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Course Syllabus

REL3145- Women and Religion

Department of Religious Studies

Florida International University



"A thinking Woman sleeps with monsters" – Adrienne Rich

*But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt. -
Genesis 19:26*

*...Who weeps for such a woman, for so small
A loss in such a brutish circumstance?
Yet ever in my heart I will recall
That wife who laid her life down for a glance - Anna Akhmatova.*

Course Description and Purpose

Are all world religions sexist? Does God have a gender? Why the controversy about women as religious leaders? Are men and women created equal? Are there female leaders in the histories of world religions? What is the relationship between violence against women and chauvinistic interpretations of sacred texts? What is feminism, and why it is important for religious studies?

This course explores world religions from a feminist perspective, focusing on how women transform their religious traditions, and how the experience sacred transforms women's lives. We

will survey historical and contemporary perspectives on religious gender roles, leadership, religious experience, and identity. Through an interdisciplinary lens, we will investigate the ways religion influences societal ideas about race, gender, and class, and vice-versa.

We will rediscover the central role of the sacred in mobilizing social changes across histories and geographies through the biographies of women such as Aisha, Joan of Arc, and Rigoberta Menchú. We will also study different theoretical approaches about gender and religion and test them on historical and recent case studies.

Our investigation will be organized around three intersecting sections: 1) Recognizing the diversity and plurality of sacred texts and interpretations, 2) Exploring how the concept of the Divine informs our worldview and social identities, 3) Understanding the consequences of conceptualizing the Divine through a gendered, racialized, and sexualized lens, 4) Feminist tactics on how to identify the anatomy of the sacred in our everyday life. Classes will be filled with a mixture of readings, films, podcasts, and discussions.

Course Requirements	Number of Items	Points for Each	Total Available Points	Weight
Discussions	13	10	130	20%
Women, Religion, and Civic Engagement Slideshow	1	100	100	15%
Final paper (Part A and B)	2	10-90	100	30%
Midterm or Final Exam	1	100	200	20%
Creative Journal	1	100	100	15%
Total	19	N/A	630	100%

Letter	Range%	Letter	Range%	Letter	Range%
A	95 or above	B	83 - 86	C	70 - 76
A-	90 - 94	B-	80 - 82	D	60 - 69
B+	87 - 89	C+	77 - 79	F	59 or less

Course Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Understand the significance and definitions of religion and gender and their influence in every-day life.

- Explain the interconnectivity between gender, race, class, and religion.
- Identify what roles have been assigned to women within world religions in various time periods.
- Recognize and explain the patterns in women's religious lives and how they respond to exclusion from central areas of the tradition, or from gender-based assignments within the tradition.
- Describe what the sacred texts of world religions have said about women.
- Evaluate the diverse feminist perspectives and interpretations that have reshaped the meaning of womanhood within religion.
- Describe the contemporary issues of women within the religions of the world.
- Understand how religion influences and informs women's secular participation and exclusion.

Important Information

Policies

Before starting this course, please review the following pages:

- [Policies](#)
- [Netiquette \(Links to an external site.\)](#)
- [Technical Requirements and Skills](#)
- [Accessibility and Accommodation](#)
- [Academic Misconduct Statement](#)
- [Panthers Care & Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#)

Course Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this course.

Textbook and Course Materials

Required: They are available in our bookstore, but make sure to search the internet for the cheapest copy! Other materials will be made available through Canvas.

- Women and Religious Traditions, by Leona M. Anderson and Pamela Dickey Young (Third or Second Edition)
- *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality* by Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ

Recommended: (There will be more recommended material in each module)

- *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* by Delores S. Williams

Course Detail

Expectations of this Course

This is an online course, which means most (if not all) of the course work will be conducted online. Expectations for performance in an online course are the same for a traditional course. In fact, online courses require a degree of self-motivation, self-discipline, and technology skills, which can make these courses more demanding for some students.

