

COURSE SYLLABUS Spring 2023

Rel 3076: Cults and New Religious Movements

Prof. Erin Prophet

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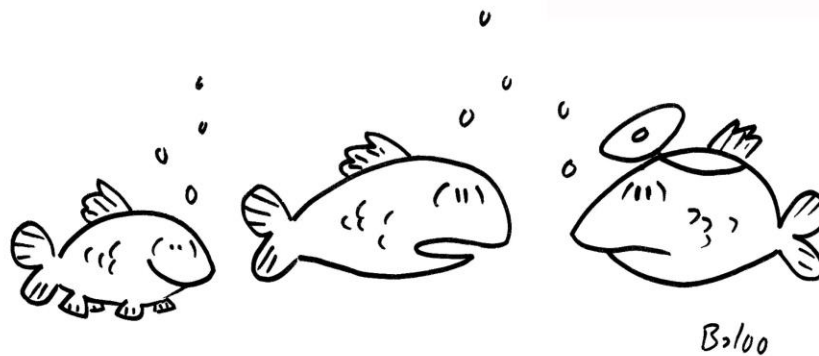
352-392-1625

Meeting Time: MWF, 10:40-11:30 p.m. (Period 4)

Meeting location: MAT 102

Office: Anderson Hall 130

Office Hours: M (2-3 p.m.); W: (2-3 p.m.) or by appointment



"You've got to help my son, Doctor
— he's joined a cult that crawls
up on beaches!"

CartoonStock.com

All religions were once new; hence the phenomenon of new religious movements (NRMs) is nothing particularly new...Several factors make it seem likely, however, that the 20th century saw much more by way of religious diversity than previous periods in history.

—George Chryssides, 2012¹

¹ *Historical Dictionary of New Religious Movements*, edited by George Chryssides, Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2012, 1.

Course Overview and Themes

Course Description

This course examines the “cult” and “new religious movement” in the context of modernity. Students will explore common typologies of religious groups, the dynamics of charismatic leadership, the sociology of small-group behavior, millennialism and apocalypticism, schism, violence, and government response, along with models of conversion—including “brainwashing.” They will trace the dynamics of tension and accommodation as groups change over time and investigate how new religious groups push the boundaries of social norms concerning family, sexuality, work and community. Specific groups to be reviewed include the Shakers, Mormons, Peoples Temple (Jonestown), Rajneeshies, Branch Davidians, and Wicca. Methodological approaches include sociology and religious studies. Students will perform case studies or engage in comparative work on two or more groups. They will also develop a toolkit for evaluating the phenomenon of new religion through close reading, discussion, and written and oral presentation. Most classes include a short clip of a film, TV show or documentary that can be further explored by students outside class.

Course Objectives

Students will:

- Be familiar with the academic literature surrounding cults and new religions and learn how to think about them from sociological, historical-critical, psychological, and religious studies perspectives.
- Be able to explain basic concepts like typologies of religious groups, charisma, conversion, millennialism and apocalypticism, and understand theories of religious violence.
- Know the history of well-known and controversial new religious movements and “cults,” such as Mormonism, Peoples Temple (Jonestown), the Unification Church (“Moonies”), Scientology, Heaven’s Gate, Falun Gong, the Branch Davidians (Waco tragedy), and Wicca.
- Evaluate one or more specific traditions from methodological perspectives introduced in the class through an in-depth writing project.

Role in Curriculum

This course serves as an elective for Religion majors and minors. It also provides Social and Behavioral Sciences General Education credits.

Course Contract

By accepting this syllabus, you are agreeing to participate in frank discussions of many matters that are commonly avoided in public and considered offensive or disturbing by some. These include—but are by no means restricted to— unusual ritual practices and forms of social organization, alternative approaches to sexuality, gender, and child rearing, and religiously motivated violence, including suicide and mass suicide. If you are not ready to critically discuss such matters, do not take this course.

