This course will explore those controversial religions that we popularly call “cults.” How and why do such alternative religious groups emerge? Why do people join – and stay? What role does the media play in stigmatizing emergent religions? What are the implications of these groups for law and public policy? Possible topics include: Scientology, Jonestown, New Age religions, the occult, Rastafarianism, Hindu gurus, Heaven’s Gate, utopian communes, Waco and the Oklahoma City bombing, the sacramental use of peyote in the Native American Church. We will pay particular attention to developing skills for analyzing how representations of these groups in media and in law engender forms of cultural memory.

Books to buy:

- Chidester, David, Salvation and Suicide: An Interpretation of Jim Jones, the Peoples Temple, and Jonestown, rev. edition (Indianapolis: Indiana University, 2003).

Assignments

ONE. 15% of your final grade will come from your participation, which involves:

- Attendance: Because there is no one textbook that holds this class together, attendance is crucial. Therefore absences in this class work like karma. You have two days to be absent without consequences. On your third day of absence, you lose all benefit of the doubt when it comes to your final grade. For every absence thereafter, you lose 1/3 of a letter grade from your final grade. (If you cut class twice in the beginning of the semester, and then become sick for two days at the end, karma will take effect and your final grade will go down). If you are absent, YOU are responsible to find out from another student what
went on in class and for making up the work that you missed. MAKE FRIENDS. If you are absent on a day when we are scheduled to take a test or turn in an essay, you MUST email me and ask for approval BEFORE our scheduled class hour begins. If you do not email me before class, your work will not be accepted.

- **INFORMED participation in each class.** If you fail to contribute (and have perfect attendance), you will earn a D for the 15% of your final grade that derives from participation. If you contribute occasionally, or contribute often but without having read the reading (and have perfect attendance), you will earn a C. If you contribute regularly, often just talking but occasionally giving evidence of having read the readings (and have perfect attendance), you will earn a B. If you contribute frequently, raising critical questions or issues in the readings in ways that demonstrate your engagement with the course (and have perfect attendance), you will earn an A.

**TWO.** 5% of your fine grade will be earned by facilitating one class discussion (singly or in a pair, depending on the number of students).

**THREE.** 35% of your final grade will come from 2 tests. The purpose of these tests is to ensure that you grasp factual information (the objective section) and that you are beginning to develop the skill of moving beyond regurgitating content and putting the information together so as to engage with the larger conceptual issues of the course (the short answer section). The first test will be worth 15% (we will have it early, so that you can have a gauge of how you are doing). The next test will be worth 20% each.

**FOUR.** 55% of your final grade will come from 2 critical thinking essays, which are designed to build on the previous assignments.

- **The Media Paper** (25%). 5-8 pages. In this essay, you will analyze the media representation surrounding a specific group or moment of controversy. ‘Media’ here is intended broadly: you could analyze news accounts, but you could also analyze a TV series (like *Big Love*), a Southpark episode, a documentary, a movie, or a novel/ memoir/ short story. Your task will be to analyze the ‘plot’ by which your chosen media represents this group as well as to assess the accuracy and ideological agenda at work in the memory engendered by your chosen media. Be sure to recall our Geertz articles: what is the story the media is telling itself about American culture via its narrative about this group?

- **The Law Paper** (30%). 5-8 pages. In this essay, you will analyze a controversy that has arisen around one of the groups that we have studied. I understand ‘law’ broadly to include court cases, but also police interaction (MOVE, Waco), or engagement with social workers. Explore the [New Religious Movements database](#). Pick a controversy. Your task will be to analyze the ‘plot’ by which this controversy makes sense of the religion you have chosen as well as to assess the accuracy and ideological agenda at work in the memory engendered by this controversy. Think about Geertz’s articles we read: what is the story that the group is telling itself about itself? (How do they see/plot themselves and the larger culture?) What is the story that the representatives of law are telling themselves about themselves through their interaction with this group? (how does “the law” emplot the group – and themselves?)
Course Schedule

Religion is an Order-Word

Class One. Practices

Class Two. Practices, II
Clifford Geertz, excerpts from “Thick Description” and “Deep Play”

Class Three. Legal definitions

Class Four. Brainwashing, Coercion, Socialization?

Peoples Temple and Jonestown

Class Five

Class Six
Chidester, Chapter Two, “The Classification of Persons,” 51-78.

