

**RELG 3315**  
**Religion & Culture: New & Alternative Religious Movements**  
**Department of Philosophy & Religion**  
**University of Central Arkansas**  
**Fall, 2013**

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<u>Office Hours</u>	
MWF	1000-1100 1200-1300
TTH	1115-1215
<i>And by appt.</i>	

CRN: 17713

Day/Time: TTH 1215-1330

Location: Harrin Hall 130

**Course Description**

Religions change with the times and new religious movements are ever on the rise. This course critically examines a variety of new and alternative religious movements in the United States today. These include

- new and alternative movements arising out of established, “mainstream” (i.e., Christian and Jewish) religious traditions (e.g., Mormonism, Hasidism);
- movements that are well-established in other parts of the world and are beginning to have a significant impact in the US--while also undergoing significant change in the process (e.g., Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism); and
- radically new movements emerging only indirectly from established religious traditions or not at all (e.g., neo-Paganism and Wicca, Scientology, “UFO cults”).

The course also explores the impact of popular culture on religious change in the US and examines several new movements emanating directly from pop culture (e.g., Matrixism, Jediism).

This course satisfies the Religion, Culture, and Society core requirement or counts as an elective toward the major and minor degrees in Religious Studies.

**Course Objectives**

Students who complete this course will be able to

- identify several factors contributing to religious change in the US today;
- identify several ways in which religion is changing in the US in response to these factors;
- identify a variety of new and alternative religious movements in the US today;
- identify the historical, theoretical, practical, and sociological contours of these movements; and

- interact critically with these movements, articulating their own well-reasoned thoughts about their significance for contemporary religion, society, and culture.

**Activities of the Course**

Students will achieve course objectives through a variety of activities, including studying important primary and secondary texts; finding and reviewing relevant information and media online; participating in class discussions; completing exams; and researching/writing a term paper.

**Assessment of Student Achievement**

Student achievement will be measured in the following ways:

1. Attendance and Participation: Students will be assigned a grade for their attendance and participation in this course. Students’ participation will be measured with respect not only or especially to its frequency (although regular participation is required), but more importantly to the contribution it makes to the course by raising important questions or sharing critical observations. Students are expected to come to class having read and studied all assigned materials for the day and should be prepared to discuss assigned materials critically with others. Lack of preparation may be counted as an un-excused absence. Legitimate excuses for absences include illness and unforeseen personal or familial emergencies. Legitimate excuses must be submitted to the instructor in writing. It is the student’s responsibility to find out what was missed in case of absence. Students who arrive late should see the professor after class to make sure their attendance is properly recorded.
2. Exams: Students will take three take-home essay exams based on assigned readings and class discussions. Essays should reflect comprehension of assigned materials and the ability to interact with them critically.
3. Research Paper: Students will research and write a 10- to 12-page paper exploring a specific new or alternative religious movement and its significance for contemporary religion, society, and culture. Detailed instructions concerning this assignment will be given in class.

**Grading**

Attendance & Participation	25%
Exams	45 %
Research Paper	30%

Final grades will be calculated according to the following schedule:

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

Note: As a general rule, students should be prepared to study two to three hours outside of class for every hour spent in class. As this course meets three hours per week, students should expect to spend six to nine hours per week studying for this course. *Students who are unable or unwilling to commit this amount of time should drop the course as they are otherwise liable to fail it.*

### **Statement on Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism**

The University of Central Arkansas affirms its commitment to academic integrity and expects all members of the university community to accept shared responsibility for maintaining academic integrity. Students in this course are subject to the provisions of the university's Academic Integrity Policy, approved by the Board of Trustees as Board Policy No. 709 on February 10, 2010, and published in the Student Handbook. Penalties for academic misconduct in this course may include a failing grade on an assignment, a failing grade in the course, or any other course-related sanction the instructor determines to be appropriate. Continued enrollment in this course affirms a student's acceptance of this university policy.

### **Statement on Americans with Disabilities Act**

The University of Central Arkansas adheres to the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you need an accommodation under this Act due to a disability, contact the Office of Disability Support Services at 450-3135.

