

# Religious Studies 395 New Religions

Fall 2011 • W 4:00-6:40 p.m. • 3 credits • AH 3110

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Website: <http://kali.sdsu.edu> Blackboard: <http://blackboard.sdsu.edu>

**Office Hours** TuTh 1:00-3:00 p.m. in AL 662B, and by appointment. If you need accommodation due to a disability, please let me know. Please let me know if you anticipate an absence due to a religious holiday this semester. Thank you!

**Course Description** Because the term "cult" bears negative connotations, sociologists of religion call a variety of non-traditional religious groups new religions, new religious movements (NRMs for short), alternative religions, and so on. We will use the term "new religions" because they are "new" to us. They may be innovative; they may demand a deep commitment from those who participate in them; they may cater primarily to immigrant populations. Course topics include: the attraction of NRs; the issue of choice vs. brainwashing; sociological theories; shared characteristics; dynamics of charismatic leadership; gender roles; and relations with media, government, and the anti-cult movement, including the conflict between freedom of religion and the protection of society. Course methods include lectures, discussions, guest speakers, videos, and field research.

**General Education** This is an Explorations course in the Humanities. Completing this course will help you to do the following in greater depth: 1) analyze written, visual, or performed texts in the humanities and fine arts with sensitivity to their diverse cultural contexts and historical moments; 2) describe various aesthetic and other value systems and the ways they are communicated across time and cultures; 3) identify issues in the humanities that have personal and global relevance; 4) demonstrate the ability to approach complex problems and ask complex questions drawing upon knowledge of the humanities.

**Course Goals** **What I would like you to learn...**  
The diversity of religious thought and practice outside mainstream religions as it exists globally and in the U.S.  
Specific facts about a number of important groups in U.S. society and abroad

**What I would like you to learn how to do...**

Identify key issues and concepts in understanding new religions, such as autonomy, brainwashing, agency, freedom of religion, etc.

Be able to describe and compare the beliefs, practices, and geographical-historical backgrounds of new religions

Improve your ability to think critically, write coherently, speak articulately, and work cooperatively.

**Required Texts** Lorne L. Dawson, ed. Cults and New Religious Movements  
James R. Lewis and Jesper Aagaard Petersen, eds., Controversial New Religions  
Douglas E. Cowan and David Bromley, Cults and New Religions: A Brief History  
Additional readings are assigned through Blackboard.

**I encourage you to buy these texts USED online if possible.**

**Tentative Course Schedule as of August 10, 2011  
(subject to change and amendment)**

**All readings are to be completed by the date of the course meeting**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic and Assignments</b>	<b>Themes and Questions</b>
31 Aug	<b>Introduction</b> Course Docs, "Spiritualism"	What are New Religions? Why are they worth studying? What is Spiritualism and why should we care?
7 Sept	<b>Theory: Definitions</b> Dawson, chs. 1-6	How do we define New Religions? How do they interact with society? Are they dangerous?
12 Sept	Drop deadline, 11:59 p.m.	
14 Sept	<b>Theory: Brainwashing</b> Dawson, chs. 7-11  Add deadline, 11:59 p.m.	Does brainwashing exist? Can it be scientifically proven?
21 Sept	<b>Theory: Violence, gender, the future</b> Dawson: chs. 12-17  <b>Due: Paper Proposal</b>	Do new religions have a propensity to violence? Is there more violence against new religions, than perpetrated by new religions? Are NRs more or less egalitarian than general society? What predictions can be made about the future?
28 Sept	<b>Test # 1 on all of Dawson, first half of class</b> Second half of class, introduction to Christian-inspired groups	Review these study questions, class notes, readings to prepare to answer two essay questions on theories about new religions.
5 Oct	<b>Christian-inspired groups</b> The Family and Unification Church Lewis/Petersen: Introduction, chs. 1, 2; Cowan/Bromley, chs. 1, 5, 6  <b>Due: Reports on Site Visits</b>	How have The Family and the Unification Church (now the World Family Federation) re-invented themselves over the years? How have they responded to criticism? What roles do/did the leaders play? How does the theory regarding gender studied for Test #1 apply to these two groups?
12 Oct	<b>Christian-inspired groups</b> Peoples Temple and Branch Davidians Lewish/Petersen, ch. 3, 4; Cowan/Bromley, ch. 7; and readings online: <a href="#">Peoples Temple</a> and <a href="#">Jonestown in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century</a> . Also visit the website <a href="http://jonestown.sdsu.edu">http://jonestown.sdsu.edu</a>	In what ways are Peoples Temple and the Branch Davidians similar? How are they different? Relate the theory studied in first part of the semester to these two groups: is it confirmed or disconfirmed?
19 Oct	<b>Asian and Asian-inspired groups</b> Hare Kirshna (ISKCON), Rajneesh Movement, TM Lewis/Petersen: chs. 5, 6; Cowan/Bromley: ch. 3	How do imported groups change as a result of being transplanted in American soil? How do these groups change over time? Are they the same now as in the 1970s, when they first arrived?

