

updated December 23, 2009

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY  
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES  
DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES  
RELIGIOUS STUDIES 381 L01  
WOMEN AND RELIGION  
WINTER 2010

---

INSTRUCTOR:	Anne White, Ph.D.
DAY AND TIME	MWF 12:00-12:50
OFFICE:	SS 1322
OFFICE HOURS:	MWF 11:00-11:50
TELEPHONE:	403-220-3285 or 403-220-5886 (main office)
E-MAIL ADDRESS:	<a href="mailto:awhite@ucalgary.ca">awhite@ucalgary.ca</a>
WEBSITE:	Blackboard

---

**REQUIRED TEXT:** Serinity Young, ed., *An Anthology of Sacred Texts By and About Women*, New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1993.  
Plus Webnotes.

**RECOMMENDED BUT NOT REQUIRED READING:**

Lucinda Joy Peach, *Women and World Religions*, Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2002.  
Nancy Auer Falk, and Rita M. Gross, *Unspoken Worlds: Women's Religious Lives*, Toronto: Wadsworth, 2001.  
Ellen M. Umansky and Dianne Ashton eds., *Four centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality: A Sourcebook*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1992.  
Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker eds., *Women Preachers and Prophets Through Two Millennia of Christianity*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998  
Asma Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

In his work, *Anatomy of the Sacred*, J. C. Livingston states that "religion is a universal and abiding dimension of human expression." The human species has further been defined as *homo religiosus* – a religious animal. Our species routinely forms and reforms religion to find meaning, purpose and solace for life. As full members of our species, women have played an indispensable role in this construction of religious identity and religious worlds of meaning (cosmologies). This course is designed to introduce the student to the voice and presence of some of the strong, passionate women of faith in the world's religions. As major contributors to the construction and enduring relevance of religion, women's role and influence has been sporadically acknowledged, but often only with broad qualifiers such as "different spheres" or "different temperamental interpretations due to gender," or even the "weaker vessel." Another common theme within many religious traditions has been that of misogyny whereby women have been viewed as pollutants or intellectually corrupting through their influence. Due to pervasive and continuing social prejudices, and their subsequent misunderstandings, the true impact, influence and validity of these women's worlds of meaning have been consistently diluted or dismissed. Using examples of heroines, victims, reformers and mystics, this course will address the strategies by which women constructed their religious identities, managed to retain their strong belief systems, endured repressive circumstances, and often constructed worlds of meaning, freedom and leadership that changed society in general. Through discussion of text and documentaries, this course will present an overview of myths and stories of gender conflict based on religious laws and other writings. It will examine accounts of the women who functioned within these contexts and left their own impressive legacy as a testimony to the reality and truth that they

lived and helped establish. Modern aspects of reform will also be addressed within the context of women's active participation in changing their religions to reflect how they identify as people of faith.

**COURSE OBJECTIVE:**

To enable students to organize and evaluate various historical events and religious concepts as perceived and interpreted by each of these religions and some of the women within them.

**SELF DIRECTED STUDY:**

Students are encouraged to read web notes and the assigned pages of text before each lecture, and come prepared to ask questions.

**COURSE METHODOLOGY:**

(i) Analysis of socio-historical contexts; (ii) examination of author, text and topic; (iii) discussion of selected documentaries for contextual background.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

Feb. 22	- Test - The midterm test will consist of six short essay type answers – each worth five points – total 30 points. The test will be 90 minutes in duration.	30%
Apr. 14	- Paper - Eight pages, plus one page bibliography Topics to be discussed in class CHICAGO STYLE FOR PAPER (MANDATORY) Eight pages, double spaced, one inch margins. Bibliography – not more than two websites, six text or academic journal sources, cover page (name, student ID, course number, title)	30%
Registrar Scheduled Final Exam (TBA)		40%

**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:

Percentage grades are calculated as follows:

A+	100 - 96	A	95.9 - 90	A-	89.9 - 85
B+	84.9 - 80	B	79.9 - 75	B-	74.9 - 70
C+	69.9 - 65	C	64.9 - 60	C-	59.9 - 55
D+	54.9 - 53	D	52.9-50	F	Under 50

**Academic Honesty:**

Students should be familiar with the University regulations regarding academic honesty.

See University Calendar.

**COURSE SCHEDULE:**

PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS SCHEDULE MAY VARY SLIGHTLY DUE TO CLASS DISCUSSIONS AND TIME CONSTRAINTS

READINGS:

NOTE THAT ALL LECTURES WILL HAVE ACCOMPANYING WEBNOTES POSTED ON BLACKBOARD. PLEASE ACCESS THESE BEFORE LECTURES.

**JANUARY**

**11, 13, 15**

Introduction

**Genre of Sacred Literature**, Cross-cultural themes, misogyny.  
Extracts from all textbook chapters.

**18, 20, 22**

**Judaism** – historical context and writings.  
Eminent female leaders and thinkers. The female rabbinate. Reformers.

**25**

Documentary

**27, 29**

**Christianity** - Extra material provided on Junia (the forgotten apostle) and Emily Spencer Kerby (early 20<sup>th</sup> century reformer). Reformers.

**FEBRUARY**

**1**

**Christianity – continued.**

**3**

Documentary

**5, 8, 10**

**Islam** - historical context and writings.  
Early female leaders, developments, and works by women. Reformers. .

**12**

Documentary

**14-21**

**READING WEEK – NO CLASSES**

**22**

**MIDTERM TEST (50 MINUTES)**

**24, 26**

**Hinduism** - Culture, texts, the goddesses, and empowerment through Bhakti devotion, Purdah, Reformers.

**MARCH**

**1**

**Hinduism** - Culture, texts, the goddesses, and empowerment through Bhakti devotion, Purdah, Reformers.

**3**

Documentary

**5, 8, 10**

**Buddhism** – Cultural context – the *bhiksuni-samgha*, heroines, goddesses and the role of the female bodhisattva. Reformers.

**12**

Documentary

**15, 17, 19**

**Confucianism, Daoism, Shinto** - Cultural and religious context, texts and Goddesses, female cults.

**22**

Documentary

updated December 23, 2009

- 24, 26                    **Antecedents – women in Ancient Near East, Greece, Rome.** Emotion versus Reality.
- 29 - 31                   **The Wiccan Movement, Witchcraft ancient and modern. .**
- APRIL**
- 2**                            **GOOD FRIDAY – NO CLASS**
- 5, 7                        **Shamanism and Tribal Religions** - mythic heroines, practical empowerment and healing ceremonies.
- 12                         Documentary
- 14                         **RESEARCH PAPER TO BE HANDED IN – April 14.**  
**Neopaganism** – Celtic, Nordic and Anglo-Saxon myths.