

SOC 301-01: WRITING IN SOCIOLOGY
Sects and Violence: Cults, Religious Innovation, and Social Conflict

Professor James A. Kitts

Office Hours: Thurs 1pm-2pm Thompson 940

jkitts@umass.edu

CLASS MEETINGS:

T Th 11:30-12:45 pm

Machmer Hall E-10

This is a course in argumentative writing. We will refine our skills in writing cogent argumentative essays by examining 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, hapless victims of predatory groups. By contrast, many social scientists have investigated cults as sites of conflict between deviant or innovative social movements, conventional religious institutions, and the state. We will study sociological research that offers rigorous lenses to help us understand how and why these conflicts can have catastrophic consequences.

REQUIREMENTS

Students must complete course readings before the assigned date. All class sessions are mandatory and class participation will be crucial for learning (and grades). Students are required to participate in team projects, oral presentations, small-group and whole-class discussion, writing workshops with peer feedback, and writing exercises on all course readings.

BOOKS AND READINGS (available at substantial discounts if you buy used online)

- Dawson, Lorne L. 2003. *Cults and New Religious Movements: A Reader*.
- Bromley, David G. & J. Gordon Melton. 2002. *Cults, Religion, & Violence*.
- Johnson, William A., Richard P. Rettig, Gregory M. Scott, Stephen Garrison. 2009. *The Sociology Student Writer's Manual*. – Get the 6th edition or 5th edition, not the 7th.

Our course materials, including many of the required readings as marked on the syllabus, will be posted on Moodle. Download readings 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://oit.umass.edu/>

In addition to writing conferences with me and workshops with your peers, I encourage you to use the UMass Writing Center for supplementary feedback.

See: <http://www.umass.edu/writingcenter/index.html>

Warning: This course includes readings and audiovisual materials that some of you may find violent, profane, offensive, or disturbing. 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

- Students may not use electronic devices in class. Exceptions may be made at the request of Disability Services, but in this discussion-based class devices only interfere with your learning.
- Each regular class meeting begins with a writing exercise (that looks and feels like a quiz on the reading). See the last page of this syllabus for an explanation of the writing exercises.
 - If you miss a class for *any* reason, complete the reading assignment and write a short paper to make up for the missed exercise (and to enhance your learning). I suggest that you also meet with me individually to discuss missed announcements or other material.
 - If you arrive late for *any* reason or fail to read the assigned text before class, you can write a short paper to make up for the missed exercise (and to enhance your learning).
- Participation in peer reviews is mandatory and associated due dates are not flexible.
 - If you want extra time to write an assignment before a class peer review day, *start earlier*.
 - Submitting incomplete/unpolished work for peer review is ok. Submitting late is not ok.
- 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.
- I respect your right to be addressed by the name and pronouns that you use and expect the same of all students. Let me know if your name and pronoun on SPIRE are not accurate.

GRADES

Final Grade Breakdown		0-100 Scale	Letter Grade	4.0 Scale
First Paper (max 3 pgs)	10%	93+	A	4.0
		90-92	A-	3.7
Second Paper (max 10 pgs)	10%	88-89	B+	3.3
		83-87	B	3.0
Third Paper (max 9 pgs)	25%	80-82	B-	2.7
		78-79	C+	2.3
Final Exam	25%	73-77	C	2.0
		70-72	C-	1.7
Class Participation	30%	68-69	D+	1.3
		63-67	D	1.0
		<63	F	0

“Class participation” includes contributions to class discussions and class activities, work on teams, peer feedback, oral presentations, and the portfolio of in-class writing exercises.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

As my students, you will maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. You *may* study for 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 may not use AI-generated text on any assignment. You may not speak with anyone or consult written materials during an exam. You are responsible for complying with this policy: <https://www.umass.edu/honesty/>

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

I gladly provide accommodations for students with disabilities, with a letter from Disability Services: <https://www.umass.edu/disability/>. Please let me know as soon as possible if you need accommodations and I will be happy to find a way to make the class work for you, in collaboration with Disability Services.

MEETING

I hope to meet with everyone at least once and keep in touch about your learning as needed. I would love to see you during my posted office hours. If you have a conflict with my office hours, we can arrange a meeting at another time, likely on a Thursday or Friday. I am not available to talk before or immediately after class because I am working on the class for everyone.

