Course description

This course provides a social-psychological approach to religion. This course will be rooted in social sciences, as such sociology, psychology and social psychology; hence, the readings and theoretical approaches covered in this course draw on these disciplines. The primary focus of this course will be sociological, and will focus on social theories pertaining to religion, and New Religious Movement, and the manners in which societies interact with them.

Core objectives and student learning outcomes

The course satisfies two core objectives (CO) of the Core Curriculum:

**CO 10 (Diversity & Equity):** Students will demonstrate an understanding of diversity through courses that focus on topics such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, physical ability, language, and/or social class with an emphasis on the analysis of equity. Students will apply and evaluate approaches or modes of inquiry used to analyze diversity and equity and the social barriers to these goals.

*How will this be accomplished:* Readings, lectures, discussions, films, and assignments will focus on social theories pertaining to religion, New Religious Movements, societal regulation and differences in the treatment and reception of New Religious Movements, sources of religious beliefs, social and psychological understanding of religious phenomena and movements. Students will also understand how legal regulation and the differential application of laws can create inequality in the treatment of religious organizations and their members. Additionally, they will understand how religion can be socially constructed, and how social, structural, political, and value changes can give rise to new religious movements, adding further to the diversity of religious groups.

**CO 12 (Ethics):** Students will demonstrate understanding of the ethical principles in general or in application of specialized knowledge, results of research, creative expression, or design processes. Students will demonstrate an ability to recognize, articulate, and apply ethical principles in various academic, professional, social, or personal contexts.

*How will this be accomplished:* This course will address ethical concerns pertaining to religion and religious movements, emphasizing ethics in the social-scientific study and the legal regulation of religion. Readings, lectures, discussions, movies, and assignments will also focus on the basis and origins of religion and religious movements, as well as religion’s potential consequences for ethical behavior from those within a religious group as well as those outside the religious group. A particular
emphasis is on the regulation of new religious movements and minority religions, and the ethical principles underlying such regulation.

This course will satisfy CO 10 and CO 12 via the following Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs):

**SLO #1**: Students will be able to identify major concepts and theories in the sociology of religion, and use sociological theory to explain how new religious movements emerge, how and why individuals may become religious, and how religious orientations/beliefs are maintained and/or changed. (satisfies CO 10)

**SLO #2**: Students will be able to analyze New Religious Movements that developed in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the societal contexts in which they emerged. Students will also be able to identify and explain efforts to control these New Religious Movements. (satisfies CO 10)

**SLO #3**: Students will be able to identify various religions and religious movements, and articulate their basic tenets and underpinnings, and identify the ethical principles advanced by them. (satisfies CO 12)

**SLO #4**: Students will be able to analyze aspects of the religious practice of individuals and groups, explain how they are embedded in institutional and social arrangements and give rise to varying levels of religiosity around the world. In addition, students will be able to articulate how definitions of religion vary within and between societies. (satisfies CO 10)

**SLO #5**: Students will be able to articulate an understanding of the legal regulation of specific religious practices, identify underlying ethical principles and evaluate their implications for the (in)equitable treatment of religions. (satisfies CO 10 and CO 12)

**Readings**

Course readings are primarily composed of books (if possible, I’d recommend the paperback copies, they will be cheaper), book chapters, articles (both media and scholarly), and book excerpts from a variety of different sources. There will be readings for every class. Keeping up with the readings is critical not only for your success in this course, but also for the success of in-class discussion. Please purchase these books, which will be available at the UNR bookstore:


All others readings will be available via WebCampus. In order to open these files, your computer must have Adobe Acrobat Reader installed. If you do not have this program, download it for free from [www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com).

**Website**

This course will use WebCampus, an online system that allows you access to various course materials, including updated versions of the syllabus. Occasionally, articles and chapters are brought to my attention that are pertinent to the course and the SLOs discussed above, and I will make them. Further, you need to submit your writing assignments via WebCampus.
To access WebCampus, go to http://webcampus.unr.edu and log in with your net id and password. You need to check WebCampus regularly as updated course materials will be posted there. Further, you will be able to monitor your grades on this website.