Students are expected to:

- **Review how to get started information** located in the course content
- **Introduce yourself to the class** during the first week by posting a self-introduction in the appropriate discussion forum
- **Take the practice quiz** to ensure that your computer is compatible with Canvas
- **Interact** online with instructor and peers
- **Review** and follow the course calendar
- Log in to the course **at least three times** per week
- Respond to discussion boards, blogs, and journal postings with **four days**
- Respond to **Canvas messages** within **two days**
- Submit assignments by the corresponding deadline

The instructor will:

- Log in to the course **five times** per week
- Respond to discussion boards, blogs, and journal postings within **two days**
- Respond to **Canvas messages** within **one to two days**
- Grade assignments within **three days** of the assignment deadline

Discussion Forums - 20%

Keep in mind that your discussion forum postings will be seen by other members of the course. Although your post is expected to be conversational, be mindful of your grammar, delivery, clarity, and respect.

Do not wait until the last minute to reply to your classmates, or they won't have a chance to respond to you! Try to spread out your answers between Thursday and Sunday. Visit the discussion board, and don't leave your classmates hanging even if you have posted your two replies.

See [the rubric](#)  for further details.

- Discussion **topics** are **listed** for the semester. You are expected to post your **initial** response by **Thursdays at 6 PM**, and your **two replies** must be submitted by **Sunday** at 6 PM. This means that by Sunday, you should have at least a **total of three posts**.
 - **Length/ How many posts/ replies?**
 - Initial post due **Thursday, 6 PM**. Approx. 200-250 words
 - Three Peer responses due **Sunday, 6 PM**. Approx. 65-75 words
 - **Style:**

- **Develop your post in essay format:** Introduction, body, and conclusion. Use the new **vocabulary and concepts** learned in the reading material.
- Although you may have experience using this type of asynchronous communication through texting or Facebook, your posts should be composed of complete and grammatically accurate sentences (no abbreviations please). Avoid writing in all caps (all caps = yelling).
- **Content:**
 - “I agree” is not enough: Avoid postings that are limited to 'I agree' or 'great idea', etc. “I agree” type of answers crowd the discussion board and make it harder for everybody to navigate the discussion. If you agree (or disagree) with a posting, then say why you agree/disagree by supporting your statement with concepts from the readings or by bringing in a related example or experience. Make each post count! Again, ask yourself whether your post brings value to the discussion.
 - **Quote your sources:** As you read, listen, and watch the material of week, jot down your favorite quotes and zingers. They will become a rich source of support you’re your discussions and essays. No need to use a particular style, just mention the last name of the author and page number: (Smith 10).
 - **Stick to the point:** Address the questions as much as possible (don't let the discussion stray).
 - **Connect to prior knowledge:** Bring in related prior knowledge (work experience, prior coursework, readings, etc.)
 - **Respond rather than add-on:** You will not get credit for any posts such as “I agree with x” or “Great job Y”. You’re expected to provide real contributions. Build on other's responses to create threads.
 - **Innovate, don’t replicate:** You usually have the choice between several questions. If you’re late contributing to the initial posts, try to answer questions that have not been addressed yet, even if they wouldn’t have been your first pick. The early bird...
 - **Take it beyond the readings:** Do quote the readings, but don’t stop there. Do your best to add value to the discussion. Ask questions you really want to find answers to, discuss what you found intriguing, confusing, share your top takeaways.
 - **Include links with current events to enhance your grade. Above all- be critical and enjoy the conversations!**
 - Feedback and grades will be available within two days.

Examinations Expectations – 20%

- There will be **two examinations**, a Midterm and a Final. Each test will contain 25 objective questions (multiple-choice, true/false, matching).

- Examinations will become available from **Thursdays 10:00 am – Sundays 11:59 pm**, and will last for **60 minutes**. Students will have the opportunity to take the examination **twice**. The **highest grade will be recorded**.
- **There will be practice quizzes available before the examinations.**
- Results:
 1. Students will be able to see the results after the availability period has ended.
 2. Students will be able to see all of the questions and answers.
- Turn-around time for feedback or grade – up to two days.

To mitigate any issues with your computer and online assessments, it is **imperative** that you take the [Practice Quiz](#) from each computer you will be using to take your graded quizzes and exams. For quiz duration, grading criteria, and feedback response time, please review the [important information about quizzes](#) page.