HOW WE COMMUNICATE

- Our course materials will be posted on Moodle, including the syllabus, assignment sheets, peer review sheets, exercise questions, overhead slides from class meetings, and many of our audiovisual materials. I will post materials on Moodle when this makes sense for our learning goals. I recommend that you check Moodle regularly and configure Moodle to notify you promptly of any newly posted content.
- I will contact you regularly by e-mail using your official UMass email account. Most of my emails aim to help you learn, clarify assignments, or notify you of any opportunities or challenges that may arise. I encourage you to configure your devices to promptly alert you to my emails.
- Our assignment sheets give detailed guidance (often pages of it) for each assignment, so I hope my expectations will be perfectly clear to you. If you have questions that are not answered by the syllabus or assignment sheets, please feel free to ask me in class, come to my office hours, or arrange an appointment with me. I can help much more by voice than by email.
- My email is a constant flood. If you contact me by email, please include “SOC 301” in the subject header so I can filter your email into a class folder to prevent it from becoming lost in the flood. I will try to respond to student emails by the next business day.
- In an emergency, you may call my cell phone at seven two seven, two six two five, using the local area code, but I prefer to phone or zoom *by appointment only*. I strongly prefer in-person meetings, ideally during my office hours.
- I would value your feedback on this course directly at any time. You can also send feedback anonymously using <http://www.anonymousfeedback.net/> .

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK ONE – *WHAT ARE NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS (NRMS)?*

Tuesday, September 5

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

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

Beckford, James “The Continuum Between ‘Cults’ and ‘Normal’ Religion”
in Dawson, (pp. 26-30).

In the next few weeks, each of you will give an oral presentation on one of the below movement profiles from Miller’s (1995) *America's Alternative Religions*, available on Moodle. We will assign you to one of the movements below in the first class period, so don’t worry about reading a movement profile for the first class period:

- Van Zandt, D. E. “Children of God.” 127-132.*
- Paden, R. “Boston Church of Christ.” 133-140.*
- Rochford, E. B. J. “Hare Krishna in America.” 215-221.*
- Barker, E. “Unification Church.” 223-229.*
- Chevannes, B. “The Rastafari Abroad.” 297-302.*
- Matthews, C. “Neo-Paganism and Witchcraft.” 339-345.*
- Bednarowski, M.F. “Church of Scientology.” 385-392.*
- Ellwood, R. S. “UFO Religious Movements.” 393-399.*

Thursday, September 7

Barker, Eileen. “The Scientific Study of Religion? You Must be Joking!” in Dawson, (pp. 7-24).

WEEK TWO – *NRMS AND THEIR MEMBERS*

Tuesday, September 12

Wallis, Roy. “Three Types of New Religious Movements.” in Dawson, (pp. 36-56).

Thursday, September 14

Stark, Rodney and William Sims Bainbridge. “Cult Formation: Three Compatible Models.” in Dawson, (pp. 59-69).

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK THREE – PAPER #1

Tuesday, September 19

BEFORE 9am SUBMIT PAPER #1 THESIS LIST TO MOODLE

AT 11:30am (SHARP) BRING 2 HARDCOPIES OF THESIS LIST TO PEER REVIEW

Consult pp 17-27 in the *Sociology Student Writer's Manual* (pp 19-29 in 5th edition).

Thursday, September 21

BEFORE 9am SUBMIT PAPER #1 TO MOODLE

AT 11:30am (SHARP) BRING 2 HARDCOPIES OF PAPER #1 TO PEER REVIEW

Consult pages 38-62 and 77-99 in *Sociology Student Writer's Manual*
(pp 39-64 and 79-98 in 5th edition)

WEEK FOUR – *WHO JOINS NRMs?*

Tuesday, September 26

Glock, Charles Y. 1998. "The Role of Deprivation in the Origin and Evolution of Religious Groups." in Dawson, Lorne. *Cults in Context*, pp. 147-158.*

Levine, Saul. "The Joiners." in Dawson, pp. 131-142.

Thursday, September 28

Lofland, John and Rodney Stark. 1965. "On Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective." *American Sociological Review* 862-875.*

WEEK FIVE – *THE CONVERSION PROCESS*

Tuesday, October 3

Snow, David A. and Cynthia L. Phillips. 1980. "The Lofland-Stark Conversion Model: A Critical Assessment." *Social Problems* 27:430-447.*

Thursday, October 5

Lofland, John. 1997. "Becoming a World-Saver Revisited." Pp. 284-289 in *Social Movements: Readings on Their Emergence, Mobilization, and Dynamics*, edited by Douglas McAdam and David A. Snow. Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury Publishing.*

Dawson, Lorne "Who Joins New Religious Movements and Why: Twenty Years of Research and What Have We Learned?" in Dawson, pp. 116-126.

