
Writing the Essay 2

Collectives, Communes and Cults: Alternative Societies and their Leaders

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Eugene Lang College: Spring '08

This course will revolve around the relationship between utopian philosophy, group psychodynamics and the sociology of alternative communities through biographical and historical research. Students will read selected works of utopian philosophers, biographies and psychological analyses of charismatic leaders and examine alternative communities through primary and secondary texts. The practical research will be an investigation of the group leaders, the origins and influences of their beliefs, and the practical manifestation of those beliefs within the communities.

Communities to be covered will include Scientologists, Mormons, Tolstoyan Communes, Ashrams, the People's Temple and the Black Panther Party. Readings will include texts by Emile Durkheim, Erich Fromm, Charles Fourier, Leo Tolstoy, Ghandi, Ben Franklin, Huey P Newton and Jim Jones.

Students will develop their academic writing and research skills through an investigation of various research approaches, and the review and annotation of critical essays focusing on the philosophy, psychology and sociology of alternative communities. Students will be expected to conduct research on various communities, their philosophical and political underpinnings and the group and individual psychology of their members and leaders. Written responses and short presentations are expected each class, and students should come prepared to engage in discussions that specifically reference the text with respectful enthusiasm.

Responses are due on the day listed. No late responses accepted. First drafts due for in-class workshop by group; final drafts due one week from first draft workshop date. All responses must be typed and double-spaced.	
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SEQUENCE ONE: Utopian Communes and Ashrams	
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Jan 27	INTRODUCTIONS
Jan 29	Read "Eighteenth-Century American Utopianism: From the Potential to the Probable" by Howard P Segal and "Utopia, The Bronx: Coop City and Its People" by Ian Frazier. Respond to the 18 th century essay topic: "Has the discovery of America been beneficial or harmful to the human race?"
Feb 3	Read "American Communal Utopias" by Michael Cummings, and Part One of <i>The Craft of Research</i> . Research one of the communities profiled in the essay, and write a response in which you assert the reasons for its success or failure.
Feb 5	Read "A Mother and Her Daughters at the Northampton Community: New Evidence on Women in Utopia" and Chapters 1-4 in <i>The Craft of Research</i> . Research and prepare a short presentation on gender roles in an alternative community of your choosing.
Feb 10	Read "Our Way of Life Makes us Miserable" by Erich Fromm, "A Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity, Pleasure and Pain" by Ben Franklin, and "The Phalanstery" by Charles Fourier. Write a response addressing the philosophical, religious or political foundation of an American utopian community.

Feb 12	Read “J.C. Kenworthy and the Tolstoyan Communities in England” by W.H.G. Armytage and “Rabindrath Tagore’s Ideals of Aesthetic Education” by Swati Lal. Write a response describing the influence of Tolstoy on communes or Ghandi’s influence on the expansion of ashrams in India.
Feb 17	Read “Religion and Intragroup Cooperation: Preliminary Results of a Comparative Analysis of Utopian Communities” by Richard Sosis and Chapters 4, 5,6 in <i>The Craft of Research</i> (may be read throughout the workshop period).
Paper #1: Write an essay comparing and contrasting two utopian communities. Be sure to consider the philosophical influence behind their practices, and work to incorporate external sources including critical essays and primary documents.	
Feb 24	Group One first draft due (16 copies).
Feb 26	Group One, continued. Group Two first draft due (16 copies).
March 3	Group Three first draft due. Group Two, continued.
March 5	Group Four first draft due. Group Three, continued. Read “Compared to What? ‘Cults’ and ‘New Religious Movements.’” by Eugene V Gallagher
SEQUENCE TWO: Sects, Cults and Collectives	
March 10	Read “Anthropological Materialism, History of Sects” by Walter Benjamin and “Sects, Cults and Movements” by Malcolm Hamilton. Prepare a short presentation on a cult, sect or collective founded in the 20 th century.
March 12	Read “Religion and Ritual” by Emile Durkheim and “Club Mormon: Free-Riders, Monitoring, and Exclusion in the LDS Church” by Michael McBride. Read chapter 7 and chapter 8 of <i>The Craft of Reason</i> . Write a response in which you develop an argument on the relationship between the social and the spiritual.
March 24	Read “Celebrity Spirituality” by Daniel Harris, “Inside Scientology” by Janet Reitman, and chapters 9 and 10 in <i>The Craft of Research</i> . Write a response in defense of a particular evangelical or promotional campaign, being sure to consider the prospective reader’s point of view.
March 26	Screening: “Jonestown: The Life and Death of the People’s Temple”. Read “Collective Welfare as Resource Mobilization in People’s Temple: A Case Study of a Poor People’s Religious Movement” by John R. Hall and “The Genius of Huey P Newton” by Huey Newton. Read chapters 12, 13 and 14 in <i>The Craft of Research</i> (may be read throughout the workshop period).

