

CONTEMPORARY CULTS AND NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS (NRMS) IN NORTH AMERICA

Contemporary Religious Movements (RST 391)
Virginia Commonwealth University
T/R 11:00 W 4:00

Dr. David G. Bromley
1003 Religious Studies Bldg.
14 North Laurel St.
Office Phone/Voice Mail 828-6286
Email dbromley@vcu.edu
Web Site: <http://www.people.vcu.edu/~dbromley>

Office Hours:
T/R 9:00 - 10:30
W 2:00 - 3:30
By Appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

America is the most religiously diverse nation in the world. There are more than 2,500 separate religious organizations in the U.S., and the number of groups has increased steadily through our history. This is an introductory course in contemporary religious movements in North America. The focus of the course is on groups that emerged during the last half of the twentieth century, New Religious Movements (NRMs). The overall objective of the course is to examine the diversity of these movements and to make sense of them from a sociological perspective. This project involves understanding how these movements are distinctive, what gives rise to them, how they differ from one another, and how they develop through their histories.

COURSE TEXT

The course text is available at the VCU Bookstore and the Virginia Bookstore.

James R. Lewis, ed., *Controversial New Religions*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

OFFICE HOURS AND INDIVIDUAL ASSISTANCE

I will be available for personal meetings during the office hours listed above. Throughout the course I will be glad to meet with you personally to discuss issues which you find particularly interesting, which you wish to pursue further, or on which you would like clarification. In general it will be preferable if you schedule a specific meeting time even during office hours so that we will not be interrupted. I will also be glad to schedule individual appointments outside of regular office hours at your request.

CLASS ATTENDANCE

I expect you to attend class regularly. Attendance will be taken during each class. Because I think that regular attendance is important for the learning process, I offer a reward for regular attendance and discourage non-attendance. You are allowed to miss two weeks of classes without penalty. These are free absences to be used for illness or alternative activities.

Through the attendance policy you can either earn or lose points on your final course average. The scale of attendance point adjustments is as follows:

If you miss 0 classes or 1 class, you will earn 6 points on your overall test score average.

If you miss 2 classes, you will earn 4 points on your overall test score average.

If you miss 3 classes, you will earn 2 points on your overall test score average.

If you miss 4 classes, 0 points will be added or deducted from your overall test score average.

If you miss 5 classes, you will lose a letter grade from your overall test score average.

If you miss 6 classes, you will lose a second letter grade from your overall test score average.

If you miss more than 6 classes, you automatically receive an F in the course.



Please note: Each class meeting for the evening section counts as two classes and attendance will be taken twice. Therefore, if you miss a weekly class meeting that will count as two absences.

If you encounter unusual problems in maintaining regular attendance, you are responsible for letting me know so that I can respond appropriately. If other commitments will result in persistent late arrivals, early departures, or absences, I strongly advise that you enroll in the course at a later time.

CLASS DECORUM (House Rules)

1. If you arrive after class has begun, you will wait to be admitted (fifteen minutes after class begins).
If you arrive more than fifteen minutes late, do not disturb the class. Use one of your excused absences.
If you arrive after class begins three times, you will be counted as late the third time.
2. If you need to leave class early, you will inform me and I will arrange a seat near the door exit. Signing the roll does not constitute attendance; you will not be counted present if you leave class early.
3. A late arrival/early departure seating area will be available.
4. Repeated late arrivers will not be eligible to sign the roll.
If you arrive after class begins three times, you will be counted as late the third time.
5. All cell phone, beeper, and texting devices must be turned off **and stored away** before class begins. If you are expecting an emergency call, inform me and I will locate you near the door so that you can take the call privately.
6. Laptops can be used in class only by permission. If you receive permission, you will agree to access only the course website or a text file and to sit in a location that will not disturb others.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

All reading assignments will be drawn from the text and online materials. The attached course organization guide provides a listing of the organizational format of the course, the issues which will be covered in each of the major segments of the course, reading assignments for each course segment, and the placement of examinations. Reading assignments will be made in class each week for the following week and posted on the web site. Longer term reading assignments can be obtained from the course organization guide. Additional assignments will be made for material contained on the course web site as indicated in the "Course Web Site" section below.

COURSE WEB SITE

I have placed the overheads used in lectures and sample questions for each of the four exams on the course web site. Weekly class assignments and announcements of upcoming exams will be posted on the web site on a regular basis. There are also links to web sites and material drawn from those sites that are related to topics covered in class. I will assign certain of these materials along with normal text reading assignments. Since web based materials are constantly changing, assignments of these materials will be made on a weekly basis. These various resources are very important to successful completion of the course. The web site address is as follows:
<http://www.people.vcu.edu/~dbromley>

COURSE EXAMINATIONS AND GRADING

There will be *four* examinations. Exact dates will be announced in class at least one week prior to the exam and posted on the course web page. Each of the four tests, including the final (fourth) exam, will cover only material subsequent to material on the previous exam(s). The exam format will be multiple choice and true/false questions. Material from reading and lecture will appear on each examination.

