

**A - New Course Proposal V. 7.2022 : Entry # 3310****DEAN Decision**

Approved

**Date**

02/22/2024

**Is this course intracollegiate or intercollegiate?**

Intercollegiate

**GEC Decision**

Approved

**Date**

03/05/2024

**APIRC Decision**

Approved

**Date**

03/15/2024

**Begin Form****Today's Date**

02/22/2024

**Your Name:**

Mark Plume

**Your Email:**[mplume@highpoint.edu](mailto:mplume@highpoint.edu)**Are you a Department Chair?**

No

**Department Chair Name**

Dr. Matt Sayre

**Email address of your Department Chair**[msayre1@highpoint.edu](mailto:msayre1@highpoint.edu)**By checking below, I certify that my department chair has seen and approved the new course that I am proposing.**

**A - New Course Proposal V. 7.2022 : Entry # 3310**

Yes

**Please select the appropriate school overseeing this proposal:**

Humanities and Behavioral Sciences

**Which semester is this course to be taught for the first time?**

Fall 2024

**Information for the Registrar****Choose the department designator from the list below.**

DIS

**Proposed Course Number?**

1000

**Is this course cross listed?**

No

**Does this course replace a current course?**

No

**What is the title of the new course?**

Cults: The Rise and Demise of Controlling Communities

**Write the catalog description of your proposed course:**

DIS Course Catalog Description

Taken during the first year of enrollment, Intellectual Discovery classes revolve around an engaging topic designed to inspire students to embark on intellectual discovery and to sustain it for entirety of the semester.

**Specific Course Description Example**

This course examines religious groups in the United States that have been labeled in the public as “cults” (new religious movements, or NRM’s). This course will examine an array of such groups both domestically and globally. Topics in the study of “cults” and NRM’s will include but not be limited to cults that focus on UFO’s, the apocalypse, prophecy, satanism and even violence/suicide. The examination of cults highlights important and interesting conversations about religion and the study of religion itself, as well as recent and culturally relevant conversations about religion and American society.

In studying these groups, we will investigate their beliefs about the world, the self, the divine, and the “good life,” as well as their histories, recruitment strategies, social dynamics, commitment to social and political causes, and relationships with the public. The focus will be on building a scholarly toolkit by which to understand these religious groups in an objective and critical manner. Toward this end, we will examine critical debates on the growth of new religious movements, charges that converts to these groups are “brainwashed,” the ways in which these groups are portrayed in the media, and how we might best understand these groups as scholars. Finally, as a class we will examine debates (and debate ourselves) about whether these groups deserve the label of “cult” at all.

**A - New Course Proposal V. 7.2022 : Entry # 3310****How many credit hours will this course be?**

4

**How will the course be graded?**

Letter grade

**Please select the course repeat option for this course:**

Not repeatable for credit

**What is the offering cycle for this course?**

Fall semester

**Does your course have any prerequisites?**

No

**Gen Ed and Academic Programs****Is this course part of Gen Ed?**

- Yes

**Does your course count in the general education core (one of the core classes that cannot be double-dipped in your major or minor)?**

Intellectual Discovery

**Does this course count towards a major or a minor?**

No, it does not count toward any particular major or minor

**Please list the Major / Minor and if it is Required or Elective**

N/A

**Is this course part of an academic program?**

- This course does not fulfill academic program requirements

**Does this course include any community engagement?**

No

**Does this course participate in the GoGlobal Program?**

No

**Information for Curriculum Review****Rationale and evidence for new course's consistency with departmental mission:**

## A - New Course Proposal V. 7.2022 : Entry # 3310

Intellectual discovery courses are tasked with providing "...courses that revolve around an engaging topic designed to inspire students to embark upon intellectual discovery..." This course content revolves around Cults, a phenomena that has been present since we started recording human societies. Cults continue to fascinate lay people as well as scholars: This course examines the long legacy of cults in America and abroad.. Since 1694, the religious tolerance of the Pennsylvania Colony enticed a Transylvanian monk and his forty followers to cross the Atlantic. Almost two hundred years later, a charismatic preacher founded a utopian community in Oneida, New York, that practiced socialism and free love. In the 1960s and '70s, a new generation of seekers gathered in vegetarian restaurants, Satanic coffee shops, and fortified communes. And in the twenty-first century, gurus find their flocks through self-help seminars and get-rich-quick schemes. Students in this class will examine an array of cults, ranging from UFO style to the messianic and satanic to the current day Twin Flames romance cult.

