**. Please research a human transition you believe deserves stronger ritual scaffolding and design a rite meant to help individuals or groups in this situation move through that transition successfully. Your work with this ritual development will have several pieces. You will [choose a partner and]:
- a. develop ideas and **confirm focus of your ritual** with professor by **the end of Week 6 (5%)**;
 - b. **conduct** (individual) **mid-term research** (*see below*) and **present** it briefly to the class **in Week 10**, i.e., November 3 **(15%)**;
 - c. **develop the ritual** and **present it** to the class **in Weeks 12-13**, submitting a copy of your ritual to the professor **(15% of final grade)**.

Notes on Ritual Development Assignment:

- Choose a life transition/human need that you or a loved one or place/ecosystem have experienced or might in the future
- Research existing rites for this need or related ones (if applicable) – what elements can you adapt?
- *From what* specifically do participants need to sever?
- *Into what* new form or reality is the rite meant to make transition?
- Give a positive, creative *name* to the liminal state this rite invites
- Integrate senses, bodily engagement, and nature for full credit

Mid-Term Research Project: Conduct *individual* **scholarly research** on the context your ritual will engage and why this population of humans or other creatures needs ritual grounding (in the situation you are addressing) and/or on spiritual or religious questions particular to your ritual. Create a video, PowerPoint, or other multi-media **resource** inviting viewers or participants into encounter with these contextual needs and **present** this on November 3 (*this is brief*: ten minutes maximum!). In your PowerPoint, include a **bibliography** of at least eight high-quality sources, using Turabian Notes/Bibliography style.

Presentation of Ritual: Along with leading us into (key aspects of) the ritual itself, come prepared to address how the structure and ritual flow you have created **engage the need/s** of the population or context you researched, for whom the ritual is intended, along with **your hopes and intentions for the rite and why you structured it as you did**. You will be turning in a copy of the ritual to Canvas, due at the beginning of class time on the day you present it.

- **For teams:** Please *both* partners submit the ritual to me individually to Canvas, along with a brief statement outlining how each of you contributed to the development of the rite. If the workload appears to have been shared equitably, based on both of your statements, I will grade you *as a team* for the ritual (i.e., both receiving the same grade) – but I will assign separate grades if one partner appears to have done considerably more work. **You will have twice the amount of class time to present your ritual.**



CALENDAR

WEEK	TOPIC	DUE DATES and READINGS
Week 1: <i>Tuesday, September 1, 2026</i>	Introduction to Course, Topic, and One Another	<i>Read in advance:</i> Bruce Feiler, “ This Is the Antidote to a Lonely Life of Screens ,” NYT
Week 2: <i>September 8, 2026</i> Blog 1 due	Liminality	<i>Readings for this Week:</i> • Carson, “Neither Here nor There” (Introduction) • Plotkin, “Circle and Arc,” 1-12 • Turner, <i>Between & Between</i>

Week 3: <i>September 15, 2026</i> Life Transition Narrative due	Life Transition Narration	<i>Readings for this Week:</i> • David Abram, “The Ecology of Magic” • Karen Hering, “Introduction”
Week 4: <i>September 22, 2026</i> Blog 2 due	Ritual	<i>Readings for this Week:</i> • Ivy Beckwith, “Transformative Power of Ritual” • Wall and Ferguson, “A Ritual Primer” • Kimmerer, “Burning Cascade Head” • Optional: Davy and Quilley, “Ritual Matters: Changing Ontologies, Values, and Ecological Conscience Formation”
Week 5: <i>September 29, 2026</i> Blog 3 due	Coming of Age	<i>Readings for this Week:</i> • Claire Farrer, “Apache Girls’ Puberty Rite” • Ellen Barry, “Children Let Loose in Night Woods” • Foster and Little, “The Trail to the Sacred Mountain,” 6-15 • Jordan Peterson, “Simba’s Initiation” • Alia Yarrow and Tim Corcoran, “Coming Home: An Introduction to the Vision Quest”
Week 6: <i>October 6, 2026</i> Blog 4 due	Death and Rebirth RITUAL TOPIC conversations due by Friday!	<i>Readings for the Week:</i> • Kate Torgovnick May, “Fascinating Global Funeral Traditions” • Caroline Catlin, “What I Learned Photographing Death” • Sonya Vatomsky, “On Green Burial” • Choice of readings on the hajj • Plumwood, “Meeting the Predator,” 9-20
Week 7: <i>October 13, 2026</i> Blog 5 due	Liminality Deepened	<i>Readings for the Week:</i> • Trebilcock, “Hope in the Dark Passage,” in Carson • Robinson, “Climate Change and Desert Spirituality,” in Carson (<i>see more, next page</i>)