Final course grades will be calculated from test grade scores and attendance point additions/subtractions. Each of the four exams will comprise one fourth of the overall test grade score. The average of the four exam scores will be the test score base from which attendance points are added or subtracted (See the Class Attendance policy above).

Please Note: In the case of an emergency you must contact me in advance and receive permission to defer taking a test at the scheduled time if you wish to be eligible for a makeup exam.

If you know that you cannot be present on the date and time of the final test, please withdraw from the course. Please remember to bring #2 pencils and NEW scantrons to all test sessions!

You will need to record your V number on scantrons if your grade is to be posted to Blackboard.

THE VCU HONOR SYSTEM

Virginia Commonwealth University recognizes that honesty, truth, and integrity are values central to its mission as an institution of higher education. The Honor System is built on the idea that a person's honor is his/her most cherished attribute. A foundation of honor is essential to a community devoted to learning. Within this community, respect and harmony must coexist. The Honor System is the policy of VCU that defines the highest standards of conduct.

Please be sure that you are familiar with the VCU Honor System. The policy defines six acts (cheating, plagiarism, facilitating academic dishonesty, abuse of academic materials, stealing and lying) for which there are serious penalties. I will discuss the policy during the first class, and the Honor Pledge, "*On my honor, I have neither given nor received aid on this assignment,*" will appear on each examination. Signing your name on the examination constitutes an affirmation of this pledge. See the VCU Resource Guide for a complete description of the VCU Honor System and your other rights and responsibilities. As a student in this course, "you will be expected to practice personal and academic integrity; respect the rights and property of others; honor the rights of others to their opinions; and strive to learn from the differences in people, ideas, and cultures."

The Honor System in its entirety can be reviewed on the Web at http://www.provost.vcu.edu/pdfs/Honor_system_policy.pdf or it can be found in the 2010-11 VCU Insider at <http://www.students.vcu.edu/insider.html>.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES POLICY

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 require Virginia Commonwealth University to provide academic adjustments or accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Students seeking academic adjustments or accommodations must self-identify with the Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities on the appropriate campus. After meeting with the Coordinator, students are encouraged to meet with their instructors to discuss their needs, and if applicable, any lab safety concerns related to their disabilities.... Virginia Commonwealth University is an equal opportunity, affirmative action university providing access to education and employment without regard to age, race, color, national origin, gender, religion, sexual orientation, veteran's status, political affiliation, or disability. Students should contact the Disability Support Services office on the Monroe Park Campus (828-2253) or on the MCV Campus (828-9782) for appropriate academic adjustments or accommodations.

VCU CAMPUS SAFETY

What to know and do to be prepared for emergencies at VCU:

- Sign up to receive VCU text messaging alerts (www.vcu.edu/alert/notify). Keep your information up-to-date.
- Know the safe evacuation route from each of your classrooms. Emergency evacuation routes are posted in on-campus classrooms.
- Listen for and follow instructions from VCU or other designated authorities.
- Know where to go for additional emergency information (www.vcu.edu/alert).
- Know the emergency phone number for the VCU Police (828-1234). Report suspicious activities and objects.

In emergency situations the primary communications channel will be through text messaging, which is now available to students, faculty, staff and parents. You can sign up now by linking from the VCU home page or by going to <http://www.vcu.edu/alert/notify/>.

Sirens have been installed on both the Monroe Park and MCV Campuses for those unlikely occasions when it is imperative to get everyone's attention simultaneously. When a siren sounds, an emergency has occurred or is imminent:

- If you are in a building on campus, remain where you are and seek additional information about what is happening and how to respond.
- If you are outside but on campus, go to the nearest University building and seek additional information about what is happening.
- If you are off campus, do not come to campus, but seek additional information about what is happening.

Digital screens installed in major academic buildings and all residence halls on both campuses will be used in an emergency to provide audio and visual alerts similar to those displayed on the VCU Alert web site.

COURSE ORGANIZATION GUIDE

Contemporary Cults and New Religious Movements in North America is divided into four sections. In Section I we briefly review some of the core characteristics of religious organization, the distinguishing characteristics of new forms of religious organization (groups that we shall refer to as NRMs), and the methods through which scholars study these groups. Section II explores the kinds of sociocultural conditions that give rise to new religious groups and distinguishes among the types of groups that emerge. Sections III, IV, and V examine sectarian tradition, alternative tradition, and emergent tradition groups. *Each of the course section headings below contains a description of that section of the course relates to the overall course objective. The course is designed to offer:*

1. *Familiarity with some of the many contemporary religious movements in the U.S.*
2. *Understanding of how religion as a social form is socially constructed.*
3. *Understanding of the social and cultural conditions under which new religions are most likely to form.*
4. *Understanding of the development process of new religions.*
5. *Understanding of how new religious movements come to occupy their particular niches in the American religious landscape.*

SECTION I: PERSPECTIVES ON NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

The objectives of the "Perspectives on New Religious Movements" section of the course are to identify the basic components of religion as a social form from a sociological perspective and to examine the methods that social scientists use in studying these groups. Specifically, the objectives will be to distinguish NRMs from their established counterparts and to identify some of the major issues that confront social scientists who engage in researching these groups.

