Essential Information

Please refer to the following resources for information essential for the successful completion of courses and degree programs at Nazarene Theological Seminary. Links to these resources are available in the Essential Information section at [http://support.nts.edu](http://support.nts.edu).

- NTS Mission Statement & Purpose Degree Objectives
- Tips for online learning success
- NTS library services
- NTS textbook information
- Online technical requirements and Moodle support information
- NTS Student Handbook including statements on quality of work, plagiarism, and academic probation
- *Handbook for Inclusive Language*

Instructor Information

Professor: Philip N LaFountain, ThD
Email: philip.n.lafountain@enc.edu
Office: (617) 745-3585
Office Hours: Mon-Fri or by Appointment

Catalog Description

A study of the numerous perimeter or alternative religious movements in American religious history. Along with their beliefs and practices, attention is given to the historical and sociological factors that have contributed to the flourishing of such groups in America. Includes a survey of contemporary “cult” movements.

Course Narrative & Rationale

“Religions on the perimeter,” “alternative altars,” “fringe religions,” and “New Religious Movements” (NRM) (as well as “cults” and “sects”) are some of the descriptions that have been applied to the numerous religious movements in American history that have deviated significantly from the Christian “mainstream” embraced by most religious Americans. Such groups are an important part of the story of religious life in the United States.
This course is designed to survey some of the more important alternative, perimeter, or new religious groups (especially those with Christian roots and connections) which have appeared with regularity in America from the seventeenth century up to the present time. The origins, development, and principal beliefs and practices of these groups are examined along with the various factors that contribute to the formation and appeal of such groups in different historical contexts. Also, some attention is given to a variety of theological, legal, and pastoral issues raised by the presence of such groups in American society.

Teaching methodology will include lectures, but the goal of the class session is to promote a vigorous and engaging discussion of the reading material. There will be some group work during class sessions.

**Degree Objectives**
This course directly addresses concerns articulated in the goals and objectives of all NTS degree programs, which call for students to develop an understanding of the history and heritage of the Christian faith as well as familiarity with the context in which ministry takes place today.

**Course Outcomes**
Conscientious investment by students in the learning activities of the course should enable students to:

1. Grasp the basic sociological principles and theory of social group identity formation and maintenance. CX3, CX6; Assignments: 1, 3, 4
2. Develop an understanding of the utility of sociological categories and criteria of understanding and describing religious groups, such as “cults,” “sects,” and New Religious Movements.” CX3; Assignments: 1-5
3. Acquire familiarity with important “cults,” “sects,” and “New Religious Movements” in the United States. CX1; Assignments: 1, 2, 3, 4
4. Gain knowledge of the broad history of such movements in America. CX8; Assignments: 1, 2
5. Develop understanding of such groups as something more than simply odd, weird, deviant, or aberrant – rather, as religious systems that provide a coherent and meaningful way for their adherents to order and live their lives. CX2; Assignments: 1, 3
6. Understand the important factors (both historical and contemporary) that encourage the formation and survival of “alternative” religions, the reasons why some people are attracted to and join these kinds of groups. CX4; Assignments: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
7. Gain awareness of important theological, legal, and pastoral issues related to the presence and influence of “cult” type religious groups in American society. CX6, CX8; Assignments: 1, 5
8. Develop ability to relate as a Christian (minister) to contemporary alternative religious movements and their adherents in an informed, sensitive, and redemptive manner. CX1, CX6; Assignments: 3, 5
**Church of the Nazarene COSAC Competencies**

CX 1 Ability to discover sociological dynamics and trends and to apply that information to specific ministry settings  
CX 2 Ability to analyze and describe congregations and communities  
CX 3 Ability to describe socialization and to apply its dynamics to the life of the Christian community  
CX 4 Ability to explain the operational culture  
CX 6 Ability to understand, appreciation, and work sensitively to explain the nature of cultures and sub-cultures  
CX 8 Ability to place the ministry context in light of the large schemes of world and national history

**Required Texts & Course Materials**


**Recommended Texts & Course Materials**

Additional handouts will be provided by professor in Module class sessions.