Assignments and Grading Rubric

Assignments

- Attendance (taken in class or via in-class Canvas quizzes)
- In-class online quizzes (four)
- Blog and discussion posts (four)
- Family tree assignment
- Interview assignment
- Writing: Two papers: a 3-page group review and a 10-page research paper
- Group oral presentation: Share your research with the class
- Midterm exam: Multiple choice, short answer and essay in class mid-term exam

Assignment Description

1. Course participation and attendance (15% of grade). Includes attendance, contribution to class discussions, and completion of in-class polls and assessments. To achieve full credit for participation, students should be consistently prepared, engage in discussion, actively take notes, and offer informed questions and comment.
2. Examinations: 20% of grade. Four quizzes (8% of grade). Midterm Examination (12% of grade). The midterm will cover all lectures, readings, and class discussion during weeks 1–7. The three quizzes after the midterm will cover material learned between the midterm and the end of the course. Up to two extra credit assignments may be completed consisting of a 500-word reflection on a film or interview with an NRM member, with a maximum of 10 points to be applied to the exam grade.
3. Assignments: 65% of grade.
 - Family Tree assignment (10 points) Classify a group of interest in comparison to established religious traditions.

- Interview (30 points). Interview a member of a new religious movement and submit the responses.
- Single group review (100 points).
- Blog posts (4 @ 15 points each). Write 200 or more words discussing a topic of interest, incorporating course readings and engaging with fellow students.
- Final paper (200 points).

Assignment	Points per Assignment	Percentage Weight
Attendance		15%
Quizzes	4	8%
Assignments	400 points	65%
Midterm Exam	150 points	12%
Total		100%

More about the Paper Requirements...

One of the goals of the class is to familiarize you with and give you practice applying social scientific research methods. Therefore, we will be using APA style, which is commonly used for social science research. All papers must be submitted both in a hard (paper) copy and uploaded to Canvas via Turnitin. We will be going over the paper requirements in detail, but below is a basic idea of what to expect.

Single-group review: Write a three-page review of a single new religious movement and apply at least one of the methodologies reviewed in class or reading (600 to 750 words plus bibliography and endnotes). Grading principles for the single-group review are as follows:

- Clearly describes the group belief system and its relationship to a particular religious tradition (25 points).
- Explains how and in what ways the group changed over time (20 points).
- Explains group behavior in light of a particular methodology (25 points).
- Format: Printed double-spaced, in 12-point Times New Roman font, with standard one-inch margins all around (10 points).
- In-text author-date citations (10 points).
- Bibliography containing at least *six* scholarly print items (meaning university press books, academic journal articles, and similar), three from course readings

and three from unassigned or optional readings, with no missing information (10 points).

Final Paper: Write a paper of which the text makes up 2,500 words, and any references and citations are in addition to 2,500 words. The proposal and outline make up one-third of the total paper grade. The paper topic can be either an in-depth historical treatment of a single group (including the same one as for the single issue review) or a comparison of two groups, using more than one methodology. The final paper grade consists of three parts:

- 1) Paper proposal: The research proposal must include a tentative title, abstract (100 to 200-word summary of the intended approach), and an annotated list (formatted in appropriate APA Reference style) of at least five academic sources not assigned as part of the course reading and five of the assigned readings. You are welcome to include additional academic or non-academic sources, such as media reports, and material produced by the group and its current or former members. Indicate which methodologies you intend to use (historical-critical, sociological, psychological). Include names of the theories that you intend to apply or critique, for example, Dawson's criteria for the instability of charismatic authority. (75 points)
- 2) Final paper. (100 points).
 - a) Clearly describe the group belief system and its relationship to a particular religious tradition (20 percent).
 - b) Explain how and in what ways the group changed over time (15 percent).
 - c) Introduces (with citations and quotations) one or more methodological approaches to explaining the group's origins or behavior (20 percent).
 - d) Make an argument about the group's origins, belief systems and/or behavior in light of a particular methodological theory and take a stand either agreeing with, enhancing or opposing the theory (20 percent). The methodological portion (items c and d), including any citations and discussion, must make up at least 3 pages (750 words) of the total length, whether consecutive or interspersed with the historical material.
 - e) Format: Printed double-spaced, in 12-point Times New Roman font, with standard one-inch margins all around (5 percent).
 - f) In-text parenthetical citations following APA style. Use footnotes only for explanatory material; otherwise, use author-date references. (10 percent)
 - g) *Bibliography* containing at least **ten** scholarly print items (meaning university press books, academic journal articles, and similar, of which five must be from the course readings and five may be from optional readings or original research). The bibliography should be presented in APA style (10 percent) and should include all sources cited in the paper, including course readings, scholarly print items and any other print, electronic or video materials.

