

The College of the Humanities: Religion
RELI 4850 B/5850 B: Seminar on Gender, Sexuality, Religion and Public Life

Professor Ash Geissinger

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Office Hours: Thursdays 9-11 am (online),
or by email appointment

Classes: Thursdays 2:35 am-5:25 pm (online; synchronous)

Course Description

As the news cycle frequently reminds us, gender and sexuality are central elements of religion and public life. This seminar course examines several aspects of this complex topic, with a particular focus on how some contemporary religious communities and religious discourses construct gender categories, sexualities, families, and communities, as well as the bodies of individual believers, and the varying ways that such constructions intersect with public life, with a particular focus on Canada and the US.

NOTE: It is assumed that all students who take this course have already taken at least one introductory Religious Studies course, and that as a result they are broadly familiar with the basic beliefs, practices and history of major world religious traditions. Any student lacking this background is expected to acquire it through extracurricular reading.

Course learning objectives

Students who complete this course successfully will:

- develop a clearer understanding of the various ways that gender and sexuality function in both religion and public life
- hone their skills at analyzing written texts and oral arguments
- strengthen their ability to formulate and articulate academic arguments supported by evidence, and express them in written form
- creatively apply existing scholarship to a research problem
- correctly cite sources using the Chicago style
- strengthen their ability to engage with the viewpoints of others constructively and critically
- improve their ability to communicate their research findings to others

Course Evaluation

- Regular, active, and informed class participation—30%
- Leading seminar discussion (twice; 5% per occasion)—10%

- 5 response papers (RELI4850: 1-2 pages each; RELI5850: 2-3 pages each)—25%
- Research paper/project proposal and annotated bibliography—10%
- Research paper/project—25%

COURSE POLICIES

Privacy and intellectual property

All course content is protected by copyright. Course discussions, presentations, written assignments, and other teaching and learning materials or activities whether by instructors or students are the intellectual property of their respective author(s). Recording the class without prior consent of the instructor and all other participants is prohibited. Posting any recording of the class online without the prior consent of the instructor and all other participants is also prohibited. Either of these acts violate Canadian privacy laws.

Course readings and other course materials

There is no textbook in this course. Links to all the assigned course readings and other course materials are available through the course webpage on Brightspace. These are mostly library resources—therefore, for the links to work, you need to be either on campus, or signed into the library website.

Participation

As this is a seminar course, doing the assigned readings, watching assigned videos, and attending class prepared to discuss these is vitally important and is therefore expected of all students, as is regular class attendance. A student who does not come to class regularly, or who routinely comes unprepared, cannot be regarded as having taken the course. Missing more than 3 classes will result in an F. Class attendance will be taken, and participation will be graded. If you are absent, participation marks cannot be made up in any way.

When preparing for class, write down questions that the readings and other course materials bring to mind, particularly focusing on the central issues for this course: How are gender, sexuality, religion and public life being represented in this reading? Why do they matter here? What purpose(s) does the author appear to have in mind by highlighting (or downplaying or ignoring) them? What sources and methodological approaches are being utilized and what do they (or don't they) allow us to see?

Leading class discussions

At the beginning of the semester, students will sign up for the two classes for which they will lead the discussion. Leading the discussion must involve the following: (1) a 15-minute

presentation about one of the readings assigned for the class, which briefly summarizes the main issues that it raises, highlights at least two critical questions that it raises for you in light of the course materials, and critically evaluates the central arguments made/methodologies that it uses, (2) followed by class discussion, which the presenter leads, and (3) fielding questions.

The response papers

The response papers (RELI4850: 1-2 pages each; RELI5850: 2-3 pages each) must contain (1) a short, clear summary of several of the main points made in one of the readings assigned for the class, (2) at least two thoughtful, critical questions that these readings raise, in light of the course materials, and (3) a discussion which contextualizes and further explains these questions and offers some preliminary responses to them. One of the response papers is to be done for the class that you lead the discussion; the other four are open to your choice. They are to be typed, double-spaced, with 12-point type. All response papers are due at the beginning of the class which they are associated with.

