

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
"Educating Global Citizens"

WS 5263-50: FEMINISM AND RELIGION

Summer 2 2008 (July 7-August 8, 2008)

Tuesdays 6:00-9:50 p.m. in MCL 402 and online via Blackboard

"Religious traditions are more like rivers than monuments. They are not static and they are not over. They are still rolling—with forks and confluences, rapids and waterfalls." ~Diana L. Eck

"The study of religion is fundamentally about making the strange familiar and the familiar strange." ~ Timothy K. Beal

"The study of women in world religions radically alters our understanding of religion: not only our understanding of who participates in religion, but also our understanding of what constitutes religious actions and how we read religious texts." ~Serinity Young

Instructor: Claire L. Sahlin, Ph.D.

Office: HDB 307B

Office Hours: 1:00-3:00 p.m. on Wednesdays

I hope you'll feel welcome to contact me with your questions and thoughts pertaining to the course. I'm available during my office hours and by appointment at other times. I'll generally respond to email messages within 24 hours, and you're also welcome to call me.

E-mail: CSahlin@twu.edu

Phone: 940.898.2255

Graduate Assistant: Harry McMaster, M.A.

Office: HDB 307L

Office Hours: 9:00-11:00 a.m. on Wednesdays

Harry's role will be to contribute to our class discussions (especially those on Blackboard), to assist you with assignments as you may request, and to assist me with research for this course.

E-mail: Harry@twu.edu

Phone: 940.898.2117

Course Description

This course offers a multicultural introduction to the field of women's studies in religion by exploring the following topics: 1) women's religious roles and contributions to the development of religious traditions with emphasis on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, 2) interconnections between religion, gender, sexuality, 'race'/ethnicity, and culture, and 3) feminist/womanist/mujerista critiques and transformations of religious traditions.

Our approach to this subject matter will be transdisciplinary as we will be integrating insights from literature, history, philosophy, theology, and the social sciences. Through assigned readings, documentary films, guided discussion, and projects, we'll ask questions about the nature of religion and spirituality, while examining such topics as the relationships between religion and cultural identity, gendered/'raced' imagery for the divine, religious teachings about women, the nature of religious rituals, debates about women's religious leadership, veiling, religious fundamentalisms, and feminist/ womanist/mujerista theology.

Students from all academic disciplines and religious backgrounds are welcome to participate in this course, which introduces a very large and complex field of academic study. Because this

study is limited to one semester that is compressed into only five weeks, we'll concentrate on selected aspects of feminist perspectives concerning the religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Although we will not be able to explore every facet of the field of women's studies in religion or examine every issue in as much depth as each of us might like to do, you are strongly encouraged to personalize the course by carefully selecting topics for assignments that allow you to explore questions and areas of particular interest to you. I hope that this course will stimulate you to ask new questions and engage in future studies of feminist approaches to the study of religion. I sincerely hope that this course will offer you an enriching academic experience.

This course can serve as an elective for M.A. students in Women's Studies, and it can also count toward the Graduate Certificate in Women's Studies at TWU. Graduate students from all academic disciplines and religious backgrounds (or no religious backgrounds) are welcome.

Class Format

This course will be conducted as a "blended" or "hybrid" seminar with approximately 51% taking place via the Internet and 49% taking place face-to-face in the classroom. The face-to-face classes will take place from 6:00 p.m. to 9:50 p.m. in the MCL Building, Room 402, on the following Tuesdays: July 8, July 15, July 22, July 29, and August 5. The remainder of the class will be conducted via Blackboard.

Course Goals and Student Learning Outcomes

This course seeks to fulfill the following objectives:

- to increase knowledge of feminist interpretations of religious traditions, including scriptural texts, rituals, symbols, and theological constructions,
- to increase knowledge of women's contributions to the formation and development of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,
- to foster insights into interconnections between religion, gender, 'race', sexuality, and culture,
- to acquaint students with ground-breaking works and contemporary debates in the field of feminist studies in religion,
- to introduce students to major questions and methods in the academic study of religion,
- to foster appreciation for the richness, diversity, and common features of religious life in world cultures and contemporary American society, and
- to further the development of communication skills, critical thinking abilities, and insights into contemporary issues needed by students who aspire to positions of leadership.

I hope you will join with me in pursuing these objectives as well as your own goals for the course.