		• <i>Your choice of one or more other essays from Carson</i> • Boettiger, “Ye Shall Be Changed,” in Carson
Week 8: <i>October 20, 2026</i>	Writes of Passage (Guest Presentation)	Readings TBD by presenter
Week 9: <i>October 27, 2026</i>	Journeys in Film	
Week 10: <i>November 3, 2026</i>	Research Presentations	
Week 11: <i>November 10, 2026</i> Blog 6 due	Creating Ritual	<i>Readings for the Week:</i> • John Seed on leading the Council: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=27EfoZfEAG4 • Janet Peterman, “Speaking to Silence” • Abby Ellin, “Untying the Knot” • Francis Weller, <i>The Wild Edge of Sorrow</i>, 75-88
Week 12: <i>November 17, 2026</i>	New Rites 1	
	THANKSGIVING WEEK	NO CLASS
Week 13: <i>December 1, 2026</i>	New Rites 2	
Week 14: <i>December 8, 2026</i>	Sit Spot Presentations	<i>Happy Winter Break to All!</i>

Blessings to Those who Are Graduating!!



POLICIES

On Creating Space for One Another:

- **Spiritual experience and worldviews** – broadly conceived – are our shared subject matter. Because of their deep rooting in personal and collective psyches, spiritual experience deserves our **sensitivity and respect**, particularly when attempting to listen to or interpret the faith of an “other.” Classroom discourse and written work will be expected to engage one another’s experience with exquisite sensitivity.



- **God or the sacred/holy is not assumed** to be male (or female), Caucasian, anthropomorphic (i.e., human-in-image), “up,” or otherwise limited by the forms of human biology, culture, or language. Rather, in transcending all human limits and language, the symbol “God” is meant to convey ultimate value; sometimes the orthography “G*D” is used to show how the term itself stretches beyond normal forms of language. Classroom discourse and written work therefore will be expected to either refrain from or make genuinely creative and theologically meaningful use of such linguistic markers as pronouns and images of G*D.

- Attention to spirituality and spiritual experience requires **key skills**: listening and reading, speaking and writing. Assignments will draw on all these skills: learning to **listen** with care and respect to new languages of all kinds (from others’ spiritual experience to the spiritual significance of the cosmos and creatures of Earth), and skill in **reading**/interpreting texts of all kinds from contexts far from our own; learning to **speak** of questions and experience hard to put into speech, and practice in **writing** in perceptive, creative, and illuminating ways regarding questions of ultimate significance. Specifically, this class – like all classes at HIU – will follow these broad guidelines:
 - **Respect and Confidentiality:** You are expected to learn and practice forms of listening and speaking that invite one another’s deepening self-disclosure and the creation of a shared safe space for the deepest questions of our lives. This includes keeping confidential what you hear from others in class, especially in small-group process, and participating in a culture of “listening one another into speech.”
 - **Reading and Writing:** The fact that the course’s subject matter strains beyond the limits of language does not (of course) legitimate sloppy speech or writing but it does invite your own language to stretch, especially in blogging and in classroom speech. What kinds of language does your experience of the holy evoke?

On Communication:

I prefer e-mail communication over campus phone/voice mail, which I do not check regularly. I generally return e-mails within two business days, usually quicker; I may or may not be on-line on weekends, however. ***Please do not use email to discuss grades.***

On Attendance:

Your presence truly matters *every class session* to me and your classmates. This is a class that includes substantial experiential material in class. You can’t easily make up a missed session, which is why class participation is a key part of the course assessment.

Details re Attendance and Grading: One class may be missed for any reason (no excuse needed).

Beginning with the second, the attendance/participation portion of your final grade will drop for each absence. Those who attend every class session will receive **extra credit** on their final Participation grade ☺. *I generally lump Participation together with attendance. That is, everyone who shows up in person or with your camera on via Zoom will get normally get full participation credit. Camera off in Zoom means I can't track your presence visually and will need to grade you for participation based on your actual engagement in the session.*

On Timely Completion of Assignments:

The blog assignment is geared around timely completion so that I can use your reflections to guide my preparation for the class session engaging a given set of readings, designing activities or discussion prompts around material you have found particularly engaging, confusing, inspiring, or problematic. Your timely completion of the blogs also allows your classmates to read and respond to you, if desired. The blog grade drops a full letter grade per day for late submission – however, I am generally happy to give you an extension *without penalty* if you alert me to the problem you are having in advance of the weekly deadline.

The grades for the God-experience paper and the in-class presentations at the end of the semester are similarly tied to actually presenting in Week 3 or on the date you agree to – but if you let me know *in advance* that something has arisen, we can almost always find ways to be flexible with no drop in grade.

On ChatGPT and Other Forms of Artificial Intelligence Software:

For purposes of your (and my) exploring this technology to see how it might work, I am open to conversation about any desire to use ChatGPT or some other form of generative artificial intelligence software this semester. These software programs can be useful research or editing tools if wisely used. HIU has not established a school-wide policy on AI use, as we weigh potential positive uses. However, AI use can also short-circuit the kinds of learning that come from reading texts and creating pieces of writing that express one's own spiritual/religious/theological voice.

