

College of Charleston
Department of Religious Studies
Spring 2006

RELS 315: NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS
Tues & Thurs, 01:40-02:55PM: ECTR 219

Instructor: Dr. Elijah Siegler
Email: sieglere@cofc.edu
Office: 4C Glebe St. Office phone: 953-3910
Office Hours: Wednesday 10-2 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. The first half of the class looks at NRMs in the West as historical and cultural phenomena. The second half explores NRMs around the world, emphasizing issues 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.

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.

Readings:

Lorne Dawson, ed. *Cults and New Religious Movements: A Reader*

Christopher Partridge, ed. *New Religions, A Guide*

My own textbook on NRMs, listed on E-reserve as “Siegler Ch. X”

Various E-Reserve articles, listed as “ER #X”

To access the Electronic Reserve materials, go online to ereserve.cofc.edu and find the course under its title or under my name. You will need the password: **tomcruise**.

Requirements:

Midterm exam on Thursday March 2: 20%

Non-cumulative **Final exam** on Tuesday May 2: 20%

1 10-12 pp. research **essay**, due Tuesday April 18, including an oral presentation = 30%

5 out of 10 1-2 pp. reading **response papers (RP)** @5%/each = 25% (see last page)

Attendance and participation = 5%

Grading Scale: A: 90-100; B+: 87-89; B: 80-86; C+: 77-79; C: 70-76; D: 60-69; F: 0-59.

The new grading scale with minus grades, will be introduced in Fall 2006, but this semester you will see what your grades would look under the new system. Under the new system, I give minus grades as follows: A-: 90-92; B-: 80-82; C-: 70-72.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Tues 1/10: Introduction to New Religious Movements (NRMs)

Thurs 1/12: Towards a working definition of NRMs

Siegler, Introduction; Partridge 6-24

Tues 1/17: How Are New Religious Movements (NRMs) studied?

Dawson, 5-31; Partridge 71-74 (Unification); 385-387 (Scientology)

RP #1 due

Thurs 1/19: Beginning to think about the Research Paper

Special Guest Speakers: Sheila Seaman and Michael Altman

NOTE: Class meets in Addlestone Library, Room 122

Tues 1/24: NRMs as Modern Heresy

Siegler Ch. 1; Dawson 73-88; Partridge 75-76, 32-35 (Latter Day Saints), 314-317 (Masons)

Recommended: Partridge 26-31 (Christianity)

RP #2 due

Thurs 1/26: The Post-Secular Background to NRMs

Dawson 358-360; Partridge 89-108

Tues 1/31: Who joins NRMs? Age, Race, Class, and Gender

Dawson 113-126, 227-229, 245-254

Recommended: Dawson 131-142, 230-242

RP #3 due

Thurs 2/2: Sociological Theories of NRMs

Dawson 59-69, 259-269

Tues 2/7: NRMs as Esoteric Revival I: To the 19th Century
Siegler Ch. 2; Partridge 39-40 (Christian Science), 42-43 (Unity), 305-308 (Western Esotericism), 312-313 (Rosicrucian), 319-320 (Spiritualism)
Recommended: Partridge 322-325

RP #4 due

Thurs 2/9: A Conversation with J. Gordon Melton

Recommended: ER#1: Melton

Tues 2/14: NRMs as Esoteric Revival II: Roots of The New Age

Partridge 308-312 (New Age), 320-322 (Theosophy), 329 (Arcane), 335-336 (Findhorn) 348-349 (*Miracles*), 355 (*Celestine*); ER #2: Lazaris

Thurs 2/16: NRMs as Esoteric Revival III: Pagans, Neo-Templars and UFO contactees

Partridge 268-270, 277-280, 288-289, 295-297, 317-319, 347-348; Dawson 208-222; Partridge 372-376, 387, 389 (Aetherius), 404-406 (Rael and Heaven's Gate)

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

RP#5 due

Tues 2/21: NRMs as Asian Mission to the West

Siegler Ch. 3; ER #3: Wessinger; Partridge 173-174, 182-184+187 (TM), 238+245 (Soka Gakkai)

Recommended: Partridge 158-168

Thurs 2/23: NRMs as Asian Mission to the West II

Partridge 169-170 (Radhasoami) 189-190 (Eckankar) 197-199 (3HO) 187-189 (Hare Krishna), 201-202 (Elan Vital), 205-206 (NKT), 209-210; ER # 4: Rochford; ER #5: Consumption

RP #6 due

Tues 2/28: The Brainwashing Controversy

Dawson 143-177

RP #7 due

Thurs 3/2: **Midterm Exam**

MARCH BREAK

Tues 3/14: NRMs in Japan, Korea and Vietnam

Siegler Ch. 4; Partridge 224- 230, 220-223 (Nichiren, Tenrikyo, Cheondogyo), 233-236 (PL Kyodan, Reiyukai, Cao Dai), 252-253, 257-258, 261-262.