Textbooks

Required Texts

- Margaret Atwood, The Handmaid's Tale
- K. Bagley and K. McIntosh, eds., Women's Studies in Religion: A Multicultural Reader
- Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, ed., Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society
- Stephanie Wellen Levine, Mystics, Mavericks, and Merrymakers: An Intimate Journey among Hasidic Girls
- Fatima Mernissi, Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood
- Danya Ruttenberg, ed., Yentl's Revenge: The Next Wave of Jewish Feminism
- Karen Jo Torjesen, When Women Were Priests: Women's Leadership in the Early Church and the Scandal of Their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity

- Alice Walker, The Color Purple
- Amina Wadud, Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam

Recommended Texts

- Gross, Rita M., Feminism and Religion: An Introduction (for an introduction to the field of Women's Studies in Religion)
- Smith, Huston, The World's Religions (for introductions to major world religions)
- Cioffi, Frank L. The Imaginative Argument: A Practical Manifesto for Writers (for guidance on writing effective academic prose)
- Gibaldi, Joseph, MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 6th edition (for guidance on notes, works cited, etc. If you use the MLA style in your papers, you should closely follow the guidelines in this handbook and consult it regularly.)

Required texts are available for purchase in the TWU Bookstore. You may also wish to purchase these texts on-line through Web sites such as half.com, barnesandnoble.com, or amazon.com. You should not attempt to take this course without obtaining copies of the required books, since one of the most significant aspects of the course involves reading, analyzing, and discussing the required texts. If you are unable to purchase your own copies of the books for whatever reason, please contact me so that I can assist you by lending you books or placing them on reserve, whenever possible.

The textbooks will be supplemented with short extra readings in the form of handouts, documents posted in Blackboard, and/or articles on websites.

Class Expectations

This graduate seminar will generally emphasize group discussion and close analysis of readings, while incorporating films, Internet resources, and student presentations. It's my hope that we'll learn together through active participation and interaction in both the classroom and online. At times I'll present information to provide you with background information and additional perspectives on particular topics; more often, however, my role will be to facilitate and to guide productive class discussions about assigned materials.

The course aims to educate and to stimulate thinking—not to convert or to indoctrinate others to our particular beliefs. I believe that our interactions will be enriched by the variety of perspectives that students bring to the class. Each of us must be committed to engaging with course materials and with each other in order to learn, gain insights, and foster effective communication and analytical skills. We should cultivate an authentic spirit of openness toward each other and the course materials. Although we will not always agree with each other, each of us should strive to foster a supportive learning community. Both in class and on-line, students are expected to consider the perspectives of others with friendliness, respect, and openness. Students are expected to listen to each other carefully with a spirit of generosity as well as to raise questions and to offer additional perspectives.

If you tend to speak a lot in class, please make an effort to think about what you want to say before you speak and to not monopolize discussions. If you tend to be quiet in class, make an effort to participate in each class discussion at least once every class period. In order for our course to function productively, you are expected to attend face-to-face class sessions regularly and on time, complete assignments regularly and on time, read assigned texts carefully, and participate in Blackboard and face-to-face discussions with thoughtful consideration for other class members.

In order for our course to function productively, you are expected to attend class sessions regularly and on time (6:00 pm), read assignments carefully prior to the class period, participate in class discussions with thoughtfulness, and complete all assignments by the scheduled deadlines. Before entering the classroom, please turn off your cell phone. Refrain from engaging in behaviors that are distracting or impolite to other members of the class. These behaviors include inattentiveness, leaving class in the middle of a class presentation or discussion, doodling, working on assignments for other courses, talking on your cell phone, or engaging in private conversations.

I welcome you to this class, look forward to learning with you this semester, and sincerely hope that this course will offer you a challenging and rewarding educational experience!

Blackboard

Using the Blackboard System

The electronic portion of our class will take place through the Blackboard (Bb) system at TWU. Blackboard can be accessed through either <http://twu.blackboard.com> OR <http://online.twu.edu>.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with the Bb system, it is a web-based, course delivery system. It provides private space on the web server that is used for members of the course. No one else has access to the "space" except for those who are registered for the class. The space that is set aside for our course includes space to post comments and questions, access course grades, send email messages to others in the course, view links to outside resources, and submit writing assignments.

To access the Bb system, you'll need a user ID and password. Your user ID and password will be the same as your Pioneer Portal user ID. If you do not have a Portal user ID, you will need to create one immediately. Go to <http://portal.twu.edu>, click on the button to create a portal account, and follow the instructions. For more information about Blackboard and Pioneer Portal, see <http://www.twu.edu/dl/quickstart/index.htm>. You can log into Blackboard from the TWU homepage (<http://www.twu.edu>) or at <http://online.twu.edu>.

