

College of Charleston
Department of Religious Studies
Fall 2011

RELS 315: NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS
MW 2-3:15 in Ed Center 219

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Office Hours: Tues 1-3 and Fri 11-1 or by appointment

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.

A typical class on new religions (or “cults”) assumes that NRMs are a sociological problem to be solved by asking and answering a series of questions—who would join a NRM? Do NRMs really engage in brainwashing? Why do some NRMs become violent? While these questions are not ignored here, this class takes as its premise that NRMs are a normal aspect of religious development and are not an aberration that has that “happened” to the Western world since the 1960s. We will examine NRMs as transnational phenomena, acting as both cause and a symptom of globalization.

On the other hand, this class also assumes that NRMs (like other religious phenomena) can and should be productively studied as *local* occurrences. Thus, the major assignment for this class will be an oral and written presentation on NRMs in the Carolinas and Georgia. These presentations will require resourceful investigation and original research. In other words, students will make the leap from consumers to producers of knowledge.

There are three required texts, available at the campus bookstore:

1. Inside Scientology by Janet Reitman ISBN-13: 978-0618883028
2. New Religions: A Guide edited by Christopher Partridge ISBN-13: 978-0195220421
3. Cults and New Religious Movements, 2nd ed. by Lorne L. Dawson ISBN-13: 978-1405101813

One book may be able to be bought used: *New Religions* by Elijah Siegler, ISBN-13: 978-0131834781. It will also be available via e-mail. This book is recommended as class lecture notes.

There are also required short E-Readings, numbered ER # 1-8 in the schedule of classes, online at OAKS. Please print these out at the library.

Please bring the relevant book or printout to class.

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.

Requirements:

Midterm exam on Wednesday October 5 =15%

Final exam on Wednesday December 14 = 20%

1 12-15 pp. **research essay**, due Wednesday Nov. 30 = 25%

1 12-minute **oral presentation** on the subject of the research essay = 5%

6 out of 11 **memos** @5%/each = 30% (see last page)

Attendance and participation = 5%

All work must be original and all sources correctly cited. 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.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Wed 8/24: What is expected in this course? How do we define NRMs?

Read: Siegler Ch. One

Mon 8/29: How do we study NRMs? **Memo #1 Due**

Read: Partridge 6-24; Dawson 5-24

Recommended: Dawson 26-34

Wed 8/31: Explaining NRMs Using Sociological Models

Read: Dawson 59-69, 89-108; Partridge 358-360

Mon 9/5: NRMs as Modern Heresy

Read: Dawson 73-85; Partridge 75-76, 32-35 (Latter Day Saints), 314-317

Recommended: Partridge 26-31 (Christianity); Siegler Ch. Two

Wed 9/7: NRMs in the Media **Memo #2 Due**

Read: ER #1 (McCloud): you may skim (not skip) the first 7 ½ pages; ER #2 (Neal): you may skim it

Mon 9/12: The Apocalypse at Jonestown; Movie

Read: Partridge 77-78; Dawson 186-202

Wed 9/14: Explaining Jonestown: Movie (cont.) **Memo #3 Due**

Read: ER #3 (J.Z. Smith)

Mon 9/19: The Brainwashing Controversy **Memo #4 Due**

Read: Dawson 143-177

Wed 9/ 21: Applying What We've Learned to Scientology **Memo #5 Due**

Read: Partridge 385-387; Reitman ix-88

Getting Started on the Research Papers (bring your laptops!)

Mon 9/26: What is Esotericism?

Read: ER #4 (Gnostic); Partridge 305-308 (Western Esotericism), 312-313, 317-319, 322-325 (Golden Dawn and OTO), 331 (Tarot), 337-339 (Astrology), 39-40, 42-43 (Unity School), 319-320 (Spiritualism), 320-322 (Theosophy), 329 (Arcane School)

Recommended: Siegler Ch. Two

Wed 9/28: Roots of the New Age **Memo #6 Due**

Read: Partridge 308-312 (New Age), 335-336 (Findhorn), 348-349 (*Miracles*), 355 (*Celestine*), ER # 5 (Lazaris)

Mon 10/3: Pagans, Neo-Templars and UFO Contactees

Read: Partridge 347-348, 268-270, 277-280, 288-289, 295-297, 372-376, 404-406; Dawson 208-222; Reitman 89-110

Recommended: Partridge 297-299 (CAW and Covenant of Goddess)

Midterm Review

Wed 10/5: **Midterm Exam**

Mon 10/10: NRMs as Asian Missions to the West

Read: Partridge 173-174, 182-184+187 (TM), 238+245 (SGI)

Recommended: Siegler Ch. Four; Partridge 158-168

Wed 10/12: Is American Daoism a New Religious Movement? **Memo #7 Due**

Read: ER #6 (American Daoism)

Mon 10/17: FALL BREAK

Wed 10/19: What is Charisma? **Memo #8 Due**

Read: ER #7 (Psychopathologies); Reitman 111-171 (you may skim 111-124)

Monday 10/24: NRMs in East Asia

Read: Partridge 224- 230, 220-223 (Nichiren, Tenrikyo, Cheondogyo), 233-236 (PL Kyodan, Reiyukai, Cao Dai), 239-244, 245-246, 257-258, 261-262.

Recommended: Siegler Ch. Five; Partridge 212-219

Wed 10/26: Qigong Fever and the Falun Gong crackdown **Memo #9 Due**

Read: ER# 8 (Palmer); Partridge 265-266

Mon 10/31: NRMs of Africa and the African Diaspora (Guest: Dr. Katie Hladkey)

Read: Partridge 281-286, 44-51, 52-53, 57-64, 280+287-288 (Santeria, Candomble), 139-140, 142-144

Recommended: Siegler Ch. Six

Wed 11/2: Race, Gender, Age, Class: NRMs Demographics **Memo #10 Due**
Read: Dawson 113-126, 227-229, 245-254; Reitman 295-315
Recommended: Dawson 131-142, 230-242

Mon 11/ 7: Student Presentations

Wed 11/9: Student Presentations

Mon 11/14: Student Presentations

Wed 11/16: Student Presentations

Mon 11/21: Student Presentations (if necessary)

Wed 11/23: THANKSGIVING BREAK

Mon 11/28: Violence and Suicide **Memo #11 Due**
Read: Dawson 181-184, 202-206; Partridge 388-391; Reitman 175-249

Wed 11/30: NRMs in a Virtual World **TERM PAPER DUE**
Read: Dawson 271-291; Partridge 360+365-366, 406, 407-408; Reitman 253-294

Mon 12/5: What is the Future of NRMs?
Read: Dawson 259-269; Reitman 316-369 (you may skim 315-336)
Recommended: Siegler Ch. Eight

Final Exam Review

Wed 12/14: **Final Exam 12-3 PM**

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.

The Center for Student Learning has writing labs and can arrange individual tutoring for these particular assignments at <http://www.cofc.edu/~csl/> or 953-5635.