Class Seven

Class Eight
Chidester, Chapter Five, “Salvation and Suicide,” 129-159. Plus read a transcript of (or listen to) the *Death Tape*

Class Nine
Charismatic Leader – or Powerful Women?

Class Ten: Test #1
Thinking about Media and Memory

Class Eleven

Class Twelve
AND
AND
Discuss Media Paper

Scientology

Class Thirteen. Institutional History of the Church of Scientology
Urban, *Church of Scientology*, Introduction, chapters one and two.

Class Fourteen. Cultural History

Class Fifteen. Legal Issues

Class Sixteen. Policy Issues

Sacramental Peyote in the Native American Church

Class Seventeen
Calabrese, Intro and Chapter two ‘Expanding our Conceptualization of the Therapeutic,” in *A Different Medicine*, p. 3-50.

Class Eighteen
Calabrese, Chapter Four “The Unfolding Cultural Paradigm Clash” and Chapter Five “Medicine and Spirit, in *A Different Medicine*, p. 77-115.

Class Nineteen

Class Twenty
Calabrese, Chapter Eight “Ritual Bureaucracy in New Mexico: Participant Observation in a
Healer’s Clinical Program” and “Decolonizing our Understandings of the Normal and the Therapeutic,” in A Different Medicine, p. 175-198.

Class Twenty-one. Test #2

New Age Spiritualities

Class Twenty-two
Michael Brown, Chapter One and Chapter Two, in The Channeling Zone, p. 1-37.

Class Twenty-Three

Class Twenty-Four
Brown, Chapter Five “Toward Sacred Androgyne” and Chapter Six “Dreaming of Community,” in The Channeling Zone, p. 93-141.

Class Twenty-Five
Brown, Chapter Seven “Spiritual Commerce” and Chapter Eight “Being Multiple” in The Channeling Zone, p. 142-192.
AND Discuss Law paper

Gurus

Class Twenty-Six
Amanda Lucia, Chapter Two “Devi Bhava” and Chapter Three “The Avatar Guru and Ordinary Women” in Reflections of Amma, p. 76-144.

Class Twenty-Seven

Class Twenty-eight
Lucia, Chapter Five “Congregational Dynamics” and Conclusion, in Reflections of Amma, p. 182-240.

Scheduled Exam Day: Law paper due. Discussion of individual paper projects.
Bibliography

_____., *The ’60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond* (Syracuse: Syracuse Univ, 1999).
Pitzer, Donald, *America’s Utopian Communities* (Chapel Hill: Univ of North Carolina, 1997).
This course will help you meet the following learning goals and objectives for HCLAS:

Goal 1. Critical and Analytical Thinking
Students will apply critical and analytical thinking across a broad array of liberal arts and science disciplines, designed to foster self-examination and inquiry into the outside world of nature and society. Liberal arts courses stress the development of clarity of expression, power of discovery, and creative imagination.

Objective 1A. Complete a broad-based course of study across the liberal arts disciplines within the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and mathematics.
Objective 1B. Apply relevant criteria to create, critically analyze, interpret, or reflect ethically on a text, artwork, performance, or other product of human creativity and reasoning.

Goal 2. Written Communication
Students will demonstrate proficiency in written communication.
Objective 2A. Apply principles of clarity and coherence to sentences and paragraphs.
Objective 2B. Write an effective expository or argumentative essay using appropriate style, structure, and voice.

Goal 4. Cultural and Global Awareness
Students will develop cultural competencies and global awareness.
Objective 4C. Demonstrate the ability to explain and reflect on important political, economic, social, aesthetic or ethical issues within one's own cultural context.

This course meets the following learning goals and objectives for the Religion department:
Learning Goal 3: Students will be able to analyze the social implications of religion [Analysis]
Objective a) Students will explain the inseparability of religion and its social context
Objective b) Students will give examples of the links between religion and other dimensions of social life (gender, class, race, ethnicity, nationality, politics, economics, science, technology etc.)

Learning Goal 5: Students will be able to evaluate religious phenomena comparatively [Evaluation]
Objective a) Students will describe differences within religious traditions (e.g. conservative vs. reform movements), or among different traditions (e.g. Catholic vs. Confucian), or between religions and movements not normally thought of as religious (e.g. science, nationalism, sport, gardening etc)
Objective b) Students will express opinions that are informed by scholarship in the field
Grading policy:

Studying religion is both an academic and a personal exercise. In your written assignments you will be graded on thinking and argumentation. I will not grade your personal beliefs or non-belief. Nor will I grade the particular position you take. I will grade how well you articulate why you (or someone) thinks this way as well as your ability to reflect critically on the position you take.