All in-class PowerPoint presentations will be posted on WebCampus prior to or shortly after class. In order to download and open the presentation, you need Microsoft PowerPoint or Adobe Acrobat Reader.

COURSE EVALUATION METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This is an upper-division elective course; therefore, I will assume you are mature individuals who are here because you are interested in a sociological and social psychological understanding of religious phenomenon. You probably believe that sociology and social psychology should have something to say that will aid in your understanding or you would not have chosen this course. Because of these assumptions, I will expect that you have or will develop study habits that enable you to read the material assigned, which is considerable. I am not assuming that you have to immediately understand everything you read; however, I do expect that you will have tried. The lecture and discussions will help you understand the material and this will be greatly facilitated if you are prepared.

You will be evaluated using the following criteria:

1. **Major tests and other quizzes.** Because of the nature of the material, major testing will be done by giving you essay questions of the take-home variety. I will attempt to give you plenty of time to do these questions (usually a week), and they will be a major source of your grade. I will give you groups of questions two times during the semester. Responses must be typed, double-space, 12 pt., Times New Roman font, and please proof-read before submission. The final exam will be in class on the day listed in the exam schedule which is ____________. No exceptions on when the final exam occurs will be granted so do not make plane reservations to leave early and assume that is OK! There will also be occasional short quizzes at the beginning of the class period.

2. **Article Summaries.** As indicated earlier in the syllabus, you will have some reading assignments on WebCampus. I will expect you to read these and on selected ones that I will assign, do a 1-2 page summary, with a complete reference at the top, with the major points of the article discussed. This requirement is for your own benefit to save your having to reread things in order to answer questions on them.

3. **Attendance and Discussion.** I seek to involve all students in discussions of the topics. Part of your grade will be determined by the amount and quality of your participation in class discussions. Having contributed to the class through discussion will aid your grade, particularly in borderline cases. Plan to attend all class meetings and participate. I will maintain a class roster in order to know about your attendance record.

4. **Term Paper.** All students are required to do a 10-12 page (double-space, 12 pt., Times New Roman font) term paper project. The topic is open; however, the paper must apply theories discussed in the readings and class discussions. Additionally, application of the theories used and the topic of your choice must both demonstrate connections to both of the Core Objectives: Diversity and Equity (CO 10), and Ethics (CO12). I must approve all topics, and the approval process for topics must be completed by ____________. The process of approval requires you to hand in a page or two of outline, showing what you will be doing, complete with at least some references. This should be submitted through WebCampus. I strongly encourage that they be submitted earlier than ________ to allow time for
feedback and resubmission if needed. I will get these outlines back to you ASAP, and will keep a record of the topics that are being worked on by the students. *The approved outline must be attached to the project paper when it is turned in*, which should be no later than ________, at the beginning of class. Late papers will be penalized. Be sure you have an approved outline before beginning work. I require that you submit the term paper in hard copy, but also electronically so I can check more easily if there are suspicions that the paper might involve plagiarism.

6. **Field work assignment.** Each student is expected to do one field work assignment. Due by ________, at the start of the class, will be a four or five page type-written, double-spaced paper describing some religious (or even quasi-religious) group with which you have had little or no contact before this assignment. *I must approve all such groups being studied*, so check with me on this, and do so ASAP, but no later than ________. I especially recommend that you seek out one of the newer groups on which to do your assignment. You are to find such a group (ask friends and acquaintances for leads to such groups, or check the yellow pages or internet sources) and write a brief descriptive paper that contains as much information as possible along the lines of the following:

1. When, why and where did the group start?
2. Who started the group and how large is it?
3. What are the major beliefs of the group, including their ethical principles? (do this part briefly)
4. What are important rituals (practices) of the group?
5. How would you characterize the membership (age, race, ethnic group, social class, education level, gender, etc.)?
6. What type of leadership does the group have and how is the group organized?
7. Apply theories or concepts we have covered in class that are relevant.

