

**The College of Humanities: Religion
RELI 2535A: Women and Religion**

Professor A. Geissinger
Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:30-3:30 pm,
or by appointment

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Course Lectures: Mondays and Wednesdays, 11:35 am-12:55 pm

Course description

This course is a survey of the historical and contemporary constructions of women in several religious traditions, as well as of the roles and experiences of women in these religious traditions. Topics dealt with for each tradition include the history and development of: the roles and status of women in stories or texts, as well as in rituals and interpretations, gendered symbols, and constructions of sexuality and religious authority. The various and varying ways that adherents of these religious traditions negotiate these complex heritages today will also be examined.

Note: The purpose of this course is not to attempt to persuade you to adopt or reject a particular religious viewpoint. This course presupposes that students accept that the primary and secondary source texts and other materials used will be studied using critical methods that are employed in a modern research university when examining any text, religious or otherwise.

Course Readings

The following textbook is required:

- Leona Anderson and Pamela Dickey Young, eds., *Women and Religious Traditions* (Don Mills, ON and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 2nd edition. [WRT]
This book is available through Haven Books (43 Seneca Street, Ottawa: www.havenbooks.ca).
Be sure to get the second edition, not the first, because the two editions are significantly different.
- All other readings are available through cuLearn. Please download them or print them out and bring them to class on the days for which they are assigned.

Course Evaluation

Your final grade will be determined by the following:

- In-class written analyses—20%
- Field work assignment—30%
- Mid-term exam I—25%
- Mid-term exam II—25%

In-class written analyses and attendance

The written analyses are based on audiovisual materials examined in class. They will be held in class at random. One of their functions is to mark class preparation (meaning, doing the readings before class) as well as attendance. Therefore, there is no way to make up for any that you might miss. This course is designed with the assumption that students will prepare the readings before coming to class, and will attend class regularly.

Field work assignment

This is a two part written assignment. Part I requires you to attend a religious service of one of the religious traditions studied in this course, and to write an initial report about it (3-4 pages in length) that clearly answers all of the assigned questions. These questions ask you to analyze how gender is constructed in the sacred space, as well as in the rituals that you are observing. The due date for Part I is November 3. Part II of the assignment (4-5 pages in length) requires you to situate the observations made at the site within the wider contexts of ongoing discourses about gender within that religious community, using materials studied in this course as well as your own research. It is due on December 8. More details about this assignment will be provided in class.

Exams

The two mid-term exams are based on both the course readings and materials discussed in class.

Please note that there will be no make-up examinations held for either of the mid-terms. If you must miss a mid-term, then you must choose whether to add its value to the mark from your other mid-term exam, or to your site visit mark. In order to qualify for either of these options, you must (1) provide adequate documentation which shows why you missed the midterm, and (2) fill out a form (available in my office) asking to have the normal grade distribution changed.

In order to pass this course, every student must write at least one of the mid-term examinations and also obtain a passing grade in it. Any student who misses both mid-terms will automatically fail the course, regardless of the quality of their other coursework.

COURSE POLICIES

Academic Integrity

“Academic dishonesty, in whatever form, is destructive to the values of the university, and risks harming the university’s reputation as a place of learning and innovation.

Furthermore, it is unfair and discouraging to those students who pursue their studies honestly.” (carleton.ca/studentaffairs/academic-integrity/)

It is every student’s responsibility to know what plagiarism is and how to avoid it, as well as how to properly acknowledge sources used in written work. If you are in doubt about what constitutes plagiarism, or how to cite sources, ask. For more resources on academic integrity (including a quiz that allows you to test your knowledge about it), go to: carleton.ca/sasc/academic-integrity/

Extensions and late papers

All assignments are due in hard copy on the dates and at the times specified above. Late papers will be penalized by the deduction of 2% per day or partial day (including weekends), unless an extension has been arranged before the due date. Retroactive extensions will be granted only according to the rules of the university—personal and family emergencies (documentation must be provided). Extensions will not be granted because of exam or essay conflicts, jobs, busy schedules, etc.

Late papers can be submitted through the drop box at the Religion and Classics Department (a large locked wooden box on the wall outside 2A39 Paterson Hall). Do not put them under my (or anyone else's) door; the cleaning staff may pick them up and throw them out.