The research paper/project

All students will research a topic directly related to the content of this course and can choose whether to write a traditional academic research paper (RELI4850: 12-15 pages; RELI5850: 15-20 pages; standard essay format), or to present their findings in the form of a podcast or video (approx. 30 min; a complete script must be submitted). Regardless of the format, all papers and podcast or video scripts MUST use proper citation and contain a bibliography, following the Chicago style.

The paper/project proposal must contain: a working title, a thesis statement, and an annotated bibliography containing at least seven sources. The annotated bibliography must provide complete citations of the sources used in the essay. Each source is to be followed by several sentences which explain why it was selected and how it will be used. Students are expected to make extensive use of academic, peer-reviewed secondary sources in their research papers/projects, and to use all primary source materials analytically.

Each student must present their paper/project proposal in class on the day that proposals are due (this is part of your proposal grade). Presenting your work to colleagues as well as giving and receiving constructive feedback is an important part of academic life which is intended to strengthen your research. The due date for submitting the paper proposal is given in the course schedule (see below for policies regarding late submissions). Failure to submit the proposal by the deadline will mean that your research paper/project will not be accepted and will therefore receive a grade of zero.

Papers/projects which do not follow the instructions given in class will be returned ungraded for revision and resubmission. Late penalties (5% per day, including weekends) will accrue from the due date, regardless of when the problem was discovered.

All students will also give a class presentation on their completed research papers/projects during the last class of the semester. This presentation (which is part of your paper/project grade) must include: an overview of your research findings, fielding audience questions, and leading a short discussion.

Note that the final version of the research paper/project is due by Dec. 23 at 4 pm (Ottawa time).

Email communication

Please be aware that in order to ensure compliance with the federal privacy act known as FIPPA, Carleton communications policy states that faculty may only communicate with students through their Carleton Connect accounts. Therefore, ensure that any emails you may send me are from your Carleton Connect account. Otherwise, your email will not receive a response.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Sept 9—Introduction to the study of gender, sexuality, religion and public life

Readings:

Lincoln's "Theses on Method" [Method in Religious Studies - Religion and Public Life \(carleton.ca\)](http://carleton.ca)

Donald Boisvert, "Saint Brother André of Montréal and the performance of Catholic masculinity," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 48.1 (2019): 97-114.

I. Religious constructions of gender categories and community

Sept. 16—Gender categories and the study of religion

Readings:

Sandrina de Finney, "Indigenous girls' resilience in settler states: honouring body and land sovereignty," *Agenda* 112 31.2 (2017): 10-21.

Alicia Dueck-Read, "Breaking the binary: queering Mennonite identity," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 33 (2015): 115-133.

Alejandro Stephano Escalante, "Trans* Atlantic religion: spirit possession and gender ideology in Cuban Santería," *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 6.3 (2019): 386-399.

Sept 23—Ritual constructions and contestations of gender

Readings:

Shira Wolosky, "Foucault and Jewish feminism: the mehitzah as dividing practice," *Nashim* 17 (Spring 5769/2009): 9-32.

Samta Pandya, "Subverting patriarchy through celibacy, renunciation, and ritual performance: the *kanyas* of Sakori Ashram in India," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 35.1 (Spring 2019): 21-34.

Sept 30—Bodies, gender, and religious symbols

Readings:

Doris Jakobsh, "Seeking the image of 'unmarked' Sikh women: text, sacred stitches, turban," *Religion & Gender* 5.1 (2015): 35-51.

Amelie Barras and Anne Saris, "Gazing into the world of tattoos: an invitation to reconsider how we conceptualize religious practices," *Studies in Religion / Sciences Religieuses* 50.2 (2021): 167-188.

II. Sexualities and public life

Oct 7—Purity culture

Readings:

Elizabeth Gish, "Are you a 'trashable' Styrofoam cup? harm and damage rhetoric in the contemporary American sexual purity movement," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 34.2 (Fall 2018): 5-22.

Sara Moslener, "'It's like playing with a nuclear bomb': fear, accommodation, and the nationalist rhetoric of evangelical purity culture," *Theology & Sexuality* 18.3 (2012): 253-269.