Text Readings:

1. James Lewis and Jesper Petersen, "Introduction," pp. 1-16.

Lecture Topics:

- Introduction to the Study of New Religious Movements
- Characteristics of New Religious Movements
- Methods in the Study of New Religious Movements

SECTION II: THE EMERGENCE OF NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

The objective of "The Emergence of New Religious Movements" section of the course is to identify the social and cultural factors that have been central to the appearance and development of NRMS and to the availability of pools of potential recruits. We will propose that both NRMS and pools of potential recruits are likely to occur during periods of tension, crisis and change.

Lecture Topics:

- Cultural and Social Context
- Types of Religious Movements
- Dominant Tradition Groups

SECTION III: SECTARIAN RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

The objective of the "Sectarian Religious Traditions" section of the course is to examine the founding and development of a series of sectarian religious movements. These movements share in common claiming status as Christian religious groups.

Text Readings:

1. Chancellor, "A Family for the Twenty-first Century" in Lewis and Petersen, 19-42
2. Beverly, "Spirit Revelation and the Unification Church" in Lewis and Petersen, 43-60.
3. Moore, "Reconstructing Reality: Conspiracy Theories about Jonestown," in Lewis and Petersen, 61-78.
4. Wright, "Explaining Militarization at Waco: The Construction and Convergence of the Warfare Narrative," in Lewis and Petersen, 79-100.

Lecture Topics:

- Calvary Chapel
- Marian Apparition at Conyers
- The Twelve Tribes
- The Family International
- Westboro Baptist Church
- Set Free Ministries

SECTION IV: ALTERNATIVE RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

The objective of the "Alternative Religious Traditions" section of the course is to examine the founding and development of a series of movements representing non-dominant (Christian) religious traditions. These movements share in common claiming status as legitimate representatives of those traditions.

Text Readings:

1. Rochford, "Family Development and Change in the Hare Krishna Movement" in Lewis and Petersen, 101-118.
2. Goldman, "When Leaders Dissolve: Considering Controversy and Stagnation in the Osho Rajneesh Movement," In Lewis and Petersen, 119-138.
1. Kisala, "Soka Gakkai: Searching for the Mainstream," in Lewis and Petersen, 139-152.
2. Harley, "From Atlantis to America: JZ Knight Encounters Ramtha," in Lewis and Petersen, 319-330.
3. Tumminia, "Heart and Soul: A Qualitative Look at the Ethos of the Movement of Spiritual Inner Awareness," in Lewis and Petersen, 331-352.
4. Palmer, "The Raelian Movement: Concocting Controversy, Seeking Social Legitimacy," 371-386.
5. Ownby, "The Falun Gong: A New Religious Movement in Post-Mao China," in Lewis and Petersen, 195-214.
6. Zoccatelli, "Notes on the Aumist Religion," in Lewis and Petersen, 215-226.
7. Santucci, "The Theosophical Society," 259-294.
8. Lewis, "The Solar Temple 'Transits: Beyond the Millennialist Hypothesis,'" 295-318.

Lecture Topics:

- Buddhism and the American Context
- Buddhism in America Timeline
- Washington Buddhist Vihara
- Insight Meditation Society
- Fire Walking
- Ramtha School of Enlightenment
- San Francisco Zen Center
- Erhard Seminar Training
- Raelians

SECTION V: EMERGENT RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

The objective of the “Emergent Religious Traditions” section of the course is to examine the founding and development of a series of movements that do not represent either dominant or non-dominant (Christian) religious traditions. These movements share in common not being able to claim status as legitimate representatives of any religious traditions.

Text Readings:

1. Gardell, “White Racist Religions in the United States: From Christian Identity to Wolf Age Pagans,” in Lewis and Petersen, 387-422.
2. Christensen, “Inventing L. Ron Hubbard: On the Construction and Maintenance of the Hagiographic Mythology of Scientology’s Founder,” in Lewis and Petersen, 227-258.
3. Petersen, “Modern Satanism: Dark Doctrines and Black Flames,” in Lewis and Petersen, 423-458.
4. Chryssides, “Come on Up and I will Show Thee: Heaven’s Gate as a Postmodern Group,” in Lewis and Petersen, 353-370.

Lecture Topics

- The Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord
- The Church of the Lamb of God
- The Church of Scientology
- The Church of Satan