### **Building Emergency Plan**

An Emergency Procedures Summary (EPS) for the building in which this class is held will be discussed during the first week of this course. EPS documents for most buildings on campus are available at <http://uca.edu/mysafety/bep/>. Every student should be familiar with emergency procedures for any campus building in which he/she spends time for classes or other purposes.

### **Student Handbook Policies**

Students are responsible to familiarize themselves with the policies listed in the Student Handbook. Special attention should be given to the Sexual Harassment and Academic Policies.

### **Use of Electronic Equipment**

Students may use computers, smartphones, etc. in class to take notes and access the Internet (sparingly) for appropriate, course-related purposes. These devices may not be used in class to check email, surf the Internet, IM, or for any other purpose not directly related to the class. The professor reserves the right to forbid any student from using electronic devices if such use distracts others or otherwise disrupts the course.

### **Recording Devices**

Students may not use audio or video recording devices in class without the professor's permission.

## **Required Texts**

- Richard Cimino and Don Lattin, *Shopping for Faith: American Religion in the New Millennium* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Pubs.; 2002). [SF]  
Eugene V. Gallagher, *The New Religious Movements Experience in America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press; 2004). [NRME]  
Richard W. Santana and Gregory Erickson, *Religion and Popular Culture: Rescripting the Sacred* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co.; 2008). [R&PC]

## **Course Outline**

- I. The Contours of Religious Change in the Contemporary US  
*Aug 27&29: Searching for Self and Spirit*  
Reading Assignment: SF Chapters 1-3; Various Poll Data (Online)  
*Sep 3&5: Searching for Communit(ies)*  
Reading Assignment: SF Chapters 4-6  
*Sep 10&12: Searching for Common (Multi-)Culture*  
Reading Assignment: SF Chapters 7-9  
*First Mid-Term Exam Distributed*
- II. New and Alternative Religious Movements in the Contemporary US  
*Sep 17&19: Studying New and Alternative Religious Movements: Approaches and Methods*  
Reading Assignment: NRME Chapter 1  
*Research Paper Assignment Distributed*  
*Sep 24&26: Groups in the Biblical Tradition*  
Reading Assignment: NRME Chapter 2  
**First Mid-Term Exam Due Sep 24**  
*Oct 1&3: Spiritualism and New Age Religions*  
Reading Assignment: NRME Chapter 3  
*Oct 8&10: Asian Religions in the US*  
Reading Assignment: NRME Chapter 4  
**Paper Topic/Bibliography Due Oct 10**  
*Oct 15: Groups of Middle Eastern and African Origin*  
Reading Assignment: NRME Chapter 5  
*Oct 17: Fall Break*  
*Oct 22&24: Groups of Middle Eastern and African Origin, cont./Neo-Pagan and Wiccan Religions*  
Reading Assignment: NRME Chapter 6  
*Oct 29&31: New Foundations*  
Reading Assignment: NRME Chapter 7  
*Second Mid-Term Exam Distributed*
- III. New Sources and Modes of Expression: Religion and Pop Culture  
*Nov 5&7: Religion, Consumerism, and the 21<sup>st</sup> C. Spiritual Marketplace*  
Reading Assignment: R&PC Chapters 1-3  
*Nov 12&14: Music, Film, and Television as Popular Mediators of Religion*  
Reading Assignment: R&PC Chapters 4-6  
**Second Mid-Term Exam Due Nov 12**  
*Nov 19,21&26: Fantasy, Fandom, and Religion: 21<sup>st</sup> C. Wizards and Jedi Knights*  
Reading Assignment: R&PC Chapter 7  
**Paper Thesis/Outline Due Nov 19**  
**First Draft Due Nov 26**
- IV. Course Summary and Conclusion  
*Dec 3&5: Themes in the Study of New and Alternative Religious Movements*  
Reading Assignment: NRME Chapter 8  
*Final Exam Distributed*  
**Peer Review Due Dec 3**  
**Final Paper Due Dec 5**
- Final Exam Due 2:00 pm, Dec. 12**