Paper #2: Write an essay in which you make an argument about the factors behind the success or failure of a cult, sect or collective. Consider the appeal of the philosophy, the marketing of the

belief system and the economic/social benefits of membership in the group. Be sure to integrate the approaches described thus far in <i>The Craft of Research</i> .	
March 31	Group One first draft due (16 copies).
April 2	Group One, continued. Group Two first draft due (16 copies).
April 7	Group Three first draft due. Group Two, continued.
April 9	Group Four, continued & leftover papers. Read “The Prophet” by Max Weber, and “Charisma” by Len Oakes
SEQUENCE 3: Leaders, Followers, and Alien Life Forms	
April 14	Read “The Authoritarian Character” by Erich Fromm, “Stage One: Early Narcissism”, and “The Followers and Their Quest” by Len Oakes. Also read chapter 16 in <i>The Craft of Research</i> . Write a response describing the psychological dynamic between leaders and followers.
April 16	Read “The Branch Davidians and the Politics of Power and Intimidation” by Lawrence Rifkind and Loretta Harper, and “Apocalyptic Suicide: From a Pathological to an Eschatological Interpretation” by Simon Dein and Roland Littlewood. Write the mission statement for a fictional cult, and outline the rules that members must follow.
April 21	“The Dominance of One and its Perils: Charismatic Leadership and Branch Structure in Utopian Communes” by Christoph Brumann, “Jonestown: Jim Jones” by Peter Olsson. Also read chapter 17 in <i>The Craft of Research</i> . Prepare a short psychological portrait of a cult leader in the form of a five-minute presentation.
April 23	Read “Heaven’s Gate: Marshall Applewhite” by Peter Olsson, “A New Mythology: Ancient Astronauts, Lost Civilization, and the New Age Paradigm” by Tim Callahan. Write a response exploring the relationship between cults and a belief in alien life forms.
April 28	Read “Aliens Adored: Rael’s UFO Religion” and “Appropriating the Master’s Tools: Sun Ra, The Black Panthers and Black Consciousness” by Daniel Kreiss.
April 30	Screening: “Space is the Place”
Paper #3: Your final essay should address the relationship between the foundational concepts of one or more alternative communities and the practical manifestation of those concepts in the operation of the community. Use the sociological and psychological readings we have read as “lenses” through which to analyze the governance, economic functioning and religious practices of the collective. Be sure to research your community’s origins, leadership and history, and to incorporate that research into your essay as well as critical sources. This essay may be an expansion, adaptation and revision of one of your previous essays, but it should be informed and altered by further research and critical review.	
May 12	Group One first draft due (16 copies).

May 14	Group One, continued. Group Two first draft due (16 copies).
May 16	Group Three first draft due. Group Two, continued.
May 18	Group Four, continued & leftover papers.

Required Books

The Craft of Research, ed. Wayne Booth et al. University of Chicago press. 2nd edition. This book is available for purchase at Barnes and Nobles Bookstore, 5th Avenue at 18th Street, (212-675-5500). Alternately, may choose to purchase the 1st edition used. Either edition is sufficient for the course, though the page numbers differ. The newer edition includes information about internet research and the individual chapters are condensed to avoid repetition.

For those who would like to deepen their knowledge on course readings, I will post *recommended* readings, images and short video clips on Blackboard. You can access Blackboard by logging onto <http://my.newschool.edu> and then clicking on “MY COURSES” in the upper right hand corner. The recommended readings are posted on Blackboard under “LECTURE NOTES.”

Packets

Packets should be purchased between the first and the second class from Village Copier, 13th Street between Fifth and University.

Grading

Major Papers (50%) are graded mainly on improvement (from first to last draft and from the beginning to the end of the semester). **Participation (15%)** is graded on general attitude – including attendance and in-class work. **Smaller Papers (20%)** include homework and in-class writing. **Presentations (15%)** will involve leading one class discussion (providing background and helping class interpret the reading).

Attendance Policy

Three unexcused absences will result in a failing grade

Excessive lateness will negatively affect your class participation grade. Although the class is held in the early morning please be considerate of the instructor, your fellow students and yourselves by arriving on time for each class.

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of someone else's work as one's own in all forms of academic endeavor (such as essays, theses, examinations, research data, creative projects, etc), intentional or unintentional. Plagiarized material may be derived from a variety of sources, such as books, journals, internet postings, student or faculty papers, etc. This includes the purchase or “outsourcing” of written assignments for a course.

Disabilities

In keeping with the University's policy of providing equal access for students with disabilities, any student requesting accommodations must first meet with Student Disability Services. Jason Luchs or a designee from that office will meet with students requesting accommodations and related services, and if appropriate, provide an Academic Adjustment Notice for the student to provide to his or her instructors. The instructor is required to review the letter with the student and discuss the accommodations, provided the student brings the letter to the attention of the instructor. This letter is necessary in order for classroom accommodations to be provided. Student Disability Services is located at 79 Fifth Avenue - 5th Floor. The phone number is (212) 229-5626. Students and faculty are expected to review the Student Disability Services webpage. The webpage can be found at <http://www.newschool.edu/studentaffairs/disability/> and the office is available to answer any questions or concerns.