[Dictating virginity | DW Documentary - YouTube](#)

Oct 14—Paper proposals due today

In-class presentations of paper proposals and discussion

Oct 21—LGBTQ identities, ancient texts, and contemporary religious discourses

Readings:

Andrew Yip, "Queering religious texts: an exploration of British non-heterosexual Christians' and Muslims' strategy of constructing sexuality-affirming hermeneutics," *Sociology* 39.1 (2005): 47-65.

Melissa Wilcox, "When Sheila's a lesbian: religious individualism among lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Christians," *Sociology of Religion* 63.4 (2002): 497-513.

"Trembling Before G-d" (Sandi DuBowski) [Film/Video Catalog \(carleton.ca\)](#)

Oct 28—Fall Break (no class)

Nov 4—Monogamies, nonmonogamies, and constructions of family and community

Readings:

Debra Majeed, "Agency and authority in polygyny," 28-51, in *Polygyny: what it means when African American Muslim women share their husbands* (University Press of Florida, 2015).

Angela Willey, "'Christian nations', 'polygamic races' and women's rights: toward a genealogy of non/monogamy and whiteness," *Sexualities* 9.5 (2006): 530-546.

III. Gender, religion, and constructions of authority

Nov 11—Gender and religious authority

Readings:

Scott Larson, “Histrionics of the pulpit: trans tonalities of religious enthusiasm,” *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 6.3 (August 2019): 315-337.

Juliane Hammer, “Gender justice in a prayer: American Muslim women’s exegesis, authority, and leadership,” *Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World* 8(2010): 26-54.

[THE NOBLE STRUGGLE OF AMINA WADUD - YouTube](#)

Nov 18—American religious nationalism, culture wars, and constructions of masculinity

Readings:

Joey Eschrich, “Behold the man!’: constructing the masculinity of Jesus of Nazareth in mainstream American film, 1961-2004,” *Men and Masculinities* 14.5 (2011): 520-41.

S. Jonathon O’Donnell, “The body politic(s) of the Jezebel spirit,” *Religion & Gender* 7.2 (2017): 240-255.

[Confronting History Webinar: Kristin Kobes du Mez, author of "Jesus and John Wayne" - YouTube](#)

Nov 25—Sexual violence, religion, and public life

Readings:

Jennifer Barry, “So easy to forget: Augustine’s treatment of the sexually violated in the *City of God*,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 88.1 (March 2020): 235-253.

Fatima Seedat, “Sexual economies of war and sexual technologies of the body: militarized Muslim masculinity and the Islamist production of concubines for the caliphate,” *Agenda* 30.3 (2016): 25-38.

Dec 2—Contestations of religio-legal and interpretive authority

Readings:

Justin Jones, “‘Where only women may judge’: developing gender-just Islamic laws in India’s all-female ‘Shari’ah courts’,” *Islamic Law and Society* 26 (2019): 437-466.

Ronit Irshai, “‘And I find a wife more bitter than death’ (Eccl 7:26): feminist hermeneutics, women’s midrashim, and the boundaries of acceptance in modern Orthodox Judaism,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 33.1 (Spring 2017): 69-86.

Dec 9—In-class paper presentations; course conclusion



Humanities

University Regulations for All College of the Humanities Courses

Academic Dates and Deadlines

[This schedule](#) contains the dates prescribed by the University Senate for academic activities. Dates relating to fee payment, cancellation of course selections, late charges, and other fees or charges will be published in the [Important Dates and Deadlines section](#) of the Registration Website.

Online Learning Resources

While online courses offer flexibility and convenience, they also present unique challenges that traditional face-to-face courses do not. [On this page](#), you will find resources collected by Carleton Online to help you succeed in your online courses; Learning Strategies and Best Practices, Study Skills, Technology and Online Interaction and Engagement.

Copies of Written Work Submitted

Always retain for yourself a copy of all essays, term papers, written assignments or take-home tests submitted in your courses.

Academic Integrity Policy (updated June 2021)

Plagiarism is presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas, or work of others as one's own.