For information about how to use Blackboard, please read the information linked here: <http://www.twu.edu/dl/orientation/start.htm>. For technical assistance, contact the TWU Helpdesk at 940-898-3971 or helpdesk@twu.edu. You can also go to the Mega Lab on the 2nd floor of the MCL building.

Make sure that the email address listed for you in Blackboard is the email address that you use and check regularly. You are responsible for checking and reading emails sent to you through Blackboard and to your Pioneer Portal (TWU) email account. You can change your email address in Blackboard under Personal Information, Edit Personal Information. It's also possible to forward your Pioneer Portal email account to another email address. Follow the instructions under "My Settings" after logging in to Pioneer Portal.

Before making postings in Blackboard, please read and follow the guidelines about "netiquette" (rules of online communication) found here: <http://www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html>.

Participation in Blackboard

Internet-based courses have unique opportunities and challenges. 51% of our class time will take place in the "virtual space" represented by the Blackboard system. Our interactions in Bb will be text-based and mostly will be asynchronous (occurring at different times rather than at the same place and time).

Since our written contributions in Bb will be posted electronically, each of us will have the opportunity to contribute to this course and respond to each others' contributions perhaps in more thoughtful and carefully considered ways than we might be able to do in our face-to-face classroom sessions, where interactions will be more spontaneous. We'll also have the opportunity to refer back throughout the semester to what we have written in earlier weeks, so that we can build on our ideas. Bb also provides opportunities for those who tend to be reticent to speak in face-to-face classes to discuss course materials more freely.

However, since our communication medium in Bb will be through the use of written words, we will not be able to make use of body language and other cues to help us interpret each other's words in Bb. Therefore, responses that we post need to be carefully written, thoughtful, and respectful. We'll need to pay attention to both what we say and how we say it. Your postings should be well-written with few or no typographical or grammatical errors.

My participation and Harry McMaster's participation on the Discussion Board in Blackboard will include responding to and asking questions about postings, in order to foster dialogue and contribute to the further development of our ideas. Sometimes this will involve inviting you to turn back to particular passages in the assigned texts. Sometimes we will ask questions to prompt you to consider other perspectives.

Time Management

Research indicates that web-based and blended courses require a greater time commitment from students than traditionally structured courses. Therefore, do not underestimate the time commitment that you will have to make to be successful in this class. In addition, this is a 15-week course compressed into a 5-week summer session. Furthermore, if this were a traditional, face-to-face course during Summer II we would meet in the classroom for eight hours each week, rather than for four hours. Thus, you should expect to devote a minimum of 20-30 hours per week to reading, reflecting, writing, attending class, posting in Bb, and completing other assignments/projects.

Distance education courses require disciplined time management skills. Be very clear with yourself that while there are unique benefits to web-based and hybrid courses, there are also unique challenges; you must resolve to accommodate these challenges if you wish to be successful.

In order to help ensure your success in the course, I expect you to check Blackboard and your email at least once a day for course-related messages. I also expect you to read postings to the Discussion Forums and Wikis at least 3-4 times per week. I will use Bb for posting information and Web links relevant to the week's reading as well as posting announcements, reminders, and/or any changes to the schedule.

Access to Internet and Word Processing Software

You will need to have regular Internet access to participate in this course. Although you do not need extensive experience with computers or the Internet, you do need to have a basic familiarity with web browsing, personal computers, and the Internet.

You also will need to have access to word processing software. You should submit documents in one of the following forms: Microsoft Word (preferred) or RTF (rich text format). Please do not submit files in Microsoft Works (.wks) or Word Perfect (.wps), since I will not be able to open them.

For a list of minimum computer requirements, please read the information here:
http://www.twu.edu/dl/Prospective_Students/computer_reqs.htm.

***I thank Professor Jim Williams and Professor AnaLouise Keating for allowing me to adapt portions of their syllabi here.*

Guidelines for Reading

To prepare for class and Bb discussions, it is essential that you closely read and critically reflect on the assigned materials. The reading materials are sometimes intense and occasionally confrontational, and you will not be expected to agree with everything you are assigned to read. (I, in fact, do not necessarily agree with everything that I have assigned to you.) You are expected, however, to read the assigned materials analytically and with open-mindedness.

As you read, you should thoughtfully reflect on what you read and reread difficult passages. I also expect that you will take notes, underline, and reflect as you read and reread. You should look up unfamiliar words and terms, read footnotes/endnotes, read the bibliographies, and read some background on the assigned authors. Reflect on the authors' ideas, consider their implications, and examine their assumptions.

