

# Religion 266 Fall 2016

## Religious Sects and Cults



### Dr. Lynn S. Neal

nealls@wfu.edu (M-F  
from 8 and 5; not on  
weekends)  
OH: Wednesday 2-3 or by  
appointment

### Course Texts: University Bookstore

Urban, *New Age, Neopagan, & New Religious Movements*  
Cowan and Bromley, *Cults and New Religions*  
Daschke and Ashcraft, *New Religious Movements: A  
Documentary Reader*  
Other readings posted on Sakai. \*\*Please bring  
assigned readings to class!\*\*

## Course Description:

The United States is celebrated as one of the most religiously diverse nations in the world. Yet, not all religions dotting the American landscape meet with approval and acceptance. Why are some groups called “cults” and seen as dangerous (politically, socially, and religiously)? This fear of cults permeates American culture from our TV shows (*Law & Order*, *Criminal Minds*, *Boy Meets World*, etc.) to news stories to feature films (*Holy Smoke*, *Martha Marcy May Marlene*, *The Master*, etc.). It creates a powerful stereotype that obscures the complex history of religious groups deemed “cults.” In addition, the “cult” stereotype prevents us from interrogating why the “cult” concept exists and how it functions in American culture. Throughout this course, we will address these issues as we investigate the history of specific “cults,” and tackle the methodological and conceptual issues that arise in studying New Religious Movements (NRMs).

*“I have made a  
ceaseless  
effort not to  
ridicule, not to  
bewail, nor to  
scorn human  
actions, but to  
understand  
them.”*

*~Spinoza*

# Advice for Religion 266

The course requirements provide you with an opportunity to explore topics and issues in more depth and are designed to help you realize the course objectives.

To successfully accomplish the course objectives, remember to work hard, ask for clarification when necessary (if something is unclear, it is your job to ask me about it!), and keep the following information in mind:

\*All assignments must be completed in accordance with the *Wake Forest Honor Code*. Failure to abide by the rules of this community will result in failure of the course.

\**Plagiarism is a violation of the honor code.* "To put your name on a piece of work any part of which is not yours is plagiarism, unless that piece is clearly marked and the work from which you have borrowed it is fully identified" (WFU English Department). Plagiarism will result in failure of the assignment. For more information, see [plagiarism.org](http://plagiarism.org)

\*If you have a learning disability that requires an accommodation, please contact the Learning Assistance Center (758-5929) and provide me with the appropriate form *as soon as possible*.

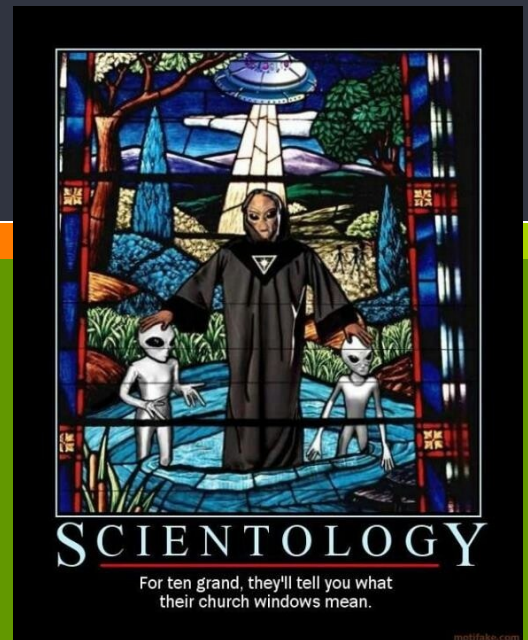
\*The Writing Center is a valuable resource for your papers.

\*Take advantage of office hours! I'm happy to meet and talk with you.

**Course Grade Scale:** A (100-93), A- (92-90), B+ (89-88), B (87-83), B- (82-80), C+ (79-78), C (77-73), C- (72-70), D (68-65), F (64-0). \*I do not round up final grades.

## Course Objectives: By the end of the semester, you will be able to...

1. Identify and evaluate the complexities involved in defining and studying the concept of "cult," as well as analyze how the "cult" label functions in relationship to conceptions of "religion" and "America."
2. Describe, analyze, and/or compare the histories, beliefs, and practices of a number of different groups labeled "cults."
3. Articulate and utilize a methodology for studying NRMS and evaluation different types of sources.
4. Build interesting and complicated discussions about religion, which will advance our understanding of the topic and increase your ability to articulate your ideas, as well as hone your thinking and critical listening skills.



| Course Objective: | Assessment   |
|-------------------|--|
| Objective 1       | Participation & Professionalism<br>Research Reports<br>Analysis Paper #1                         |
| Objective 2       | Research Reports<br>Participation & Professionalism<br>Analysis Paper #3<br>Final Research Paper |
| Objective 3       | Final Research Paper<br>Research Reports<br>Participation & Professionalism<br>Analysis Paper #2 |
| Objective 4       | Research Reports<br>Participation & Professionalism  |

“Successful students estimate spending 2-3 hours outside of class for every hour spent in class.”