Plagiarism includes reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else's published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one's own without proper citation or reference to the original source. Examples of sources from which the ideas, expressions of ideas or works of others may be drawn from include but are not limited to: books, articles, papers, literary compositions and phrases, performance compositions, chemical compounds, art works, laboratory reports, research results, calculations and the results of calculations, diagrams, constructions, computer reports, computer code/software, material on the internet and/or conversations.

Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:

- any submission prepared in whole or in part, by someone else;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, paraphrased material, algorithms,

formulae, scientific or mathematical concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;

- using another's data or research findings without appropriate acknowledgement;
- submitting a computer program developed in whole or in part by someone else, with or without modifications, as one's own; and
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another's work and/or failing to use quotations marks.

Plagiarism is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly by the course's instructor. The Associate Dean of the Faculty conducts a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include a final grade of "F" for the course.

[Academic Integrity Policy](#)

[Academic Integrity Process](#)

Academic Accommodation Policy

Carleton University is committed to providing access to the educational experience in order to promote academic accessibility for all individuals.

Academic accommodation refers to educational practices, systems and support mechanisms designed to accommodate diversity and difference. The purpose of accommodation is to enable students to perform the essential requirements of their academic programs. At no time does academic accommodation undermine or compromise the learning objectives that are established by the academic authorities of the University.

Addressing Human Rights Concerns

The University and all members of the University community share responsibility for ensuring that the University's educational, work and living environments are free from discrimination and harassment. Should you have concerns about harassment or discrimination relating to your age, ancestry, citizenship, colour, creed (religion), disability, ethnic origin, family status, gender expression, gender identity, marital status, place of origin, race, sex (including pregnancy), or sexual orientation, please contact the [Department of Equity and Inclusive Communities](#).

Requests for Academic Accommodation

You may need special arrangements to meet your [academic obligations](#) during the term. For an accommodation request, the processes are as follows:

Religious Accommodation

Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details, please review the [Student Guide to Academic Accommodation](#).

Pregnancy Accommodation

Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of

class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. . For more details, please review the [Student Guide to Academic Accommodation](#).

Survivors of Sexual Violence

As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit the [Equity and Inclusive Communities website](#).

Accommodation for Student Activities

Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details, see the [Senate Policy on Accommodation for Student Activities](#).

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you have a documented disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation or contact your PMC coordinator to send your instructor your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term. You must also contact the PMC no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your instructor as soon as possible to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. For more details, visit the [Paul Menton Centre website](#).

Grading System at Carleton University

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor, subject to the approval of the faculty Dean. Standing in courses will be shown by alphabetical grades. The system of grades used, with corresponding grade points and the percentage conversion can be found [here](#). Grade points indicated are for courses with 1.0 credit value. Where the course credit is greater or less than one credit, the grade points are adjusted proportionately.

Course Sharing Websites and Copyright

Classroom teaching and learning activities, including lectures, discussions, presentations, etc., by both instructors and students, are copy protected and remain the intellectual property of their respective author(s). All course materials, including PowerPoint presentations, outlines, and other materials, are also protected by copyright and remain the intellectual property of their respective author(s).

Students registered in the course may take notes and make copies of course materials for their own educational use only. Students are not permitted to reproduce or

distribute lecture notes and course materials publicly for commercial or non-commercial purposes without express written consent from the copyright holder(s).
[More information](#)

Student Rights and Responsibilities at Carleton

Carleton University strives to provide a safe environment conducive to personal and intellectual growth, free of injustice and characterized by understanding respect, peace, trust, and fairness.

The [Student Rights and Responsibilities Policy](#) governs the non-academic behaviour of students. Carleton University is committed to building a campus that promotes personal growth through the establishment and promotion of transparent and fair academic and non-academic responsibilities.

Deferred Term Work

In some situations, students are unable to complete term work because of illness or other circumstances beyond their control, which forces them to delay submission of the work.