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.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1

Sept. 8—Introduction to the course

Sept. 10— Studying “women” and “religion”: methodological issues

Reading: Laurel Zwissler, “Feminism and religion: intersections between western activism, theology and theory,” *Religion Compass* 6.7 (2012), pp. 354-368.

Week 2

Sept. 15—Introducing women in Hindu traditions: history, texts and symbols

Reading: WRT, Chapter 1, pp. 2-19.

Sept. 17—Women in Hindu traditions: ritual practices, social roles and sexuality

Reading: WRT, Chapter 1, pp. 20-37.

Week 3

Sept. 22—Women in Hindu traditions: female gurus and renunciants

Readings: WRT, “Case study: both guru and goddess,” pp. 287-297; Antoinette DeNapoli, “By the sweetness of the tongue: duty, destiny, and devotion in the oral life narratives of female *sadhus* of Rajasthan,” *Asian Ethnology* 68.1 (2009), 81-109.

Sept. 24—Introducing women in Judaism: history, texts and symbols

Reading: WRT, Chapter 2, pp. 44-60

Week 4

Sept. 29—Women in Judaism: ritual practices, social roles and sexuality

Readings: WRT, Chapter 2, pp. 60-72; Lea Taragin-Zeller, “Modesty for heaven’s sake: authority and creativity among female ultra-Orthodox teenagers in Israel,” *Nashim* 26 (Spring 2014), pp. 75-96.

Oct. 1—Women in Judaism: religious law, authority and gender

Reading: Jacqueline Laznow, “‘Many women have done nobly, but you surpass them all’: life stories of women rabbis living and working in Israel,” *Nashim* 26 (Spring 2014), pp. 97-121.

Week 5

Oct. 6—Introducing women in Buddhist traditions: history and texts

Reading: WRT, Chapter 3, pp. 76-92.

Oct. 8—**Mid-term exam I** (in class)

Week 6

Oct. 13—No class (Thanksgiving holiday)

Oct. 15— Women in Buddhist traditions: symbols, ritual practices, and sexuality

Readings: WRT, Chapter 3, pp. 92-103; Liz Wilson, “Buddhism and family,” *Religion Compass* 8.6 (2014), 188-198.

Week 7

Oct. 20— Women in Buddhist traditions: gender and religious authority

Readings: WRT, “Case study: Sakyadhita—daughters of the Buddha unite,” pp. 298-308; Michihiro Ama, “Shin Buddhist women in America,” *Religion Compass* 5.5 (2011), 180-191.

Oct. 22—Introducing women in Christianity: history, texts and symbols

Reading: WRT, Chapter 6, pp. 164-172.

Week 8

Oct. 27—no class (Reading Week)

Oct. 29—no class (Reading Week)

Week 9

Nov. 3—Women in Christianity: ritual practices, social roles and sexuality

***Part I of the field work assignment due today** (in class)

Readings: WRT, Chapter 6, pp. 172-189; WRT, “Case study: l’autre parole”, pp. 310-319.

Nov. 5—Women in Christianity: religious authority and gender

Reading: Christine Gervais, “Canadian women religious’ negotiations of feminism and Catholicism,” *Sociology of Religion* 73.4 (2012), 384-410.

Week 10

Nov. 10—Introducing women in Islam: history, texts and symbols

Reading: WRT, Chapter 7, pp. 194-209.

Nov. 12—Women in Islam: ritual practices, social roles, and sexuality

Readings: WRT, Chapter 7, pp. 209-221; Rhys H. Williams and Gira Vashi, “Hijab and American Muslim women: creating the space for autonomous selves,” *Sociology of Religion* 68.2 (2007), pp. 269-287.

Week 11

Nov. 17—Women in Islam: religious authority and gender

Readings: WRT, “Case study: two Muslim women in North America,” pp. 322-328; Hilary Kalmbach, “Social and religious change in Damascus: one case of female Islamic religious authority,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 35.1 (April 2008), pp. 37-57.

Nov. 19—**Mid-term exam II** (in class)

Week 12

Nov. 24—Work on the second part of the field work assignment

Nov. 26—Introducing women in New Age movements: history, texts, and rituals

Reading: WRT, Chapter 9, pp. 260-276.

Week 13

Dec. 1—Women in New Age movements: symbols, social roles, and sexuality

Readings: WRT, Chapter 9, pp. 276-284; Laura Donaldson, “On medicine women and white shame-ans: New Age Native Americanism and commodity fetishism as pop culture feminism,” *Signs* 24.3 (Spring 1999), pp. 677-696.

