

University of Calgary
Faculty of Humanities
Department of Religious Studies
Spring 2008

WOMEN AND RELIGION – RELS 381 L20

Location: SA 124A; Tues/Thurs 11:00-1:45

Instructor: Carmen Webb

Telephone: 945-3604 (feel free to call me any day or time after 9 am and before 9 pm)

Email: cwebb@telus.net (this is an excellent way to get hold of me as I check my email often)

Office Location and Hours: SS 1323 Hours: 9:30 to 10:30 on Thurs or by appointment

Required Texts

- *Women and Religious Traditions*, 2004. Edited by Leona M. Anderson and Pamela Dickey Young. Published by Oxford University Press.
- *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*, 1992. Sue Monk Kidd. Published by HarperOne.

Course Description

This course will provide students with an introduction to the ways in which some women have been shaped by and have themselves shaped religious systems in the world. The course will necessarily be selective in its approach to locations and to particular topics because a subject like “women and religion” is so vast that one could spend one’s entire life trying to gain an understanding of only one aspect of women’s religious lives and still find there was more to learn. This course, while offering historical and background material, will focus primarily on contemporary women and their actions and reactions in relation to religious beliefs, rites, doctrines, etc. In order to get some sense of both generalities and specifics the course will be roughly divided into five themes. While the first part of most classes will be used to gain a basic grounding in issues pertaining to a broad understanding of women’s lives in association with a particular religious tradition, the second part of the class (and all of some classes) will focus on one of the following thematic areas: women in relation to deity; women in relation to text; women in relation to authority; women in relation to ritual; and women in relation to body. Though these five themes may appear to be separate, there will be considerable overlap between them in terms of the issues they illustrate and the concerns they portray.

Course Organization:

This course will be conducted as a lecture/discussion course. At the beginning of most classes we will discuss the assigned readings. These readings are meant to give you an overview of some of the issues relevant to women in various religious locations. The readings that are

assigned for each class MUST be done prior to class so that you can participate in the discussions (participation makes up part of your mark). Note that the spring semester is a condensed time frame wherein each class represents the equivalent of a full week during the winter or fall semester and so you will have to carefully budget your time to make sure you get the reading and assignments done. In the second half of each class (and some full classes) we will examine and engage a particular theme in relation to a contemporary issue which has affected women's lives and how women are, in turn, affecting the issue. Lectures, films, and discussion will make up this part of the class.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes-- By the end of this course student should:

- Have developed an understanding of some of the methods used in the study of women in religion and some of the consequences of those methods.
- Have developed a more sophisticated sense of the ways in which women, and the category of woman, is a social construction that, in part, is shaped by religious systems.
- Have developed an awareness of a variety of issues in various religious, historical, and geographical locations that impact on and are impacted by women and how these issues are constructed.
- Have the ability to critically engage with issues relating to women's lives in relation to the ways in which religious systems may participate in promoting or restricting women's agency.
- Have developed an awareness of reasons why women may embrace, reject, or live in ambivalence with established religious traditions.

Student Responsibilities

- Participation and reading (20% of overall mark) – All assigned reading must be done prior to class (except for the first reading) in order that you are prepared to participate in class discussion and to offer questions and insights regarding the readings. Each student is expected to come to class with one prepared question that results from the reading. A copy of your question must be handed in at the beginning of each class and some of these questions will be used in the discussion period. The questions will be graded in relation to the extent that they demonstrate thoughtfulness, depth, and sophistication. The questions are worth 10% of your overall mark. Questions will not be accepted if you are not in class unless you have a documented reason accepted by me. The other 10% of the participation and reading mark will be derived from your participation in the class.
- News Analysis (20% of overall mark) – Each student will find a news story pertaining to women and religion from the last two years. It will be especially helpful if you can find more than one report of the same event, especially if you can find competing or divergent views of the event(s) the story deals with. You will write an analysis of the story, the way in which it is presented, the issues it highlights, and the strategies used to give the reader a particular version of the event(s). More information will be given in class as to exactly what is expected for this assignment and how it might be done. This assignment should be between 750 and 1000 words and is due on **May 27th**.
- Book Analysis (20% of overall mark) – Each student will read and analyze the book *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter* by Sue Monk Kidd. Like the news analysis you will be expected to analyze both form and content of the book. More info in class. This assignment should be between 1250 and 1500 words and is due on **June 10th**.

- **Film Analysis** (20% of overall mark) – Each student will do a film analysis of one of the films viewed in class with relation to the ways in which the issues presented have been staged or shaped by the film's producers and directors as well as the social context of both the producers of the film and the film's content/actors/referents. This assignment should be between 900 and 1100 words and is due on **June 24th**.
- **Take home final** (20%) – The final exam will be given to you on **June 26th**, the last day of class. It will consist of a choice of two out of three essay questions which will ask you to critically reflect on what you have learned in the course. You will be expected to refer to the course readings, lectures, films, and discussions in order to demonstrate that your opinion and analysis is informed by the material in the course, whether or not you agree with it. The final must be electronically submitted to me by 4pm on **June 30th**.

