

HIST 4910, 6400: MORMONISMS: The Varieties of Mormon Experience

(The course is available for Religious Studies credit; see instructor.)

Prof. Philip Barlow (philip.barlow@usu.edu; 797-3406)

Teaching Intern: Chris Blythe (christopher.blythe@aggiemail.usu.edu;
304/550-4550)

Time: Tues/Thur: 10:30-11:45 a.m. **Room:** Engineering Labs 252

Office (Main 332) **Hours:** Tuesday: noon-2 pm & Thursday: noon-2 pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Scholars have in recent years grown increasingly interested in probing the significance of Mormonism as a highly distinctive and rapidly expanding new religious tradition, one with considerable impact on American and other cultures.

What is less understood is the potency of Joseph Smith's legacy as manifest in the diverse organizations (numbering in the hundreds) that quickly or eventually arouse—all declaring allegiance to Smith as their founding prophet. Upon his death, roughly 60% of his followers cast their lot with Brigham Young and migrated to the Great Basin in the West, where they flourished as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. What of the other 40%? And what of the array of subsequent groups that arose in the West, Midwest, and elsewhere?

New and small religious movements are worth studying for their own sake and also because they can reveal much about the way religion works. In addition, one can better understand both Joseph Smith and the largest and most influential embodiments of his labors, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints headquartered in Salt Lake City, by probing the paths it might have taken, but did not--and why.

Examples of the movements whose history and theology we will consider include: The Reorganized Church (now the Community of Christ), the dissenting Remnant Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (whose president and prophet will join us for two class sessions), the Strangite movement (a serious rival to the LDS Church for a dozen years after Joseph Smith's death), contemporary (polygamous) fundamentalist branches, and the Godbeites, a liberal group that grew at odds with Brigham Young, along with their modern successors.

BOOKS for purchase:

Ed., Newell G. Bringhurst and John C. Hamer, Scattering of the Saints: Schism within Mormonism. John Whitmer Books, 2007.

Val Avery, From Mission to Madness: Last Son of the Mormon Prophet. University of Illinois Press.

Ronald W. Walker Wayward Saints: The Godbeites and Brigham Young University of Illinois Press, 1998.

Paul Edwards, Our Legacy of Faith: A Brief History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Herald House, 1991.

IN ADDITION you will receive reading materials handed distributed in class.

PROCEDURES, ASSIGNMENTS

In addition to discussion, reading the best scholarship on selected groups, and direct encounters with representatives of several churches, students will pursue original research in the archives of the Special Collections unit of the Merrill-Cazier Library.

- Students will attend interviews with key figures from various extant movements in conjunction with representatives of “Mormonisms: an Oral History Project” (the new oral history initiative associated with the Library’s Special Collections). Opportunity to report and analyze each experience will take more than one form and will be due at announced points throughout the term.

- Students will work in teams to become expert on one sect or movement among Restoration groups, providing the instructors with an oral account of their research. (Some teams may present orally to the class as a whole.)

- A final take home exam/response paper of approximately 10 pp. will allow students to formulate conclusions and to grapple with questions that together we generate in the course of our study of the variety of expressions of Joseph Smith’s religious “Restoration.”

- Short response papers in preparation for a class period may also be assigned as appropriate.

GRADING: Formula for final grades are approximately as follows:

10%: reflections on oral interviews

10%: periodic unannounced quizzes on daily readings and key terms

20%: team expertise on one sect or movement

40%: final take-home paper

20%: participation

The quality of your participation in our context has several aspects. I encourage you to help shape the class, and I construe that together we share responsibility for the outcome. Though you may feel shy to speak out as we explore things, do your best; oral expression is as important in the outside world as written expression. As in your current or future workplace, absences will affect your experience, understanding, performance, and grade. In particular, unexcused absences beyond three occasions will automatically begin the process of lowering one’s grade.

I am looking for evidence of daily pre-class preparation and in-class engagement with the issues. What are you doing to help our class thinking? It usually helps to prepare, before each class, questions or insights that you may wish to bring to our group attention.

DIRECTIONS AND CRITERIA FOR WRITTEN WORK

All written work is to be:

- typed, double-spaced
- 12-point font
- physically handed in rather than sent electronically
- based on evidence and reason rather than assertion
- documented as appropriate in the “humanities” version of The Chicago Manual of Style (easily accessed online by Googling “Chicago Manual of Style”)
- protected with a safe backup copy kept in your possession.
- turned in on time. Due dates according to the Calendar to be

handed out in class. Late papers will lose 10 points per day.

Learning cogent expression is central to what you should take from the University; good writing matters. What I am looking for in particular is your knowledge and understanding of the cumulative material in the lectures, discussion, and reading; evidence of active, imaginative, and critical reflection on the issues at hand; persuasiveness and insightfulness of your argument; clarity, organization, and good form in your expressions; and use of evidence, documentation, and reason, rather than mere proclamation or sentiment, supporting your thesis.

Class rules: 1) Note that this is not a religious course, but an academic course about religion.

We are not here to determine spiritual truth or falsity; the promotion of or attack upon the subject of our consideration is beyond our bounds. However, in the course of studying Mormon history and its contact with American culture, we will necessarily encounter documents and film that promote or criticize Mormon thought or culture. Don't be offended; these are part of trying to understand Mormon history and its relation to (which sometimes means tensions with) other societies. You can do well in the course whether you personally are inside or outside the religious tradition being studied. You are encouraged to ask any question that occurs to you, but I will be the arbiter of its appropriateness in our setting.

2) Our time is limited as we grapple with complex matters; during class time, please banish cell phones, tardiness, or anything that would distract the rest of us from our task. Do not bring your computer for matters extraneous to the course.

Special Needs: If you have special needs in relation to the course, please immediately inform me. Students with ADA-documented physical, sensory, emotional or medical impairments may be eligible for reasonable accommodations. Veterans may also be eligible for services. All accommodations are coordinated through the Disability Resource Center (DRC) in Room 101 of the University Inn, (435)797-2444 voice, (435)797-0740 TTY, or toll free at 1-800-259-2966. Please contact the DRC as early in the semester as possible. Alternate format materials (Braille, large print or digital) are available with advance notice.

Academic Integrity:

Trust is a precious commodity. Cheating will trigger an automatic grade of "F" in the course and a report to the Dean. Especially important as you master the world of academic inquiry is the issue of plagiarism: Thou shalt not claim another person's ideas as if they originated with you. Thou shalt not copy, paraphrase, or borrow an idea from another work without citing the source. Thou shalt not cite a work and then paraphrase too closely or copy directly without quotation marks. Please see the USU General Catalog for explicit descriptions of and procedures for Academic Dishonesty: http://studentlife.tsc.usu.edu/stuserv/pdf/student_code.pdf; <http://www.usu.edu/policies/PDF/Acad-Integrity.pdf>.

[Note: this syllabus, in particular the schedule of readings and assignments that will be distributed in class, is subject to change during the give and take of the semester. Be alert for any pertinent announcements which may affect the content or timing of your responsibilities.]