Written Assignments - 30%

Essays will be turned into Turnitin via Assignments in Canvas. It is not necessary to create a separate Turnitin account. Keep electronic and paper copies of all written work. For your own protection, keep a copy of your Turnitin electronic receipt until you have received your final grade for the course.

- Each paper has specific instructions posted on Canvas.
- **Extra Credit:** You can earn up to five points toward your paper by making an appointment with our Writing Center. You only need to paste the appointment confirmation number and name of your writing assistant.
- **Plagiarism:** What is it? How to avoid it? Please go to <http://integrity.fiu.edu/plagiarism.html> and learn the easy ways to prevent plagiarism. Do not use someone else's work as yours.
- **Late Assignments:** Check with the professor about your options. If possible, reach out before you fall behind.

Final Paper –20%: A list of topics for the final paper will be provided. Students are also encouraged to propose their own topics for the research paper; however, you must confirm your topic with the instructor to make sure that your thesis is not too broad or narrow. You may also choose one of the books below and write a book review. If you choose this option, make sure to get the book early during the semester. All books are available at the FIU library. If you are interested in a book that is not on the list, please inform the professor for consideration.

This paper is divided into two sections: Part A (10%) for the submission of your thesis statement, outline, and bibliography, and Part B for the complete report (20%). See module for further instructions.

- **Length:** 550-750 words, double-spaced, 12-sized-font, Times New Roman
- **Academic sources:** At least three (use our course material and check our library's website!)
- **Follow the MLA** (Links to an external site.) style to structure your paper. Reach out if you have questions about citations or any other matter about academic writing.
- See written communication rubric
- Please review the [important information about assignments](#) page.

Book Review options

- *The Veil and the Male Elite* – Fatima Mernissi
- *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* –Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza
- *Standing again at Sinai* –Judith Plaskow
- *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Goddess* –Starhawk
- *Buddhism after Patriarchy* –Rita Gross
- *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* –Gloria Anzaldua
- *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* –Jaquelyn Grant.
- *Body, Sex, and Pleasure: Reconstructing Christian Sexual Ethics* –Christine Gudorf
- *Blessing Same-Sex Unions: The Perils of Queer Romance and the Confusions of Christian Marriage* –Mark D. Jordan,
- *Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* –Carolyn Merchant.
- *The Church and the Second Sex* –Mary Daly.
- *Encountering Kali: In the Margins, at the Center, in West* –Rachel Fell.

Creative Journal - 15%

This portion of the class is interested in providing a place where you can use/explore your creative potential through different genres of art. The material of this class can be intense/complicated/painful/frustrating, so feel free to react to our weekly readings and videos in the manner you prefer.

- The only requirement is that you have five entries in your journal, which can be submitted as a document, video, podcast, song, etc. – or a mixture of these. Just make sure that if you are turning in a mixture of media, you convert your audio or video into a shareable YouTube link (you can make it private to only share with me) and paste this into a single word doc, PowerPoint, PDF, etc.
- Some artistic ideas: poems, sound clips, photos, articles, paintings, movie clips, and so on.

Course Calendar

Access your [Course Calendar](#) for course topics and assignments.

COURSE TOPICS

- See canvas for media (videos, podcasts, and news articles) and recommended readings*

Theoretical and Scriptural Introductions

Week 1: Why women and religion: Feminism and the Anatomy of the Sacred – August 22-28

- Saiving, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View" (Canvas)
- R. Gross, "Defining Feminism, Religion, and the Study of Religion" (Canvas)
- M. Walters, "The religious roots of feminism?" (Canvas)
- Pew study, The Gender Gap in Religion Around the World (Canvas)
- [Task: Discussion question #1](#)

Week 2: Naming the Sacred: Hermeneutics and the Power of Language - August 29- September 4

- D.M. Juschka, "Gender: What is gender? What is sex? What is gender/sex?" (Canvas)
- Reuther, "Sexism and God-Language" In *Weaving the Visions*
- Gross, "Has it always been that way?" (Canvas)
- "Selections from the inclusive language lectionary" in *Weaving the Visions*
- Recommended: Daly, "After the Death of God the Father" (Canvas)
- [Due: Discussion question #2](#)

