

SASB02, New Religious Movements, 7.5 credits

New Religious Movements, 7,5 högskolepoäng

First Cycle / Grundnivå

Details of approval

The syllabus was approved by The Pro Dean of First and Second Cycle Studies at The Joint Faculties of Humanities and Theology on 2026-04-14 (U 2026/199). The syllabus comes into effect 2026-04-14 and is valid from the spring semester 2027.

General information

The course is offered as a freestanding course. It can be included in a first or second cycle degree.

Language of instruction: English

*Main field of
study*

Specialisation

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G1N, First cycle, has only upper-secondary level entry requirements

Learning outcomes

On completion of the course, the students shall be able to

Knowledge and understanding

- account for the central characteristics of New Religious Movements and describe how these can be understood as phenomena in historical and contemporary contexts,
- identify and explain basic theoretical and methodological perspectives used to analyze New Religious Movements,
- describe overarching patterns in how New Religious Movements relate to the surrounding society, including social, cultural, and media dimensions,

Competence and skills

- apply basic theories and methods to interpret and discuss beliefs and practices within selected New Religious Movements,
- locate, compile, and critically discuss information about New Religious Movements from primary sources and scholarly literature,
- present well-structured arguments in writing and speech regarding New Religious Movements and their significance in society,
- carry out a basic participant observation during a study visit to a New Religious Movement and document and analyze observations using relevant ethnographic methods and concepts,

Judgement and approach

- critically reflect on different societal and media representations of New Religious Movements and discuss how these shape public understanding of them,
- evaluate and problematize preconceived notions about New Religious Movements from Religious Studies perspectives and with attention to ethical considerations,
- identify and discuss ethical issues that may arise when studying New Religious Movements, particularly in relation to representation, source criticism, and research ethics.

Course content

The course introduces the study of New Religious Movements (NRMs) as expressions of religious change and diversity. Through historical and thematic examples from the nineteenth century onward, it examines how such movements emerge, are organized, and develop, as well as how they relate to and are influenced by the surrounding society. The course focuses on central concepts and perspectives within the study of NRMs, such as authority, charisma, apocalypse, conversion, counterculture, processes of change, and ritual innovation.

The course highlights the breadth of the field through examples that include Christian movements as well as movements rooted in other traditions, such as the Hare Krishna movement (ISKCON), the Church of Scientology, and various forms of neopaganism. Through case studies and theoretical explorations, NRMs are discussed as complex social, cultural, and spiritual phenomena that address issues of identity, community, meaning-making, and the relationship between religion and modernity.

Course design

Teaching is conducted through lectures and seminars. Attendance at all teaching sessions is compulsory. Students may be absent from up to 20 % of the sessions without being required to complete additional work. Absence exceeding 20 % must be compensated through written assignments in accordance with the teacher's instructions.

The course includes an ethnographic component in which students, organized in smaller groups, independently plan and carry out a study visit. The visit may, for example, consist of participant observation, an interview, a guided tour, or other

forms of structured insight into a New Religious Movement, where students are given the opportunity to collect empirical material using ethnographic methods. Students are responsible for establishing contact with the field, conducting the visit, and documenting their observations in accordance with research ethical principles. One of the teaching sessions consists of a mandatory oral presentation of the results from the study visit.

Assessment

The course is examined through a written report based on the course's ethnographic component, as well as a final take-home exam.

The examiner, in consultation with Disability Support Services, may deviate from the regular form of examination in order to provide a permanently disabled student with a form of examination equivalent to that of a student without a disability.

Grades

Grading scale includes the grades: U=Fail, E=Sufficient, D=Satisfactory, C=Good, B=Very Good, A=Excellent

The written report accounts for 30% and the final take-home exam for 70% of the overall course grade.

A is the highest grade, and the lowest passing grade is E. A failing result is designated as U (Fail). To obtain a passing grade for the course as a whole, the student must achieve at least grade E on all assessed components.

The overall course grade is calculated as follows:

1. Each letter grade corresponds to a numerical value: A = 5, B = 4, C = 3, D = 2, E = 1, and U = 0.
2. The numerical value for each component is multiplied by the component's percentage weight.
3. The products are summed, and the resulting average determines the overall course grade:
 - 4.5–5.0 gives grade A
 - 3.5–4.49 gives grade B
 - 2.5–3.49 gives grade C
 - 1.5–2.49 gives grade D
 - 1.0–1.49 gives grade E

Entry requirements

General requirements

Further information

- The course is offered at the Centre for Theology and Religious Studies, Lund University.
- The credits allocated for course content that in whole or in part is commensurate with another course can only be credited once for a degree.
- A general exemption from the requirement of proficiency in Swedish applies to international exchange students.