



**WBUonline Campus
School of Christian Studies**

UNIVERSITY MISSION STATEMENT

Wayland Baptist University exists to educate students in an academically challenging, learning-focused and distinctively Christian environment for professional success and service to God and humankind.

COURSE NUMBER & NAME:

THST 4340 New Religious Movements

TERM & DATES:

Spring 2 2026 Mar 23 – May 16, 2026

INSTRUCTOR:

Dr. J. M. Givens Jr.

Professor of Theological Studies

Ben and Bertha Mieth Professor of Missions

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Office phone: 806.291.1166 (assistant 806.291.1160)

WBU Email: jgivens@wbu.edu

Mobile phone: 806.292.3957 (prefer to reserve this for emergency situations, which is not defined as last minute work based on student preference . . . plan ahead on assignments)

OFFICE HOURS, BUILDING & LOCATION:

Flores Bible Building office suite

Office Hours will be posted in the Instructor Info section of Blackboard

COURSE MEETING TIME & LOCATION:

Asynchronous interaction with specific deadlines managed through [Blackboard](#)

CATALOG DESCRIPTION:

Introduction to the history and thought of religious or spiritual groups founded after 1800, which evidence deviant beliefs and/or practices from established denominations and religions; major attention on Latter-Day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Science, New Age Movements, and other groups which have a significant presence in the United States.

PREREQUISITE:

RLGN 1301 and RLGN 1302

REQUIRED TEXTBOOK AND RESOURCE MATERIAL:

Title	Editor/Author	Publisher	Ed	Year	ISBN
<i>New Age, Neopagan, and New Religious Movements: Alternative Spirituality in Contemporary America</i>	Hugh B. Urban	University of California Press		2015	978-0520281189
Bible	Any modern translation recognized by mainstream Christianity (not a NRM)				

NOTE: There is an Automatic eBook already in the Blackboard classroom – click on the menu link for information. Should you wish to purchase a print copy remember to opt out by the date listed in Blackboard.

- Internet Equipped Computer
 1. Must conform to [minimum recommended settings](#) identified by Virtual Campus
 2. Should use compatible browser and have [correct settings](#) as recommended by Blackboard
 3. Must utilize WBU [student email account](#) for official university communications
- WBU Blackboard Course Management Software
 1. All assignments and other class issues will be available through Blackboard.
 2. WBUonline technical support can assist you with log in issues, such as username and password.
 3. Contact to technical support is available on the login page of Blackboard. Support is 24/7 support by phone and available also by chat or creating a case.

OPTIONAL MATERIALS

1. Hexham, Irving, Stephen Rost, and John W. Morehead II, eds. *Encountering New Religious Movements: A Holistic Evangelical Approach*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2004.
2. Rhodes, Ron. *The Challenge of the Cults and New Religions*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001.

COURSE OUTCOMES AND COMPETENCIES:

The student will

1. describe the origins, development, essential doctrines, and present status of new religious movements (NRMs) in America
2. Explain the appeal of such groups to the American people
3. Formulate a method that facilitates dialogue with persons affiliated with religious cults and sects

ATTENDANCE REQUIREMENTS:

1. Attendance for online courses is defined fully in the [university catalog](#).
2. Students are expected to participate in all required instructional activities in their courses.
3. Student "attendance" in an online course is defined as active participation in the course as described in the course syllabus (completing weekly assignments).
4. Students aware of necessary absences must inform the professor with as much advance notice as possible in order to make appropriate arrangements.
5. Any student absent 25 percent or more of the online course, i.e., non-participatory during 3 or more weeks of an 11 week term, may receive an F for that course.
6. Any student who has not actively participated in an online class prior to the census date for any given term is considered a "no-show" and will be administratively withdrawn from the class without record. To be counted as actively participating, it is not sufficient to log in and view the course. The student must be submitting work as described in the course syllabus.

7. When a student reaches a number of absences considered by the instructor to be excessive, the instructor will submit a Report of Unsatisfactory Progress to the student's WBU student email account and to appropriate university personnel.

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

Read Wayland Baptist University's [policy on academic integrity](#), as you will be held to it in this course. There is a no tolerance for plagiarism or academic dishonesty.

No use of any generative AI tools permitted.

1. Students are required to create and produce all work themselves or with assigned group members. Any work submitted that has used an AI generative tool like ChatGPT will be in immediate violation of the academic integrity policies for the course and WBU.
2. All assignments must be fully created, designed, and prepared by the student(s).
3. Any work that uses generative AI will be treated as plagiarism.

