Theo 278: Religion and Gender  
John Felice Rome Center  
Fall 2020  
Wednesdays | 14.00-16:30  
Dr. Deborah F. Sawyer  
Email: dsawyer2@luc.edu  
Office Hours: Wednesdays 16.30 – 17.30 or by appointment

Course Description
A central feature of this course is the project. Your project, selected with consultation and supervised throughout the course, will provide a unique opportunity to delve in depth into a particular aspect of religion and gender. These projects highlight the distinctive roles and expectations prescribed for gendered identities, illustrated, for example, by sacred texts, rites of passage, leadership, festivals, pilgrimages and other ritual practices.

You will research your chosen subject’s context in terms of its history, its concept of the divine and spirituality, its beliefs and practices, and its contemporary outlook and development – examined through the expectations and experiences of believers. As well as exploring your subject’s origins and belief system, your project can include archival material, images, interviews and other appropriate empirical data.

In the classes running concurrently with the projects you will be introduced to contemporary gender theory, and discuss how it can be applied as a critical tool for examining religion past and present. The contemporary perspective is woven consistently through parts 1 and 2 with analysis and discussion on sexualities, gender identities and feminist critique.

In the first part of the course we focus on the Garden of Eden in biblical narrative, and study its history of interpretation in relation to female and male gender roles. Further biblical texts that relate to this narrative will be analysed, as well as its impact on Christian beliefs. This text is foundational, providing archetypes that both consciously and unconsciously inform gender identity in Western and Post-Colonial contexts. You will be shown how this text is interpreted in art and sculpture, and be encouraged to study examples in Rome and across Europe.

For the remainder of the course we move outside the biblical and Christian worlds to observe how gender has been constructed in a selection of the world’s major religious traditions, namely Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam and Indigenous traditions. These foci will provide a broad global perspective of religious beliefs and practices.

Important note: At the outset you need to be aware that because this course examines religious beliefs and issues pertaining to gender roles and identities discussions will include sexual and gender expressions, body anatomy, sexual attitudes and behaviors. Exploring and challenging our own assumptions and expectations about both religion and sexual identity may produce a certain level of discomfort. The classroom should be a safe space where consideration of each student’s individual expression is paramount for learning. Students’ individual opinions and feelings are to be fostered, protected, and respected. Any personal opinion or experience shared within the class must and will remain within the class.
Learning Outcomes
Students who successfully complete this course will have the ability to:

- Apply their research skills to construct a well-informed argument in writing and orally
- Research and evaluate secondary sources in relation to primary texts
- Understand diversities and similarities in gender roles across major world religions
- Identify and explain key issues in gender studies and religion from an historical and global perspective
- Synthesize information from a variety of academic disciplines as it relates to the impact of religion on women and men’s lives around the world
- Provide examples, both historical and contemporary, of the impact that gender construction and expectations in religious contexts can have on social, cultural, political, and economic conditions

The Project
Work on the projects begins early on in the semester, after consultations to select viable topics. In the class workshops we discuss developing project plans and schedules for completion. The workshops and consultations continue throughout the course to ensure projects are underway and progressing. The project presentations will be timetabled for weeks 12 and 13 (11/25 and 12/02).

1. Midterm and Finals
The first part of your project comprises part of your assessment for the Midterm, and is submitted in Week 7 on Wednesday, 10/14 by 16.30.
The completed project comprises part of your assessment for Finals, and is submitted during the Exam time on Wednesday, 12/09 between 11.30-13.30.

2. Worksheets
Each week you will be given a worksheet to complete. This will include questions based on the reading/s for that week posted on SAKAI. The aim of the worksheets is to ensure that you are building up - and being tested on - your knowledge base in the subject week by week. They perform the same function as quizzes or short tests. Furthermore, this exercise creates your learning journal for this course.
You can revise your worksheet answers/comments in the light of the lecture and discussion. Worksheets for weeks 1-6 will be submitted in Week 7 (10/14), and worksheets for weeks 8-11 in Week 12 (11/25).

Assessment Components
Midterm assessment 45%
a. submission of the first part of your project (15%)
b. Your completed worksheets for weeks 1-6 (20%)
c. Short answer exam 10%
Final assessment 55%
a. Final version of your project (25%)
b. Worksheets for weeks 8-11 (15%)
c. Participation and Project presentation (15%)
For this component your preparation for and participation in class group work will be assessed, together with your project presentation.
Grading
94-100: A  90-93: A-  87-89: B+  84-86: B  80-83: B-

Grading criteria for Exams, Coursework and Participation: A (90-100) Outstanding, excellent: original articulation of student’s understanding of major concepts/ideas; displaying in-depth reading of class material and complex critical insight; few, if any, problems with organization. Present and alert in class. Good listening, taking notes. Frequent, thoughtful contributions to discussion.