Week 3: The Problem of Dehumanization: Theodicies and the Social Practice of *Othering* Women—September 5- 11

*September 5- Labor Day, NO ASSIGNMENTS

- Merchant -" Nature as Disorder: Women and Witches" (Canvas)Actions
- Wood, "The Doctor's Dilemma: Sin, Salvation, and the Menstrual Cycle in Medieval Thought"Actions
- Tribble, "Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread" In *Womanspirit Rising*, (Canvas)
- Wessinger, pp. 112-116, 119-127.
- The Devil's Gateway.
- [Due: Discussion question #3](#)

Women in Ancient Religions – September 12- 18

- Stone, "When God was a Woman" in *Womanspirit Rising* (Canvas)
- M. Gimbutas, "Women and Culture in Goddess-Oriented Old Europe" in *Weaving the Visions*
- Case study: Choose one of the following
 - B. Moon, "The Star who Became Queen" (Canvas)
 - C. Spretnak, "The myth of Demeter and Persephone" In *Weaving the Visions*
- Recommended: C. Downing, "Artemis" In *Weaving the Visions*

- [Due: Discussion question #3](#)

Week 4: Hinduism - September 19- 25

- in *What men Owe to Women* (Canvas)
- Ch 1, Women in Hindu Traditions, Anderson and Young
- Case Study: Folk, “Both Guru and Goddess: Mātā Amritānandamayī of Kerala” In Anderson and Young (p. 287)
- [Due: Discussion question #4](#)
- [Due: Women, Religion, and Civic Engagement Slideshow – Friday, Sept. 23, 11:59 PM](#)

Week 5: Buddhism - September 26- October 2

- Puntarigivat, “A Thai Buddhist Perspective” in *What Men Owe to Women* (Canvas)
- Ch 3, Women in Buddhist Traditions, Anderson and Young
- Case Study: Falk, “The Case of the Vanishing Nuns: The Fruits of Ambivalence in Ancient Indian Buddhism”
- [Due: Discussion question #5](#)

Week 6: Local Asian Religions - October 3- 9

- Ch 4, Women in Chinese Traditions, Anderson and Young
- Xiaogan, “A Taoist Perspective: Appreciating and Applying the Principle of Femininity” in *What men Owe to Women* (Canvas)
- Case Study: Choose one of the following:
 - Harvey, “Possession, Sickness, and Women Shamans in Korea” (Canvas)
 - Nadeau, “Harmonizing Family and Cosmos: Shamanic in Chinese Religions” (Canvas)
- [Due: Discussion question #6](#)
- [Midterm Opens Oct 6th-Due Oct. 9th by 11:59 PM.](#)

Week 7: African and Afro-Caribbean Religions - October 10- 16

- **October 14, Fall Wellness Day – No assignments.**
- Nkulu-N’Senga, “Bumuntu Paradigm and Gender Justice” in *What men Owe to Women* (Canvas)
- Teish, “Ancestor Reverence” in *Weaving the Visions*
- Case study: Choose one of the following
 - Brow, “Women’s Leadership in Haitian Vodou” in *Weaving the Visions*
 - Baum, “Alinesitoué: A Diola Woman Prophet in West Africa” (Canvas)
- [Due: Discussion question #7](#)

Week 8: Indigenous Religions: Australia, North, and Latin America - October 17- 23

- Women in Indigenous Traditions, in Anderson and Young

- Ronwanièn:te Jocks – “A Native American Perspective: To Protect the Ground We Walk on” in *What men Owe to Women* (Canvas)
- Collins, “Theology in the Politics of the Appalachian Women” In *Womanspirit Rising*, (Canvas)
- Case study: Choose one of the following
 - Marcos, “Beyond Binary Categories: Mesoamerica Religious Sexuality” (Canvas)
 - Gross, “Menstruation and Childbirth as Ritual and Religious Experience Among Native (Canvas)
- [Due: Discussion question #8](#)

