

## Religion and Social Life

Cults, New Religious Movements, and the End of the World  
RELS:2791:0001

Spring 2016  
T/TH 12:30-1:45  
E224 Chemistry Building (CB)

---

**Gwendolyn Gillson**

**401 Gilmore Hall**

**Office Hours:** Tuesday 9-11 and Thursday 2-3 or  
by appointment

**Office Phone:** 319-353-1991

**Email:** [gwendolyn-gillson@uiowa.edu](mailto:gwendolyn-gillson@uiowa.edu)

**DEO: Diana Cates**

**305 Gilmore Hall**

319-335-2161

[diana-cates@uiowa.edu](mailto:diana-cates@uiowa.edu)

---

### Course Description

What is a cult and why would somebody want to join one? What might the end of the world look like? Why are people worried about the apocalypse? This course will attempt to answer these questions through the study of different groups that have been labelled “cults.” We will explore why people choose to join new religions and why others call those new religions “cults” but why we’re supposed to call them “New Religious Movements.” We will also try to discover why many of these new religions focus on the end of the world, the coming apocalypse, and the rebirth of humanity and society. Throughout the semester we will use a variety of groups from America and Asia to illustrate four key themes within New Religious Movements: charismatic leadership, the end of the world, race and gender, and violence.

---

### Course Objectives

- Be able to identify and explain what constitutes a “cult” and what differentiates it from a New Religious Movement
  - Cultivate expertise in a particular cult and general knowledge about a number of cults.
  - Situate New Religious Movements within interrelated contemporary and historical contexts both locally and globally
  - Be able to answer the following question: what should most Americans know about “cults?”
  - Increase information literacy
- 

### Required Texts

Layton, Deborah. *Seductive Poison: A Jonestown Survivor's Story of Life and Death at the People's Temple*. New York: Anchor Books, 1998. 365 pages. ISBN: 978-0385489843.

Wade, Mark, and Alex Ross. *Kingdom Come*. New edition. New York: DC Comics, 2008. 228 pages. ISBN: 978-1401220341.

These books are available at Iowa Book and Supply and online.

All other readings for the course are available through ICON on our class site.

---

## Attendance Policy

Attendance at all class sessions is expected and I will take attendance in every class. However, you may miss two class periods for whatever reason without it counting against your grade. If you have an excused absence (medical, family emergency, etc.) more than your two free absences, please contact me as soon as possible.

---

## Grades

I expect you to come to class having read and thought about the reading assignments. It will be beneficial for you to write down thoughts and ideas as you read not only for class participation, but also because it will be much easier for you complete the Reflections (explained below) at the end of each section.

*Late work* will be accepted within 48 hours of the due date with 10% points automatically deducted, meaning the highest grade you will receive for late work is 90%. After 48 hours, no late work will be accepted except for emergency situations.

I am a strong believer in the importance of discussion. Therefore, we will strive to have some sort of discussion period in every class meeting. I expect you to come prepared to talk about the NRM for the day and the reading and to be an active and full participant in the discussions.

Your *participation grade* is a combination of speaking in class and weekly completion of the following exercise. At the end of every class period, I will provide you with a few minutes to write down something you found interesting from class, any questions you have that were not addressed in class, and/or anything for which you would like more information. The point of these is for you to reflect on what you have learned and show me that you paid attention in class. They should be no longer than a half page and will be graded with a ✓ or X.

Grading will be as follows:

Fact Sheet – 10%  
 In-class Presentation – 10%  
 Annotated Bibliography – 20%  
 Research Paper (6-8 pages) – 30%  
 Reflections (2 @ 10% each) – 20%  
 Attendance – 5%  
 Participation – 5%

Grading Scale will be as follows:

A – 90-100%  
 B – 80-89%  
 C – 70-79%  
 D – 60-69%  
 F – 59% and below

---

## Collaboration:

I expect the work that you turn in to me to be done on your own. The exception to this is the in-class presentation if you are co-presenting with a fellow student. However, even if you co-present with a student, your fact sheet, annotated bibliography, and research paper should be solely your work.