Unless the class agrees collectively otherwise, I expect you to **refrain from using generative AI to allow you to avoid doing the readings**, and I expect that **the written work you turn in to blog posts, responses to classmates, and in your final presentation is fully your own voice**. *If the class agrees to allow limited use of AI software to (say) create a rough draft of a submission, you will be required to note that fact clearly, along with documenting the prompt/s you used to generate it.* You will not be penalized for doing so in that case. You are responsible for the selection of the quotes you are choosing from the readings and for the truthfulness and accuracy of submitted work, including all AI-generated assertions. It's still your work, for which you are being credited as (co-?) author – *and*, unless you document your AI use clearly, you are taking credit for work that is not your own.

HIU Plagiarism Policy:

Plagiarism, the failure to give proper credit for the words and ideas of another person, whether published or unpublished, is strictly prohibited. All written material submitted by students must be their own original work; where the words and ideas of others are used they must be acknowledged. Additionally, if students receive editorial help with their writing they should also acknowledge it appropriately.

Credit will not be given for work containing plagiarism, and plagiarism can lead to failure of a course. Faculty report all instances of plagiarism to the Academic Dean. The Academic Dean will collect documented details of the case and advance any recommendations for further action to the Academic Policy Committee. Through this process the situation will be reviewed and any additional penalties that may be warranted (up to and including expulsion from the school) will be determined.

For clarity as to what constitutes plagiarism, the following description is provided:

1. Word for word plagiarism:
 - a. the submission of another person's work as one's own;
 - b. the submission of a commercially prepared paper;
 - c. the submission of work from a source which is not acknowledged by a footnote or other specific reference in the paper itself;
 - d. the submission of any part of another person's work without proper use of quotation marks.
2. Plagiarism by paraphrase:
 - a. mere re-arrangement of another person's works and phrases does not make them your own and also constitutes plagiarism;
 - b. paraphrasing another person's words, ideas, and information without acknowledging the original source from which you took them is also plagiarism.
3. See Part II of Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses and Dissertations* (7th Edition, University of Chicago Press, 2007), for an explanation of the proper ways to acknowledge the work of others and to avoid plagiarism.
4. Reuse of your own work: Coursework submitted for credit in one course cannot be submitted for credit in another course. While technically not plagiarism, this type of infraction will be treated in the same manner as plagiarism and will be subject to the same penalties. If you are using small amounts of material from a previous submitted work, that work should be referenced appropriately. When a student is writing their final program requirement (paper, project or thesis) it may be appropriate, with their advisor's permission, to include portions of previously submitted materials if properly referenced.

HIU MA and PhD Grading Scale:

A (95-100)	Demonstrates excellent mastery of the subject matter, a superior ability to articulate this, and provides helpful connections to daily life or contemporary issues. Exceeds expectations of the course.
A- (90-94)	Demonstrates mastery of the subject matter, ability to articulate this well, and makes connections to daily life or contemporary issues. Exceeds expectations of the course.
B+ (87-89)	Demonstrates a very good understanding of the subject matter, able to articulate lessons learned in the assignment well. Meets expectations of the course.
B (83-86)	Demonstrates an understanding of the subject matter and the ability to articulate lessons learned. Meets expectations of the course.
B- (80-82)	Demonstrates an understanding of the material at hand, has some difficulty articulating this, and basic connection of the material to daily life or contemporary issues/life. Meets basic expectations for the course.
C+ (77-79)	Demonstrates a basic comprehension of the subject matter, weak articulation and connections. Does not meet expectations for the course.

- C (70-76) Demonstrates a minimal comprehension of the subject matter and has difficulty making connections. Does not meet expectations of the course.
- F (below 70) Unable to meet the basic requirements of the course.

HIU Inclusive Language Policy: Inclusive language is encouraged when the writing is the student's own. In general, do not use the terms "man" or "mankind" for human beings; use instead "human beings," "humans," "persons," "people," "individuals," "humanity," "humankind," "figures," etc.

- Pronouns: generally, use the non-binary pronouns "they/them/their" when referring to people whose gender/gender preference is unknown or unrelated to the context, or when the preference is expressed as non-binary.
- Avoid using the third person singular masculine or feminine, unless you are certain that the person referred to is male or female or expresses as male or female exclusively. For example, revise a sentence like: "A student must ask questions if he expects to learn" to something like: "Students must ask questions if they expect to learn," or "A student must ask questions if they expect to learn."
- When a source you quote uses exclusive language, you may quote it as it appears, or substitute/add bracketed words, e.g., "[humanity]" – unless to do so would, in the judgment of the student, defeat the purpose of the quotation or violate the integrity of the student.
- Students who prefer to use male pronouns for the deity should consult with their professor/advisor on a case-by-case basis.

For all other questions of policy, see the HIU Student Handbook

(<https://www.hartfordinternational.edu/current-students/student-resources/student-handbook>) and/or the **HIU Academic Policies website** (<https://www.hartfordinternational.edu/current-students/academics/academic-policies>).

Final Note

This syllabus is subject to change. I will make every effort to alert you to changes promptly.

*I look forward to this semester
and to the growth and insight we will experience together*