B (80-89) Very good: good articulation of student’s understanding of major concepts/ideas; displays very good grasp of the reading; perhaps some problems with organization. Present and alert in class. Good listening, taking notes. Contributes often to discussion.

C (70-79) Satisfactory: meets requirements/expectations; displays a basic grasp of the reading; some problems with organization. Present and alert in class. Listens, takes notes. Contributes occasionally to discussion.

D (60-69) Unsatisfactory: does not meet minimal expectations, does not display a clear understanding of the reading and basic concepts; writing may be incoherent or unintelligible. Several absences from class and discussion. Inattentive or disruptive.

F (59 and below) Very unsatisfactory: does not approach minimal expectations. Incomplete or missing work. Does not meet minimal expectations. Numerous absences from class and discussion.

Academic Honesty
Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are unacceptable at the JFRC and will be dealt with in accordance with Loyola University Chicago’s guidelines. Please familiarize yourself with Loyola’s standards here: [http://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg_academicintegrity.shtml](http://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg_academicintegrity.shtml). You are responsible to comply with the LUC Student Handbook.

Late or Missed Assignments
Late or missed assignments will not be accepted for grading except with authorization.

Attendance Policy
In accordance with the JFRC mission to promote a higher level of academic rigor, all courses adhere to the following absence policy:
- For all classes meeting once a week, students cannot incur more than one unexcused absence.

Unexcused absences beyond this will result in 1% lowering of the final course grade for every absence after the “approved limit”.

Accessibility Accommodations
Students registered with the Student Accessibility Center requiring academic accommodations should contact the Office of the Dean at the John Felice Rome Center, the first week of classes.
Email Communication I will do my best to reply to emails sent during business hours (Monday to Friday, 9.00 – 18.00). Emails sent after 18.00 will be considered received the next day. The best way to communicate is directly, during my office hour or by making an appointment.

Computer, Phone & Internet Use in the Classroom Use of phones is always prohibited. Please turn your phones off when in class. Use of laptop computers during class time for note taking is not permitted unless permitted by the instructor. This includes checking emails and use of social networks.

Course Schedule


Week One: 09/02 Introduction to the course and the subject: gender studies and religion
In class reading/Worksheet 1: Posey, Lauren, ‘Gender’, pp.94-96

Week Two: 09/09 Introduction to the biblical account
Discussion theme: Is the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden a good or bad thing for humanity?
Worksheet reading: Fewell, Danna Nolan and Gunn, David M. ‘Shifting the Blame’, Gender, Power and Promise: The Subject of the Bible’s First Story, pp.22-38.

Discussion theme: To what extent do the gender roles constructed in the Garden influence ideas on sexuality?

Week Four: 09/23 Introduction to Islam
Project Plans Due
Discussion theme: ‘Jihad’ has been called the Sixth Pillar of Islam. What does the term mean?
Worksheet Reading: Watt, Montgomery, ‘A Historical Overview’, from A Brief Introduction to Islam, ed. Tim Dowley, pp.52-60

Week Five: 09/30 Women and Islam
Discussion theme: Discuss how wearing the veil can be interpreted as a sign of coercion and autonomy of women.

Week Six: 10/7 Judaism and Gender
Discussion theme: Does male circumcision as the sign of Judaism’s covenant with God signify that it is essentially a religion for men?
Worksheet reading: Goldstein, Elyse, ‘Jewish feminism and "new" Jewish rituals’, Canadian Woman Studies; Downsview Vol. 16, Iss. 4, (Fall 1996): 50-52.)

Week Seven: 10/14 Midterms

Fall Break

Week Eight: 10/28 Introduction to Hinduism
Discussion theme: What is the Kumbh Mela? Describe this religious phenomenon and explain its significance for Hindus
Worksheet Reading: ‘Historical Overview’, ‘Worship and Festivals’ and ‘Family and Society’ from Tim Dowley ed. A Brief Introduction to Hinduism

Week Nine: 11/04 Hinduism and Gender

Week Ten: 11/11 Buddhism and Gender
Discussion theme: ‘...as far as misogynist discourses go, it (Buddhism) is one of the most flexible and open to multiplicity and contradiction’ (Faure, B., 2003, p.3, quoted in WRT, p.79)). Find examples to illustrate and interrogate this statement.

Week Eleven: 11/18 Indigenous Spiritual Traditions and Gender
Discussion theme: Discuss the historical and contemporary context of Indigenous spirituality and how these traditions relate to women and men’s lives.
Worksheet reading:

Week Twelve: 11/25 Submission of Worksheets 8-11
Weeks Twelve and Thirteen: 11/25 and 12/02 Project Presentations

Wednesday, 29 April, 11.30-13.10 Submission of Projects