This course will examine controversial religious groups that are often called “cults.” In describing cults, popular media have focused on armed confrontations, mass suicides, and alleged satanic conspiracies. They have portrayed cult members as coerced or brainwashed, unable to save themselves from abuse and control. In contrast, many social scientists have investigated cults as social movements, advocating unconventional beliefs in a world that is often hostile to innovators. With rigorous sociological lenses, we will examine cults’ occasionally catastrophic conflicts with government authorities, established religious organizations, and anti-cult movements. As we engage this controversial material, we will refine our skills in writing cogent argumentative essays.

REQUIREMENTS
Students must complete course readings before the assigned date. Due to the importance of discussion and collaborative writing, class participation will be crucial. Also, our activities, readings, and discussions will often require use of computers and access to the Internet. All assignments must be typed and double-spaced.

In addition to writing conferences with me and workshops with your peers, I strongly encourage you to use the UMass Writing Center for supplementary feedback. See: http://www.umass.edu/writingcenter/index.html

BOOKS AND READINGS

Readings marked * on the syllabus are on Moodle. Download these materials in advance, as problems with downloading or printing these articles will not excuse you from the readings.

For questions on Moodle, contact the OIT Help Center (413) 545-9400 or submit an online help ticket at http://www.oit.umass.edu/

NOTE: This course includes readings and audiovisual materials that some of you may find violent, obscene, or otherwise offensive. Our discussions of religious conflicts will highlight differences in our faiths and values. I ask students to treat one another with respect as we learn from this intellectually and personally challenging material.
GROUND RULES
• All class sessions are mandatory. Students who miss the first week (session 1) will be dropped.
• Each regular class meeting will begin with a writing exercise related to the readings. If you are absent, late, or unprepared, you must write a (short) extra paper to enhance your learning. This make-up paper is required, and is not a penalty, so ‘excuses’ for absences are irrelevant.
• The exam and paper due dates are not flexible. There are no make-ups for exams or papers.
• If you have a conflict with a paper due date, submit the paper early.
• There is no curve, so grades will not be competitive and I encourage group study.
• Grades are never negotiable, but I do accept substantial projects for “extra credit.”
• Make frequent backups of your files. Lost papers and failed disks do not earn extensions.
• Video and audio recording in class is prohibited, unless requested by Disability Services.
• Students may not use laptops, tablets, or cell phones during class, unless I ask you to do so.

GRADES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Final Grade Breakdown</th>
<th>0-100 Scale</th>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>4.0 Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Paper (max 3 pgs)</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>93+</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>90-92</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>88-89</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>83-87</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Paper (max 10 pgs)</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>80-82</td>
<td>B-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>78-79</td>
<td>C+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Paper (max 7 pgs)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>73-77</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>70-72</td>
<td>C-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>68-69</td>
<td>D+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>60-67</td>
<td>D</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>&lt;60</td>
<td>F</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

“Class participation” represents constructive involvement in discussions and activities, written feedback on your peers’ writing, and your portfolio of in-class exercises.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY
Students will maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. You may study the exam together, and I encourage you to do so. You must share drafts of your papers with your peers and give them feedback. However, you may not copy (or paraphrase) text from any other source without citation and/or quotation, as appropriate. You also may not speak with anyone else or consult any written materials during an exam. You are responsible for complying with this policy: http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/downloads/AcademicHonestyPolicy.pdf

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES
I am happy to provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities, with written notice by Disability Services. Please let me know how I can make the class work for you.
WEEK ONE – WHAT ARE NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS (NRMS?)

Monday, September 9

Bring books to class today, read the below, and come prepared for a quiz.

Dawson, Lorne “Introduction.” in Dawson, (pp. 1-3).


Depending on your last name, you will present on one of the following profiles from Miller’s (1995) America's Alternative Religions. Just read your profile for today, and you will give your presentations as scheduled over the next few weeks:

- (last name begins C to E) Paden, R. “Boston Church of Christ.” 133-140.*
- (last name begins F to G) Rochford, E. B. J. “Hare Krishna in America.” 215-221.*
- (last name begins H to K) Barker, E. “Unification Church.” 223-229.*
- (last name begins L to M) Chevannes, B. “The Rastafari Abroad.” 297-302.*
- (last name begins O to Q) Matthews, C. “Neo-Paganism and Witchcraft.” 339-345.*
- (last name begins R to S) Bednarowski, M.F. “Church of Scientology.” 385-392.*
- (last name begins T to Z) Ellwood, R. S. “UFO Religious Movements.” 393-399.*

WEEK TWO – NRMS AND THEIR MEMBERS

Monday, September 16


Wednesday, September 18

PAPER #1 THESIS LIST DUE (on Moodle)

Consult pages 17-27 in the Sociology Student Writer’s Manual as needed.

Thursday, September 19

PAPER #1 THESIS PEER REVIEW (on Moodle)

Saturday, September 21

PAPER #1 DUE (on Moodle)

Consult pages 38-62 and 77-99 in the Sociology Student Writer’s Manual as needed.

Readings Marked ‘*’ are on Moodle at https://moodle.umass.edu/
WEEK THREE – WHO JOINS NRMs?

Monday, September 23


BRING TWO HARDCOPIES OF THE FINAL DRAFT OF PAPER #1

WEEK FOUR – THE CONVERSION PROCESS

Monday, September 30


WEEK FIVE – SOCIAL NETWORKS AND NRM RECRUITMENT

Monday, October 7


# COURSE SCHEDULE

## WEEK SIX – BRAINWASHING AND COERCIVE CONVERSION

**TUESDAY, October 15**

- Robbins, Thomas “Constructing Cultist ‘Mind Control.’” in Dawson, (pp. 167-177).

## WEEK SEVEN – CHARISMA IN NRMS

**Monday, October 21**


## WEEK EIGHT – PAPER 2

**Monday, October 28**

Begin Paper 2 during class (WE WILL MEET AT DUBOIS LIBRARY, DOWNSTAIRS IN THE CALIPARI ROOM)

**Saturday, November 2**

PAPER #2 DUE

Consult pages 77-99 and 110-128 in the *Sociology Student Writer’s Manual* as needed.


## WEEK NINE – VIOLENCE AND NRMS

**Monday, November 4**


GIVE ORAL PRESENTATION BASED ON PAPER 2

Readings Marked ‘*’ are on Moodle at [https://moodle.umass.edu/](https://moodle.umass.edu/)
COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK TEN – APPLICATION: JONESTOWN  

**WEDNESDAY, November 13**


WEEK ELEVEN – APPLICATION: WACO  

**Monday, November 18**


**Friday, November 22**

**PAPER #3 THESIS LIST DUE: MOODLE**

Consult pages 17-27 in the Sociology Student Writer’s Manual as needed.

**Saturday, November 23**

**PAPER #3 THESIS PEER REVIEW (on Moodle)**

WEEK TWELVE – APPLICATION: HEAVENS GATE  

**Monday, November 25**


**PAPER #3 PROPOSAL DUE (3 COPIES): WRITING WORKSHOP**

WEEK THIRTEEN – PAPER 3  

**Monday, December 2**

**PAPER #3 DRAFT DUE (2 COPIES): WRITING WORKSHOP**

Consult pages 77-99 and 110-128 in the Sociology Student Writer’s Manual as needed.

**Friday, December 6**

**PAPER #3 FINAL PORTFOLIO DUE (ALL DRAFTS & FEEDBACK)**

Readings Marked ‘*’ are on Moodle at https://moodle.umass.edu/