**Course Outline**

Pre-Module  
Begin laying theoretical foundation to understand and describe New Religious Movements by reading Peter Berger’s *Sacred Canopy*.  
Begin developing an historical framework for interpreting the rise of New Religious Movements by engaging Philip Jenkins’ *Mystics and Messiahs*.

Module  
Continue laying a foundation for interpreting New Religious Movements by participating in class lectures and discussion on NRM.  
Investigate in-depth issues on NRM by engaging Lorne Dawson’s *Comprehending Cults* and John Saliba’s *Understanding New Religious Movements*.  
Gain in-depth knowledge of selected NRM by participating in class lecture and discussions.
Post-Module
Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of sociological theory of NRMs by completing a take-home essay exam. Questions will be provided by professor on the last day of class (Friday November 1).
Gain personal knowledge and insight into one NRM through research and writing. The student will complete a research project investigating the history and dynamics of one NRM. The format of the paper will be provided by the professor on the last day of class (Friday November 1).

Course Assignments & Requirements

Pre-Module
1. Read pp. 1-51 in Peter Berger’s *Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* prior to the beginning of class. Students should be prepared to engage in class discussion on Berger’s theory of religious world creation and maintenance. An in-class project will be completed by students on the first day of class (Monday October 28).

2. Read *Mystics and Messiahs: Cults and New Religions in American History* by Philip Jenkins prior to the beginning of the Module (October 28). Students should be prepared to share insights from their reading in class.

3. On, or before, the first day of class (Monday, October 28) students are to submit a 4 page double–spaced reflection essay discussing how Jenkin’s book has informed their thinking about the issues addressed by the book. There will be an “Assignment” section for the class on the NTS Moodle site where the essay may be posted.

4. Read *Understanding New Religious Movements*, 2nd Edition by John A. Saliba, pp. 1-67 prior to the beginning of class. No written report of this reading is required, but students should be prepared to discuss this material in the first class meeting (Monday October 28).

5. Read *Comprehending Cults: The Sociology of New Religious Movements* by Lorne L. Dawson. No written report of this reading is required, but students should be prepared to discuss this material during the module sessions. We will be contrasting and comparing the course material.

Module
6. Complete an in-class exercise on Peter Berger’s theory of social construction. The in-class exercise will be based on his book *Sacred Canopy*. All materials for the in-class exercise will be provided by the professor on Monday October 28.

7. Participate in a class discussion on *Comprehending Cults: The Sociology of New Religious Movements* by Lorne L. Dawson. The chapters of the book will constitute a thematic outline of the Module week.
8. Prepare for a class discussion on John Saliba’s *Understanding New Religious Movements*, 2nd Edition, pp. 75-276. The book will be discussed on Wednesday, October 30 and Thursday, October 31. No written report will be required, but students should be prepared to discuss the book during class sessions.

**Post-Module**

9. Complete take-home essay exam on sociologic theory of NRM. The professor will provide essay questions on the last day of the course (Friday, November 1). Essay exams will be posted to the NTS Moodle site. Exams are due no later than December 1, 5:00pm.

10. Complete a research project. Students are required to investigate through reading and research one NRM of their choice (in consultation with the professor). The project will be essentially a written report, but could include personal first-hand experience, interview with a person, or sociological investigation. The project should include a biography of sources that inform the work. Research projects are due no later than December 20, 5:00pm. Projects will be posted to the NTS Moodle site.

Students are strongly encouraged to complete the course evaluation.

