

Women and Religion, RLGS 200 and WMST 200
Alfred University Spring 2013

Class meetings: Tu-Fri 1:20 - 2:10 p.m., McMahon 358

Professor: Dr. Wakoh Shannon Hickey

Office hours: 2nd floor, Kanakadea Hall

Tuesday & Thursday 5:30-6:30 p.m.; Wednesday 4-6 p.m., mornings by appointment.

Please note: The *worst* time to catch me is immediately before class, especially if you have significant questions or concerns. I will be focused on getting organized for class, and unable to give you adequate attention. Please come during office hours or make an appointment.

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OVERVIEW

We will explore the lives of women in multiple religious traditions: indigenous, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim. We will explore the following concepts and issues: religion; academic religious studies; androcentrism, patriarchy, and feminism, both as an analytical method and as a social vision; reflexivity; social location (how one's sex, race, culture, religion, economic class, sexual orientation, age, etc., shape our attitudes and assumptions); the differences between sex, gender, and sexual orientation; social privilege of various kinds; authority, religious and otherwise; body image; sexual violence; religious freedom; structural violence and social justice. Class format will involve some lecture, but mostly seminar-style discussion of the readings. Students will take turns preparing questions and helping to facilitate class discussions.

This course is cross-listed with Women's Studies because most of the course material deals with the religious lives of women; it focuses on a variety of women's issues; and it examines the role of gender as a social construct.

Why This Class Matters

Developing basic religious literacy about the world's major religious traditions will help you understand different people and cultures in the world around you: in the communities where you live and work, and perhaps in your own family. Thinking about religions from academic and feminist perspectives (empathetically, reflexively, comparatively, and critically) will help you to avoid dogmatism, ethnocentrism, absolutism, and bigotry, and enable you to help *others* avoid them, because they produce and fuel violence, both interpersonal and structural. Focusing on the lives and experiences of women will help you to understand how gender is socially constructed, and how religious and cultural attitudes about gender affect both women and men. Reflecting on your own experience will help you to understand yourself better. This will, in turn, improve your ability to understand and communicate with those who differ from you, and to work with them

more effectively. The reading, writing, thinking, speaking, and teamwork skills you develop here will serve you throughout your academic life, and make you more valuable as a professional.

Methods

Students will read primary and secondary literature, take notes on lectures, complete writing assignments, lead and participate in classroom discussions, watch films, perform self-assessments, practice teamwork, and produce a final project. Class may host occasional guest speakers.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Level 1, Remembering:

- Define key terms: basic vocabulary and concepts in the various religious traditions we study, as well as key concepts such as feminism, androcentrism, patriarchy, sex, gender, sexual orientation, etc.
- Identify key rituals, disciplines, festivals, and/or observances in the traditions we study.
- Identify major sub-groups within the broad religious traditions we study.

Level 2, Understanding:

- Describe the religious traditions we study in terms of:
 - ways they understand and describe ultimate reality (creeds, myths, scriptures)
 - core problems or questions they try to address
 - moral guidelines and ethical values they consider important
 - rituals they practice and objects they regard as sacred
 - attitudes about gender

Level 3, Applying:

- Explain how broad theories of religion apply to particular religious traditions: e.g., Albanese's 4 Cs, Tweed's definition of religions, Smart's seven dimensions of religion.

Level 4, Analyzing:

- Reflect on your own social location and how it shapes your assumptions, attitudes, and choices, and explain why people whose social locations differ from yours might operate from different assumptions and attitudes, and make different choices.
- Explain how concepts such as patriarchy, androcentrism, feminism, reflexivity, social location, gender roles, privilege, and/or structural violence apply or appear in the experiences of the women whose essays and spiritual autobiographies we'll be reading.
- Explain how the religious traditions and people we study have changed over time, and how they have been affected by modernization, colonialism, and globalization.
- Develop critical questions about the reading materials for the class to discuss.

Level 5, Evaluating:

- Explain why you think particular arguments or claims made by the authors, your classmates, or the professor are or aren't persuasive to you. Identify strengths and weaknesses, citing specific evidence to make your case.