~Cliffs Notes



## Requirements for the Course:

### Participation & Professionalism (20%).

Attendance at and active contributions to each class is expected. Studies show that talking about your ideas makes you smarter, and discussing issues and hearing varying perspectives broadens your thinking and helps sharpen your analytical skills. Speaking and sharing ideas with each other is a vital part of learning. It also helps you cultivate a variety of professional skills that are important in the workplace—listening and responding to others, expressing your ideas, discussing areas of agreement and disagreement, empathizing with others, etc.

**Expectations:** You enter the class with a “C” for participation. You earn a higher participation grade by enriching each class with your reading, research, questions, and ideas. To demystify this process I have created a **Participation & Professionalism Rubric (available on Sakai)** that outlines expectations, and we will periodically be discussing “participation” in class. This rubric includes: listening, quality of contributions, impact on class, frequency of participation, and focused on tasks.

To accommodate different positions on the introvert/extrovert spectrum we will be utilizing different settings for participation, including class, a class Facebook Page, and in-class activities. There will also be other opportunities, such as the Name Quiz (successfully identify 10 of your classmates to earn credit), through which you can show your engagement with and participation in the course. **\*\*See Sakai for ways to enhance your P&P grade!\*\***

Disagreement is expected in class, especially in a class about religion. We must learn how to talk with each other to enhance our learning and this includes disagreement. Use disagreement constructively and respectfully. You can say: “You made a good point, but I disagree because...” or “I respect your view, but it seems to overlook...”

**Professor Pet Peeves:** Please note that your professor has a few pet peeves: (1) falling asleep in class, (2) arriving late to class, (3) leaving in the middle of class, and (4) packing up early to leave class. Each of these actions disrupts and distracts our learning community and will lower your overall Participation & Professionalism grade.

**Sick Days:** The WF Bulletin states that students are “expected to attend classes regularly and punctually.” Attendance is the expected norm; however, occasions of illness or ‘other events’ can at times prevent you from attending. Thus, you are allowed two “sick days” over the course of the semester. More than 2 sick days will lower your Participation & Professionalism grade, and a significant number of absences will result in a failing grade for the course.

**Technology:** We will be using technology at various times in the class to enhance our learning. However, when we are not using computers/phones/tablets, please put them away so that you do not distract your classmates and so that you can focus on the discussion. **\*\*A number of readings for class will be available online. I encourage you to print readings out, then read, and then bring them to class. Studies show that we read more effectively on paper than on screens.\*\***

### Required Participation Log!

Quality discussions and participation do not occur naturally; rather, we must intentionally build meaningful discussions and cultivate our participation skills. To do this, I have created a weekly **Participation and Professionalism Log** for you to complete that ask you to reflect on and strategize about your participation in a sustained way. Completion of the Participation Log is required and constitutes part of your P&P grade. Detailed guidelines for this assignment are on Sakai.





**Logistics:** RRs will be posted in Sakai at least two days prior to their due date. RRs should be typed, single-spaced, with 1 inch margins, and they should show evidence of having completed all of the assigned tasks and answering all of the questions in a thorough and thoughtful manner. *\*\*One sentence answers or minimal engagement with the RRs will lower your grade.\*\**

[illegible]

**NOTE:** Even if you choose not to do a specific RR, you should look at the sources listed and review the questions asked as these will provide a basis for our class discussion.

**\*\*Printers fail, so if you attend class, but are unable to print your RR, *you may email it to me twice over the course of the semester.***

### Family Guy "Chitty Chitty Death Bang"

### 3 Analysis Papers:

Over the course of the semester, you will be researching and writing three focused papers that analyze a particular question or issue related to the study of NRMs.



**Analysis Paper #1 (10%):** Research and select one media source to analyze and answer the question: Why is a cult not a religion?

**Analysis Paper #1 is due Monday 9/12 via email by 5pm.**

**Analysis Paper #2 (15%):** Research, select, and analyze two conflicting sources about a “cult” to answer the question: How do scholars make sense of and navigate conflicting sources?

