

Religions & Cults in US

Last Updated: Sat, 08/02/2025

Course prefix: HTS

Course number: 3018

Section: A

CRN (you may add up to five):
94481

Instructor First Name: KEMAL

Instructor Last Name: BUDAK

Semester: Fall

Academic year: 2025

Course description:

This course delves into the sociology, history, and cultural significance of new religious movements (NRMs) and groups often labeled as "cults," offering a comprehensive exploration of their development, beliefs, and societal impacts. Through sociological and interdisciplinary lenses, students will investigate a broad range of themes, including the dynamics of charismatic leadership, the psychological and social factors influencing conversion and recruitment, and the mechanisms of control and indoctrination within these groups. The course also examines the controversies surrounding NRMs, such as their portrayal in media and legal conflicts, while addressing critical events like the Waco siege and the Heaven's Gate tragedy.

Course learning outcomes:

- *Develop a sociological perspective to analyze new religious movements (NRMs) and their interactions with society, distinguishing sociological approaches from psychological or theological frameworks.*
- *Engage with major sociological theories and concepts, such as charismatic leadership, social influence, brainwashing, and millennialism, and apply them to the study of NRMs.*
- *Understand how social, cultural, and historical contexts shape the emergence, adaptation, and public perception of NRMs, including their role during periods of societal crisis.*
- *Gather and critically evaluate sociological evidence from ethnographies, case studies, and memoirs, constructing well-reasoned arguments through written assignments and discussions.*

- *Analyze the lived experiences of individuals in NRMs, including processes of recruitment, commitment, disaffiliation, and recovery, to gain insights into their psychological and social dimensions.*

Required course materials:

No textbook is needed for this class. All required readings will be uploaded to Canvas.

Grading policy:

Attendance and Participation (15%)

Pre-Class Discussions (10%)

Assignments (30%)

Midterm (20%)

Final Exam (25%)

Attendance policy:

It is crucial to attend every class to stay up to date with the course material. You are allowed only **TWO** absences (excused and unexcused combined) throughout the semester. Lectures, videos, and discussions are designed to complement the reading assignments by providing additional insights, rather than simply repeating the content. Your grade will reflect solid preparation and active participation.

Academic honesty/integrity statement:

- Students are expected to adhere to the [Georgia Tech Honor Code](#). Violations of the Honor Code will be addressed appropriately and may result in an “F” on the assignment or in the course. If you require special accommodation due to a disability, please inform me as soon as possible. You should also contact the [Office of Disability Services](#).
- **Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools:** You may use generative AI programs, e.g. ChatGPT, to help generate ideas and brainstorm. You should be aware that the material generated by these programs may be inaccurate, incomplete, biased or otherwise problematic. Also, use of these tools may stifle your own independent thinking and creativity. Per GaTech's Honor Code, you may not submit any work generated by an AI program as your own. If you include material generated by an AI program, it should be cited like any other reference material (with due consideration for the quality of the reference, which may be poor). When/if you use AI platforms in your assignments, please write a note to clarify where in your process you used AI, include the prompt used to generate the material, and which platform(s) you used. See this article for how to cite AI properly: How to cite ChatGPT: <https://apastyle.apa.org/blog/how-to-cite-chatgpt>

- **That said, using any AI tools during a proctored exam or quiz is never permitted.**

Core IMPACTS statement(s) (if applicable):

This course is a Core IMPACTS course within the Social Sciences area, designed to provide students with essential knowledge in foundational academic disciplines. It aims to help students master course content while supporting their broader academic and career goals. The course is centered around the following guiding question:

- How do I understand human experiences and connections?

By completing this course, students should achieve the following learning outcome:

- Students will effectively analyze the complexity of human behavior and understand how historical, economic, political, social, or geographic relationships develop, persist, or change.

The course content, activities, and exercises are designed to help students develop the following career-ready competencies:

- Intercultural Competence
- Perspective-Taking
- Persuasion