- h) Submit online via Turnitin and via hard (paper) copy.

Grading Policies

The course follows the standard UF grading scheme.

- A 94 to 100
- A- <94 to 90
- B+ <90 to 87
- B <87 to 84
- B- <84 to 80
- C+ <80 to 77
- C <77 to 74
- C- <74 to 70
- D+ <70 to 67
- D <67 to 64
- D- <64 to 61
- E <61 to 0

There is no A+ grade. Grades are not rounded up; for example, a 93.85% is an A- and not an A; grades are consistent with UF

policy: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

Late or Missing Assignments

Late assignments will be penalized and may not receive credit.

Course Policies

Communication with Instructor

Communication and grading will take place online through Canvas. Please enable Canvas to forward all course announcements and instructor communications to your email so that you stay informed. You may email me directly but communication through Canvas is preferred.

Use of Technology

During class, electronic devices may be used only for note-taking or participation in the course, such as accessing readings or completing online polls. Headphones may not be worn in class.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Any student with a documented disability seeking academic adjustments or accommodations (including those involving the use of technology) is requested to speak with me during the first two weeks of class. All such discussions will remain as confidential as possible. Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester. The Disability Resource Center may be contacted here: 352-392-8565; <https://disability.ufl.edu/>

Canvas Reading Assignment Pages are Authoritative

The syllabus distributed at the beginning of class may be updated. The course reading assignment pages on Canvas are the operative and binding version, so to be sure of your assignment, check Canvas rather than the version distributed at the beginning of class. No additions will be made to course assignments as provided in the syllabus, though due dates may be adjusted and readings may be substituted or removed.

Attendance and Participation

Class attendance is required. Do not register for this class if you cannot attend on time. Tardiness harms your understanding of the material and disrupts the class. Please let me know about any planned absences (for religious holidays, athletic events, or other reasons) as soon as possible, and at least 24 hours in advance. For unplanned absences (due to illness or emergency), please let me know as soon as possible and provide paper or electronic documentation (e.g., doctor's note) if possible. While some absences are unavoidable, if you expect to be unable to make classes on a regular basis, you must receive permission in advance. Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found in the [online catalog](#). Attendance will be taken by way of an online check-in via Canvas, with password given out at the beginning of class.

Returned Assignments

Assignments will usually be graded no later than one week after they were due.

Academic Honesty and the Honor Code

Students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Students caught plagiarizing or cheating will automatically receive a grade of zero on the assignment in question and may fail the course. In addition, they will be reported to the

appropriate university authorities. Please keep in mind that plagiarism does not consist only in copying verbatim someone else's material and presenting it as if it were yours. It also includes taking ideas (even paraphrased!) from an author without according him/her proper recognition (through a footnote, for instance). Other forms of cheating (particularly downloading material from the Internet and presenting as if it were yours) will also be subject to the same action. See the [policy website](#) for more information.

Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations during the available interval. Summary results of these assessments will be available to students. Evaluations are completed [here](#).

Reading Assignments and Course Schedule

Required Text (purchase)

Dawson, Lorne. (2006). *Comprehending Cults: The Sociology of New Religious Movements*. Ontario, Canada: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Selections from Additional Texts Available on Canvas (Required)

Ashcraft, W. Michael. (2018). "Cultic Studies," chapter 6 in *A Historical Introduction to the Study of New Religious Movements*. London: Routledge, 103-133.

