

STANDARD SYLLABUS

Women and Religion
THEO 278

This course will study the role of women in three of the major world religious traditions. Through study of the teachings (e.g., the understandings of the divine, the human person, moral action in the world, the role of marriage and sexuality, religious rituals) of the religious tradition(s), particularly as they affect women, students will become aware of the influence of religion on gender roles, and how women in the contemporary world are reinterpreting their religious traditions. By studying the ways both historical and contemporary women relate these teachings to their lives, students will learn how women and men subject these traditions to critique by drawing on the core teachings of the traditions themselves as well as by contemporary ideas of gender equality, in order to work for greater justice in religion as well as in society. Students will study some of the issues that engage contemporary scholars of women and religion, such as scriptural interpretation, violence against women and children, and women's religious leadership.

Knowledge Area(s) satisfied: Theological and Religious Studies Knowledge
Skill(s) Developed: Critical Thinking Skills and Dispositions
Values Requirement(s) satisfied: Understanding Diversity in the United States or the World, Understanding Spirituality or Faith in Action in the World

Learning Objectives:

Knowledge Area (Theological and Religious Studies Knowledge):

By successfully passing this course, students will:

Learn to analyze and interpret religious texts, including scriptural texts, using standard scholarly methods and tools.

Since the three major western religious traditions are all based on sacred texts (the Tanakh, the Bible, the Qur'an), and since these texts provide an authoritative source for religious teachings, students will study both the ways that traditional interpretation has understood texts related to women, as well as feminist interpretations of these texts.

Demonstrate knowledge, with attention to historical development, of the central texts, beliefs, ethical understandings, and practices of at least one religious tradition.

The beliefs and practices of religious traditions present understandings of the divine, the human relation to the divine, the distinctive approach that each religion takes towards human life (e.g., how salvation will be accomplished). Students will learn how gender factors into these beliefs and practices (e.g., images of the divine, whether gender plays a role in salvation) and will also learn how these beliefs and practices with relation to sex and gender have changed over time (e.g., the rationale for or against women's ministerial leadership).

Demonstrate knowledge of the intersections between religion and selected contemporary issues.

The women's movement, as a contemporary social, political, and religious movement, has had a powerful impact on religious traditions, some of which have changed their positions with regard to women's ministerial leadership (ordination), and some of which have not; feminism has challenged particular religious practices (such as women's traditional inability to help constitute a minyan in Judaism). Students will learn how religious traditions have responded positively and negatively to the challenges of contemporary feminism and will consider how their own religious backgrounds (for those raised in a tradition) have responded to the challenges of the women's movement. Students less familiar with religion will learn how religious ideas pervade contemporary culture.

Evaluate one's own religious perspective and the religious perspectives of others.

Students will consider how their own religious backgrounds have influenced their understanding of gender roles and how other religious traditions may understand these roles in similar and different ways. Through classroom discussion of lecture material, videos, and reading material, students will be able to evaluate these understandings in dialogue with others.

Skills (Critical Thinking Skills and Dispositions):

Comprehend, paraphrase, summarize, and contextualize the meaning of varying forms of communication, including, but not limited to: written work (fiction and nonfiction), speech, film, visual art, multimedia, and music.

Students will learn to comprehend and summarize the views of various scholars on religious ideas of women and learn how these can be understood in relation to their context (e.g., how Thomas Aquinas's view that women are "misbegotten males" needs to be seen in light of medieval biology).

Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of varying points of view.

Students will compare the views of contemporary scholars who defend their religious traditions' teachings with women who challenge these traditions and evaluate the arguments for the different positions.

Generate new ideas, hypotheses, opinions, theories, questions, and proposals; and develop strategies for seeking and synthesizing information to support and argument, make a decision, or resolve a problem.

In their class discussions, small groups, and in written work, students will be encouraged to develop various hypotheses and proposals for understanding the differences among religious teachings about sex and gender, and to articulate these positions with reasoned arguments.

Monitor individual thinking or behavior in order to question, confirm, validate, or correct it.

By reading the ideas of various authors, by listening to the instructor, guest lecturers and other students, the student in this class will be required to reflect on their own ideas about women and religion and to articulate their ideas in clear and reasoned ways.

Values Area (Understanding Diversity in the United States or the World):

This course satisfies the value of Understanding Diversity in the United States or the World by focusing on the diverse ways in which women's roles are understood in religion. Through studying the diverse ways in which women's roles are understood in religion, students come to see how complex and variegated views about gender are (a); they learn to distinguish the various factors that inform and impact individual identity formation, especially that of gender (b) in relation to religious views. The content of the course covers diverse religions and diverse views of religion (e.g., both African-American Muslim and Christian women), and the students in the course learn to identify distinctive patterns of thought and behavior that contribute to the formation of a culture different from their own by reading and discussing the views of these scholars.

Values Area (Understanding Spirituality or Faith in Action in the World):

This course also satisfies the value of Understanding Spirituality or Faith in Action in the World. Students learn to articulate the foundations of the religious traditions they study, since these foundations are most often seen as the basis for distinctive treatment of men and women. They develop the ability to reflect on how these faith and belief systems relate to intellectual and cultural life by examining the relationship between social and political ideas of equality and how these relate to religion. Finally, they encourage both men and women students to reflect on the applications of these traditions to their own personal decisions by raising questions about the roles of women in religion, how these roles may differ from the roles of men, and how these roles relate not only to the religious tradition's own foundational beliefs but to their own goals in life.

Learning Activities:

Possible array of texts:

- A Bible
- Judith Plaskow, Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990).
- Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994)
- Amina Wadud, Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999)

Note: (Instructors may vary the textbooks.)

Possible evaluation methods:

- Lecture
- Discussion
- Participation
- Large groups
- Small groups
- Readings
- Examinations
- Papers
- Audio-visual resources
- Presentations

Note: (Instructors may vary the evaluation categories.)

Sample Semester Schedule:

Week 1:	Intro to the course Religion and Feminism
Week 2:	Why a feminist Judaism? The Torah, Part I
Week 3:	The Torah, Part II Re-Imagining God, Part I
Week 4:	Re-Imagining God, Part II Judaism and Sexuality
Week 5:	A New Theology of Sexuality
Week 6:	Christianity and Women: Reclaiming the Bible Women-Church and the Bible
Week 7:	Feminist Biblical Interpretation Models of Biblical Interpretation

- Week 8: The Bible and Liberation
- Week 9: The Bible and Ethics
African-American Women and the Bible
- Week 10: African women and biblical interpretation
- Week 11: Women in Islam; Qur'anic interpretation
"Creation" in the Qur'an
- Week 12: How the Qur'an Views Women
The Qur'an and Paradise
- Week 13: Women's Rights and Roles in Islam
- Week 14: Assessment of Women in Islam

Note: (Instructors may vary the presentation of topics to some degree, but the material covered will remain the same.)