

College of Charleston
Department of Religious Studies
Spring 2024

RELS 315: New Religious Movements
Mon, Wed 2:00-3:15; EDUCATION CENTER 219

Instructor: Dr. Elijah Siegler
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Office: 4 Glebe St., Second Floor
Office Hours: M, W 12-1:30 or by appointment (in person or on Zoom)

This class takes an interdisciplinary approach to the study of new religious movements (NRMs), looking at them through the lenses of sociology, history, and cultural studies. We look at NRMs in the West and around the world, as historical phenomena and as agents of political and social change.

There are **two** required books:

- Douglas **Cowan** and David Bromley, *Cults and New Religions*, 2nd ed. ISBN: 9781118722107
- Elijah **Siegler**, *New Religious Movements*, PDF files on OAKS

There are also required miscellaneous readings on OAKS. Print these out! **Please always bring the relevant book or printout to class.**

Course Requirements:

- * **Participation and attendance** including in-class group work and serving as discussion leader for one class: **10%**
- * **Midterm quiz** on Wed Feb 28: **12%**
- * **Final test** on Mon April 29 at 3:30: **18%**
- * 12-15 pp. original **research essay**, due Wed April 24: **30%**
- * 12-minute **oral presentation on your research**: **5%**
- * 1-2 page media analysis paper plus informal oral presentation, rotating deadline: **5%**
- * 4 out of 6 **memos** @5%/each: **20%** (see last page)

We will review and discuss each assignment before it is due. There will also be various opportunities to gain bonus marks by attending relevant lectures or films and writing short papers about them.

Grading Scale: A: 93-100; A-: 90-92; B+: 87-89; B: 83-86; B-: 80-82; C+: 77-79; C: 73-76; C-: 70-72; D+: 67-69; D: 63-66; D-: 61-62 F: 60 or below.

Expect emails from me the night before most classes with reminders, pro tips, and a preview of questions and issues we will be discussing in the next day's class. I love getting reply emails!

All work must be original, and all sources correctly cited. No use of **GAI*** is permitted. The university's honor code will be strictly enforced. Students can find a complete version of the Honor Code and all related processes in the Student Handbook, available [online](#).

Absence Policy

Missing classes without an explanation will affect your in-class participation score since you cannot participate if you are not present! Missing a few classes in the name of sensible health precautions (e.g. cold/flu symptoms, or positive COVID test) will not incur any penalties to your participation grade, as long as you keep me informed, keep up with your work outside of class, and keep up with what you missed in class by getting notes from a classmate (not me). If you anticipate missing multiple classes for any reason—athletic commitments, health conditions, family or work obligations, travel, etc.—please get in touch with me to discuss options for keeping up. **RELS 315 is a fully in-person course.** In general, it will not be possible to join the class by Zoom. If I test positive for COVID or experience a health or family emergency, this class may pivot to remote learning in the form of synchronous Zoom sessions for everyone.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Wed 1/10: **What do we know about NRMs? And how do we know it?**

Watch: Batsh*t Valley

Mon 1/15: MLK Day

Wed 1/17: **How should we Study NRMs?** (Memo #1 Due)

Read: Cowan Ch. 1, Siegler Ch. 1; Watch: *Wild Wild Country* or *Holy Hell* or *The Source Family*

Mon 1/22: **Scientology/ How do NRMs begin?** (Memo #2 Due)

Read: Cowan Ch. 2; Bainbridge (OAKS); Watch: *Going Clear*

Wed 1/24: **Popular Representations of “Cults”**

Read: Siegler Ch. 2, Zeller (OAKS), Montell (OAKS); Optional: S. Palmer (OAKS)

Mon 1/29: **NRMs as Asian Missions to the West/ Who Joins NRMs?**

Read: Siegler Ch. 4, Dawson (OAKS)

Wed 1/31: **Transcendental Meditation**

Read: Cowan Ch. 3

Mon 2/5: **NRMS as Esotericism**

Read: Siegler Ch. 3

Wed 2/7: **New Thought (Special Guest: Rev. Ed Kosak)**

Read: Hutchison (OAKS) and TBA (OAKS)

Mon 2/12: **Channeling** (Memo #3 Due)
Read: Cowan Ch. 4, Lazaris (OAKS)

Wed 2/14: **The Moonies/ What is Brainwashing?** (Memo #4 Due)
Read: Cowan Ch. 5, Brainwashing A and B (OAKS)

Mon 2/19: **Wicca and Witchcraft**
Read: Cowan Ch. 9, Starhawk (OAKS)

Wed 2/21: **Varieties of Modern Paganism (Special Guest: Holli Emore, M. Div)**
Read: TBA

Mon 2/26: **Midterm Review/ Catch-Up**

Wed 2/28: **Midterm Quiz/ Term Paper Workshop**

SPRING BREAK

Mon 3/11: **Special Guest: Satanism (Special Guest: Dr. Gene Gallagher)**
Read: Cowan Ch. 9, Gallagher (OAKS)

Wed 3/13: **Forum on New Religions and Authenticity**
Watch: *Hail, Satan?*

Mon 3/18: **The Children of God (Special Guest: Dr. Linda Jones)**
Read: Cowan Ch. 6

Wed 3/20: **The Branch Davidians (Special Guest: Dr. Gene Gallagher)**
Read: Cowan Ch. 7, Gallagher II (OAKS); Watch: *Rules of Engagement*

Mon 3/25: **Heaven's Gate and UFO Religions (Memo #5)**
Read: Cowan Ch. 8

Wed 3/27: **Entheogenic Churches**
Read: Cowan 198-200, TBA (OAKS)

Mon 4/1: **Donald Trump as Cult Leader (Special Guest: Dr. Robert McNamara)**
Read: McNamara (OAKS), Zeller II (OAKS)

Wed 4/3: **New Religions in China**
Read: Siegler Ch. 5, Falun Gong (OAKS)

Mon 4/8: **New Religions in Japan (Memo #6 Due)**
Read: Reader (OAKS)

Wed 4/10: **Rethinking Cults**

Read: Cowan Ch. 10, Siegler Ch. 8

Mon 4/15: **Student Presentations**

Wed 4/17: **Student Presentations**

Mon 4/22: **Student Presentations**

Wed 4/24: **Student Presentations/ Final Test Review/ Final Discussion**

Mon 4/29: **Final Test 3:30-5:30**

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Note: Students with documented disabilities who have been approved to receive accommodation through SNAP should feel free to discuss this during office hours. For more information, contact Disability Services at 953-1431.

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The Center for Student Learning has writing labs and can arrange individual tutoring for this particular class. Drop by, go to <http://www.cofc.edu/~csl/> or call 953-5635.

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***Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI)** tools are not permitted for any work in this class. If you use GAI tools, your actions would be considered academically dishonest and a violation of the College of Charleston's Honor Code and Code of Conduct. You may not engage in unauthorized collaboration or make use of ChatGPT or other GAI tools. Since writing, analytical, and critical thinking skills are part of the learning outcomes of this course, all writing assignments should be prepared solely by the student and without any assistance. Questions? Ask me! Developing strong competencies in this area will prepare you for a competitive workplace.