	<b>Due: Bibliography</b>	
26 Oct	<b>Asian and Asian-Inspired Groups</b> Aum Shinrikyo, Aumist Religion, Soka-Gakkai and Falun Gong Lewis/Petersen: ch. 8, 9, 10; <a href="#">Falun Gong</a> readings online, including <a href="#">FAQs</a>	Relate theory regarding religious violence to the groups studied this week: how is the theory confirmed? How is the theory disconfirmed?
2 Nov	<b>Test # 2</b> on Lewis/Petersen, chs. 1-10, Cowan/Bromley 1, 3, 5,6, Internet Sources Second half of class, introduction to Western Esotericism and New Age Religions	Be able to apply theories learned for Test #1 to the groups studied for Test # 2. Be able to discuss and describe the specifics of each group studied.
9 Nov	<b>Esoteric and New Age Groups</b> Scientology, Theosophy, Solar Temple, Ramtha Lewis/Petersen: ch. 11, 12, 13, 14; Cowan/Bromley: chs. 2, 4  <b>Due: Preliminary draft of paper</b>	Apply gender theory to these groups. Apply brainwashing theories: do they explain the popularity of these groups? How can we characterize media coverage of these groups? Theories of religious violence?
16 Nov	<b>Peer Review Process</b> Read and analyze paper(s) from your peers  <b>Due: Peer review evaluation</b>	Following instructions on assignment sheet, we will discuss our papers in small groups and overall as a class.
23 Nov	<b>Thanksgiving Eve</b> No class	Revise your papers!
30 Nov	<b>Other Groups</b> Outer Space, Satanism, Neopaganism, Wicca Lewis/Petersen: ch. 15, 16, 17, 19; <a href="#">Heaven's Gate website</a> ; Cowan/Bromley: chs. 8, 9	Are these religious groups? Why or why not? How does gender theory apply to Neopaganism and Wicca?
7 Dec	<b>Wrap Up</b>  <b>Due: Final Paper/Assignment</b>	Can we come up with some general theories of New Religions?
14 Dec	<b>Test # 3</b> on all readings from Nov 16 through Dec 7 4:00-6:00 p.m.	

<b>Grading and Assignments</b>	
You will be graded on the following assignments, tests, and projects	
Test # 1 @ 20 pts (28 Sept)	20
Test # 2 @ 30 pts (2 Nov)	40

Test # 3 @ 60 pts (14 Dec)	60
Site Visit to Spiritualist Church (5 Oct)	15
Research Project	100
Proposal @ 5 pts (21 Sept)	
Bibliography @ 15 pts (19 Oct)	
First draft @ 20 pts (9 Oct)	
Peer-Review @ 10 pts (16 Nov)	
10-page paper @ 50 pts (7 Dec)	
Participation	15
TOTAL	255

**5 points extra credit are available if you accompany a classmate on their site visit. This would be a separate visit from your own site visit.**

**The following percentage grading scale will be used:**

	87-89 = B+	77-79 = C+	67-69 = D+	59% or less = F
95-100 = A	84-86 = B	74-76 = C	64-66 = D	
90-94 = A-	80-83 = B-	70-73 = C-	60-63 = D-	

To calculate your standing in the class at any time simply take the number of points currently available, divide this figure into the number of points you have earned, and look at the percentage chart above to see what your grade is.

### **Grading Criteria (from 2011-2012 University Catalog, p. 461)**

Grade of A = outstanding achievement; available only for the highest accomplishment

Grade of B = praiseworthy performance; definitely above average

Grade of C = average; awarded for satisfactory performance; the most common undergraduate grade

Grade of D = minimally passing; less than the typical undergraduate achievement

Grade of F = failing

### **The Bold Print**

1. No electronic devices of any kind are allowed in class unless you have explicit permission of Student Disability Services.
2. If I see you text messaging I will ask for your phone until the end of the class period. Same for computers.
3. I do not accept any papers via email. They must be submitted directly to me in hard copy.
4. You have exactly one week (seven days) to take a missed exam or to turn in a paper late. Regardless of the reason for being late, you have an unfair advantage over students who complete the work on time, or take the test in the appointed hour, therefore you will be docked 10% points for late papers and exams. If you fail to talk with me or to make other arrangements regarding make-up work within one week, then you will receive a zero on the assignment. No exceptions!
5. Academic Honesty: If I suspect you of cheating on a test, or of presenting a paper as your own which you have not written, I will confront you with my suspicions. In the case of an exam, I will confiscate your cell phone or any other suspicious item. In the case of papers, I will ask you to provide documentary evidence that either you have not cheated (e.g. you provide a complete set of notes) or that the paper is your own (e.g. a rough draft, evidence of original work, notes.) If you are caught cheating--by which I mean if I find similar material on the Internet--you will receive a zero on the assignment, with no opportunity to do make-up work. Please read the guidelines on academic honesty, and the consequences of cheating by looking at my website, <http://kali.sdsu.edu/honesty.html>. If I decide it's not worth the hassle, I will simply turn over your paper and evidence of my own suspicions to the Center for Student Rights and

Responsibilities, and let them deal with the issue.

#### 6. Statement on What I Can and Can't Do To Assist You

I will do everything within reason to actively support your learning. I will also do everything possible to make this class as well-organized and straightforward as possible. My concern is for ALL of the students in the class, making sure that everything is fair, and that everyone has the opportunity to earn the highest grade possible. I strive to provide a diversity of learning strategies to meet a variety of student learning preferences from online learning to experiential opportunities.

#### 7. For those who would seek special treatment

Over many years of teaching I have found that the number of students who seek special consideration at the end of the semester has increased dramatically. This practice is especially common among students who have missed assignments or done poorly on the exams. Seeking special favors is not fair to all the hard-working students who have kept up with the course work over the entire semester and reflects a lack of integrity. Furthermore, university policy does not allow professors to change grades or permit individual students to earn extra points without that same opportunity being available to every student in the class. ***If you are concerned about your grade the time to do something about that is right now at the beginning of the class and throughout the semester.*** If you must have a certain grade in the class to meet eligibility requirements for a major, a scholarship, athletics, or graduate school then it is your responsibility to see that you earn that grade. Out of respect for hard-working and honest students in the class, and university policy, I cannot provide special treatment for individual students. Although it is my hope that everyone is successful, that is ultimately up to each of you. The course is designed to reward your efforts. If you want to do well in the class you will.