University of Gdańsk

Subject card

Subject name and code	New Religious Movements, PG_00200634		
Field of study	Religious Studies		
Date of commencement of studies	October 2026	Academic year of realisation of subject	2026/2027
Education level	Bachelor's studies	Subject group	Obligatory subject group in the field of study Subject group related to scientific research in the field of study
Mode of study	full-time studies	Mode of delivery	at the university
Year of study	1	Language of instruction	Polish
Semester of study	1	ECTS credits	2.0
Learning profile	academic	Assessment form	credit
Conducting unit			
Name and surname of lecturer (lecturers)	Subject supervisor	dr Andrzej Migda	
	Teachers	dr Andrzej Migda	

Lesson types	Lesson type	Lecture	Tutorial	Laboratory	Project	Seminar	SUM
	Number of study hours	30.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	30
	E-learning hours included: 0.0						

Learning activity and number of study hours	Learning activity	Participation in didactic classes included in study plan	Participation in consultation hours	Self-study	SUM
	Number of study hours	30	2.0	18.0	50

Subject objectives	In this course, students will explore the typology of New Religious Movements by analysing the academic literature that covers the topic of NRRs from sociological, psychological and religious studies perspectives. The class will focus on the internal diversity of these communities and organisations, exploring fundamental questions about the scale of the phenomenon and the distinctive features that characterise religious organisations that emerged after the second half of the 20th century. Participants in the course will trace the historical roots of contemporary religious movements, and will be introduced to their key doctrinal assumptions, founding figures, organisational structure and the worldview promoted, which often provides an alternative to the dominant institutional religions and cultural religions.

Learning outcomes

Course outcome	Subject outcome	Method of verification
[RELL3_W07] Knows and understands research methods and tools of the religious studies research framework, including methods of analysing and interpreting various cultural products.	Understands the mutual influences between religions, e.g. Hellenistic syncretism, the influence of Hinduism on Buddhism, Christianity's relationship with pagan religions. Knows key figures, texts and events shaping the history of religions. Analyses the relationship between religion and historical factors such as migration, war, colonialism, technological revolutions or climate change.	[SW4] test/exam - oral or written [SW1] oral statement/ conversation/discussion
[RELL3_W04] Has structured knowledge of the history of different religions and understands the historical factors shaping their development.	Identifies key stages in the development of religions - from archaic traditions (shamanism, animism) to universal religions (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism) - including their geographical, political and social contexts.	[SW4] test/exam - oral or written [SW1] oral statement/ conversation/discussion
[RELL3_U02] Is able to identify various forms of past and contemporary cultural production and critically analyse and interpret them in order to determine their meanings, social impact and role in historical and cultural processes.	The student is able to reconstruct the evolution of shamanic rituals - from traditional practices of Siberia to their contemporary adaptations in holistic therapies. To do so, he/she uses interdisciplinary research methods - from the history of ideas to historical anthropology - to reconstruct religious processes.	[SU1] oral statement/conversation/ discussion [SU4] test/exam - oral or written
[RELL3_K05] Is prepared to perform professional roles responsibly and observe professional ethics, with particular attention to respecting the dignity and freedom of religion of persons belonging to different religious traditions.	The student not only assimilates facts, but interprets religions as dynamic systems, shaped by historical processes. This enables him/her to both analyse the past and anticipate trends (e.g. the rise of non-institutional religions) and to participate in debates about the role of religion in the global world. It respects religious diversity, understanding that contemporary practices are often the result of complex historical processes.	[SK5] implementation of a problem task [SK8] observation of student's independent or team work

Subject contents

During the course, participants will have the opportunity to explore the diverse beliefs and cultic practices of New Religious Movements, focusing on their doctrine, organisational structure and the nature of their membership. The analysis will include terminology that clarifies the differences between church, sect and cult group, and we will look at both global communities and local organisations and their interactions with the community. In this class we will discuss the origins and doctrine of the Unification Church and the Church of Scientology, which are examples of global religious movements. In addition, we will focus on the analysis of groups associated with the cult of space visitors, such as the Aetherius Society, the Unarius Academy of Science, the Realists, the Ordre du Temple Solaire and Heaven's Gate. Students will also be introduced to groups drawn from Judeo-Christian and Oriental traditions. We will discuss a variety of esoteric and occult communities, such as Argentum Astrum and Ordo Templi Orientis, as well as reconstructionist and neo-pagan religions, including Wicca, Native Faith and the Polish Slavic Church. We will also examine radically ecological organisations such as Pracownia na rzecz Wszystkich Istot and Klub Gaja. In addition, students will be introduced to examples of communities where extreme self-aggressive behaviour, social isolation and sexual dominance have occurred and have been motivated by religious beliefs.

Prerequisites and co-requisites

Assessment methods and criteria

Subject passing criteria	Passing threshold	Percentage of the final grade
oral colloquium	55.0%	50.0%
Participation in discussions, attendance in class, knowledge of issues presented in lectures, knowledge of readings.	55.0%	50.0%

Recommended reading

Basic literature

1. Teaching New Religious Movements, red. D. G. Bromley, Oxford-New York 2007.
2. W. Ashcraft, A Historical Introduction to the Study of New Religious Movements, New York, 2018.
3. R. Stark, W.S. Bainbridge The Future of Religion, Berkeley 1985.
4. The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements, red. J.R. Lewis, Oxford 2008.
5. Handbook of New Religions and Cultural Production, ed. C. Cusack, A. Norman, Brill 2012.
6. H. Urban, The church of scientology: a history of a new religion, Princeton 2013.

	Supplementary literature	• J. A. Saliba, Understanding new religious movements, Walnut Creek 2001. • D. M. Gibson, A History of the Nation of Islam, Santa Barbara 2013. • P. B. Clarke, Encyclopedia of New Religious Movements, London 2008
	eResources addresses	
Example issues/ example questions/ tasks being completed	• New religious movements and popular culture. • Can we talk about cults related to UFOs, racism and esotericism. • Critical reflection on research methodology. • What are the most important examples of new religious movements. • How new religious movements influence society. • Definitions of new religious movements and their classification. • Controversies related to this phenomenon in modern science.	
Work placement	Not applicable	

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