Grading:

A numerical mark will be given for each course requirement. Following the final examination, a letter grade will be assigned on the following number and letter grade scheme:

A+	100-96%	A	95-90%	A-	89-85%
B+	84-80%	B	79-75%	B-	74-70%
C+	69-65%	C	64-60%	C-	59-55%
D+	54-53%	D	52-50%	F	Fail

N.B. All written assignments will be graded with regard to both form and content.

Academic Accommodation:

If you are a student with a disability who requires academic accommodation and have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre, please contact their office at 220-8237. Students who have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre are not eligible for formal academic accommodation.

Intellectual Honesty:

Students should be familiar with University regulations regarding academic integrity (http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/2007/how/How_LB.htm). I take plagiarism VERY seriously and will vigorously pursue all incidents. Be sure you know what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it!

Safewalk Program :

"You don't have to walk alone...." Call 220-5333 and a member of the Safewalk Team will walk you to your car, the LRT, or any destination on campus. Safewalk is available to all students, staff and faculty any time of the day or night. Look for the Campus Security Help Phones located throughout the University. Please don't hesitate to call!

Withdrawing from courses:

Please note the information regarding withdrawals and fee refunds in the Academic Schedule of the 2007/08 University Calendar.

Gnosis:

Gnosis is the Religious Studies Student Club. For membership or more information please email: gnosis@ucalgary.ca or visit <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~gnosis>.

Course Outline

May 15 – Why do we need a course in women in religion?

- Is religion a gendered social category?
- “Ain’t I a woman?” How is the category of “woman” a social construction and who gets to decide what a woman is and when?
- Feminist theories in religious studies

(Read on your own “Introduction” in Anderson and Dickey Young.)

May 20 – Women in Hinduism and women and the body

- Discuss reading “Women in Hindu Traditions” in Anderson and Dickey Young
- Film *Harsh Beauty* – Consider the question “what is a woman?”

May 22 - Women in Islam and women and the body continued

- Discuss readings “Women in Islam” in Anderson and Dickey Young
- Consider the veil in Islam – Is it necessarily oppressive (say, compared to crop tops, plastic surgery, and high heeled shoes in contemporary North America)? Who gets to decide? What do Muslim women say?
- Film *Under One Sky: Arab Women in North America Talk About the Hijab*

May 27 – Women in Christianity and women and deity

- Discussion of “Women in Christianity” in Anderson and Dickey Young
- Consider Rosemary Radford Ruether’s question “If women cannot represent Christ, in what sense can it be said that Christ represents women?” and the symbol of Sophia for some contemporary Christian women.
- **News analysis due**

May 29 – Feminist Spirituality and women and deity

- Discussion of “Women in New Age Traditions” in Anderson and Dickey Young.
- Film *Goddess Remembered*
- Consider the consequences of female deities for Hindu women vs. the overwhelmingly masculine deity of certain other traditions. Does the gender of deity matter? Why? Why not? How so? What can we discern from the construction of the gender of deities and the impact on women’s lived lives?

June 3 – Women in Judaism and women and deity

- Discuss readings “Women in Judaism” in Anderson and Dickey Young
- Consider reframing of Shekinah among some contemporary Jewish women.
- Film *Half the Kingdom*

June 5 - No Class – Reading Day

June 10 – Women in relation to text

- Consider how religious texts in Islam, Judaism, and Christianity are used by and against women in these three traditions. Issues of interpretation and authority will be considered.
- Film *Texts and Contexts*

June 12 - Women in Buddhism and women and positions of power

- Discussion of “Women in Buddhist Traditions” in Anderson and Dickey Young
- Consider developments in female ordination in Theravadan Buddhism.
- **Book analysis due**

June 17 – Women and positions of power

- Consider recent developments in female ordination in Roman Catholicism. What are the possible ramifications of such developments? Is ordination a way for women to resist or is it an acquiescence? What about Buddhism – same issues, different robes?
- Film *The Sermons of SisterJane: Believing the Unbelievable*

June 19– Women in Indigenous Traditions and women and power

- Discuss “Women in Indigenous Traditions” in Anderson and Dickey Young.
- Consider issues of religious neocolonialism – the commercialization and appropriation of aspects of aboriginal religious systems. Woman as exploiter? Woman as victim? Woman as partner?
- Film *Spirit Doctors*

June 24 –Women and ritual

- Consider how women are engaging with rituals – perpetuating old, creating new, adapting tradition.
- Film *In My Father’s Church*
- **Film analysis due**

June 26 – Women in Confucianism and Taoism and women and ritual

- Discuss “Women in the Chinese Traditions” in Anderson and Dickey Young
- Consider *mizuko kuyo* in Japan and the United States – act of resistance or acquiescence? What is “women’s experience”?
- Hand out final exam questions.

Final exam due electronically by 4pm on June 30.