

**Special Topics: Gender, Nature, and Religion**  
**REL 4937 / Fall 2009**  
**Tuesday/Thursday, 2:00-3:15**  
**GPA 119**  
**Professor: Whitney Bauman**

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**Office Hours: Tuesday 4-6pm; Thursday 4-6pm; And by Appointment.**

### **Course Description**

This course will explore the relationships between “gender,” religious traditions and concepts of “nature.” On the one hand, the history of feminist reflection upon religion and the environment (also known as eco-feminism) has developed from essentialist constructions of gender and “nature” toward that of ecological and social constructions of “gender” and “nature.” Furthermore, these critiques highlight the continued relationship between social oppressions (such as sexism, racism, and classism) and ecological degradation. On the other hand, concepts of both “religion” and “nature” continue to serve as foundations for gender, race, and other forms of discrimination. Toward that end, we will examine a variety of positions (geographically, politically, and religiously) that attempt to “queer” concepts of gender, nature, and religion, including those of: Val Plumwood (Feminist Philosopher of the Environment, Australia), Marcella Althus Reid (Queer Theory, Scotland), Ivone Gebara (Christian Ecofeminist, Brazil), Vandana Shiva (Physicist and Activist, India), Wangari Maathai (Activist, Kenya), Donna Haraway (Philosophy of Science, US), and Daniel Spencer, (Environmental Studies, US).

### **Course Justification**

Contemporary ecological crises pose new threats to the human and earth community and thus call for paradigm shifts in the way we look at human-human and human-earth relations. Contemporary ecological ills are more and more tied to social inequities and oppression. To a great extent, poor women and children face the brunt of ecological disasters. They are “the least of these” in regards to contemporary ecological problems. Thus, this course will focus on the connections between social oppression and ecological degradation through the lens of gender construction and its relationship to constructions of “nature.”

### **Aim of the Course**

To explore the role of gender in religious, philosophical, and scientific discourses and to examine the relationship between gender constructions and environmental issues.

### **Learning Outcomes**

This course will: a) introduce students to the literature in “eco-feminist” thought, b) introduce students to the roles that religious and scientific discourses play in shaping the concept of “gender” and c) provide students with tools for analyzing the relationship between gender and environmental issues.

## **Requirements/Grading:**

Recognizing that there are many different learning styles, these requirements are designed to provide you with a variety of ways in which you can demonstrate your engagement with and knowledge of the materials in the course.

### Participation (20%) (100pp)

The first step to doing well in this class is to show up! You can't be a part of the learning community if you are not present. If you have to be absent from the course, please notify me ahead of time. Any more than two absences (unless there are extenuating circumstances) will result in a lowering of your participation grade. One absence is a free-bee. The second you may use the "get out of class" free card that I am providing on the first day of class.

The second step to doing well in this course is to read the materials. I trust that you will read the materials for each week's class. But just for fun, there may be a few, in class, pop-quizzes throughout the semester if the instructor feels that people are not reading.

The third step to doing well in the class is to speak up during course discussions. I realize that we all exist on a spectrum between introversion and extroversion, but remember that the classroom is as good as all of the voices therein. We all lose if we don't hear your voice at some point(s) throughout the semester.

The classroom is a community of learners. That is, we are all in the process of critically engaging the lectures and course materials together. Learning should be a collaborative process and it will take all of us to learn this semester. Having said that there are some ground rules that should be followed in course discussions and assignments.

1. Confidentiality: Sometimes we are exploring serious issues in the course that may be hard to speak about or give voice too. I expect that students will respect one another's privacy in this course and allow room for this type of exploration.
2. Trust and Respect: The classroom is a learning community and it is only as good as the relationships of the people that make up the classroom. Give your classmates the benefit of the doubt before jumping to conclusions about what is said. Also, be sure to state your opinions, questions, ideas and beliefs in a way that is not intentionally disrespectful to others in the class.
3. Academic Honesty. In all written materials, students will be expected to cite sources. Plagiarizing and "Copying" from other students may result in a failing grade. Grading for written assignments will follow the Rubric that is handed out on the first day and posted on Blackboard.
4. Other "Ground Rules" will be discussed in the first day of class.