1. Students who claim illness, injury or other extraordinary circumstances beyond their control as a reason for missed term work are held responsible for immediately informing the **instructor** concerned and for making alternate arrangements with the instructor and in all cases this must occur **no later than three (3) working days after the term work was due**. The alternate arrangement must be made before the last day of classes in the term as published in the academic schedule. Normally, any deferred term work will be completed by the last day of term. In all cases, formative evaluations providing feedback to the student should be replaced with formative evaluations. In the event the altered due date must extend beyond the last day of classes in the term, the instructor will assign a grade of zero for the work not submitted and submit the student's earned grade accordingly; the instructor may submit a change of grade at a later date. Term work cannot be deferred by the Registrar.
2. In cases where a student is not able to complete term work due to illness or injury for a significant period of time/or long term, the instructor and/or student may elect to consult with the Registrar's Office (undergraduate courses) or Graduate Registrar (graduate courses) to determine appropriate action.
3. If a student is concerned the instructor did not respond to the request for academic accommodation or did not provide reasonable accommodation, the student should consult with the department/school/institute chair/director. If a mutually agreeable accommodation to complete course requirements prior to the course grade submission deadline cannot be achieved, the Associate Dean will become involved. If academic accommodation is not granted, and the student receives word **after** the academic withdrawal deadline, the student may submit a petition to the Registrar's Office (undergraduate courses)/Graduate Registrar (graduate courses) for a final grade of WDN (Withdrawn) in the course(s). If academic

accommodation is not granted, and the student receives word **prior** to the academic withdrawal deadline, the student may elect to withdraw from the course(s).

4. Furthermore, if academic accommodation is granted, but the student is unable to complete the accommodation according to the terms set out by the instructor as a result of further illness, injury or extraordinary circumstances beyond their control, the student may submit a petition to the Registrar's Office (undergraduate courses)/Graduate Registrar (graduate courses). Please note, however, that the course instructor will be required to submit an earned final grade and further consideration will only be reviewed according to established precedents and deadlines. [More information of deferred Term Work](#)

Deferred Final Exams

Students who are unable to write a final examination because of a serious illness/emergency or other circumstances beyond their control may apply for accommodation. Normally, the accommodation for a missed final examination will be granting the student the opportunity to write a deferred examination. In specific cases when it is not possible to offer a deferred examination, and with the approval of the Dean, an alternate accommodation may be made.

The application for a deferral must:

1. be made in writing to the Registrar's Office **no later than three working days after the original final examination or the due date of the take-home examination**; and,
2. be fully supported by appropriate documentation and, in cases of illness, by a medical certificate dated no later than one working day after the examination, or by appropriate documents in other cases. Medical documents must specify the date of the onset of the illness, the (expected) date of recovery, and the extent to which the student was/is incapacitated during the time of the examination. The University's preferred medical form can be found at the Registrar's Office [here](#).

[More information on Final Exam Deferrals Registrar's Office "Defer an Exam" page](#)

Financial vs. Academic Withdrawal

Make sure that you are aware of the separate deadlines for Financial and Academic withdrawal!

Making registration decisions in Carleton Central involves making a financial and academic commitment for the courses you choose, regardless of attendance. If you do not attend, you must withdraw in [Carleton Central](#) within the published deadlines to cancel your registration. A fee adjustment is dependent on registration being canceled within the published [fee deadlines](#) and dependent on your course load. A course dropped after the deadline for financial withdrawal will receive a grade of Withdrawn (WDN), which appears on your official transcript.

Even if you miss the deadline for financial withdrawal, you might decide to drop a course to avoid a failure or a poor grade showing up on your student record and bringing down your CGPA. It is your responsibility to drop the course via Carleton Central within the published [deadlines](#) (see Academic Withdrawal).

If you are considering withdrawing from a course, you may want to talk to an advisor first. Course withdrawal may affect your student status, as well as your eligibility for student funding, immigration status, residence accommodation and participation in varsity sports, etc. Additionally, remember that once you choose your courses, you must use the “Calculate amount to pay” button to determine the correct amount of fees to pay.

Carleton Central is your one-stop shop for registration activities. If you are interested in taking a course, make sure to complete your registration. Simply attending a course does not mean you are registered in it, nor is it grounds for petition or appeal.

Department Contact Information

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