



AFFILIATED WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO

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Renison University College

Affiliated with the University of Waterloo
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Renison University College Land Acknowledgement

With gratitude, we acknowledge that Renison University College is located on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg, Hodinohsyó:ni, and Attawandaran (Neutral) Peoples, which is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land granted to the Six Nations that includes ten kilometres on each side of the Grand River from mouth to source. Our active work toward reconciliation takes place in all corners of our campus through research, learning, teaching, community building and outreach. We are guided by the work of our Reconciliation and Restoring Steering Committee and Anti-Racism and Decolonization Spokescouncil, as well as the [University of Waterloo's Office of Indigenous Relations](#).

Winter 2024

Course Code: RS 280/SOC 262

Course Title: Cults and New Religious Movements

Class Times/Location: M/W 10:00-11:20, REN 1918

Course Dates: January 8, 2024 – April 3, 2024

Instructor:

Office:

Hours: Monday/Wednesday (11:30 am-12:30 pm, sort of).

While I will likely be on campus during these times, I would prefer to consult with students virtually. Besides being a more Covid-conscious option for everyone, this allows me (a) to be more flexible in terms of your schedule, and (b) to give you more direct attention in terms of particular questions and issues that you may have. Once we have scheduled a meeting, I will send a Zoom link.

Email:

This is always the best way to reach me. Please note that while I will make every effort to respond within a few hours during the week—within reason, of course—I do not read university email on the weekends or on holidays.

Cross-listed course

Please note that a cross-listed course will count in all respective averages no matter under which rubric it has been taken. For example, an RS/Soc cross-list will count in a Soc major's average, even if the course was taken under the Religious Studies rubric.

Course Description

New religious movements—what are colloquially and often inaccurately labeled “cults”—are a significant feature of the global religious landscape. There are few countries in which they do not appear and fewer still where they are not met with a mixture of fear, misunderstanding, and attempts at social control. Many of the most well-known of the global religions—Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam—began as new religious movements and met similar opposition in their day. This course approaches new religions from the perspective of their place in that global religious landscape and considers them as religions in their own right: worthy of our interest, our careful attention, and our understanding.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Describe how new religious movements emerge and develop, how they influence and are influenced by society; how they establish and maintain legitimacy, and how they withstand various social control measures.
- Explain how these groups constitute an important part of the late modern religious world.
- Engage in critical dialogue about these groups, both with scholars who have contributed to their interpretation, and with each other.

Required Text

Cowan and Bromley, *Cults and New Religions: A Brief History*. 2nd ed. (Wiley/Blackwell, 2015).

Nb., (a) you must have the second edition of the text; the first edition is not sufficient for this course. (b) Although the textbook is required, it cannot replace class attendance and lecture material.

Class Materials Available on LEARN

Any other required readings or videos will be available on or through LEARN as necessary. When a reading or a video is linked in LEARN for reviewing outside of class, it is your responsibility to access it. For readings, I recommend that you download them to your device rather than read them online. You will benefit from readings even more if you print them out. Slide decks used to support lectures will be available on LEARN a day or so after the class, but it is important to remember that these will not and cannot replace class attendance. (If there is a discrepancy between a slide deck and the syllabus, the syllabus takes precedence.)

Course Requirements and Assessment

<u>Assessment</u>	<u>Date of Evaluation</u>	<u>Weighting</u>
Class Attendance	See attendance policy	10%
LEARN Discussion Participation	Feb 1, Mar 1, Apr 1	30%
Quiz #1	February 14	20%
Quiz #2	April 3	20%
Annotated Bibliography	April 5	20%
Total		100%

Nb., for all assignments, one mark is equal to one percentage point. I will go over all course requirements in more detail in class, but generally...

Online Discussion Participation (30%)

Discussion participation is crucial to success in a course such as this. It's simply a fact that active engagement leads to more effective learning. This is especially the case in a large class such as this, since online discussion will supplement classroom activity significantly.

In addition to attendance and in-class participation (see below under "Attendance Policy"), for each week, I will post discussion prompts related to that week's reading from the textbook and/or class lectures. For each of these prompts, you are required to contribute at least one substantive initial post (min. 300 words) and at least two substantive response posts.

The prompts are designed to stimulate your thinking, not simply answered with two or three sentences that say little more than "I agree" or "I disagree." In all cases, you must articulate why you think what you do. The online portion of the course supplements (and is not infrequently based on) in-class discussion, so it should be taken with the same level of seriousness. As a guideline, always think about how your own contributions and particularly your responses work to further the topic of discussion. I evaluate posts and threads for both quality and quantity.