## Assignments:

All assignments will have a separate handout detailing the assignment further; these are intended merely as overviews. You will submit a hard copy to me in class and an electronic copy through the Dropbox on the ICON site for all assignments except the Research Paper which requires no hard copy.

Your chosen New Religious Movement (70% of your final grade)

*Fact Sheet* (10%) – a 1-page single-spaced fact sheet that will be made available to the entire class as background information about your NRM so the class will understand the reading and your presentation. DUE Tuesday February 2<sup>nd</sup>.

*In-Class Presentation* (10%) – a 15 minute presentation on the reading about your selected NRM. If more than one person selects your reading, you will co-present on it in class. You will write at least two discussion questions and lead the class through those questions at the conclusion of the presentation.

*Annotated Bibliography* (20%) – an analysis of the six core resources you will use for the Word Clouds in your final research paper. DUE Tuesday March 22<sup>nd</sup> (the day after Spring Break)

*Research Paper* (30%) – a 6-8 page research paper that includes 6 sources and analysis of 6 Word Clouds you will create from the sources listed in your *Annotated Bibliography*. DUE Tuesday May 10<sup>th</sup>.

*Extra Credit Option 1* (5 points on your research paper score) – if you come into my office to discuss your research paper you will receive 5 points on your final research paper score. This meeting must be about the argument or content of your paper, not a technical question. For example, you would receive points for coming in to ask how to craft a good thesis statement or how to use your sources; you would not receive points for asking how to make a Word Cloud. You are welcome to come to my office for technical questions, but they will not count for extra credit points.

*Extra Credit Option 2* (5 points on either the annotated Bibliography or your research paper score) – if you write an additional Fact Sheet for a NRM not selected by another student, you can gain 5 extra credit points on your Annotated Bibliography or your Research Paper (your choice). You will only receive credit if the Fact Sheet is complete and meets the requirements for the original Fact Sheet assignment. This will be due one week before we discuss the NRM in class.

Reflections (2 at 10% of your final grade) – a 1-2 double spaced paged reflection that covers your thoughts and ideas about the theme of the section we studied. You will have three options to write two of these.

## What you can expect from me:

I will arrive on-time and prepared. I will invite and encourage you to participate and contribute. I will always strive to allow for diverse viewpoints and arguments. I will respectfully listen and respond to your questions and comments. I will be available both inside and outside class to answer questions or concerns you have.

## THE DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

**Department Office:** 314 Gilmore  
**Department Director (DEO):** Diana Fritz Cates  
**DEO e-mail:** [diana-cates@uiowa.edu](mailto:diana-cates@uiowa.edu)

**Telephone:** 319-335-2164  
**DEO Office:** 316 Gilmore Hall  
**DEO Telephone:** 319-335-2162

### Administrative Home

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is the administrative home of this course and governs matters such as the add/drop deadlines, the second-grade-only option, and other related issues. Different colleges may have different policies. Questions may be addressed to 120 Schaeffer Hall, or see the CLAS Academic Policies Handbook at <http://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook>.

### Electronic Communication

University policy specifies that students are responsible for all official correspondences sent to their University of Iowa e-mail address (@uiowa.edu). Faculty and students should use this account for correspondences ([Operations Manual, III.15.2](#), k.11).

### Accommodations for Disabilities

A student seeking academic accommodations should first register with Student Disability Services and then meet with the course instructor privately in the instructor's office to make particular arrangements. See <http://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/> for more information.

### Academic Honesty

All CLAS students or students taking classes offered by CLAS have, in essence, agreed to the College's [Code of Academic Honesty](#): "I pledge to do my own academic work and to excel to the best of my abilities, upholding the [IOWA Challenge](#). I promise not to lie about my academic work, to cheat, or to steal the words or ideas of others; nor will I help fellow students to violate the Code of Academic Honesty." Any student committing academic misconduct is reported to the College and placed on disciplinary probation or may be suspended or expelled ([CLAS Academic Policies Handbook](#)).

## CLAS Final Examination Policies

The final examination schedule for each class is announced by the Registrar generally by the fifth week of classes. Final exams are offered only during the official final examination period. **No exams of any kind are allowed during the last week of classes.** All students should plan on being at the UI through the final examination period. Once the Registrar has announced the date, time, and location of each final exam, the complete schedule will be published on the Registrar's web site and will be shared with instructors and students. It is the student's responsibility to know the date, time, and place of a final exam.

