

Mystical England
London Summer 4-Week Program
Cooperative Center for Study Abroad (CCSA)

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Introduction:

Hello and welcome to Mystical England!

I am professor of sociology and gender studies at Morehead State University in Morehead, Kentucky. I teach a variety of courses on gender, sexuality, religion, and inequality. I am also the author of *Pray the Gay Away: The Extraordinary Lives of Bible Belt Gays*. I'm excited to be teaching this class, and looking forward to our journey together!

Course Overview:

Mystical England takes a sociology of religion approach to explore the mystical dimensions linking major world religions and pagan spiritual practices. We will visit sacred places in London and the surrounding area to observe the commonalities underpinning cross-cultural religious and spiritual systems. Among the ideas we will explore are the afterlife beliefs of major world religions, the impact of fundamentalist thought on social life, social inequality and religion overall, atheism, the difference between the paranormal and spiritual, and the nature of individual and collective transformation.

The past several decades have seen a global resurgence of religious fundamentalist expression with damaging consequences on the lives of minority members. At the same time, there is a strong tradition of peace, service, and supporting the well-being of all humans in every major religion. In our exploration of the mystical, we will also seek to understand the role of religion and spirituality in secular society.

Because your class members will likely identify in a variety of ways spiritually -- Christian, agnostic, Wiccan, Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, atheist, pagan, etc -- we will demonstrate respect toward every class member's spiritual identity and expression. Our goal is to situate critiques of religious dogma in a broader social context.

Class Ground Rule:

Personal alignment is my goal: "In class, I discuss religion and spirituality in terms of how it best aligns with me (or not), and respect my classmates' practices and perspectives."

Academic Goals:

1. Through visits to "sacred places:" temples, churches, and henges - students will familiarize themselves with the beliefs and practices of Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and paganism.
2. By first-hand observation of ancient and contemporary sacred sites, group discussion, and individual reflection students will distinguish fundamentalist, religious, spiritual, and metaphysical perspectives.
3. Students will explore the nature of personal and social transformation.

4. Students will be exposed to religious diversity and the spiritual commonalities linking different faith systems.

Course Requirements

1. Weekly journal (25% each).
2. Attendance and participation (10%).
3. Short essays (10%).
4. Individual exploration and presentation (20%)
5. Summative project (35%).

Weekly Journals (25%)

You will record your thoughts, responses, and impressions of the class material, field trips, class discussions, and personal travel experiences at least four times a week in your journal. I will collect, read, and give you feedback on your journals each week. In general, I expect a minimum of 5 journal pages a week. Journals will be turned in to me on Sundays afternoons, and I will read and return them early in the week.

Participation (10% - graded P/F)

You are required to attend all field trips and classes. Come prepared to discuss the material, and savor your experiences in the UK. I consider all our time together, especially the time spent traveling to sites, as opportunities to reflect upon class themes.

Short Essays (10%)

You will submit three short essays including a 4-5 page paper on the reading assigned before our class begins, and two other 2-3 page essays discussing your reactions to two field trips you choose drawing on course themes and concepts

Individual exploration and presentation (20%)

Scavenger hunt - you will locate, observe, and experience *one* of the following places and/or activities *each* week, and then share your experience with the class:

- get a tarot card or other psychic reading
- find and walk a labyrinth
- find and explore a “power place” not in our itinerary
- interview 2-3 locals about religiosity in the United Kingdom
- find and attend an Anglican service
- browse through a spiritual shop
- try an ethnic cuisine you have never had before
- find and photograph Celtic imagery in a monument or artwork

(Or something you stumble across you believe should be added to our scavenger list!)

Summative Component: Individual Transformation Project (35%)

You will decide upon a transformation goal the first week of the class and collect data

throughout the trip (in your journals) on a personal transformation project you choose. Examples of possible goals include being more present, reducing technology usage, engaging in positive thinking, exploring your spirituality, trying daily meditation, becoming better listeners, exercising regularly, and stepping outside your comfort zone as you experience London. You will be graded *on your efforts*, not your accomplishments, and your application of course concepts and themes.

Transformation Project Guidelines

You have been collecting data throughout the class on a transformation goal of your choosing. For this summative component, write a 10-12 page double-spaced paper evaluating your experience drawing from a list of key course concepts. Elements you should cover in your final paper include:

Describe the transformation project you undertook and explain why you chose it.

