

Title: “Cults in the Classroom”

Speaker: Wind Goodfriend, Buena Vista University

Abstract

Students find cults intrinsically fascinating. They watch documentaries about Jonestown, NXIVM, Charles Manson, and others. How can we capture that curiosity and use it to both maintain their interest in our courses and help them understand difficult and abstract psychological concepts? In this workshop, Dr. Wind Goodfriend will explain how she has incorporated the psychology of cult leaders, cult members, cult indoctrination, and escape and healing from cults in her own courses. Using documentaries, academic journal articles, general-audience memoirs from cult survivors, or even just by presenting historical examples, you can use cults in the classroom to demonstrate a wide range of concepts including (but not limited to): critical thinking, persuasion techniques, personality traits, cognitive dissonance, social identity theory, operant conditioning, optimal distinctiveness, and more.

During this workshop, attendees will experience an example of a one-day small group discussion activity based on critical thinking and cults. Activities like this one (and explained in this session) can be incorporated into courses like Introductory Psychology, Social Psychology, or First-Year Seminar – or you could follow Dr. Goodfriend’s syllabus for an entire semester-long course on the Psychology of Cults. The focus on psychology and cults can therefore range from a single day, a unit, an extra credit assignment, or an entire semester.

Anyone who attends the session will receive access to a website with materials including the slides for the NITOP presentation, open-source readings, activities, the contact information for a cult survivor who is willing to be a guest speaker in classes (via Zoom or Teams – no travel expenses needed), and the syllabus for Dr. Goodfriend’s Psychology of Cults semester-long course, for those interested in teaching their own version of the class.

Bio

Wind Goodfriend has been teaching psychology at Buena Vista University – a Midwestern liberal arts school of only 800 students – for twenty years. She received her B.A. from Buena Vista University and both her Master’s and Ph.D. in Social Psychology from Purdue University. She’s won the Faculty of the Year award three times, received the 2024 Undergraduate Teaching and Mentoring Award from the Society for Personality & Teaching of Psychology (SPSP), and was the Recipient of the George Wythe Teaching Award, one of the nation’s largest teaching awards for undergraduate faculty.

Wind has written three textbooks with Sage Publications: Social Psychology, Intimate Relationships, and Psychology and Our Curious World. The first two both won the Most Promising Textbook of the Year award from the Textbook and Academic Authors Association in their first edition. The third book is just coming out in January 2025, in alignment with the NITOP conference.

Her research focuses on understanding and preventing intimate partner violence, as well as on stereotypes and stigma related to gender and sexual minorities. She also analyzes how popular culture media (movies, TV shows, and video games) reflect psychology concepts. She has over 100 publications on these topics in peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters. Wind is the author and narrator of

three Audible Original books, and her new docuseries on the psychology of cults is now available through The Great Courses.

Wind teaches 8-10 courses per year, including special topics courses on Psychology in Popular Film, Relationship Violence, Psychology of Gender, and Psychology of Cults. She previously served her university as the Assistant Dean of Graduate Studies and is currently the Assistant Dean of Liberal Arts.