As you read the texts, you should consider the following questions in relation to each reading assignment:

- What do you know about the author and his/her perspective? What can you infer about the author and his/her assumptions?
- What is the author's major purpose and thesis?
- How does the author support or defend his/her thesis? What arguments, examples, or illustrations does he/she use?
- From your perspective, what is the author's strongest argument? Why?
- From your perspective, what is the author's weakest argument? Why?
- What passage was particularly thought-provoking or insightful to you? Be prepared to explain your response to the passage.
- What passage was particularly troubling or objectionable to you? Be prepared to explain your response to the passage.

More specifically, as you read texts in this course, you should ask questions like the following:

- What have I learned from this author about specific religious texts, symbols, and/or practices?
- How does the author understand relationships between "religion," "spirituality," and "social justice"?
- How does the author understand relationships between conceptions of the sacred and society?
- What criticisms of mainstream religion, contemporary societies, and cultures does the author offer?
- What does the author assume or assert about religion, spirituality, feminism, culture, 'race,' and/or the nature of oppression?

Course Requirements

Grades will be awarded on a point system. Your points will be accessible to you through the Gradebook in Blackboard. A total of 1,000 points will be possible in this course.

1. Attendance and Participation in Face-to-Face Classroom Sessions (100 total points)

Our class meets five times during the semester on the following dates: July 8, July 15, July 22, July 29, and August 5. Attendance and thoughtful interaction with course materials and other students are requirements of this course. You're expected to come to class prepared to listen respectfully to other students in the class and to discuss the required course materials in a productive manner.

20 points will be awarded for each class session that you attend and in which you participate thoughtfully. 10 points will be subtracted for late arrivals, early departures, inattentiveness, etc. If you must miss class, please notify me ahead of time, if possible, by email.

If you miss more than one class period without excuses sanctioned by the Office of Student Life, the highest grade you will be able to receive for this course is a "B," no matter how many total points you earn throughout the semester. According to TWU policy, absences from class will be excused in only these cases: 1) illness certified by a physician, 2) serious illness or death in student's immediate family, 3) absence from the campus with the sanction of the University or for a religious holiday. In the event that you must miss class due to an excused absence, you should obtain an absence memo from the Office of Student Life (940/898-3615); please do not bring your documentation of personal illnesses or emergencies to me. You will be responsible for providing the Office of Student Life (Student Center, 2nd floor) with the proper verification for your absence.

2. Initiating Class Discussion (25 points)

In class on either July 15, July 22, July 29, or August 5, you will be responsible for presenting to the face-to-face class some brief questions and/or comments about the reading assignments for that evening, in order to stimulate our discussion. Your presentation should be 3 to 5 minutes in length; your questions and/or comments related to the reading should be typed (no more than 1 page) and distributed to the class. Up to 25 points will be assigned according to the clarity of your presentation, the depth of understanding it displays, and its helpfulness for stimulating thoughtful reflection on the reading. You will sign up for the specific date in advance.

3. Blogs (Informal Journals) (75 total points)

Since the course materials may evoke a range of personal thoughts and emotions, I would like you to keep a private, weekly journal of your informal responses to the course materials and class discussions. Your personal journal, which will be in the form of a "blog" (web log) in Blackboard, will be accessible only to me (and not to anyone else in the course). You're required to post at least one entry by 10:00 p.m. on the following dates (and preferably earlier, if possible): Thursday, July 10; Thursday, July 17; Thursday, July 24; Thursday, July 31; and Thursday, August 7.

You're welcome to post more than one entry each week if you wish. Each week you should post at least 150 words describing your personal thoughts, questions, and/or emotions related to any course materials discussed during the week. Although I will comment briefly on your entries within your private blog in Blackboard, do not write in order to please me. I'd like you to use the blog entries to record your honest thoughts and feelings pertaining to the course. You're also welcome to be as creative and as informal as you wish by adding images, adding Web links, incorporating video clips, and/or changing font styles.

For more information about the blogs and to access your personal blog, please click on the “Blogs & Wikis” button in Blackboard.

Each weekly blog is worth up to 15 points. You’ll receive full credit for each weekly blog as long as it thoughtfully responds to class materials explored during the week in which you’re writing. Have fun!

4. Wikis (100 total points)

Throughout the semester I hope and anticipate that you’ll wish to seek out and share with others in the class additional information about the topics under our consideration. In order to facilitate the sharing of information, we’ll create collaborative Web sites (“wikis”) in Blackboard on specific topics. The wikis will be used to prompt our further investigation into course topics that supplement our readings and discussions.

You’re expected to contribute thoughtfully, creatively, and significantly throughout the semester to at least three different wikis. You may add (or edit) information in the form of text, images, video clips, and/or Web links; you may also organize information and/or add new pages to existing wikis. Your contributions may incorporate various font styles and colors. Whenever you incorporate information from a Web site or another source, please identify your sources of information.