**Analysis Paper #2 is due Monday 9/26 via email by 5pm.**

**Analysis Paper #3 (15%):** Research, select, and analyze one dimension of a “cult” (history, theology, gender, race, etc.) that you plan to examine in more depth for your final research paper.

**Analysis Paper #3 is due Thursday 10/20 via email by 5pm.**

***Resources and specific directions for all assignments can be found on Sakai.***

**Final Research Paper: 20%**

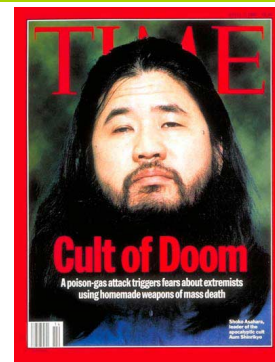
The final research paper provides you with an opportunity to go deeper into one NRM and to demonstrate what you have learned over the course of the semester.

**Assignment (20%):** Research one NRM in-depth by analyzing one theme or dimension in its history. The theme or dimension can vary depending on the group in question and your research interests. Possible themes or dimensions include, but are not limited to: gender, sexuality, violence, theology, law, brainwashing, and media.

**Final Research Paper Process:** Researching and writing a successful paper requires time and attention. Thus, you *must* complete the following steps as a part of your final paper. Failure to successfully complete these steps will negatively impact your overall final research paper grade.

- Final Project Research Plan
- Final Project Research Summary
- Final Project Outline
- Final Project Presentation

**Final Research Paper is due Wednesday 12/15 via email by noon.**



Time Cover 1999



***“There is no analytical substance to the popular definition of a cult as a dangerous group with bizarre religious beliefs that follows a deranged or cynically opportunistic leader. One person’s ‘cult’ is another person’s true faith.”***

***~Lawrence Foster  
“Cults in Conflict”***



### Wednesday 8/31 Welcome!

*Class Question: What is this class about and what can you expect?*

**SAKAI:** Rich, "Claiming an Education" Leamnson, "Learning (Your First Job)", Hooks, "Critical Thinking"

### Friday 9/2 Cults in the American Imagination

*Class Question: How have we been socialized to see "cults"?*

RR#1

**SAKAI:** "They're Freaks!"



### Wednesday 9/7 Studying Cults

*Class Question: How do we study cults?*

RR#2 (Required, Submit via email)

**Urban:** "Introduction"

**B&C:** "Cults and New Religions: A Primer"

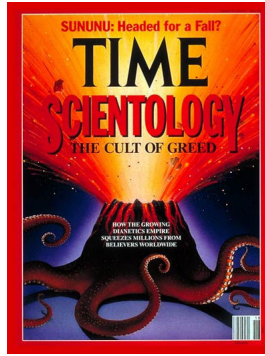
*Attend brief Library Research Session in ZSR 476 and Complete Sakai Lesson Plan Online*

### Friday 9/9 The Scandal of Scientology

*Class Question: How is Scientology depicted in the media?*

RR#3

**Sakai:** "The Mass Media and New Religious Movements," and Hall, "Stereotyping as a Signifying Practice"



Time Cover 1991

**\*Monday 9/12 Analysis Paper #1 due via email by 5pm.**

### Wednesday 9/14 Scientology: Foundations

*Class Question: What is Scientology?*

RR#4

**B&C:** "The Church of Scientology"

**\*NAME QUIZ at start of class**

### Friday 9/16 Scientology: Questions

*Class Question: Why is Scientology controversial?*

RR#5

**Urban:** "The Church of Scientology"



Rev. Moon

### Wednesday 9/21 Unificationism: Foundations

*Class Question: What is Unificationism?*

RR#6

**B&C:** "The Unification Church/The Family Federation"

**D&A:** "The Unification Church"

### Friday 9/23 Unificationism: Questions

*Class Question: What's the difference between conversion and brainwashing?*

RR#7

**SAKAI:** "Prologue," and "Deprogramming/Faithbreaking,"

**Urban:** Pp. 212-216

**\*Monday 9/26 Analysis Paper #2 due via email by 5pm.**

### Wednesday 9/28 The Children of God: Foundations

*Class Question: What is the Children of God/The Family?*

RR#8

**B&C:** "The Children of God/The Family International"



Early Children of God Followers

### Friday 9/30 The Children of God: Questions

*Class Question: What is the role of sexuality in the Children of God and how do we evaluate it?*

RR#9

**D&A:** "The Family/Children of God"



### Wednesday 10/5 The Church of Satan: Foundations

*Class Question: What is Satanism?*

RR#10

**Urban:** "The Church of Satan and the Temple of Set"

### Friday 10/7 The Satanism Scare: Questions

*Class Question: What's the difference between the Church of Satan and the Satanic panic?*