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK SIX – BRAINWASHING AND COERCIVE CONVERSION

Tuesday, October 10 (HOLIDAY: NO CLASS TODAY)

Singer, Margaret Thaler. “The Process of Brainwashing, Psychological Coercion, and Thought Reform.” in Dawson, (pp. 147-159).

Thursday, October 12

Richardson, James T. “A Critique of ‘Brainwashing’ Claims About New Religious Movements.” in Dawson, (pp. 160-165).

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

WEEK SEVEN – SOCIAL NETWORKS AND NRM RECRUITMENT

Tuesday, October 17

Stark, Rodney and William S. Bainbridge. 1980. “Networks of Faith: Interpersonal Bonds and Recruitment to Cults and Sects.” *American Journal of Sociology* 85:1376-1395.*

Thursday, October 19

Snow, David, Louis Zurcher, and Sheldon Ekland-Olson. 1980. “Social Networks and Social Movements: A Microstructural Approach to Differential Recruitment.” *American Sociological Review* 45:787-801.*

Rochford, E. Burke. 1982. “Recruitment Strategies, Ideology, and Organization in the Hare Krishna Movement.” *Social Problems* 29:399-410.*

WEEK EIGHT – VIOLENCE AND NRMS

Tuesday, October 24

Melton & Bromley. 2002. “Challenging Misconceptions about the New Religions-Violence Connection.” pp. 42-54 in Bromley & Melton.

Thursday, October 26

Thomas Robbins. 2002. “Sources of Volatility in Religious Movements” pp. 57-76 in Bromley & Melton.

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK NINE – *CHARISMATIC AUTHORITY IN NRMS*

Tuesday, October 31

Weber, Max. 1968. “The Nature of Charismatic Authority and Its Routinization” in *Charismatic Authority. Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building*. S.N. Eisenstadt. Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press. 48-65.*

Thursday, November 2

Dawson, Lorne. 2002. “Crises of Charismatic Legitimacy and Violent Behavior in New Religious Movements.” pp. 80-98 in Bromley & Melton.

WEEK TEN – PAPER #2

Tuesday, November 7

Begin Paper 2 during class (MEET AT DUBOIS LIBRARY, CALIPARI ROOM)

Thursday, November 9

Group Work on Paper #2 and Preparing Presentation

WEEK ELEVEN – PAPER #2; *APPLICATION: JONESTOWN*

Tuesday, November 14

PAPER #2 DUE ON MOODLE 9AM

GROUP ORAL PRESENTATIONS IN CLASS

Consult pages 77-99 and 110-128 in the *Sociology Student Writer’s Manual* as needed.
(pp 79-98 and 108-125 in 5th edition)

Optional reading: Barker, Eileen. 2002. “Watching for Violence: A Comparative Analysis of the Roles of Five Types of Cult Watching Groups.” pp. 123-47 in Bromley & Melton.

Thursday, November 16

Hall, John R. 2003. “The Apocalypse at Jonestown” pp 186-206, in Dawson.

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK TWELVE – APPLICATION: *BRANCH DAVIDIANS*

Tuesday, November 21

Hall, John R. 2002. “Mass Suicide and the Branch Davidians.” pp 149-168, in Bromley & Melton.

Thursday, November 23 (HOLIDAY: NO CLASS TODAY)

Wright, Stewart. 2002. “Public Agency Involvement in Government-Religious Movement Confrontations.” pp. 102-121 in Bromley & Melton.

WEEK THIRTEEN – PAPER #3

Tuesday, November 28

BEFORE 9am SUBMIT PAPER #3 THESIS LIST TO MOODLE

AT 11:30am (SHARP) BRING 3 HARDCOPIES OF THESIS LIST TO PEER REVIEW

Consult pages 17-27 in the *Sociology Student Writer’s Manual* (pp 19-29 in 5th ed.)

Thursday, November 30

BEFORE 9am SUBMIT PAPER #3 PROPOSAL TO MOODLE

AT 11:30am (SHARP) BRING 3 HARDCOPIES OF PAPER PROPOSAL TO PEER REVIEW

WEEK FOURTEEN – APPLICATION: *HEAVENS GATE*; PAPER 3

Tuesday, December 5

Balch & Taylor 2002. “Making Sense of the Heaven’s Gate Suicides.” pp. 209-28 in Bromley & Melton.