Week 9: Judaism - October 14- 30

- Falk, “A Jewish Perspective” in *What men Owe to Women* (Canvas)
- Ch 2, Women in Judaism, Anderson and Young
- Plaskow, “Jewish Memory from a Feminist Perspective” in *Weaving the Visions*
- Case study: Neudel, “Innovation and Tradition in Contemporary Midwestern Jewish Congregation” (Canvas)
- Recommended: Plaskow, “The Coming of Lilith” (Canvas)
- [Due: Midterm, Content from Weeks 1-8, See practice quizzes and review sheet on Canvas.](#)
- [Due: Discussion question #9](#)

Week 10: Christianity 1: Catholicism - October 31- November 6

- Fiorenza, “Feminist Spirituality, Christian Identity, and Catholic Vision” In *Womanspirit Rising*, (Canvas)
- Tribble, “Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread” In *Womanspirit Rising*, (Canvas)
- Royan “A Catholic Perspective” in *What Men Owe to Women* (Canvas)
- Case study: Choose one of the following
 - Strasser, “Bones of Contention: Catholic Nuns Resist their Enclosure” (Canvas)
 - Campbell, “Dorothy Day and Women’s Power in the Church” (Canvas)
- [Due: Discussion question #10](#)
- [Submit Creative Journal, Nov. 6 by 11:59 PM](#)

Week 11: Christianity 2: Protestantism - November 7- 13

- Pagels, “What became of God the Mother” in *Womanspirit Rising* (Canvas)
- Women in Christianity, Anderson and Young
- Ellison, “A protestant Christian Perspective” in *What Men Owe to Women* (Canvas)
- Pew Study: The Divide over Ordaining Women
- Case study: Choose one of the following
 - Ross, “Religious Responsibility and Community Service: The Activism of Victoria DeLee”
 - Setta, “When Christ was a Woman Theology and Practice in the Shaker Tradition”
- [Due: Discussion question #11](#)

Week 12: Islam - November 14-20

- Engineer, “Islam, Women, and Gender in *What Men Owe to Women* (Canvas)
- Ahmed, “The Discourse of the Veil”
- Case Study: Choose one of the following
 - Mernissi, “Women, Saints, and Sanctuaries in Morocco”
- Hosseini, “The Construction of Gender in Islamic Legal Thought and Strategies for Change.”
- [Due: Discussion question #12](#)
- [Due: Final Paper Part A – Sunday, Sept. 20th, 11:59 PM](#)

Week 13: - November 21- 27

- Fall Break/Thanksgiving Break- No Assignments

Week 14: Women, Power, and Religion: Witches, Womanists, and Mujeristas - November 28- 4

- Starhawk, “Witchcraft and Women’s Culture” in *Womanspirit Rising* (Canvas)
- K. Blee, “Joining the Ladies’ Organization” in *Religious Women and Racism: KKK and Black Churches* (Canvas)
- Anzaldua, “Entering into the Serpent” in *Weaving the Visions*
- D.S. Williams, “Womanist Theology”
- Recommended: Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic” in *Weaving the Vision*
- [Due: Discussion Question#13](#)

Weeks 15-16: Study and Final’s Week- December 5-11

- December 5- Last Day of Classes
- [Due:](#)
 - [Turn in your Final Paper – Friday, December 9th by 11:59 PM.](#)
 - [Final Exam Opens December 5th- Due by Dec. 11, 11:59 PM \(Keep in mind that if you submitted your Midterm, it is optional to complete the Final Exam- the highest grade will be recorded\).](#)

Extra Credit

You will see extra credit opportunities appear throughout the semester. I will provide you with a list of articles and movies to choose from (you can also propose your own) if you wish to write a review. You will also receive the requirements if you are interested in writing a song, poem, interview, short story, or create an Instagram account or blog.

- Movie Review- up to 25 points EC
- Article Review – up to 25 points
- Poetry – up to 15 points EC
- Song– up to 15 points EC
- Short Story – up to 20 points EC
- Instagram account – Up to 30 points
- Blog- Up to 50 points
- Interview – Up to 25 points