Dec. 3—Women in New Age movements: religious authority and gender

Reading: Cynthia Eller: “Divine objectification: the representation of goddesses and women in feminist spirituality,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 16.1 (2000), pp. 23-44.

Week 14

Dec. 8—Course conclusion

*** Part II of the field work assignment due** (in class)

REGULATIONS COMMON TO ALL HUMANITIES COURSES

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.

PLAGIARISM

The University Senate defines plagiarism as “*presenting, whether intentional or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one’s own.*” This can include:

- 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;
- submitting a take-home examination, essay, laboratory report or other assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another’s data or research findings;
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another’s works and/or failing to use quotation marks;
- handing in “*substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs.*”

Plagiarism is a serious offence which cannot be resolved directly with the course’s instructor. The Associate Deans of the Faculty conduct 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

GRADING SYSTEM

Letter grades assigned in this course will have the following percentage equivalents:

A+ = 90-100 (12)	B = 73-76 (8)	C - = 60-62 (4)
A = 85-89 (11)	B- = 70-72 (7)	D+ = 57-59 (3)
A- = 80-84 (10)	C+ = 67-69 (6)	D = 53-56 (2)
B+ = 77-79 (9)	C = 63-66 (5)	D - = 50-52 (1)

F	Failure. Assigned 0.0 grade points
ABS	Absent from final examination, equivalent to F
DEF	Official deferral (see “Petitions to Defer”)
FND	Failure with no deferred exam allowed -- assigned only when the student has failed the course on the basis of inadequate term work as specified in the course outline.

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean.

WITHDRAWAL WITHOUT ACADEMIC PENALTY

The last date to withdraw from **FALL TERM** courses is **DEC. 8, 2014**. The last day to withdraw from **FALL/WINTER (Full Term)** and **WINTER** term courses is **APRIL 8, 2015**.

REQUESTS FOR ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term because of disability, pregnancy or religious obligations. Please review the course outline promptly and write to me 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. You can visit the Equity Services website to view the policies and to obtain more detailed information on academic accommodation at: carleton.ca/equity/accommodation/

Students with disabilities requiring academic accommodations in this course must register with the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) for a formal evaluation of disability-related needs. Documented disabilities could include but not limited to mobility/physical impairments, specific Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/psychological disabilities, sensory disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and chronic medical conditions. Registered PMC students are required to contact the PMC, 613-520-6608, every term to ensure that your Instructor receives your Letter of Accommodation, no later than two weeks before the first assignment is due or the first in-class test/midterm requiring accommodations. If you only require accommodations for your formally scheduled exam(s) in this course, please submit your request for accommodations to PMC by **Nov. 7, 2014** for the Fall term and **March 6, 2015** for the Winter term. For more details visit the Equity Services website: carleton.ca/equity/accommodation/

PETITIONS TO DEFER

If you miss a final examination and/or fail to submit a **FINAL** assignment by the due date because of circumstances beyond your control, you may apply a deferral of examination/assignment. If you are applying for a deferral due to illness you will be required to see a physician in order to confirm illness and obtain a medical certificate dated no later than one working day after the examination or assignment deadline. This supporting documentation must specify the date of onset of the illness, the degree of incapacitation, and the expected date of recovery.

If you are applying for a deferral for reasons other than personal illness, please [contact](#) the Registrar’s Office directly for information on other forms of documentation that we accept.

Deferrals of assignments must be supported by confirmation of the assignment due date, for example a copy of the course outline specifying the due date and any documented extensions from the course instructor.

Deferral applications for examination or assignments must be submitted within **5 working days** of the original final exam.

ADDRESSES: (Area Code 613)

College of the Humanities 520-2809	300 Paterson
Greek and Roman Studies Office 520-2809	300 Paterson
Religion Office 520-2100	2A39 Paterson
Registrar's Office 520-3500	300 Tory
Student Academic Success Centre 520-7850	302 Tory
Paul Menton Centre 520-6608/TTY 520-3937	501 Uni-Centre
Writing Tutorial Service 520-2600 Ext. 1125	4 th Floor Library
Learning Support Service 520-2600 Ext 1125	4 th Floor Library