Class Presentation (20%) (100pp). All Students are required to pick one Thursday in class to present on the course readings for the topic of that week. These presentations can use video, art, music, discussion, case studies, etc. in order to present the ideas and/or information in a given week's reading. Students may have to work in groups some weeks, but in no more than groups of 3. These presentations are intended to get the course reading discussion going. Thus, they do not have to be an hour long, but rather are intended to initiate us into the discussion of the course readings.

### Mid-term Essay (30%) (100pp)

All Students will take a mid-term essay exam, which will cover course lectures, readings, and discussions through **October 8<sup>th</sup>**. The Exam will be distributed at the end of class on **October 13<sup>th</sup>** and must be turned in by **October 20<sup>th</sup>**.

Final Essay (30%) (100pp). Students will write a final essay of 6-10 pages based on the content of the course. The goal of the paper is to apply some of the critical theories and methods learned in the course to specific issues. Each student will sign up with the professor on **October 1**, for an office-hour time to discuss the final paper. Students should bring to that office hour discussion a **one-page** proposal outlining which of the following three questions will be addressed and an idea for how this will be done.

There are Three Ways you can Approach this Final Paper.

1. (Methods/Theory). What are **two** arguments from the course materials that suggest “religion” and “nature” have been used to reinforce gender biases and/or heteronormativity? Do you agree with these arguments? Why or why not? In this essay, the idea would be to explore, for instance, whether or not the scientific revolution led to both a concept of “women” and “nature” that are passive materials for male use. Or, the idea that Darwin’s theory of evolution reinforces a heteronormative understanding of the rest of the natural world.
2. (Author-Based). Take **one** of the authors in the course and write a paper on his/her approach to the relationship between gender and nature: Are they essentialist? Constructivist? Or Post-Gender? What Scientific, Philosophical, and/or Religious data do they use to support their understanding of Gender and Nature? The point here would be to critically analyze one of the authors we have read during the course of the semester. (Whether in one of the handouts or the required texts.)
3. (Issue-Based). Pick **one** specific issue such as water issues, farming issues, family values, or education. In the paper, show how sexism and/or heterosexism shape both the social and environmental lives of women, men, and others differently. Is there a link between social oppressions of gender and/or sexuality and ecological degradation? Why, or Why not.

In each of the three examples, the essay should include course materials (lectures/readings/discussions), and at least one outside book source, one outside article, and one outside electronic resource. The essays should follow the Chicago style of citation (which will be posted on our blackboard site). Furthermore, the essays should have a clearly defined thesis/argument (What is the goal of this essay) that is then demonstrated/defended. **The final essay will be due on the date of the final exam.**

### Grading Scale

A	96-100	C	72-77
A-	91-95	C-	71, 70
B+	89, 88	D+	69, 68
B	82-87	D	62-67
B-	80, 81	D-	60, 61
C+	79, 78	F	59 and below

## Required Texts

Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2005). ISBN: 0742535304.

Scheibinger, Londa. *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (Rutgers University Press, 2004) 2<sup>nd</sup>, ed: ISBN 081353531X.

Rachel Stein, *New Perspectives on Environmental Justice: Gender, Sexuality and Activism* (Rutgers UP, 2004). ISBN 0813534275.

Other Readings will be distributed in class.

