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American Public University System

The Ultimate Advantage is an Educated Mind

Department – Philosophy and Religion
RELS462
Course Name – New Religious Movements
Credit Hours: 3 Length of Course: 8 weeks

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Course Description

This course examines religious cults that span specific times and religions. Its focus is on the causes of cult formulation, cult leadership, cult purpose, and cult interactions with the outside world. Course content also explores what is meant by the terms "cult," "new religious movement," and "alternative religion," using historical and contemporary examples to illustrate these ideas.

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Course Scope

This course is divided into eight weeks and is organized to give students a broad context in which to study religious cults and their development. In this course, students will read about a variety of cult groups from various geographic areas and study the various rituals that correspond to these organizations. Instruction is primarily textbook driven with accompanied online lectures and online classroom weekly discussions. Because this is a survey course of a broad subject, it will out of necessity, cover each topic with a broad brush. However, the reference area will allow a deeper look into any subject area that particularly attracts the student. The student will learn how to use the World Wide Web to research topics related to the material discussed and covered in the textbook.

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Learning Objectives

- CO1: Describe what is meant by the term cult and describe key “characteristics” of cults, summarizing some difficulties and problems associated with using that word
- CO2: Discuss the roles of “brainwashing” and the characteristics of the “charismatic leader” in “cult” formation and religious conversion
- CO3: Summarize and assess various theories concerning religious conversion and deprogramming
- CO4: Identify characteristics common to “cult” members and who joins religious cults
- CO5: Discuss how “cults” interact with the larger society
- CO6: Identify the stages of cult formation and several “types” of cults
- CO7: Summarize the history of religious “cults” from the beginnings of western civilization through the 1960s and beyond
- CO8: Describe the beliefs, principle players, and actions of the Ramakrishna Mission, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi’s TM groups, Yoga groups, Hare Krishnas, Western Zen, Tibetan Buddhism, Soka Gakkai International, the Sufi Order, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and the Unification Church
- CO9: Discuss the beliefs, goals, and agendas of the People’s Temple, the Charismatic Movement, Heaven’s Gate, the Neopaganism societies, and the Chen Tao movement

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Course Delivery Method

This course delivered via distance learning will enable students to complete academic work flexibly, and completely online. Course materials and access to an online learning management system will be made available to each student. Online assignments are due by the last day of each week and include discussion questions (accomplished in groups through a threaded discussion board) and individual assignments (submitted for review by the Faculty Member).

Course Materials

Course Materials are all found in the classroom.

Evaluation Procedure

Assessment	Percent of Final Grade
Assignments	35%
Final Assignment	35%
Forum Posts	30%
Total	100%

Week	Topic	Learning Objectives	Readings	Assignment
1	Introduction to New Religious Movements and Cults: History, and the Who, Why, and What	<p>Describe what is meant by the term New Religious Movements and Cult, summarizing some difficulties and problems associated with using that word</p> <p>Summarize briefly the history of New Religious Movements and Cult from the beginnings of western civilization through the 1960s and beyond</p> <p>Discuss the roles of “brainwashing” and the “charismatic leader” in the formation of a New Religious Movements or Cult.</p>	See classroom for readings.	Week 1 Discussion – answer due by Thursday & responses due by Sunday
2	New Age Spirituality, Scientology and Falon Gong	<p>Describe the beliefs, principle players, and actions of various New Age Spirituality in America, including the Scientology movement, contemporary paganism, and Wicca</p> <p>Describe the beliefs of new religions.</p> <p>Explain whether these individual groups are true NRMs or Cults</p>	See classroom for readings.	Week 2 Discussion - answer due by Thursday & responses due by Sunday Assignment due by Sunday
3	Controversy in contemporary NRMs, Jewish, and Islamic Traditions	<p>Describe the beliefs, principle players, and actions of Kabbalah Center, and Sufism</p> <p>Describe the beliefs, principle players, and actions of Black Afro-American Muslims</p> <p>Describe the beliefs, principle players, and actions of Ramatha</p>	See classroom for readings.	Week 3 Discussion - answer due by Thursday & responses due by Sunday
4	NRMs and Cults interact with the larger society	<p>Identify characteristics of Branch Dravidian members</p> <p>Describe Calvary Chapel</p> <p>Discuss how new religious movements and cults interact with the larger society</p>	See classroom for readings.	Week 4 Discussion – answer due by Thursday & responses due by Sunday
5	Asian Religious Movements	<p>Describe the beliefs, principle players, and actions of Aum Shinrikyo</p> <p>Describe the beliefs, principle players, and actions of Hare Krishna</p> <p>Distinguish ethnocentrism from cultural relativism</p>	See classroom for readings.	Week 5 Discussion - answer due by Thursday & responses due by Sunday