Grading Scale:

0 -- You turned in an assignment that was not your own. Don't let this be you!

F -- You can earn an F in two ways. Your writing was fantastic, but late. OR your writing fails to answer the questions, expresses little accurate information, and/ or is not coherent.

D -- shows effort, but the information and explanation are weak. You need to make more references to the readings.

C -- articulates what you think clearly. You need to engage in a more detailed and systematic way with the readings. You probably also need to engage in a more thoughtful way with the major critical issues of the course.

B -- explores why you think the way you do.

A -- reserved for excellence, when you use the material as a springboard for higher level thinking. You engage with other perspectives and counter-arguments. You elaborate a creative and original take on the readings and issues being discussed in class, and you articulate your thoughts in your own voice. You go beyond stating your point of view to evaluate the pros and cons of thinking the way you do.

ABSENCES DETRACT FROM YOUR GRADE:

Your class has an absence policy! It is included on your syllabus above in the section entitled Assignments: please read and observe it. Please be aware that if you are in class but working on your computer checking email or surfing or doing assignments for another class this will cause you to lose points from your final grade. So will texting.

LATE POLICY

In order to return your work to you promptly with detailed and constructive feedback, I do not accept late work. You will earn an F, and will forfeit your right to my feedback. If there is an emergency or a tragedy in your life and you need an exception, you must communicate with me BEFORE the due-date. This includes tests: if you are too sick to attend class on a day when we are scheduled to take a test, you must call and let me know BEFORE class begins that you will not be able to take the test and arrange time for a make-up.
Academic Honesty:

Hofstra University Honor Code: “As a member of the Hofstra community I pledge to demonstrate integrity and ethical behavior in all aspects of my life, both inside and out of the classroom. I understand that I am accountable for everything I say and write. I will not misrepresent my academic work, nor will I give or receive unauthorized assistance for academic work. I agree to respect the rights of all members of the Hofstra community. I will be guided by the values expressed in the P.R.I.D.E Principles. I accept the responsibility to follow this Honor Code at all times.”

Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are serious ethical and professional infractions. For information regarding Hofstra’s statement of principles with respect to academic honesty, examples of violations, procedures for handling violations, as well as a student’s right to appeal a charge, see Faculty Policy Series #11 for undergraduate students (http://www.hofstra.edu/pdf/Faculty/Senate/senate_FPS_11.pdf)

Students With Disabilities:

If you believe you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Student Access Services (SAS). In accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, qualified individuals with disabilities will not be discriminated against in any programs, or services available at Hofstra University.

Individuals with disabilities are entitled to accommodations designed to facilitate full access to all programs and services. SAS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will provide students with documented disabilities accommodation letters, as appropriate.

Please note that accommodations may require early planning and are not retroactive; please contact SAS as soon as possible. All students are responsible for providing accommodation letters to each instructor and for discussing with him or her the specific accommodations needed and how they can be best implemented in each course. For more information on services provided by the university and for submission of documentation, please contact Student Access Services, 107 Student Center, 516-463-7075

Deadlines: Please be mindful of University deadlines. See www.hofstra.edu/deadlines

Incomplete Policy: Hofstra’s policies regarding Incomplete grades, default grades, and associated deadlines can be found in the Undergraduate and Graduate Studies Bulletins (http://bulletin.hofstra.edu)

Notice On Campus Sexual Assault And Discriminatory Harassment
University policy and federal laws such as Title IX, Title VI and the ADA make it clear that sexual violence and harassment based on any protected characteristic are strictly prohibited and are subject to standards of accountability at the University. If you or someone you know has been sexually assaulted or subjected to discriminatory harassment, the University offers multiple resources to support you and has policies and procedures to address these offenses. For more information, contact:

** the University Title IX Coordinator, Jean Peden-Christodolou, at 516-463-6815, Jean.C.PedenChristodoulou@hofstra.edu

** the University Equal Rights & Opportunity Officer, Jennifer Mone, at 516-463-1800, eroo@hofstra.edu or

** refer to the applicable University policy at www.hofstra.edu/eoe