Barker, Eileen. (1993). "Charismatization: The Social Production of 'an Ethos Propitious to the Mobilisation of Sentiments.'" In *Secularization, Rationalism and Sectarianism: Essays in Honour of Bryan R. Wilson*, 181–201. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Cusack, Carole M, and Pavol Kosnáč. (2016). *Fiction, Invention and Hyper-reality: From Popular Culture to Religion*. London: Routledge, excerpts.

Davidson, Markus Altena. (2016). "The Elven Path and the Silver Ship of the Valar: two spiritual groups based on J. R.R. Tolkien's Legendarium," in Cusack, Carole M, and Pavol Kosnáč, eds. *Fiction, Invention and Hyper-reality: From Popular Culture to Religion*. London: Routledge.

Finley, Stephen C. (2022). *In and Out of this World: Material and Extraterrestrial Bodies in the Nation of Islam*. Duke University Press. Ch. 5, "Mother Ship Connections: Louis Farrakhan as the Culmination of Muslim Ideals in the Nation of Islam," pp. 131-157.

Francis, Richard. (2013). *Ann, the Word: The Story of Ann Lee, Female Messiah, Mother of the Shakers, the Woman Clothed with the Sun*, chapter 2. New York: Skyhorse.

- Homer, Michael W. (1999). "The Precarious Balance Between Freedom of Religion and the Best Interests of the Child." In *Children in New Religions*, 187–209, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Kripal, Jeffrey. (2007). "From Emerson to Esalen: America's Religion of No Religion." *Chronicle of Higher Education* 53:32 B6-B8, April 15.
- Lewis, James R. (2016). "Seekers and Subcultures." In *Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements* 2: 60–71.
- Mueller, Michelle. (2017). "The Chalice and the Rainbow: Conflicts Between Women's Spirituality and Transgender Rights in US Wicca in the 2010s." In *Female Leaders in New Religious Movements*, edited by Inga Bårdsen Tøllefsen and Christian Giudice. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Palmer, Susan Jean. (1994). *Moon Sisters, Krishna Mothers, Rajneesh Lovers: Women's Roles in New Religions*, chapter 2. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Palmer, Susan J. and Frederick Bird. (1992). "Therapy, Charisma and Social Control in the Rajneesh Movement." *Sociological Analysis* 53, pp. S71-S85.
- Palmer, Susan J. and Charlotte E. Hardman. (1999). "Alternative Childhoods." In *Children in New Religions*, 1–8, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Puttick, Elizabeth. (1999). "Women in New Religious Movements." In *New Religious Movements: Challenge and Response*, edited by Bryan Wilson and Jamie Cresswell, pp. 143-162.
- Prophet, Erin. (2016a). "Charisma and Authority in New Religious Movements." In *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements*, 2:36–49.
- Prophet, Erin. (2016b). "New Religion." In *Religion: Sources, Perspectives, and Methodologies*, edited by Jeffrey Kripal, 159–76. Macmillan Interdisciplinary Handbooks. Boston: Macmillan Reference.
- Prophet, Erin. (2018). *Coercion or Conversion: A Case Study in Religion and the Law CUT v. Mull v. Prophet 1986*. Gainesville, FL: Linden Books.
- United Nations Human Rights Council. (2019). "Forcible deprogramming of members of Shincheonji in the Republic of Korea." May 2019.
- Wessinger, Catherine. (2001). *How the Millennium Comes Violently: From Jonestown to Heaven's Gate*, Chapter 2, 12-29. New York: Seven Bridges Press.
- Wright, Stuart A. and Susan J. Palmer. (2016). *Storming Zion: Government Raids on Religious Communities*. Chapters 1 and 5. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Yates, Bonnie. (2017). "John Victor Stoen: Son of Jonestown" Alternative Considerations of Jonestown & Peoples Temple, 6-1-2017. https://jonestown.sdsu.edu/?page_id=30909

Optional Reading:

Arrington, Leonard J., and Davis Bitton. (1979). *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints*. London: Allen & Unwin.