6	NRM, Transcendental Meditation, and Osho Rajneesh	Describe the beliefs, principle players, and actions of Rajneesh Describe the beliefs, principle players, and actions of Mahesh Yogi	See classroom for readings.	Week 6 Discussion - answer due by Thursday & responses due by Sunday Assignment due by Sunday
7	The Earth School, and Heaven's Gate	Describe the beliefs, principle players, and actions of the Earth School and Heaven's Gate Summarize characteristics of NRM leaders and members Summarize the position of Earth School and Heaven's Gate Discuss the characteristics of the Earth School and Heaven's Gate	See classroom for readings.	Week 7 Discussion - answer due by Thursday & responses due by Sunday
8	Making Sense of it All	Discuss the ways that NRMs and Cults "fit" into mainstream society Describe the ways that religious theorists conceive of NRMs and Cults	See classroom for readings.	Week 8 Discussion - answer due by Thursday & responses due by Sunday Assignment due by Sunday

Policies

Please see the [student handbook](#) to reference all University policies.

[Drop/Withdrawal Policy](#)

[Plagiarism Policy](#)

[Extension Process and Policy](#)

[Disability Accommodations](#)

Writing Expectations

You will follow the citation style that is common to your discipline/program (APA, Turabian, AP, or MLA). If you do not have a citation style, please use MLA style. For further assistance, you can use the APUS library or <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>.

Late Assignments

Students are expected to submit classroom assignments by the posted due date and to complete the course according to the published class schedule. As adults, students, and working professionals, I understand you must manage competing demands on your time. Should you need additional time to complete an assignment, please contact me before the due date so we can discuss the situation and determine an acceptable resolution. Work posted or submitted after the assignment due date will be reduced by 10% of the potential total score possible for each day late up to a total of five days, including forum posts/replies, quizzes, and assignments. Beginning on the sixth day late through the end of the course, late work, including forum

posts/replies, quizzes, and assignments will be accepted with a grade reduction of 50% of the potential total score earned.

Online assignments are due by the date listed in the classroom 11:55 pm ET. While Distance Learning provides some flexibility in when you choose to conduct your studies, you are expected to follow the syllabus and turn in your assignments on time and on schedule.

IMPORTANT: Please note that **any assignment submitted after the last day of class will not be counted toward your final grade – there will be no exceptions.** It is your responsibility to ensure that all assignments are submitted on time. If you have requested and been approved for a formal 30-day course extension through the Registrar's office, it is your responsibility to submit all assignments before the expiry of the extension.

Netiquette

Online universities promote the advancement of knowledge through positive and constructive debate--both inside and outside the classroom. Discussions on the Internet, however, can occasionally degenerate into needless insults and "flaming." Such activity and the loss of good manners are not acceptable in a university setting--basic academic rules of good behavior and proper "Netiquette" must persist. Remember that you are in a place for the fun and excitement of learning that does not include descent to personal attacks, or student attempts to stifle the discussion of others.

- **Technology Limitations:** While you should feel free to explore the full range of creative composition in your formal papers, keep e-mail layouts simple. The Educator classroom may not fully support MIME or HTML encoded messages, which means that boldface, italics, underlining, and a variety of color-coding or other visual effects will not translate into your e-mail messages.
- **Humor Note:** Despite the best of intentions, jokes and--especially--satire can easily get lost or taken seriously. If you feel the need for humor, you may wish to add "emoticons" to help alert your readers: ;-), :), ☺

Disclaimer Statement

Course content may vary from the outline to meet the needs of this particular group.

Online Library

The Online Library is available to enrolled students and faculty from inside the electronic campus. This is your starting point for access to online books, subscription periodicals, and Web resources that are designed to support your classes and generally not available through search engines on the open Web. In addition, the Online Library provides access to special learning resources, which the University has contracted to assist with your studies. Questions can be directed to librarian@apus.edu.

- **Charles Town Library and Inter Library Loan:** The University maintains a special library with a limited number of supporting volumes, a collection of our professors' publications, and services to search and borrow research books and articles from other libraries.
- **Electronic Books:** You can use the online library to uncover and download over 50,000 titles, which have been scanned and made available in electronic format.
- **Electronic Journals:** The University provides access to over 12,000 journals, which are available in electronic form and only through limited subscription services.
- **Tutor.com** - detailed information is located in the Online Library on the *Tutorial & Student Study Center* page: <http://www.apus.edu/online-library/tutorials/index.htm> If you have any **questions** regarding online tutoring, please email librarian@apus.edu If a student is **Active Duty DOD Military (and their dependents)**, please go to the Online Library Tutorial page to link directly to their branch of

service to start their UNLIMITED online tutoring with Tutor.com
<http://www.tutor.com/military/colleges/amu-apus> All other students (non-active duty DOD military)
who are interested in online tutoring, please go to the Online Library Tutorial page to link to the
AMU/APU Civilian & CG Military Tutor.com portal <http://www.tutor.com/colleges/landing/apus>

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