- Assess your own learning: strengths, areas for improvement, and insights, and evaluate your own performance in class.

Level 6, Creating

- Begin writing your own spiritual autobiography, explaining how material from the class has affected your thinking about your own experience.

GRADING

Because this class is a seminar, TWO THIRDS of your final grade will depend upon your weekly contributions to class: preparation, participation, and reflection.

- **Reflection** 24 SHORT (2-3 paragraph) journal or blog entries: 12 responses to class (at the end of each week except the last, reflecting on what you learned and questions you have as a result of classroom lectures/discussions); and 12 reflections on the assigned readings, in preparation for each week of class. 48 percent of final grade.

Class-response entries are due in Blackboard by 5 p.m. on Saturdays; reading-response entries are due by noon on Mondays.

If you can't finish all the reading by Monday at noon, write on what you have been able to read. Journal entries are somewhat informal, but they must be clearly organized (e.g., in paragraphs with topic sentences and transitions) and use proper English grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. They should be drafted, edited, and proofread before they are posted.

- **Participation:** arriving in class having done all or most of the reading, thought about it, and developed some questions or comments about it (that's what the reading journal entries are designed to help you do); contributing actively and thoughtfully to class discussions; leading or helping to lead part of class discussion once a week during the 4th-7th weeks of class.
22 percent of final grade.
- **Midterm and final papers,** worth 15 percent each and 30 percent total of final grade. Class will decide together the topics/questions for these papers.

COURSE POLICIES

Academic or Other Difficulties: If you are having academic or personal difficulties that affect your ability to do your work, and/or need information about support services available on campus, please see the professor right away. She will help you find appropriate resources on campus.

Disability: If you have a disability and need an accommodation to help you succeed in class, please let the professor know right away. All such information will be treated as confidential.

A Note from Special Academic Services re: Students with Disabilities:

Alfred University is committed to upholding and maintaining all aspects of the Federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. If you are a student with a disability and wish to request accommodations, please contact Dr. Aubrey Elmore at the Office of Special Academic Services located in Crandall Hall, or call (607) 871-2148. Any information regarding your disability will remain confidential. Many accommodations require early planning; therefore requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible. Any requests for accommodations will be reviewed in a timely manner to determine their appropriateness to this setting.

Tutor Services/Requests:

The office of Special Academic Services offers personalized help in the form of individual and group tutoring. Please contact Beth Niles at (607) 871-2148 for more information. Also, contact your instructor for additional support.

Writing Help: Whether you are having trouble getting started on a writing assignment or need a little help with editing along the way, the Writing Center offers individual assistance to meet your needs. To make an appointment, go to my.alfred.edu/writing and click on the link “sign up here.”

Religious Concerns: Students who need to miss class in order to participate in the religious observances of their own traditions may do so, but they must make arrangements with the professor *in advance* to make up any required work.

Athletes: Students who must miss class to participate in athletic events must notify the professor at the beginning of the semester *and* by e-mail at least one week before each class to be missed, and must make arrangements to get notes from class, contribute to class teamwork, and submit assignments timely. The one-week requirement will be waived in case of unscheduled playoff, but you should let the professor know as soon as possible of an expected absence.

Lateness and Absences: You are expected to arrive in class on time and attend all class meetings. If unforeseen circumstances will make you late, please make every effort to notify the professor before class, or ask a fellow student to do so. After the first week of class, you will be allowed **TWO** unexcused absences. After that, every unexcused absence will reduce your final grade by one full increment, e.g., from a B to a B-. *It is possible to do all the work and still fail the course because of unexcused absences.* If you know in advance that you must miss a class, notify the professor by phone or e-mail at least 48 hours in advance. Prearranged absences will not affect your grade (but you should ask classmates or the professor to inform you about class discussions, and complete assigned work timely). If you are ill, contact the professor by phone or e-mail as soon as you know you are too ill to attend class. Do not attend if you have a fever or are contagious.

Mobile Phone: Turn volume off and put it away before class begins. If you send text messages or otherwise use your phone without permission during class, the professor will collect and hold it until the end of class.