*Do not prepare any type of questionnaire to use for this field assignment paper.* Simply attend, observe, talk with some leaders and members, and record your impressions and information. You may seek an interview or two with group members or leaders, but be open with them as to your purpose. *Use no subterfuges.* Obtain any brochures or pamphlets they produce and attach them to your paper. More than one class member can use the same group, with prior approval, but all papers are to be written independently. The field work assignment can develop into the term paper project, with approval.

**Caution:** In all your contacts with people, while working on this assignment be courteous and open. Explain to them that this assignment is designed to allow some exposure to religious groups, since many students have had little such contact and need it to better understand and gain from the class. I hope you enjoy the assignment.

7. **Grading:** Allocations toward your final grade will be as follows:

   - Take-home tests (2, at 15% each) 30%
   - Term project 15%
   - Field assignment 10%
   - Article Summaries 10%
   - Short Quizzes 10%
   - In-class Participation 5%
   - Final exam 20%

Unless noted otherwise, the grading scale will be 90-100% = A range, 80-89% = B range, 70-79% = C range, 60-69% = D range. The grading scale in this course includes “plus” (+) and “minus” (−) grades.
8. **Extra credit:** There also will be opportunities to earn extra credit. These will be announced in class or via WebCampus. If you learn of presentations or activities that seem to fit the substantive areas of this class, send that information to me and I will consider it for extra credit.

9. **Late Policy:** For every day that your paper is late, I will deduct *a third of a letter grade* from your assignment grade (i.e. an A- will become a B+; a B will become a B- etc.).

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**Writing assistance**

An important part of your education is that you hone your writing skills. And, as for any kind of learning process, feedback is crucially important if you want to get better. In order for you to improve your writing assignments, I recommend that you visit the UNR Writing Center [http://www.unr.edu/writing_center/](http://www.unr.edu/writing_center/). There you will find people ready to give you helpful feedback. Keep in mind that the best writers always use others’ feedback to improve their work.

**Emergencies**

If there is an emergency that does not allow you to complete assignments or take exams, please contact me as soon as possible. For example, should a family emergency require that you leave town, be sure to contact me **before** you leave, not afterwards.

**Assistance**

If you require any particular arrangements, e.g., due to a learning disability, please inform me immediately. It is your responsibility to seek assistance when you are having difficulty understanding the course material. Keep in mind that you should contact me as soon as an issue emerges, as you cannot necessarily expect to receive assistance on the day of the exam/on the due date of an assignment.

**Final Comments and Cautions.** Mutual discussion of take-home exam questions is encouraged, but each student must do his or her own separate responses. No copying of sharing of answers will be acceptable, and plagiarism will be dealt with according to the policies below.

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**Academic Dishonesty**

Academic dishonesty (e.g., cheating on exams, plagiarism) is a serious offense. All work that you submit in this class must be your own original work, and must have been generated by you specifically for the assignments. Academic dishonesty can take on many forms including, but not limited to, the use of prohibited materials during examinations, having one’s own assignments completed by a third party, submit the identical paper in two different courses, and plagiarism—each of which is a serious offense.

Each student is responsible for being familiar with UNR's policies on academic dishonesty, available at [http://www.unr.edu/student-conduct/policies/university-policies-and-guidelines/academic-standards/policy](http://www.unr.edu/student-conduct/policies/university-policies-and-guidelines/academic-standards/policy). It is the policy of the Department of Sociology that any student who engages in any act of academic dishonesty will receive automatically a course grade of “F.” Further, in accordance with the UNR’s Undergraduate Academic Dishonesty Procedures, a record will created with the Office of Student Judicial Affairs. Repeated offenses may lead to the expulsion from the university.
**What is plagiarism?** Whereas most acts of academic dishonesty are obvious, students are sometimes unclear what “plagiarism” entails. Plagiarism means that you incorporate another author’s work into your own, but create the impression that you yourself are the original author. For instance, it is plagiarism when you cut and paste another author’s text into your own paper, but do not clearly mark it as a quote and do not credit the original source. Another example of plagiarism is when you use another author’s text, but change the syntax and vocabulary only slightly. Yet another instance of plagiarism involves using another person’s ideas and presenting them as your own. The web offers a number of great resources on the subject of plagiarism that help you decide when you need to credit another author and when something can be assumed to be common knowledge (in which case you do not need to credit a source). See, e.g., [http://libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students/](http://libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students/).