Recommended: Partridge 212-219

Thurs 3/16: NRMs in China

Partridge 239-244, 245-246, 265-266; ER# 6: Palmer

Tues 3/21: Surprise Guest Speaker
RP#8 due

Thurs 3/23 NRMs of Africa and the African Diaspora
Siegler Ch. 5; Partridge 281-286,44-51, 52-53, 57-64 (Kimbangu, ZCC, Aladura, Rasta),
280+287-288 (Santeria, Candomble), 139-140, 142-144

Tues 3/28: Islamic Based NRMs
Siegler Ch. 6; Partridge 130-134 (Naqshbandis, Baha'i), 135-137, 138-139; ER #7: Al-
Qaeda
Recommended: Partridge 124-129
RP #9 due

Thurs 3/30: Student Presentations

Tues 4/4: Student Presentations

Thurs 4/6: Student Presentations

Tues 4/11: Student Presentations

Thurs 4/13: No Class: Religious Holiday

Tues 4/18: Violence, Satanism, and Moral Panic
Dawson 181-206; Partridge 77-80+85 (People's Temple, Davidians), 336+340-342
(Satanism), 388-391
Research Paper Due

Thursday 4/20: Transnational and Virtual NRMs
Siegler, Conclusion; Dawson 271-281; Partridge 191-193 (Osho), 407-408 (Church of
Moo)
RP Due #10
Final exam review sheet handed out

Tues 5/2, 12-3 PM: Final Exam

Recommended Websites:

Note: web research on NRMs presents potential hazards. Most sites dealing with NRMs are extremely biased, one way or another (which does not mean they are not useful, only that they must be properly understood.) The following sites attempt to maintain scholarly neutrality; most are gateway sites with lots of links to other sites or academic articles.

First, there are good resources from your very own Department of Religious Studies at the College of Charleston, on how to write and research a religious studies paper:

http://www.cofc.edu/~rels/research_resources.htm

Here are the best sites specifically on NRMs:

Religious Movements Homepage at the University of Virginia:

<http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/welcome/welcome.htm>

Gene Thursby's alternative or new religions Homepage:

<http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/gthursby/rel/newrels.htm>

Hartford Institute for Religion Research:

http://hrr.hartsem.edu/org/faith_new_religious_movements.html

Cesnur: Center for Studies on New Religions:

<http://www.cesnur.org/default.htm>

Online texts about cults and new religions:

<http://www.skepsis.nl/onlinetexts.html>

Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance:

<http://www.religioustolerance.org/nurel.htm>

Writing assignments:

The reading response papers (**RP**) are due in class and are never accepted late. In about 2 pages, compose a well structured and well-written essay that expresses your own opinion using reasoned argument and direct evidence from the readings for the week the paper is due. Your paper should have a point of view. Use proper bibliographic citation. Each paper must be on a specific topic (or choice of two topics) handed out the week before. Here is the first:

RP #1

What's In a Name?

Are there fundamental differences between a "cult," a "new religious movement," "alternative spirituality" and a "normal religion?" If so, what are those differences? If not, why have these different terms evolved and what use are they?

Due in class on Tuesday, January 17

The **research essay**, although not due until the end of the term, merits immediate consideration. In early February, I will schedule individual meetings to discuss possible topics. You may research an NRM alone, or with a partner (though each person must submit her own paper). Students who regularly travel to NC, GA or upstate SC are encouraged to do research there. Here are some suggested topics (just to get you started thinking...)

Various Neopagan groups in Charleston

Yoruba Village in Sheldon, SC

Meher Baba Center in Myrtle Beach

Eckankar <http://www.eck-sc.org/> (in Columbia and Greenville, SC)

Pagans or Wiccans in the Carolinas or in Georgia

Falungong (in Columbia and Florence, SC)

Scientology in Atlanta

ISCKON: a farm near Chapel Hill, NC, and a temple in Atlanta

Asheville, NC: a Mecca for NRMs

Christian Exodus or other Christian Identity

Nuwaubians in Eatonton, GA

Lost-Found Nation of Islam in Atlanta

Unity in North Charleston

... Or any group listed in Partridge!!