Ground Rules for Class Discussion: The classroom must be a productive and respectful environment for everyone, and religion can be difficult to discuss. Participants hold a wide variety of religious, moral, and political beliefs. In both the academy and society at large, human knowledge and community depend upon our ability to engage in civil discussions of such differences. You should be able to argue for your own positions on the basis of evidence and reason. You are *encouraged* to question or disagree with one another and the professor, respectfully. Insulting others' character, beliefs, or practices is not acceptable. Because personal integrity is fundamental to both good scholarship and good citizenship, you are also expected to uphold the university's standards for academic and personal integrity. Cheating, plagiarism, or harassment of any kind *will not be tolerated*.

All reference sources must be completely and correctly cited. If you have questions about how to cite a particular type of source, please ask. You may be asked to submit the midterm and final papers to www.turnitin.com before they are submitted to the instructor.

First violations of the Academic Dishonesty policy will result in a failing grade on the assignment. If the violation is severe, or if there is a second violation, it will be reported formally, in writing, to your dean and the University Provost, and will become part of your permanent academic record (unless you appeal and are exonerated). If your dean and the provost receive two formal, written reports of academic dishonesty from one or more instructors, you will be dismissed from the university. Two violations *in this course* will result in automatic failure of the course. *You are expected to inform yourself about and abide by school policies regarding academic integrity, plagiarism, and harassment.* If you have questions about these policies, ask the professor right away.

Alfred's Student Code of Conduct may be viewed here:

http://my.alfred.edu/index.cfm/fuseaction/student_policies.code_of_conduct_0708.cfm

Alfred's policy on Academic Dishonesty may be viewed here:

http://my.alfred.edu/index.cfm/fuseaction/academic_policies.academic_regulation_ug.cfm#700

Other campus policies and resources can be found here:

<http://my.alfred.edu/index.cfm/fuseaction/policies.menu.cfm>

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Rita Gross, *Feminism and Religion*

Judith Plaskow and Carol Christ, *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality*

Leila Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution*

Karen Armstrong, *The Spiral Staircase*

Ellen Schecter and Noah Arlow, *Fierce Joy*

Jan Willis, *Dreaming Me*

SCHEDULE

Week 1	Jan. 22-25	Key concepts: Religion, Religious Studies, Feminism	Read for <i>following week</i>
Tue	22	Intros, syllabus, learning levels	Feminism & Religion, Ch. 1
Wed	23	Religious Studies & Feminism	
Thu	24	Religions, definitions	Ch. 2
Fri	25	Discuss Feminism & Religion Chs. 1-2	Feminism & Religion Chapters 3-4
Week 2	Jan. 28-Feb. 1	Feminism & Religion Chapters 3-4	Feminism & Religion Chapters 5-6
Week 3	Feb. 5-8	Feminism & Religion Chapters 5-6	Weaving the Visions Part 1
Week 4	Feb. 12-15	Weaving the Visions Part 1	
Thu	14	"Miss Representation"	
Fri	15	"Miss Representation"	Weaving the Visions Part 2
Week 5	Feb. 19-22	Weaving the Visions Part 2	Weaving the Visions Part 3
Week 6	Feb. 26-Mar. 1	Weaving the Visions Part 3	Weaving the Visions Part 4
Week 7	Mar. 5-8	Weaving the Visions Part 4	
Fri	8	Midterm papers will be due	A Quiet Revolution Chs. 1-4
Week 8	Spring Break		
Week 9	Mar. 19-22	A Quiet Revolution Chs. 1-4	A Quiet Revolution Chs. 5-9
Week 10	Mar. 26-29	A Quiet Revolution Chs. 5-8	A Quiet Revolution Chs. 9-11
Week 11	Apr. 2-5	A Quiet Revolution Chs. 9-11	The Spiral Staircase
Week 12	Apr. 9-12	The Spiral Staircase	A Fierce Joy
Week 13	Apr. 16-19	A Fierce Joy	Dreaming Me
Week 14	Apr. 23-26	Dreaming Me	Dreaming Me
Week 15	Apr. 30-May 3	Dreaming Me	Write final reflection
Finals Week	Wrap-up, final reflections due.		