As important as class attendance, it is important to keep up with online discussion participation. If students consistently post either their initial contributions or their responses at the last moment, this will be considered inadequate for participation. If students only post initially, but make no effort to respond to other posts, this too will be considered insufficient. Lastly, students may not 'do all the discussions at the same time'—either ahead of the module or at the end of the semester. Obviously, this defeats the purpose of the assignment.

For the online discussions, I will be assigning a mark out of 10 for each of the three months of the course, and these will contribute to an overall participation grade for the course.

In-class Quizzes (2 x 20%): February 14 / April 3

These will be standard short-answer-plus-short-essay quizzes, the kind you are used to writing in any number of other courses. There are a couple of caveats for this: (a) you must be in place and ready to write before the class begins. Late admissions will not be allowed and there will be no make-up test. (See "Attendance Policy" below.) Walking in late to a test is simply not fair to other students. It's not any more complicated than that. (b) If something comes up that would legitimately allow for a make-up test, you must let me know as much beforehand as possible. You cannot miss a test then claim an exemption after the fact. Again, this is fairly standard across the university.

Annotated Bibliography (20%)

I will be going over this assignment in detail in class on January 29 and I will be providing a worksheet for you to follow at that time: **Due: April 5.**

Course Outline

Week	Date	Topic
1	Jan 8-10	Introduction to the Course Cults and NRMs: How do you know what you know?
2	Jan 15-17	Cults and New Religions: A Primer Reading: Cowan and Bromley, pp. 1-17
3	Jan 22-24	Dr. C.'s Dangerous Cult Exercise Reading: Cowan and Hadden, "God, Guns, and Grist..."
4	Jan 29-31	Scientology: The Question of Religion Reading: Cowan and Bromley, pp. 18-37
5	Feb 5-7	Transcendental Meditation: The Question of Science Reading: Cowan and Bromley, pp. 38-58
6	Feb 12-14	Catch-up and Review *Feb 14: In-class Quiz #1 (20%)
Feb 17-25 Reading Week		
7	Feb 26-28	Joining and Leaving NRMs: Brainwashing/Deprogramming Reading: Cowan and Bromley, pp.78-98
8	Mar 4-6	Disputing NRMs: Countercult v. Anticult Reading: Cowan, "Exits and Migrations"
9	Mar 11-13	The Children of God: The Issue of Sexuality Reading: Cowan and Bromley, pp. 99-119
10	Mar 18-20	The Branch Davidians: The Question of Violence, Pt.1 Reading: Cowan and Bromley, pp. 120-139
11	Mar 25-27	Heaven's Gate: The Question of Violence, Pt.2 Reading: Cowan and Bromley, pp. 141-160
12	Apr 1-3	Catch-up and Review Reading: Cowan and Bromley, pp. 181-203 *Apr 3: In-class Quiz #2 (20%) *Apr 5 Annotated Bibliography Due (20%)

Attendance Policy

I expect that everyone will be in class every day. It is simply the only way to do well in a course such as this. If you are not here, you cannot participate and you will miss class lecture material that cannot be captured in any other way. Beginning January 15, I take attendance at every class. **Students are allowed two unexcused absences**, after which they will lose **2 marks per absence up** to a total of 10 marks.

If you are aware of an upcoming absence, it's your responsibility to let me know well in advance so we can make arrangements for that—if such arrangements are appropriate. In addition, you

should make yourself aware of the university's self-declared absence policy, and of any paperwork required to support particular absences.

If you do find yourself unable to attend class due to illness, you will need to contact me and, where appropriate, use the University of Waterloo [Self-declared Absence](#) site or the [University of Waterloo Verification of Illness](#) form. Please note that, once you declare an absence using this site or get a medical note, you must also contact your professor to arrange for any accommodations (retaking a Quiz, submitting an assignment late, avoiding an unexcused absence penalty, etc.).

Late or Incomplete Work

Assignments turned in past the due date will be assessed a penalty of 10% per day late, including the day on which you turn it in. If a paper is due on Friday and you turn it in Sunday, that is a 20% penalty. As noted above, I will be talking in depth about the annotated bibliography during the class indicated. I only grant extensions for reasons of medical and family emergency, and documentation is required in both instances. See the University of Waterloo guidelines on Covid-19 to assist you in this. Extensions beyond the end-of-semester require that you complete Request for Incomplete form, available at the Renison Registrar's Office, and supporting documentation may be required.

Policy on Plagiarism

"Policy 71's glossary defines plagiarism, in part, as "presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others (whether attributed or anonymous) as one's own in any work submitted whether or not for grading purposes"... The Vice-President Academic and Dean has the authority to assess instances of plagiarism and the resultant penalties that are raised by an instructor. An instructor can propose a grade penalty to the Vice-President Academic and Dean, who will decide whether to accept the penalty or initiate a formal inquiry."