## Helpful Texts/Resources

## Important Dates

### Schedule:

### Part I: Making the Connections

#### **Week One: The Gender, Nature, Religion Triangle**

August 25: Class One: Introduction to the Syllabus and the learning community

*In class essay: What is Religion? What is Gender? What is Nature?*

August 27: Class Two: Introduction to Gender, Nature, and Religion Triangle

#### **Readings:**

#### **Week Two: Gender and Science; Gender and Religion**

September 1: Class Three: Introduction: Gender, Religion and Science

#### **Readings:**

*Pick Discussion Sections!*

September 3: Class Four: Research Trip to FIU Library

#### **Week Three Introduction: What is Eco-Feminism?**

September 8: Class Five: Religious, Philosophical, and Scientific Ecofeminisms

#### **Readings:**

September 10: Class Six: Discussion

#### **Readings:**

#### **Week Four: Introduction: What is Queer Theory?**

September 15: Class Seven: The Performance of Gender/Sexuality; The Science of Gender/Evolution's Rainbow

**Readings:**

September 17: Class Eight: Discussion

**Readings**

## **Part II: Comparative Approaches**

### **Week Five: Religion Gender and Nature: Abrahamic Faiths**

September 22: Class Nine: Western Religions and Scientific Underpinnings of Gender

**Readings:**

September 24: Class Ten: Discussion

**Readings:**

### **Week Six: Religion, Gender, and Nature: "Eastern" Traditions**

September 29: Class Eleven: Eastern Religions and Holistic Gender Constructions

**Readings:**

October 1: Class Twelve: Discussion

*Sign-up to Discuss Final Papers*

**Readings:**

### **Week Seven: Religion, Gender, and Nature: Indigenous and Neo-Pagan Traditions**

October 6: Class Thirteen: "Third Spirits," Goddesses, and Mother Earth/ Shaman's Witches and Magic

**Readings:**

October 8: Class Fourteen: Discussion

### **Week Eight: Religion, Gender, and Nature: The Death of Nature**

October 13: Class Fifteen: The Scientific Revolution and the creation of "nature"

**Readings:**

*Hand out Mid-Term.*

October 15: No class. Work on Mid-term.

### **Week Nine: Religion, Gender and Nature: The Death of Nature (cont)**

October 20: Class Seventeen: From Midwives and Witches to Doctors

*Turn in Mid-Term*

*In-Class, Mid-Term Evaluation*

**Readings:**

October 22: Class Eighteen: Discussion

**Readings:**

**Week Ten: Religion, Gender, and Nature: Queer(y)ing Heterosexual Norms in Science**

October 27: Class Nineteen: Connection of Religion, Nature and Heterosexual Norms: Evolution's Rainbow Part II

**Readings:**

October 29: Class Twenty: Discussion

**Readings:**

**Part III: Contemporary Issues**

**Week Eleven: Contemporary Issues: Animals, Humans, Companions and Cyborgs. A Post-human future?**

November 3: Class Twenty-Three: Animals, Gender, Nature, Technology

**Readings:**

November 5: Special Guest Lecture!!!!

**Readings:**

**Week Twelve: Contemporary Issues: Post-Colonial, *Mestiza* Identities**

November 10: Class Twenty-One: The Virgin of Guadeloupe, The first Man to Give Birth, the Third Spirit, and the Queer God

**Readings:**

November 12: Class Twenty-Two: Discussion

**Readings:**

**Week Thirteen: Contemporary Issues: Reproduction and Family**

November 17: Class Twenty-Five: Marriage and "Family Values"

**Readings:**

November 19: Class Twenty-Six: Discussion

**Readings:**

**Week Fourteen: Contemporary Issues: Farming, Water, and Education:  
Globalization and its Gendered Discontents**

November 24: Class Twenty-Seven: The Case of India

**Readings:**

November 26: No Class Thanksgiving Holiday! Rest! Catch Up!

**Week Fifteen: Contemporary Issues: Farming, Water, and Education:  
Globalization and its Gendered Discontents**

December 1: Class Twenty-Eight: The Case of Indigenous Amazonians

**Readings:**

December 3: Last Class/ Wrap Up/ Discussion

*In class essay: What is Religion? What is Gender? What is Nature?*

**Final Essay due on final exam date!!**