

Emerging Scholars 2022 Summer Research Program  
8-Week Proposal

Do You Believe in Q? The Religio-Politics of QAnon

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My name is Paris Gallagher and I am a Junior from . I am double majoring in Religious Studies and Political Science with a minor in Legal Studies on a Pre-law track. I hope to develop an honors thesis my senior year that combines my two majors and investigates my interests. I am applying for the Emerging Scholars Program to develop a clear thesis statement, an annotated bibliography and a structural outline.

## **I. Topic Summary**

I will examine QAnon as a new religious movement in order to understand how it uses religious symbolism in the service of its political agenda. I plan to compare QAnon to other American new religions to understand how it attracts new members and mobilizes them towards political action (including violence) through a religious worldview.

I became interested in QAnon when I read about “Pizzagate” in 2016. Everything I thought I knew about the movement changed when Professor Penniman introduced the idea of QAnon as a religion in my What Is Religion class. I became intrigued by the way Qs religious motifs were shaped by political ideologies and I developed an interest in New Religious Movements. The January 6th assault on the capital proved that QAnon was something more than a harmless conspiracy and that a deeper understanding of its rhetorics, its motivations and its symbolism is needed.

January 6<sup>th</sup> illuminated the power of belief to undermine democratic governance through perpetuating violence and paranoia. Many of the capital rioters were adherents of Q and justified their actions with ideologies deployed by the movement. The storm on the capital demonstrated QAnon’s capability to incite violence and highlighted the devotion of its followers. The

implications of January 6<sup>th</sup> make the study of QAnon's religio-politics relevant to current events and important towards our understanding of 21<sup>st</sup> century American politics.

## **II. Research Methods**

I would begin my research by exploring scholarly sources on New Religious Movements and formulate my own, informed definition of what classifies a movement to be a "NRM". I then would apply this standard to QAnon and investigate how the movement operates as a religion. To do this, I plan to explore secondary sources such as books and academic articles that analyze the characteristics of NRMs and assess the role of religion in communities that organize themselves around conspiracy theories. I would analyze common themes amongst NRM's such as apocalypticism, The Great Awakening, and patterns of NRMs. Additionally, I would engage with sources regarding Evangelicalism and right-wing Christian groups to examine their commonalities with QAnon. Since QAnon is a contemporary and evolving movement, I would refer to primary sources such as current news sources, documentaries, books and interviews with Q followers for research.

To understand QAnon's political agenda, I would gather information from scholarly sources that discuss political activism, populism, political ideologies, conspiracies and 21<sup>st</sup> century politics in America. My American Politics and Political Theory classes contributed to my ability to understand political systems, movements, democracy and interpret scholarly work.. In addition, I would utilize my background in qualitative methods to conduct political science research. This early research will allow me to cultivate a deeper understanding of how QAnon operates as a New Religious Movement within the political sphere of America.

### **III. Research Goals**

1. Clarified research question and thesis
2. Annotated bibliography
3. Tentative outline

### **IV. Relationship of Project to Academic Goals**

As a humanities fellow, one of my obligations is to produce an independent research project. My interest in QAnon and its relation to my majors propelled me to pursue an honors thesis in the subject. I am confident in my ability to undertake the research required of me to form an outline. As a humanities student, I have gained experience with critically engaging with scholarly work and developing analytic arguments. In addition, my background as a Political Science major has given me experience with research projects and papers. I think my double-major supplied me with the skills I need to succeed in my research and eventual thesis. From the research process, I hope to sharpen my bibliography and citing skills and develop my research skills on long term projects. By researching a topic across disciplines, I hope to improve my analytical and writing abilities by formulating a complex argument.

### **V. Mentor Relationship**

My mentor for this project, Professor Penniman, is also my academic advisor and favorite professor. He introduced me to Religious Studies and the lessons he taught me in the classroom has shaped my academic career and altered my worldview. I feel comfortable coming to him with any question or comment and receiving constructive criticism on my work. I look up to Professor Penniman as a professor and person and appreciate how he has mentored me

throughout my time at Bucknell. With his knowledge of NRM's and our previously established relationship, I think we would work great together. I am available to be on campus all summer and Professor Penniman will return from sabbatical in Greece in early June. During the spring, as I develop the research plan for the summer, we will zoom and correspond over email regularly. Once he returns, we will meet in person at least once a week in addition to communicating over email. During our meetings we will evaluate my progress, discuss the content of my reading material, and strategize next research steps and address questions.

I am a motivated, disciplined and dedicated student who is genuinely interested in their studies. I have a passion for the humanities and am fascinated with studying the worldviews of others who have different beliefs than myself. I hope to show the inseparable nature of our society's social, political and cultural forces through examining QAnon's ideologies.