Coltri, Marzia A. (2017). "Women and NRMs: Location and Identity" pp. 11-28 in *Female Leaders in New Religious Movements*, edited by Inga Bårdsen Tøllefsen and Christian Giudice. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Introvigne, Massimo. (2004). "Brainwashing Just Ain't What It Used to Be: From *The Manchurian Candidate* (1959, 1962) to *The Manchurian Candidate* (2004)," CESNUR: Center for Studies on New Religions. http://www.cesnur.org/2004/mi_mc.htm

Melton, J. Gordon. (2000). "Spiritualization and Reaffirmation: What Really Happens When Prophecy Fails." In *Expecting Armageddon: Essential Readings in Failed Prophecy*, ed. John R. Stone, 144–157. New York: Routledge.

Van Eck Duymaer van Twist, Amanda. (2015). *Perfect Children: Growing Up on the Religious Fringe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Course Schedule

Lecture #	Day	Topic	Reading	Assignments
1	Week 1 Mon. Jan. 9	Syllabus and Course Contract; Student Learning Goals		Film clip
2	Week 1 Wed. Jan. 11	Ways to Study NRMs	Prophet 2016b, "New Religion"	
3	Week 1 Fri. Jan 13	What are Religious Families?	Dawson ch 1, "Why Study NRMs?"	
	Week 2 Mon. Jan. 16	NO CLASS, Martin Luther King Jr. Day		
4	Week 2 Wed. Jan. 18	Definitions and Methodologies	Dawson ch 2, "What are NRMs?" pp. 14-25 Prophet (work in progress)	Due online: Initial student query
5	Week 2 Fri. Jan. 20	Definitions and Methodologies (cont.)	Dawson ch. 2, "What are NRMs?" pp. 26-38	
6	Week 3 Mon. Jan. 23	Why Do New Religious Movements Emerge?	Dawson ch 3, pp. 39-58;	Due online: Family Tree assignment
7	Week 3 Wed. Jan. 25	Origins: The Shakers	Encyclopedia of Religion, "Shakers"; Francis ch 2 (25-50);	
8	Week 3 Fri. Jan. 27	Origins: The Mormons	Dawson ch. 3, pp. 59-70 Arrington and Bitton, ch 1 (optional)	
9	Week 4 Mon. Jan. 30	Who joins and why?	Dawson ch 4	
10	Week 4 Wed. Feb. 1	Milieus and Settings	Lewis 2016, "Seekers and Subcultures."	
11	Week 4 Fri. Feb. 3	Movement milieus	Encyclopedia of Religion, "Nation of Islam";	Due: Interview with a Member of an NRM
	Week 5 Mon. Feb. 6	Nation of Islam Focus	Finley, ch. 5	
11a	Week 5 Wed. Feb. 8	Hindu-Oriented NRMs	None	Group work on definitions and origins
	Week 5 Fri. Feb. 10	NO CLASS (Catch up on reading)		
12	Week 6 Mon. Feb. 13	Introduction to Charisma	Prophet 2016a; Film clips	Review for Quiz 1
13	Week 6 Wed. Feb. 15	Charisma: Rajneesh	Palmer and Bird 1992	Quiz 1