Optional Reading: Introvigne, Massimo & Jean-Francois Mayer. 2002. “Occult Masters and the Temple of Doom: The Fiery End of the Solar Temple.” pp. 170-86 in Bromley & Melton.

Thursday, December 7

BEFORE 9am SUBMIT PAPER #3 DRAFT TO MOODLE

AT 11:30am (SHARP) BRING 2 HARDCOPIES OF PAPER DRAFT TO PEER REVIEW

Consult pages 77-99 and 110-128 in the *Sociology Student Writer’s Manual*. (pp 79-98 and 108-125 in 5th edition).

COURSE SCHEDULE

FINAL EXAM DECEMBER 11, 1:00-3:00pm (Check SPIRE for any updates closer to the date)
--

FINAL PORTFOLIOS (PAPER 3)

The Registrar's deadline for faculty submitting final grades is December 20. Thus, **I need to receive any and all materials to be considered for your grade by 9am Tuesday, December 19.** This includes all stages of Paper 3 and printouts of all feedback you received on Moodle. I cannot give extensions on this deadline unless I give you an Incomplete grade.

SOC 301 – In-Class Writing Exercises

We will begin regular class meetings with an in-class writing exercise, which will look and feel like a quiz. These exercises will allow you to reflect on the assigned readings, while directing you to key topics to guide you in reviewing for the exam. Your exercises are never graded individually, but will be assembled into a portfolio at the end of the term to show how consistently you completed the assigned readings. This portfolio will serve as a large portion of your Class Participation grade, which is 30% of your final grade.

The exercise questions will be challenging and you will not be able to answer them without reading the assigned material. If you read the assignment but did not understand it sufficiently to answer the exercise questions, feel free to give partial responses or write something else to show that you have read the assignment. Don't stress about the exercises. Misunderstandings or errors in exercises will have no direct effect on your portfolio grade and you may earn full credit with an incomplete response. However, if I do not see solid evidence that you read the assignment, you will not get credit for the exercise.

Some exercises will be 'open note,' so I encourage you to take (handwritten hardcopy) notes as you read.

Rules on Submitting Rewrites of In-Class Exercises: You may submit "rewrites" of exercises that you missed, in order to fill gaps for your portfolio grade and – most importantly – to improve your understanding of the material. You must submit a *typed* rewrite of an exercise (or particular questions on an exercise), giving a thoughtful and detailed response to the question(s). Rewrites are due at the *next class meeting* and will be added to your portfolio along with the original exercise. My expectations for the quality of rewrites are higher than my expectations for in-class writing exercises. However, a rewrite will never hurt your grade!

HINT: If you are afraid that your responses on an exercise were so off-track that they may have failed to show that you had read the assignment at all, then it will obviously be a good idea to review the reading and rewrite the exercise. This will give you an opportunity to fill gaps in your understanding. *Rewrites will improve your grade primarily by helping you understand the relevant material for the exam.*

Portfolio Grades (out of 15) are determined by the following table:

15 – All exercises completed satisfactorily. All (or nearly all) of the *original* in-class exercises demonstrated sufficient attention to the reading material, though you may have also submitted several rewrites to improve your understanding.

13-14 – All exercises completed satisfactorily. Some of the original exercises may have been missed or unsatisfactory, but the typed rewrites demonstrate that you have studied all of the missed material.

12 – One exercise missing (or failed to show that you came prepared) without a typed rewrite.

11 – Two exercises missing from the portfolio without typed rewrites.

10 – Three exercises missing from the portfolio without typed rewrites.

Note that the portfolio grade rapidly approaches zero if you miss exercises and fail to submit rewrites. However, almost all students earn a 14 or 15 Portfolio grade because they complete all of the reading assignments on time and have perfect attendance (or quickly catch up after any absence).

Even more important than the contribution to the Participation grade is the impact of regular attendance and careful reading on the exam grades and overall performance. *On average, a student who misses one class reading (and fails to make up the exercise) tends to score about 15% lower on the exam and receive a full grade lower (i.e., B rather than A) on their final course grades.* The vast majority of students who attend all of the classes, arrive on time, and read the assignments in advance get an A in this course.