For additional information on how plagiarism is dealt with at Renison, review the policy from where the above text is copied: [Policy 71 - Student Discipline](#). Students should also be aware that copyright laws in Canada prohibit reproducing more than 10% of any work without permission from its author, publisher, or other copyright holder. Waterloo's policy on Fair Dealing is available at uwaterloo.ca/copyright-guidelines/fair-dealing-advisory Violation of Canada's Copyright Act is a punishable academic offence under Policy 71 – Student Discipline. Bottom line? Do your own work.

Turnitin.com

Text matching software (Turnitin®) will be used to screen the final assignment in this course. Turnitin® is used to verify that all materials and sources in assignments are documented. Students' submissions are stored on a U.S. server, therefore students must be given an alternative (e.g., scaffolded assignment or annotated bibliography), if they are concerned about their privacy and/or security. Students will be given due notice, in the first week of the term and/or at the time assignment details are provided, about arrangements and alternatives for

the use of Turnitin in this course. It is the responsibility of the student to notify the instructor, in the first week of term whether they wish to opt out of Turnitin®. N.b., this is for the entire semester, and I will provide an alternate scaffolding for the assignment.

Policy on Generative AI

This course includes the independent development and practice of specific skills, such as critical examination of course concepts, reflexive articulation of your own views, developing and practicing writing skills, research and the application of specific methods, as well as creative expression. Therefore, unless specifically indicated, **the use of generative artificial intelligence** (GenAI) trained using large language models (LLM) or other methods to produce text, images, music, or code, like Chat GPT, DALL-E, or GitHub CoPilot, **is not permitted in this class in any form or for any assignment**. Unauthorized use in this course, such as (but not limited to) running course materials through GenAI or using GenAI to complete a course assignment is considered a violation of [Policy 71](#) (plagiarism or unauthorized aids or assistance). Work produced with the assistance of AI tools, other than in specifically indicated circumstances, does not represent the author's original work and is therefore in violation of the fundamental values of academic integrity including honesty, trust, respect, fairness, and responsibility.

You should always be prepared to show your work. To demonstrate your learning, you should keep your rough notes, including research notes, brainstorming, and drafting notes. You may be asked to submit these notes along with earlier drafts of their work, either through saved drafts or saved versions of a document. If the use of GenAI is suspected where not permitted, you may be asked to meet with your instructor to provide explanations to support the submitted material as being your original work. Through this process, if you have not sufficiently supported your work, academic misconduct allegations may be brought to the Associate Dean. In addition, you should be aware that the legal/copyright status of generative AI inputs and outputs is unclear. More information is available from the Copyright Advisory Committee: <https://uwaterloo.ca/copyright-at-waterloo/teaching/generative-artificial-intelligence>

Electronic Device Policy

Students who choose to use electronic devices to support their learning may do so provided that the individuals in the class are not disturbed or prohibited from their own learning. Electronic devices should be used for the purposes of supplementing the learning experience and focus on topics being discussed in class. **Please respect the rights of other students to learn without distraction. Phone use** (including texting) **is not permitted**. A first offense will result in a discussion. Each subsequent offense will mean a deduction of 1 mark on your class participation grade. Phones must be kept in a bookbag or coat pocket at all times during class. I have this policy because [research](#) shows that laptop and device use in class interferes with learning both for the user and the people around them. By the way, students who believe *most strongly* that they can multitask while learning attain the *lowest scores* on tests of learning and retention.

Communication Policy

Email, using the uWaterloo provided email address, is the approved method of communication for Renison. The Office 365 email that you use to login using your WatIAM login and password is secure and confidential. Take caution when forwarding your WatIAM email to an external email service as confidential information forwarded to a third-party provider could be a data security breach and violation of FIPPA (Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act) under which all students, staff, and faculty are bound by law.

Final Examination Policy

There is no final examination scheduled for this course. (You're welcome.)

Accommodation for Illness or Unforeseen Circumstances

The instructor follows the practices of the University of Waterloo in accommodating students who have documented reasons for missing quizzes or exams. See [Accommodation due to illness](#).

Accommodation Due to Religious Observances

The University acknowledges that, due to the pluralistic nature of the University community, some students may seek accommodations on religious grounds. Accordingly, students must consult with their instructor(s) within two weeks of the announcement of the due date for which accommodation is being sought. Failure to provide a timely request will decrease the likelihood of providing an accommodation. [See Request for accommodation on religious grounds](#).