## Making a Suggestion or a Complaint

Students with a suggestion or complaint should first visit with the instructor (and the course supervisor), and then with the departmental DEO. Complaints must be made within six months of the incident (CLAS [Academic Policies Handbook](#)).

## Understanding Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. All members of the UI community have a responsibility to uphold this mission and to contribute to a safe environment that enhances learning. Incidents of sexual harassment should be reported immediately. See the UI [Comprehensive Guide on Sexual Harassment](#) for assistance, definitions, and the full University policy.

## Reacting Safely to Severe Weather

In severe weather, class members should seek appropriate shelter immediately, leaving the classroom if necessary. The class will continue if possible when the event is over. For more information on Hawk Alert and the siren warning system, visit the [Department of Public Safety website](#).

## CLASS SCHEDULE

Date	Topic	Reading	Due
Jan 19 (T)	Syllabus, class policies		
Jan 21 (Th)	What is a cult?	Reader, Ian. "Chronologies, Commonalities, and Alternative Status in Japanese New Religious Movements: Defining NRMs outside the Western Cul-de-sac." <i>Nova Religio</i> 9, no. 2 (2005): 84-96.	Sign up for NRM
	<b>Charismatic Leaders</b>		
Jan 26 (T)	What is a charismatic leader?	Charisma Breakdown: How to Captivate Groups of People: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjoiVgCAD04">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjoiVgCAD04</a> Let's Face it: Charisma Matters: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEDvD1IICfE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEDvD1IICfE</a>	
Jan 28 (Th)	Theosophical Society	Crow, John L. "Taming the Astral Body: The Theosophical Society's Ongoing Problem of Emotion and Control." <i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i> 80, no. 3 (2012): 691-717.	
Feb 2 (T)	Unification Church	Parsons, Arthur S. "The Secular Contribution to Religious Innovation: A Case Study of the Unification Church." <i>Sociological Analysis</i> 50, no. 3 (1989): 209-227.	Fact Sheet
Feb 4 (Th)	ISKCON	Berg, Travis Vande and Fred Kniss. "ISKCON and Immigrants: The Rise, Decline, and Rise Again of a New Religious Movement." <i>The Sociological Quarterly</i> 49, no. 1 (2008): 79-104.	
Feb 9 (T)	Information Literacy Session	Meet at the Main Library in Room 1015. Bring a copy of your Fact Sheet and any sources you already have for your project.	
Feb 11 (Th)	Iva Patel - Swaminarayan Sampradaya		
	<b>End of the World</b>		
Feb 16 (T)	Theory on Apocalypticism (William Miller)	Kyle, Richard. "Why do Americans Love Doomsday?" <i>Direction</i> 42, no. 1 (2013). (excerpt from <i>Apocalyptic Fever: End Time Prophecies in Modern America</i> . Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012)	Reflection Paper Option 1
Feb 18 (Th)	Seventh Day Adventists	Ross, Janell. "Why Ben Carson's Opposition to a Muslim President is Curious." <i>The Washington Post</i> . September 30, 2015. <a href="http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/09/30/ben-carson-opposed-to-a-muslim-president-practices-a-faith-that-has-faced-similar-suspicions/">http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/09/30/ben-carson-opposed-to-a-muslim-president-practices-a-faith-that-has-faced-similar-suspicions/</a>	