Evaluate your journey – what ups and downs did you experience?

What were the highlights?

What challenges did you face? How did you handle these?

How did our class field trips affect you both academically and personally?

How would you evaluate your class engagement and feeling of being connected in our class community relative to your other classes?

Draw on at least five course sources (texts, class discussions, field trips) in your analysis, and use at least five course concepts from a list I will distribute later. Of course, feel free to use additional ones that improve your paper. Be both succinct and thorough in your writing. Conclude your paper by sharing how successful you believe you were in accomplishing the transformation goal you set for yourself. Include your journal or other record of your progress with the final paper. I will return all journals by hand or mail, so please include your home address with your paper.

Grading Scale

A	90-100	C	74-76
B+	87-89	C-	70-73
B	84-86	D+	67-69
B-	80-83	D	64-66
C+	77-79	D-	60-63
		F	0-59

Assignments turned in late will be penalized 5% for each day beyond the due date unless you have made arrangements with me in advance, or circumstances beyond your control prevent you from turning your work in on time.

Academic honesty

Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism or helping others to commit these acts will not be tolerated. Academic dishonesty will result in severe disciplinary action including, but not limited to, failure of the student assessment item or course, and possible expulsion from your home

university. If you are not sure what constitutes academic dishonesty, ask me. For example, copying information from the Internet is plagiarism if appropriate credit is not given.

Reading list:

Selected articles on the sociology of religion

Moreman, Christopher M. (2008). *Beyond the Threshold: Afterlife Beliefs and Experiences in World Religions*. London, Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield.

Schlitz, Marilyn Mandala, Cassandra Vieten, and Tina Amorok. 2007. *Living Deeply: The Art and Science of Transformation in Everyday Life*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

Pharr, Suzanne, *In the time of the Right* (available online and free downloading at <http://suzannepharr.org/category/books/>)

Tolle, Eckhart. 1999. *The Power of Now*. Novato, CA: Namaste Publishing.

Field Trips

We have four days set aside for field trips. However, because of the structure and content of the course (where most music and theatre events occur in the evening), we have some events scheduled outside of both our field trip days and our class meeting times. For those of you who are taking more than one course, these events have been approved by your other professor.

Tickets for most field trip events have been paid for in advance. However, **you should plan on bringing at least £50 pounds IN CASH with you on field trip days (some places don't take plastic, and restaurants are not always willing to split up checks)** for food, entry fees (these will be few and far between), gift shopping, etc. For days when we have a lot of ground to cover, I have made plans for your meals, but they have not been paid for in advance. I have tried to make sure that the restaurants are affordable and that they have a variety of foods, including vegetarian options. I will also try to choose a variety of food and styles of restaurants/pubs – we'll be discussing these things as part of our course content as well! As much as possible, I will get those menus to you in advance. You will always – with the exception of the event mentioned above – have the option of bringing your own food with you, or choosing to eat somewhere else (as long as you are close to where we are/need to be. Some of the restaurants I've chosen are on the list because they are the best option, given our location and travel schedule).

We will also spend some of our class meeting times traveling throughout the city. I will always make sure that you are at King's College for breakfast and lunch.

IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT FIELD TRIPS - WEAR COMFORTABLE CLOTHES AND COMFORTABLE SHOES. No flip flops, sandals, or heels. We will be walking several miles over the course of the day, and you'll need to take good care of your feet. There will be times when we're standing for a long period (during a tour, for instance) – again: reasonable

shoes and comfortable clothes are important. Save the special clothes for when you're heading out on the town with your friends.

All field trip events are mandatory.

Field Trip Schedule

(**note: some of these events are subject to change; some of the field trip events haven't even been scheduled yet, and I'm exploring things to do during some class meeting times. I will keep you informed as we go along; hopefully on a week by week basis).

Week one:

The Thin Veil of London: Explore the Capital's Mystical Side, a theatrical walking tour

Week two:

A Stone Seeker tour (<http://www.stoneseeker.net/WalksAndTalks>), possibly the Private Day Tour of Stonehenge and Avebury

Week three:

Tours of Buddhapadipa Temple, and Sree Ganapathy Temple

Week four:

Trip to Glastonbury to tour the Chalice Well, Glastonbury Abbey, and Glastonbury Tor