

HIS 191, Cults, Chakras, & Crunchy Granola
Instructor: Daniel Gorman Jr.
Ethnography/Interview Report
July 2019

Courses on U.S. religion often stay within the walls of the classroom. For this assignment, you will break out of the classroom to study lived religious experience in the City of Rochester. As an interviewer, a visitor, and a field researcher, you will create an ethnographic report. Ethnography is a form of anthropological research in which the author participates in a community to learn about it.

You will select a Rochester New Age site from the attached list and, after confirming your choice with me, make formal arrangements to visit the site. I have contacted the organizations and individuals listed below, and all of them are amenable to student visits or meetings. Some of the sites have specific instructions about visits, while others may allow more flexibility. While there, you should ask questions, make observations, and take notes recording your impressions. You must get the permission of the site managers before making any recordings or taking photographs.

Afterward, you will write a **five-page, double-spaced report** based on your visit. A strong paper will first describe why you choose your site, and then provide your observations and impressions from the visit. This descriptive section, giving insight into how people act and think at this site, will be the core of your ethnography. A key part of ethnographic research is the ability of the author to reflect on their relationship with a community. You should discuss any assumptions or preconceived notions you had before visiting the site, and how or if they changed because of your visit. Finally, your paper should connect your site to themes or events in American religious history. While you do not need a narrow thesis, as in a research paper, you should try to make some kind of interpretive claim about the site and the activities practiced there. By incorporating relevant materials from our course readings and discussions, you can contextualize your site and help your reader (in this case, me) see the connection between national trends and local religious life. **Please use Chicago Style footnotes and include a bibliography.**

Alternatively, you might choose to interview someone from the Rochester area who is deeply involved in a New Age tradition, and write a report based reflecting on your conversation. Such an interview does not have to occur at a specific religious site. Harriette Royer from the Warner School of Education has offered to be one such individual, but you are welcome to seek out another person, depending on the New Age practices that interest you. As with a site visit, you must confirm your interview choice with me in advance. Your report in this case should summarize the conversation, instead of narrating a site visit, but it should still include self-reflection and a connection to historical trends.

Your report is due by 11:59 PM on Friday, July 19. Submit your paper via Blackboard. You should also submit your notes (typed or scanned) and any media produced during your visit/interview. This report counts as **25% of your semester grade**, and there are only two-plus weeks in which to do it, so I encourage you to schedule your visit or interview

ASAP. Visiting the Writing Center may help you to refine your argument. You can make an appointment with a writing tutor on the center's website. Papers that receive a B letter grade or higher will be considered for inclusion in *Digitizing Rochester's Religions*, a digital project spotlighting students' research into local religious sites. I am leading this project in conjunction with the Digital Scholarship Lab.

Acknowledgment: This assignment is partially based on Dr. Joshua Dubler's ethnography assignment for REL 155/HIS 175, "Religion in America," which was taught at the University of Rochester in the spring 2014 semester.

Possible Sites to Visit

Baha'i Center of Rochester.

Eckankar Rochester Center.

The Hindu Temple of Rochester.

Mystic Moon [store].

Mythic Treasures [store].

Harriette Royer, Warner School of Education: Organized labyrinth walks for 21 years.

White Lotus Buddhist Center.