**Distribution of Student Learning Hours**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Pre-Module Hours</th>
<th>Module Hours</th>
<th>Post-Module Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face Class Sessions</td>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Participation in forums, groups, etc.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Assignments and Learning Activities</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exams &amp; Quizzes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>58</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>47</td>
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Total Student Learning Hours: 144

**Method for Submitting Assignments**

All written work should be submitted to the NTS Moodle site. Appropriate sections will be designated on the Moodle site for upload. The professor is able to access your completed work there. If you have difficulties posting work on Moodle, please, inform the professor as soon as possible.
**Form and Style Expectations**

All written work will follow Turabian standards of formatting and annotation. All written work will include a cover page, footnotes, and bibliography in proper Turabian format. Essays and research projects should have a well written thesis paragraph and coherent and logical supporting paragraphs.

**Inclusive Language**

NTS is committed to the equality of women and men. Recognizing that people have often used the English language in ways that imply the exclusion or inferiority of women, NTS urges students, faculty, and staff to avoid sexist language in public discourse, in classroom discussions, and in their writings. All written work presented to meet course requirements must use gender inclusive language.

**Policy Regarding Late Work & Missed Exams**

All reading assignments and written work is due no later than class time unless otherwise noted. The Post-Module take-home exam will be due December 1 by 5:00pm. The final research project will be due December 20 by 5:00pm. All work should be posted on the NTS Moodle site.

Since essays, exams, and research projects are done outside of class, no rescheduling should be necessary. However, if students require additional time to complete assignments, they should consult with the professor.

**Additional Costs**

There should be no additional costs incurred for this course.

**Course Grading**

All written work is expected to demonstrate graduate level writing skills and this will be given due consideration in grading.

For all written assignments the following criteria are employed in evaluation and grading:

1) *“A” quality work* – is superior in every way – writing is clear, essentially without errors in grammar, syntax, word usage, spelling, etc. – content evidences careful reflection, insight, and originality;

2) *“B” quality work* – is above average – writing is generally clear, with few errors of grammar, syntax, spelling, word usage, etc. – content evidences careful preparation and meets the expectations of the assignment;

3) *“C” quality work* – is average – writing is adequate, but may have errors – content is adequate, meets the minimum expectations of the assignment, but lacks insight and originality;

4) *“D” quality work* – is below average – writing is poor, marred with frequent errors – content evidences lack of insight or lack of understanding of the assigned materials;
5) “F” quality work – is failure to do satisfactory work – work evidences haste, lack of careful preparation, lack of basic understanding of the assigned material.

In determining the final grade for the course:

1. **Class Participation (25% of final grade):** throughout the week of the Module class students will be expected to be fully prepared, engage in dialogue and discussion, and demonstrate knowledge and understanding of class material. Students will be evaluated on the consistency and quality of their preparation for and participation in class activities. Course Outcomes: CO 1-7; Competencies: CX1-4, 6, 8;

2. **Require Reading Report (10% of final grade):** Students will be required to write one (1) reading report/essay on Philip Jenkins’ book *Mystics and Messiah: Cults and New Religions in American History*. Essay to be submitted to NTS Moodle site prior to beginning of Module week. Course Outcomes: CO 2,3, 6; Competencies: CX8

3. **In-class Project (10% of final grade):** Students will complete an in-class project on Peter Berger’s sociological theory of social group formation and maintenance (based on his book *Sacred Canopy*). The project will be completed during class session on the first day of class (Monday, October 28). Course Outcomes: CO 1-6, 8; Competencies: CX1-4

4. **Take-home Essay Exam (25% of final grade):** Students will be required to complete a take-home essay exam and submit it to Moodle by December 1, 5:00pm. Course Outcomes: CO 1-3,6; Competencies: CX1-4

5. **Final Research Project (30% of final grade):** Students will be required to complete a major research project on one NRM. The project should include the following features:

   - Review the origin and historical development of the NRM
   - Identify religious, social, and intellectual dimensions of the NRM
   - Describe the NRM’s response to the surrounding social environment
   - Identify who joins the movement and offer some explanation why
   - Explain how the NRM satisfy’s adherents needs
   - Identify how power relations, gender, authority are expressed
   - Identify whether violence is utilized by the NRM
   - To what extent does the NRM display the six (6) characteristics described in Dawson Comprehending Cults, ch. 8?