RR#11

**SAKAI:** "Satan's Underground" and "Occult Survivors and the Making of a Myth"



Gerald Gardner

### Wednesday 10/12 Wicca: Questions

*Class Question: What is Wicca and why are people so confused about it?*

RR#12

**SAKAI:** "Satanism and Witchcraft"

**B&C:** "Wicca and Witchcraft"

### Friday 10/14 Wicca: Foundations

*Class Question: What is Wicca and what does it mean to be a Wiccan?*

RR#13

**Urban:** "Wicca and NeoPaganism"

**D&A:** "Wicca"

### Wednesday 10/19 Writing Workshop

*Class Question: How can I improve my paper?*

Bring 3 printed drafts of your paper to class. We will use these drafts for peer evaluation.

**\*Thursday 10/20 Analysis Paper #3 due via email by 5pm.**

### Friday 10/21 No Class, Fall Break

### Wednesday 10/26 Jonestown: Foundations 1

*Class Question: What was Jonestown?*

RR#14

**SAKAI:** "Jonestown and People's Temple" and "The Devil in Mr. Jones"

### Friday 10/28 Jonestown: Foundations 2

*Class Question: What was Jonestown?*

RR#15

**D&A:** "Jonestown"



Jim Jones and his Rainbow Family

**\*Monday 10/31 Final Project Research Plan due via email by 5pm.**

### Wednesday 11/2 Jonestown: Questions

*Class Question: How do we make sense of Jonestown?*

RR#16

**SAKAI:** "Letters from Jonestown" and "Accusations of Human Rights Violations"

**Urban:** "People's Temple"

### Friday 11/4 Jonestown: Questions

*Class Question: Why did Jonestown happen?*

RR#17

**SAKAI:** "A Witness to Tragedy and Resurrection," "Drinking the Kool-Aid" or "American as Cherry Pie"



### Wednesday 11/9 Waco: Questions

*Class Question: What is the relationship between Jonestown and Waco?*

RR#18

**SAKAI:** "Mass Suicide and the Branch Davidians"

**B&C:** "The Branch Davidians"

### Friday 11/11 Waco: More Questions

*Class Question: What happened at Waco and why?*

RR#19

**SAKAI:** "The Branch Davidians and Waco," "Visions and Omens," "Showtime"



Fake Nike Advertisement based on actual photograph.

**\*Monday 11/14 Final Project Research Summary due via email by 5pm.**

### **Wednesday 11/16 Heaven's Gate: Foundations**

*Class Question: What was Heaven's Gate?*

RR#20

**B&C:** "Heaven's Gate"

**D&A:** Ch. 14, pp. 297-306

### **Friday 11/18 Heaven's Gate: Questions**

*Class Question: What happened at Heaven's Gate?*

RR#21

**SAKAI:** "Scaling Heaven's Gate" and/or "Making Sense of the Heaven's Gate Suicides"

**\*Monday 11/21 Final Project Outline due via email by 5pm.**

### **Wednesday 11/30 Course Wrap-Up**

*Class Question: What have we learned this semester?*

*Bring your computer to class!*



### **Friday 12/2 Research Paper Work Day & Consultations**

*Class Question: How can I improve my paper?*

Assignment: Bring at least 3 printed drafts of your paper and questions about how to improve your work. Be prepared to workshop!

### **Wednesday 12/7 and 12/9 Research Paper Presentations**

*Class Question: What have you learned through your research?*

Half of the class will present on Wednesday and the other half on Friday. Each student researcher will have 10 minutes to present the major findings of their research. This is a formal presentation that requires preparation and practice. If you will be using a powerpoint or prezi, please share that presentation with me prior to class to speed up the transition between presentations.

**\*FINAL: Your final research paper is your final exam. It is due via email on Wednesday 12/15 by noon.**

## **Important Dates for this Semester:**

**9/12 Analysis Paper #1 due via email by 5pm**

**9/14 Name Quiz (in class)**

**9/26 Analysis Paper #2 due via email by 5pm**

**10/20 Analysis Paper #3 due via email by 5pm**

**10/31 Final Project Research Plan due via email by 5pm**

**11/14 Final Project Research Summary due via email by 5pm**

**11/21 Final Project Outline due via email by 5pm**

**12/2 Final Project Research & Consultation Day**

**12/7 and 12/9 Final Project Presentations**

**12/15 Final Research Paper due via email by noon.**

