

**REL 4933: The Comparative Study of Religion
Women Religion and Society**

Fall 2013

Thursdays: 8-10 periods (3:00 - 6:00 PM)

MAT 007

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Course Description

This course is a required capstone seminar for religion majors. Its aim is to engage students in both the field of religious studies and important religious issues in the larger society. This semester the course will compare and contrast religions' (most especially Judaism, Christianity and Islam) impact on women in the societies in which these religions are practiced. We will also focus on the efforts of feminist scholars and activists to alter women's roles and status in these religions and their societies. As Kwok Pui-lan has written:

For some time, feminist scholars in religion have pointed to the obliteration of women's religious experiences as a result of androcentric biases in male scholarship. They have exposed deep-seated patriarchal religious norms and practices, presented new knowledge about women's religious roles and leadership, and reclaimed women's subjectivity and consciousness."

Through our readings, viewing of films and documentaries and discussions we seek to understand the role of religion in the subjugation and oppression of women. There seems to have been a long delay (over 3,500 years) in women coming to a group consciousness of their own subordinate positions in religion and society. Many have argued that women are "complicit" in their own subordination and have most often embraced the role and status religion designates for them. We will attempt to understand such "complicity" in women's upholding of the patriarchal religious systems that have oppressed them and in some instances killed them (let's not forget the European "Witch hunts" of the 15th and 16th Centuries, genital mutilation which kills thousands still and the horror of "honor killings", which are also occurring as I write this sentence.) Our specific focus

will be on the three monotheistic traditions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) and their historic roles in both the subjugation of and liberation of women.

Objectives:

The objectives of this class include but are not limited to:

- To introduce students to a history of the role of women in the three Abrahamic Faith Traditions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam).
- To introduce students to concepts of gender and women's roles as defined in these three religions.
- To learn what feminists in these three faiths are saying about the role of women in their religions.
- To learn about some of the actions, feminist scholars in these faiths are proposing to change the status of women in their traditions.
- To critically reflect upon and possibly challenge the view-points of the scholars we are studying.
- To develop one's own perspective on the role of women past present and future in these three faiths.

Required Course Materials:

Rita M. Gross, *Feminism & Religion: An Introduction*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1996. print

Leona M. Anderson and Pamela Dickey Young, editors, *Women and Religious Traditions*, 2nd edition, Oxford U.P. 2010. print

Richard H. Hiers, *Women's Rights and the Bible: Implications for Christian Ethics and Social Policy*, Pickwick Publications, 2012. print

James C. Raines & Daniel C. Maguire, eds., What Men Owe to Women: Men's Voices from World Religions, SUNY Press, 2001. print

You will also need a composition book or binder for your journals.

My view of the classroom experience; your role and mine:

I see the optimal learning environment as one in which the students and the teacher are actively engaged in the learning and teaching process. The class belongs to everyone in it and everyone has the responsibility to make the class interesting and inviting. "I will not be feeding you facts that you will then regurgitate".¹ Each of you must contribute to the class experience by having thoroughly read the assigned materials, thought about the readings and written your reflections on the readings in your journals, which you will be keeping for this class. I will act as a facilitator for our discussions, generally opening the class period with an initial statement about the materials read for that class, raising questions, giving my opinions as well as soliciting yours.

Classroom Environment:

We will be discussing sensitive volatile and controversial issues in this class; religion, feminist critiques of religion, sexism, misogyny, etc. It is to be expected that we will have differing opinions on these issues. Some of the things read or seen might be disturbing, or unsettling. Therefore we must all agree that, "everyone has the right to their own opinion and the right to a classroom free from hostility, ridicule, or embarrassment".² Every student is expected to be mature, act responsibly and understand that we are engaged in the academic study of religion, in which all issues are open for challenge and debate.

Ethical Conduct:

The university and I expect the highest degree of ethical comportment in this class. Getting caught cheating will lead to failure in this class as well as university disciplinary action. Examples of cheating include: plagiarizing a written assignment, copying from another student's work or letting someone copy for yours, cheating on exams, etc.

Students with Disabilities:

Students requesting classroom accommodation or special consideration must first register with the Dean of Students

¹ Sara Crawley, Syllabus for "Interdisciplinary Perspectives of Women", Summer A 2000, p2.

² Crawley, 2.

Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation of special consideration.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Attendance and Participation:

As we will only have 15 class meetings, your participation and attendance in class is very important. You are permitted 2 unexcused absences without penalty. However, unexcused absences after the first two will impact negatively upon your grade. Each class missed is extremely important. Therefore, 3 points will be deducted from your final grade for each unexcused absence after the first two. **Class participation will account for 15% of your grade.**

Assignments:

2. Reading and Keeping a Journal:

This is a reading intensive course. Therefore, **reading the assignments** is by far the most important responsibility of the student. Next you must try to understand the reading(s) and **write your reflections on the assigned readings in your journal, which you will keep throughout the semester.** I will **randomly collect** everyone's journal **3 times during the course of the semester.** You must **bring your journal to every class** because if I ask for it and you do not have it, it will count as a 0 for one of the 3 grades you will receive for your journal. You also need the journal for classroom discussions, as I will expect you to refer to it in class discussions at each class. **Your Journal will account for 20% of your grade.**

3. Writing Four Reaction Papers

Four Reaction Papers to assigned readings (6 pg. minimums equal 6000 +words) will be written during the course of the term (Reports on these readings will be made in class by an assigned person in each class and along with the instructor's comments on the readings will serve as the basis for our weekly discussions). The teacher will grade each paper and return it with my comments and critique of your writing. Each student will be given the opportunity to

re-write a paper that has less than a B grade. A signup sheet for these reaction papers and presentations will be circulated at the 2nd meeting of this class.) The four reaction papers will count for **40% of your grade.**

4. Conducting Research and Writing a Final Term Paper

You will be asked to write **a final research paper (8-12 pages)** on a topic of your choice, which must be approved before you begin working on the project. Each student will give an in-class report toward the end of the semester on his or her project with a handout that gives an overview of the project and lists the bibliography for the project paper. All papers must be typed, double-spaced with no greater than 1 inch margins on each side and top and bottom. The papers are to be typed in 10 to 12 point fonts. Grammar, spelling, and punctuation count toward the grading of all papers. Dates for the papers and more information will be posted on the Sakai class site.

Grades will be based on these four things:

- **Class participation - 15%** (this includes your project presentation to the class with synopsis and bibliography as well as your involvement in class discussions).
- **Journal (3 grades of 10% each) - 20%**
- **4 Reaction Papers- (10% each) -40%**
- **Research Project and paper- 25%**

Grading Polices and Scale:

Full information about UF's grading policy, including credit for major, minor, General Education and other requirements is available at this website:

<http://www.registra.ufl.edu/catalog/polices/regulationgrades.html>

The grade scale for this course is as follows:

A = 94-100
A-= 90-93
B+= 98-87
B = 86-83
B-= 82-80
C+= 79-77
C = 76-73
C-= 72-70
D+= 69-67
D = 66-64
D-= 63-60

E = 59 & Below

Please note that a C- is not a qualifying grade for major, minor, General Education or College Basic distribution credit. To achieve such credit you must achieve a C or better in this class.

<http://www.isis.ufl.edu/minusgrades.html>

Weekly Readings and Discussion Topics plus additional information about the Course will be handed out in our first class and posted on our Sakai class site.

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