   Students may also engage in field work, interviews, or rely on personal experience in developing the project.

The Research Project is due to be posted on the NTS Moodle site by December 20, 5:00pm. Course Outcomes: CO 2,6-8; Competencies: CX1-4, 6, 8
NOTE: In accordance with the provisions of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, NTS is committed to providing students with disabilities the opportunity to participate and benefit from its programs and activities. Accordingly, NTS will make reasonable modifications to its programs and activities to accommodate otherwise qualified students with disabilities, unless such modifications would impose an undue burden on the operation of the particular program or activity or would fundamentally alter the nature or purpose of the program or activity. Students needing accommodations should contact the Office of the Registrar. They also should contact the instructor no later than the end of the first class session to discuss learning needs and adaptive strategies that have been beneficial for the student in the past.

**Class Attendance**

Attendance at classes is essential for realizing the maximum benefit of your education. Since the professor in each course is best acquainted with the importance of consistent attendance, he or she will determine the rules for attendance.

If you must be absent because of extenuating circumstances, contact the professor as soon as possible to discuss the situation.

If a student is absent for 8 hrs of a one week or is absent (does not participate) four or more weeks of the pre/post module, the professor may automatically fail the student.

Daily attendance records must be reported for those obtaining V.A. and Department of Education benefits. Students must make the professor aware if their attendance must be recorded.

**Audio and Video Recordings**

In order to foster a safe learning environment in which various viewpoints are respected, audio or video recordings or transcripts thereof by students is prohibited without the permission of the faculty member in charge of the course. If permission is granted, redistribution of these recordings or transcripts thereof outside the scope of the course is prohibited.

Students enrolling in videoconferencing courses or participating in certain synchronous Moodle activities should be aware that their images and voices will be transmitted digitally through the videoconferencing equipment and may be recorded. Continued enrollment in these courses constitutes willingness to participate in the class with these conditions. If you have privacy concerns, please discuss your enrollment with the Registrar.
### Course Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sep 16</td>
<td>1-6</td>
<td><strong>Pre-Module Begins</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>Read <em>Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion</em>, Peter Berger (pp. 1-51).</td>
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<td>Read <em>Mystics and Messiahs: Cults and New Religions in American History</em>, Philip Jenkins. Write a 4 page essay describing how the book influenced students understanding of NRM’s. Submit to NTS Moodle site by beginning of class time.</td>
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<td>Read <em>Comprehending Cults</em>, Lorne L. Dawson. Be prepared to discuss in class.</td>
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<td>Oct 28</td>
<td>7</td>
<td><strong>Module Face to Face Begins</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Monday, October 28</strong></td>
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<td>*Required Background Reading: <em>Sacred Canopy</em>, Peter Berger (pp. 1-51).</td>
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<td>Complete in-class project on Berger’s sociological theory of group formation and maintenance.</td>
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<td><strong>Tuesday, October 29</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>What Are New Religious Movements? And, Why do they Emerge?</td>
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<td>*Required Background Reading: <em>Mystics and Messiahs</em>, Philip Jenkins; and, <em>Comprehending Cults</em>, Lorne L. Dawson (pp. 1-71).</td>
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<td><strong>Wednesday, October 30</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Who Joins NRM’s and Why? Is Brainwashing used?</td>
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<td><strong>Thursday, October 31</strong></td>
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<td>NRM’s and Violence</td>
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**Friday, November 1**
Social Significance of NRMs.

*Required Background Reading: *Comprehending Cults*, Lorne L. Dawson (pp. 158-1180). Class discussion will also rely on student’s reading of all class texts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nov 4</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>Post-Module Begins</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dec 1</td>
<td>9-10</td>
<td>Complete Take-home Essay by 5:00pm</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Course Evaluations (approximate release time by the Dean’s Office)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec 20</td>
<td>11-14</td>
<td>Complete Research Project on NRM by 5:00pm</td>
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