This course is designed for social science fellows. Therefore, this class will engage with cults using a number of theoretical and methodological traditions from a range of the social sciences. The focus will be on building a scholarly toolkit by which to understand these religious groups in an objective and critical manner.

### List all student learning outcomes for this course.

#### General Course Outcomes (Objectives)

- Describe the historical and modern contexts of cults.
- Describe a range of cult styles domestically and abroad
- Explain the methods utilized by cult leaders to gain compliance and membership.
- Explore the role of religion and beliefs among cults.
- Examine the world of cults through interdisciplinary lenses, including Sociology, Psychology, Criminology, Gender Studies, Political Science, etc.
- Investigate contemporary cults and their influence on society.
- Produce and present a substantial group project

#### DIS Specific

#### Intellectual Discovery Course Learning Objectives

##### #1. Fostering of a constructive team climate

- Investigate contemporary cults and their influence on society.
  - o Students will accomplish this task through weekly group presentations on cults in the news and in literature.
  - o In groups of 3 to 4, students will work together to produce a podcast episode on a cult of their choosing.

##### #2. Demonstrate emotional intelligence, a growth mindset, and resilience while addressing challenges.

- Balance the constitutional freedoms to form cults with the crimes committed by cults past and present.
  - o Students will listen to podcast episodes about cults and dangerous behaviors, which may have been tabooed to discuss previously. This will challenge students to push past their comfort zones, while seeking High Point University resources if necessary.
  - o Crimes, such as sexual assault, abuse, and murder that have occurred in the confines of a cult will be discussed in this course.

##### #3. Connect concepts, theories, and frameworks of fields of study to life experiences.

- Examine the world of cults through interdisciplinary lenses, including Sociology, Psychology, Criminology, Gender Studies, Political Science, etc.
  - o Students will be expected to demonstrate an understanding of the interdisciplinary nature of this topic. They will be exposed to cults through unique lenses that introduce them to a range of perspectives in the social sciences.

##### #4. Adapt and apply skills, abilities, theories, or methodologies acquired in one situation or discipline to new situations or problems.

- Produce an original podcast episode on a cult of their choosing that outlines the historical origins of the cult, the methods of social control, the psychological advantages, and disadvantages of cult members, and/or crimes of the cult.

**A - New Course Proposal V. 7.2022 : Entry # 3310**

- o This task requires students to examine methods of style, communication, and art as they develop their own podcast title, artwork, and episode.
- Describe the historical and modern contexts of cults.
- Examine sex and gender expectations within the cults.
- Explore the role of religion and beliefs among cults.
- o Students will gain additional knowledge in the fields (history, gender studies, and religion) to fully appreciate the inner workings of cults, as they distinguish whether cults are inherently problematic or not. This will help them answer the question: Are cults deviant?

**List any units or content areas that will be required for all sections of this course.**

Providing a fundamental understanding of what cults are, and how they differ from other religious/spiritual groups.

Introduce a broad range of cults (in America and globally)

Examine how cults rise and fall using the theoretical and methodological traditions of the social sciences.

Other than these three broad requirements, individual instructors are free to explore the topic as they see fit.

**List any assignments, tests, or other assessments that will be required for all sections of this course.**

Students in this course will produce and present a substantial group project.

**List any readings or other materials that will be required for all sections of this course.**

Readings and other course materials will be at the discretion of the individual instructor.

**List any course policies that will be required for all sections of this course.**

N/A

**If you would like to specify how requirements for contact hours must be met for all sections of this course, please indicate below. (e.g., if any experiential learning activities will replace seat time)**

N/A

**Is there anything else the reviewing parties should know about this new course proposal that hasn't been addressed?**

N/A

**Sample Syllabus**

- [DIS.Cults\\_TentativeSyllabus-1.docx](#)