DISABILITY STATEMENT:

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), it is the policy of Wayland Baptist University that no otherwise qualified person with a disability be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any educational program or activity in the university. The Disability Services Coordinator and Academic Coach serves as the coordinator of students with disabilities and must be contacted concerning accommodation requests (office (806) 291-1057. Documentation of a disability must accompany any request for accommodations.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS and GRADING CRITERIA:

1. *Blackboard Scavenger Hunt.* The hunt is designed to help familiarize you with the essential features of Blackboard. **Complete by Wednesday of Week 1 (3rd day of class).** **1 point** will be deducted each day for **late submissions**.
2. *Weekly Reading Quizzes.* Students will take quizzes over assigned chapters each week.
3. *Weekly Discussions and/or Activities.* Student interaction through class discussion and activities enhances learning and understanding. Discussion will be over the assigned readings and other materials. Discussions will help students understand one or more aspects of the religion more fully. Initial posts should be substantive, informative, and should enhance the learning experience for the student and colleagues. Interaction is expected, so subsequent responses to student posts or to instructor inquiries, and questions to others about their posts to gain clarity or deeper understanding will be part of the evaluation. See weekly grading rubric and the Course Info section of the course in Blackboard for detailed description of expectations. In final weeks, your weekly discussion will be based on presentations made by graduate students.

NOTE: Because the university classroom is a place designed for the free exchange of ideas, students are encouraged to think aloud and to be honest about their theological perspectives and concerns. Students should respect the views of their peers, addressing any concerns or questions about another's views with charity and compassion, so that the whole body of Christ might be built up ([Eph. 4:11-15](#)). NRM members during field trips (and any guest speakers, if scheduled) should be extended the same respect in order that they might see Christ reflected in your life ([1 Pet. 2:12](#)).

4. *Research Reviews.* You will read/review 3 assigned articles/chapters to learn about additional New Religious Movements. For each item read/reviewed, you will write a reflective paper of 1-2 pages as outlined in Blackboard for that reading.
5. *Field Trip Participation.* Students will attend worship services/meetings of other faiths to provide an opportunity to encounter "real-life" adherents of these movements rather than just scholarly statements/analysis of these religions. A report will be submitted for the visit. Details of the report will be posted in Blackboard. **One field trip is required.** **Extra credit** will be available to students for additional field trips with accompanying reports, up to two (2) bonus points on the final average for each.

GRADING CRITERIA

1. University Grading Scale	2. Computation of Final Grade	
A 90-100	a. Scavenger Hunt	5%
B 80-89	b. Weekly Discussions/Activities	25%
C 70-79	c. Weekly Quizzes	25%
D 60-69	d. Research Reviews	25%
F below 60	e. Field Trip Report	20%

Grade Appeal Statement: Students shall have protection through orderly procedures against prejudices or capricious academic evaluation. A student who believes that he or she has not been held to realistic academic standards, just evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course by using the student grade appeal process described in the Academic Catalog. Appeals may not be made for advanced placement examinations or course bypass examinations. Appeals are limited to the final course grade, which may be upheld, raised, or lowered at any stage of the appeal process. Any recommendation to lower a course grade must be submitted through the Vice President of Academic Affairs/Faculty Assembly Grade Appeals Committee for review and approval. The Faculty Assembly Grade Appeals Committee may instruct that the course grade be upheld, raised, or lowered to a more proper evaluation.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

1. Introduction to New Religious Movements (ch 1)
2. Mormonism (ch 3)
3. Spiritism and the New Age Movement (chs 4 and 11)
4. Nation of Islam and the Five Percent Nation (ch 5)
5. Scientology and Wicca/Neopaganism (chs 7 and 8)
6. Debates about New Christian Groups (readings provided in Blackboard)
7. **Research Reviews Due**
8. Review and Discussion of Graduate Presentations **and Field Trip Paper Due**

POSSIBLE FIELD TRIPS

Can be any number of smaller groups that are in your local area, whether one of these or another group, but make sure your selection is pre-approved by the instructor **before** the trip.

1. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints
2. Jehovah's Witnesses (Kingdom Halls)
3. United Pentecostal or other Oneness Pentecostal Church (non-trinitarian)
4. Seventh Day Adventist Church
5. Christian Science
6. United Church of Religious Science
7. Unity School of Christianity
8. Baha'i meeting group
9. Unitarian Universalist Church
10. Scientology
11. Nation of Islam
12. Nation of Gods and Earths
13. Wicca
14. Native American Church
15. Spiritism
16. Church of Satan (Temple of Set or other similar group)
17. Theosophy meeting
18. New Age festival (need to visit various booths) or a channeling event
19. Unification Church
20. Messianic Jewish congregation
21. Hebrew Roots or Messianic Covenant Community