Lecture #	Day	Topic	Reading	Assignments
14	Week 6 Fri. Feb. 17	Charisma: Sun Myung Moon	Barker, "Charismatization."	Due: Blog Post 1 on Milieus and Settings
15	Week 7 Mon. Feb. 20	Brainwashing	Dawson ch. 5, pp. 95-103; Optional: Introvigne.	
16	Week 7 Wed. Feb. 22	Conversion vs. Brainwashing	Dawson ch. 5, pp. 103-119	Due: Single-group review
17	Week 7 Fri. Feb. 24	Formulations of Brainwashing	Dawson ch. 5, 119-124	
18	Week 8 Mon. Feb. 27	Deprogramming	Ashcraft ch. 5, 103-117;	
19	Week 8 Wed. Mar. 1	Coercive Persuasion and the Law Outside the United States	Richardson 2011; UN Human Rights Council 2019.	
20	Week 8 Fri. Mar. 3	Types of Exit	Prophet "Coercion or Conversion," 2018 (exc.)	
	Week 9 Mon. Mar. 6	Group Work: Brainwashing; Review for Midterm		Film clip and group work in class
	Week 9 Wed. Mar. 8	MIDTERM	In class	Due before class: Blog post 2 on brainwashing
21	Week 9 Fri. Mar. 10	Sex and Family Dynamics	Dawson ch. 6, 125-132;	Review midterm
	Mar. 13-17	SPRING BREAK: No class. Work on research.		
22	Week 10 Mon. Mar. 20	Women's Roles	Dawson ch. 6, 136-141, Puttick, "Women in NRMs"; Optional: Coltri 2017, "Women and NRMs"	Due: Proposal and outline for final research paper
23	Week 10 Wed. Mar. 22	Female Leadership	Palmer 1994, ch. 3, "Lovers and Leaders"	
24	Week 10 Fri. Mar. 24	Children	Dawson ch. 6, 132-135; Palmer and Hardman 1999, ch 1: "Alternative Childhoods"; Optional: Van Eck Duymaer van Twist, Intro & ch 1;	
25	Week 11 Mon. Mar. 27	Children's Interests	Homer, "Precarious Balance"	
26	Week 11 Wed. Mar. 29	Children as Actors and Weapons	Yates, "John Victor Stoen"	In-class group work on sex and family dynamics

Lecture #	Day	Topic	Reading	Assignments
27	Week 11 Fri. Mar. 31	Violence (Begin case study, Jonestown)	Dawson, ch. 7 142-146	
28	Week 12 Mon. Apr. 3	Jonestown, cont.	Dawson ch. 7, 152-168	
29	Week 12 Wed. Apr. 5	Government Intervention	Wright and Palmer, ch. 1	
30	Week 12 Fri. Apr. 7	Government Intervention cont.: Waco Raid	Wright and Palmer, ch. 5, "The Branch Davidians"	
31	Week 13 Mon. Apr. 10	Millennialism/Apocalypticism	Dawson ch. 7, 146-152, 168-178 Optional: Encyclopedia of Religion, s.v. "Seventh-Day Adventists"; Melton, "What Really Happens"	Revision to paper proposal and outline due (if required by instructor)
32	Week 13 Wed. Apr. 12	Millennialism: Branch Davidians/Review for Quiz	Wessinger, "How the Millennium Comes Violently," ch. 2.	
	Week 13 Fri. Apr. 14	Group Discussion: Government Intervention		In class: Quiz 3, Group Work
33	Week 14 Mon. Apr. 17	Cultural Significance: Modernism, Postmodernism, Metamodernism	Dawson ch. 8	
34	Week 14 Wed. Apr. 19	Fiction-based NRMs	Reading: Cusack and Kosnáč, Davidsen;	
35	Week 14 Fri. Apr. 21	Tradition and Innovation	Mueller, "Conflicts US Wicca";	
36	Week 15 Mon. Apr. 24	Tradition and Anti-Tradition Esalen	Kripal, "From Emerson to Esalen"	
	Week 15 Wed. Apr. 26	Oral Presentations and Review for Quiz 4		
	Week 15 Fri. Apr. 28	Oral Presentations		Due: Final Paper (paper copy submitted to Dr. Prophet's office) In class: Quiz 4
		No Final Exam		

Campus Resources

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

U Matter, We Care: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit umatter.ufl.edu/ to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

Counseling and Wellness Center: Visit counseling.ufl.edu/ or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.

Student Health Care Center: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit shcc.ufl.edu/.

University Police Department: Visit police.ufl.edu/ or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).

UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; ufhealth.org/emergency-room-trauma-center.

ACADEMIC RESOURCES

E-learning technical support: Contact the UF Computing Help Desk at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.

Career Connections Center: Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services career.ufl.edu/.

Library Support: cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

Teaching Center: Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352-392-6420. General study skills and tutoring. teachingcenter.ufl.edu/

Writing Studio: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers. writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/

Student Complaints On-Campus: sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/

On-Line Student Complaints: distance.ufl.edu/student-complaint-process/ /