Academic Integrity, Grievance, Discipline, Appeals and Note for Students with Disabilities

Academic Integrity: To maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. See the [UWaterloo Academic Integrity](#) and the [Arts Academic Integrity](#) websites for more information. Renison University College is committed to the view that when a problem or disagreement arises between a faculty member and a student every effort should be made to resolve the problem through mutual and respectful negotiation. Most issues are resolved by a student/faculty meeting to discuss differences of opinion. It is only after this stage, when a common understanding or agreement is not obtained that further actions listed below could be taken.

Discipline: Every student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for their own actions. [Check the [Office of Academic Integrity](#) website for more information.] A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about "rules" for group work/collaboration, should seek guidance from the course professor or academic advisor. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties are imposed under the University of Waterloo [Policy 71 – Student Discipline](#). For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to [Policy 71 - Student Discipline](#). For typical penalties check the [Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties](#).

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of their university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read [Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4](#). When in doubt, please be certain to contact the Department's administrative assistant, or Academic Advisor, who will provide further assistance.

Appeals: A decision made or penalty imposed under [Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances](#) (other than a petition) or [Policy 71, Student Discipline](#) may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes they have a ground for an appeal should refer to [Policy 72, Student Appeals](#).

Academic Integrity Office (UWaterloo): The website can be found at uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities

[AccessAbility Services](#) is located in Needles Hall, Room 1401, and collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with AccessAbility Services at the beginning of each academic term.

Students are encouraged to register with AccessAbility Services (AAS) at the start of each term if they require accommodations due to a disability. However, some students not connected to AAS may require accommodations later in the term. In that case, you should immediately consult with your instructor and/or your Academic Advisor.

Intellectual Property

Students should be aware that this course contains the intellectual property of the instructor, which can include:

- lecture handouts and presentations (e.g., PowerPoint slides)
- lecture content, both spoken and written (and any audio or video recording thereof)
- questions from various types of assessments (e.g., assignments, quizzes, tests, final exams)
- work protected by copyright (i.e., any work authored by the instructor)

Making available the intellectual property of instructors without their express written consent (e.g., uploading lecture notes or assignments to an online repository) is considered theft of intellectual property and subject to disciplinary sanctions as described in [Policy 71 – Student Discipline](#). Students who become aware of the availability of what may be their instructor's intellectual property in online repositories are encouraged to alert the instructor.

Mental Health Support

All of us need a support system. The faculty and staff in Arts encourage students to seek out mental health supports if they are needed.

On Campus

- [Counselling Services](mailto:counselling.services@uwaterloo.ca): counselling.services@uwaterloo.ca / 519-888-4096
- [MATES](#): one-to-one peer support program offered by the Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association (WUSA) and Counselling Services
- [Health Services](#) – Student Medical Clinic: located across the creek from Student Life Centre

Off Campus, 24/7

- [Good2Talk](#): Free confidential help line for post-secondary students. Phone: 1-866-925-5454
- [Empower Me](#): Confidential, multilingual, culturally sensitive, faith inclusive mental health and wellness service.
- Grand River Hospital: Emergency care for mental health crisis. Phone: 844-437-3247
- [Here 24/7](#): Mental Health and Crisis Service Team. Phone: 1-844-437-3247
- [OK2BME](#): set of support services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning teens in Waterloo. Email: ok2bme@kwcounselling.com Phone: 519-884-0000

Full details can be found online at the [Faculty of ARTS](#) website.

Download [UWaterloo and regional mental health resources \(PDF\)](#)

Download the [WatSafe](#) app to your phone to quickly access mental health support information.

A Respectful Living and Learning Environment for All

Everyone living, learning, and working at Renison University College is expected to contribute to creating a respectful environment free from harassment and discrimination.

Harassment is unwanted attention in the form of disrespectful comments, unwanted text messages or images, degrading jokes, rude gestures, unwanted touching, or other behaviours meant to intimidate.

According to the Ontario Human Rights Code, discrimination means unequal or different treatment causing harm, whether intentional or not, because of race, disability, citizenship, ethnic origin, colour, age, creed, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression, or other personal characteristic.

If you feel that you are experiencing the above from any member of the Renison community (students, staff, or faculty), you may contact Melissa Knox, Renison's external anti-harassment and anti-discrimination officer, by email (mnknox@uwaterloo.ca) or by phone or text (226-753-5669). Melissa is an employment and human rights lawyer and part-time Assistant Crown Attorney for the Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General. Melissa is experienced in case management, discipline and complaints processes, and works with organizations across Canada to foster safe, respectful, and inclusive work and learning environments through policy development, educational workshops, conflict mediation and dispute resolution, and organizational culture audits.

For additional information see Renison's [Harassment, Discrimination, and Abuse](#) policy.