**How to avoid plagiarism?** When writing a paper, focus on what and how you want to say something, not on the language another author used. The easiest way is to follow a “closed source” policy: That is, when you have read a paper, book or website that is relevant to a paper that you are writing, close it and put it aside before you write your own text. Once you are done, go over your paper again and make sure that have not inadvertently copied another person’s language. Likewise, make sure that you do not pretend that another person’s insights are your own.

Keep in mind that plagiarism is more easily detected than you might think. Many instructors and graders have access to the same resources as you (e.g., the internet) and routinely check up whether any text you have submitted appears elsewhere. If you are in doubt whether something constitutes plagiarism or not, ask your instructor, TA, or the UNR writing center, [http://www.unr.edu/writing_center/](http://www.unr.edu/writing_center/).

Note that certain acts of academic dishonesty are also prohibited under Nevada law. Here the relevant section from the Nevada Revised Statutes:

**NRS 207.320 Preparation or sale of academic writings.** Any person who prepares for sale or sells any term paper, thesis, dissertation or similar writing intending such writing to be submitted to an academic institution as the work of any person not the author in fulfillment of a requirement for completion of a course of study, award of a degree or other academic credit is guilty of a misdemeanor. (Added to NRS by 1973, 1161)

**Disputes**

In the unlikely case that there is a disagreement between the instructor and a student concerning any part of this course, including grading, and the conflict cannot be resolved in a conference between student and instructor, it is the student’s obligation to follow the grievance/appeal procedures as outlined in the University of Nevada Catalog.

**Recording**

Surreptitious or covert video-taping of class or unauthorized audio recording of class is prohibited by law and by Board of Regents policy. This class may be videotaped or audio recorded only with the written permission of the instructor. In order to accommodate students with disabilities, some students may have been given permission to record class lectures and discussions. If this occurs, students will be informed that their comments during class may be recorded.

**Course Schedule & Reading List**

Read all readings for the week before the class meetings.

<p>| Week 1 | Introduction to Sociology of Religion/What is Sociology of Religion? |</p>
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<th><strong>Week 2</strong></th>
<th><strong>Definitions of religion and theoretical approaches</strong></th>
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<th><strong>Week 3</strong></th>
<th><strong>Sources of religious belief and practice – Quiz #1</strong></th>
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<th><strong>Week 4</strong></th>
<th><strong>The Social Costs of Religious Illiteracy</strong></th>
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<th><strong>Week 5</strong></th>
<th><strong>Social theory and religion</strong></th>
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<th><strong>Week 6</strong></th>
<th><strong>Religion as Meaning and Belonging</strong></th>
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| **CO 10 & 12** | Berger, Peter. 1969. *The Sacred Canopy*. Doubleday. CHAPTERS 1, 2 & 3  
  Take-home Exam #1 |

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<tr>
<th><strong>Week 7</strong></th>
<th><strong>Social Psychological Perspectives</strong></th>
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<td>Week 8</td>
<td>Religious movements -- Quiz #2</td>
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<th>Week 9</th>
<th>Social theory and new religions</th>
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<th>Spring Break</th>
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<th>Week 10</th>
<th>Christianity as a social movement -- Quiz #3</th>
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<th>Week 11</th>
<th>Christianity as a social movement cont.</th>
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<th>Week 12</th>
<th>Violence and religious movements -- Quiz #4</th>
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<th>Week 13</th>
<th>Movie “Rules of Engagement”</th>
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|        | NO READINGS  
Take-home Exam #2 |

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<tr>
<th>Week 14</th>
<th>Legal and Extra-Legal Regulation of New Religious Movements</th>
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Richardson, James T. and Mary W. Stewart. 2004. “Medicalization and Regulation of... |
### Week 15  
**Islam in America and Legal Pluralism -- Quiz #5**

**CO 10 & 12**  


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### Week 16  
**Religious Freedom Abroad**

**CO 10 & 12**  


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**Final Exam**