



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 5340 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:

Intensive study and analysis of origins, personalities, historical development, and thought of religious or spiritual groups founded after 1800, which evidence deviant beliefs and/or practices from established denominations and religions. Major attention will be given to Latter-Day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Science, New Age Movements, and other groups which have a significant presence in the United States.

PREREQUISITE:

None

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

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
4. research the history and beliefs of a new religious movement and creatively present this information to classmates

ATTENDANCE REQUIREMENTS:

1. Attendance for online courses is defined fully in the [university catalog](#).
2. The School of Religion and Philosophy has a “no cut” policy. Roll will be checked each class meeting.
3. The School of Religion and Philosophy attendance policy states that students missing more than 25% of the class meetings (including both excused and unexcused absences) may receive an “F” in the course.
4. Late arrivals and early departures will be recorded. **Three such instances may be counted as one absence.** If you have an excusable reason to leave early, you must speak to the instructor *in advance*. If you have an excusable reason for arriving late, you must speak to the instructor *immediately after class*.

5. Students may have **three unexcused absences without penalty**. After the third unexcused absence, a student's **final average may be penalized up to 2 points per absence**.
6. ***Sleeping in class is the same as an unexcused absence.*** Mind and body must be in class.
7. All absences and missed work must be explained to the satisfaction of the instructor, who will then decide whether the absence is excused and whether the omitted work may be made up.
8. Strong attendance in class can help raise a grade that is on the border between two letters, as will active participation throughout the course and frequent use of practice quizzes.

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 Presentation.* Students will select a new religious movement to study in consultation with the instructor. Students will create a presentation (audio and visual media) of the history, beliefs, and practices of the NRM to instruct their classmates. Presentations should be around 20 minutes and should highlight key events and developments in the history of the NRM, as well as the NRM's beliefs, and practices, focusing especially on beliefs and practices that diverge from historic Christian faith (not necessarily your personal Christian beliefs or your denomination's beliefs). You will post the video of your presentation to YouTube by the end of weeks 6 or 7 (as assigned by instructor, depending on number of graduate students). Presenters will respond to classmates' questions.
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

A	90-100
B	80-89
C	70-79
D	60-69
F	below 60

2. Computation of Final Grade

a. Scavenger Hunt	5%
b. Weekly Discussions/Activities	25%
c. Weekly Quizzes	25%
d. Research Presentation	25%
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 Presentations Due (Saturday)

8. Review and Discussion of Graduate Presentations and Field Trip Paper Due

POSSIBLE RESEARCH TOPICS

Verify sufficient resources available from library (physical texts/journal articles and electronic texts/journal articles) and/or other avenues. Internet sources provided by the group itself do not need prior approval. Other Internet sources should be pre-approved by instructor. You may use your textbook as a source if it discusses the NRM. You should have at least 10 sources. At least 1 should be a journal article, if possible. You should footnote sources in your presentation as applicable and display a slide of sources used at end of presentation.

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| 1. Jehovah's Witnesses | 12. Transcendental Meditation |
| 2. Christian Science | 13. Soka Gakkai International |
| 3. United Church of Religious Science | 14. Falun Gong |
| 4. Unity School of Christianity | 15. Church Universal and Triumphant |
| 5. The Baha'i Faith | 16. Branch Davidians |
| 6. Unitarian Universalism | 17. The Unification Church |
| 7. Rastafari | 18. The Family International (Children of God) |
| 8. Voodoo | 19. People's Temple |
| 9. Santeria | 20. Raëlians |
| 10. International Society for Krishna
Consciousness | 21. Another group you suggest, if approved by
instructor |
| 11. ECKANKAR | |

POSSIBLE FIELD TRIPS

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| 1. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints | 18. New Age festival (need to visit various
booths) or a channeling event |
| 2. Jehovah's Witnesses (Kingdom Halls) | 19. Unification Church |
| 3. United Pentecostal or other Oneness
Pentecostal Church (non-trinitarian) | 20. Messianic Jewish congregation |
| 4. Seventh Day Adventist Church | 21. Hebrew Roots or Messianic Covenant
Community |
| 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 | |