Feb 23 (T)	Tenrikyo	Morishita, Saburo. "Good Works and the Question of Self-Presentation in Tenrikyo." <i>Nova Religio</i> 9, no. 2 (2005): 33-49.	
Feb 25 (Th)	Falun Gong	Fisher, Gareth. "Resistance and Salvation in Falun Gong: The Promise and Peril of Forbearance." <i>Nova Religio</i> 6, no. 2 (2003): 294-311.	
Mar 1 (T)	Scientology – watch <i>Going Clear</i>	<i>Optional Reading</i> - Lewis, James R. "Scientology vs. the Media." <i>Alternative Spirituality and Religion Review</i> 6, no. 1 (2015): 61-78.	
Mar 3 (Th)	Scientology – finish <i>Going Clear</i> and discussion	Bromley, David G. "Making Sense of Scientology: Prophetic, Contractual Religion." In <i>Scientology</i> , edited by James R. Lewis, 83-102. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.	(optional Bibliography check)
Mar 8 (T)	Heaven's Gate	Zeller, Benjamin E. "Scaling Heaven's Gate: Individualism and Salvation in a New Religious Movement." <i>Nova Religio</i> 10, no. 2 (2006): 75-102.	
Mar 10 (Th)	Discussion of class/catch up		Reflection Paper Option 2
		<b>SPRING BREAK</b>	
	<b>Race and Gender</b>		
Mar 22 (T)	Theory on Race and Gender in NRM	Jacobs, Janet Liebman. "Gender and Power in New Religious Movements: A Feminist Discourse on the Scientific Study of Religion." <i>Religion</i> 21, no. 4 (1991): 345-356.	Annotated Bibliography
Mar 24 (Th)	Rastafarianism	Yawney, Carde D. "Remnants of All Nations: Rastafarian Attitudes to Race and Nationality." In <i>Ethnicity in the Americas</i> , edited by Frances Henry, 231-262. The Hague: Mouton, 1976.	
Mar 29 (T)	Ghost Dance	Kehoe, Alice Beck. "Death or Renewal" from <i>The Ghost Dance: Ethnohistory and Revitalization</i> . New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1989.	
Mar 31 (Th)	Wicca	Warwick, Lynda L. "Feminist Wicca: Paths to Empowerment." In <i>Women's Spirituality, Women's Lives</i> , edited by Ellen Cole and Judith Ochshorn, 121-133. New York: Haworth Press, 1995.	
Apr 5 (T)	Superheroes – co-class with Brandon Dean	Wade, Mark, and Alex Ross. <i>Kingdom Come</i> . New edition. New York: DC Comics, 2008. (whole novel!)	
Apr 7 (Th)	Shinnyo-en	Usui Atsuko. "Women's 'Experience' in New Religious Movements: The Case of Shinnyoen." <i>Japanese Journal of Religious Studies</i> 30, no. 3/4 (2003): 217-241.	

	<b>Violence</b>		
Apr 12 (T)	Why do NRMs and violence go together?	Wessinger, Catherine. Chapter 2 in <i>How the Millennium Comes Violently: From Jonestown to Heaven's Gate</i> . New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2000. Pp. 12-29.	Reflection Paper Option 3
Apr 14 (Th)	Branch Davidians (and Timothy McVeigh)	Wright, Stuart. "Revisiting the Branch Davidian Mass Suicide Debate." <i>Nova Religio</i> 13, no. 2 (2009): 4-24.	
Apr 19 (T)	Aum Shinrikyo	Reader, Ian. "Consensus Shattered: Japanese Paradigm Shift and Moral Panic in the Post-Aum Era." <i>Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions</i> 4, no. 2 (2001): 225-234.	
Apr 21 (Th)	Responses to Aum Shinrikyo	Mullins, Mark R. "The Neo-Nationalist Response to the Aum Crisis: A Return of Civil Religion and Coercion in the Public Sphere?" <i>Japanese Journal of Religious Studies</i> 39, no. 1 (2012): 99-125.	
Apr 26 (T)	People's Temple	<i>Seductive Poison</i> , Chapters 3, 4, 6, 7, 10-12	(Research paper drafts)
Apr 28 (Th)	People's Temple	<i>Seductive Poison</i> , Chapters 13-20	
May 3 (T)	Islamic State (ISIS)	Tharoor, Ishaan. "How the Islamic State is like a Christian Death Cult." <i>The Washington Post</i> . March 23, 2105. <a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/03/23/how-the-islamic-state-is-like-a-christian-death-cult/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/03/23/how-the-islamic-state-is-like-a-christian-death-cult/</a>	
May 5 (Th)	Review and reflect		Last day for extra credit 1

**Final Paper due Tuesday May 10<sup>th</sup> by 11:59PM in the Dropbox.**