For more information about the wikis and to access them, please click on the “**Blogs & Wikis**” button in Blackboard.

You should contribute to the class wikis at least one time per week during our summer session (Weeks 1-5). You should contribute to at least three different wikis during the course of the semester. By the end of the semester, I hope that we’ll have some useful and creative sources of information that we’ve compiled together.

You’re required to make contributions to Wikis by 10:00 p.m. on the following dates (preferably earlier, if possible): Thursday, July 10; Thursday, July 17; Thursday, July 24; Thursday, July 31; and Thursday, August 7.

Each weekly contribution to wikis is worth up to 20 points. You’ll receive full credit for your contributions to the wikis as long as they seek to contribute meaningfully and significantly to our collaborative Web site and our knowledge about the topic under consideration. If you would like to begin a class wiki on a new topic, please let me know so that I can add the wiki.

I encourage you to be as innovative and creative as possible! Have fun!

5. Reading Interaction Postings (RIPs) (300 total points)

According to the schedule of readings and assignments listed below, you will be required to submit and post to the Discussion Board in Blackboard four Reading Interaction Postings (RIPs) in response to required course readings. As you write your RIPs, please follow these guidelines:

- a) Each RIP should discuss one essay, one chapter, or one brief passage—even just a paragraph; you should not try to respond to all of the assigned readings in your RIP.

b) Your RIP should focus on answering **one** of the following questions in a thoughtful and thorough manner with specific references to the specific passage: 1) From your perspective, what is the author's strongest point, strongest argument, or greatest insight? Why? 2) From your perspective, what is the author's weakest point or argument? Why? 3) What passage in the text was particularly thought-provoking or insightful to you? Explain your response to the passage. OR 4) What passage in the text was particularly troubling or objectionable to you? Explain your response to the passage.

c) As you discuss your responses to the specific passage, be sure to explain how the passage relates to the author's argument or work as a whole. Your RIP should display good understanding of the significance of the passage that you discuss within the larger context of the article or book.

d) In addition, your RIP should conclude by listing one discussion question raised for you by the passage.

A well-written RIP will contain a thesis statement (generally at the end of your introductory paragraph) that is supported throughout the paper. You should support points that you make with brief quotations and references to the text. Identify the page numbers to which you refer by placing the page number within parentheses at the end of the quotation or relevant sentence. For example:

In Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam, Amina Wadud asserts that "gender justice is essential to the divine order of the universe" (10).

Always state in your own words the meaning and significance of any quotations you use.

Each Reading Interaction Posting should be 300 to 500 words in length. Revise your RIPs before submitting them, and eliminate punctuation, grammatical errors, and typos. Reading Interaction Postings will be evaluated according to their depth of interaction with the reading material(s) as well as the clarity of their communication.

Each Reading Interaction Posting should be 1) sent directly to me through the Assignments Feature in Bb (click on the Assignments button and follow the directions), AND 2) pasted into a message on the Discussion Board, so that everyone in the class can read it. You will need to edit your postings after you have posted them on the Discussion Board, in order to correct punctuation errors (e.g., quotation marks turning into question marks) that frequently arise in Blackboard.

Reading Interaction Postings are no later than 10:00 p.m. on the following dates: Friday, July 11; Friday, July 18; Friday, July 25; and Friday, August 1. Up to 75 points will be awarded for each RIP. No credit will be given for late RIPs.

6. Blackboard Response Postings (100 total points)

In addition to participating in face-to-face discussions in the classroom, you will be expected to interact with other students about the course materials on the Discussion Board in Bb.

According to the schedule below on the syllabus for Weeks 1-4, you will be required to post a minimum of two Discussion Board responses (minimum of 75 words for each response) per week to two other students' Reading Interaction Postings. (You will be expected, in other words, to respond to at least two different Reading Interaction Postings each week during

Weeks 1-4.) Your responses are due by 10:00 p.m. on the following dates: Saturday, July 12; Saturday, July 19; Saturday, July 26; and Saturday, August 2.

Your Discussion Board responses should offer additional perspectives, respond to questions, raise questions, and/or express your points of agreement or disagreement with other students' Reading Interaction Postings.

Your postings should be well-written according to standards of academic writing and free of typographical and spelling errors. Don't use abbreviations commonly associated with instant messaging and email (for example, "IMHO, u r not rite bout that!" "don't b l8 4 class," "LOL, wat r u doin 2nite???"). Avoid abbreviations, and use standard spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.

Each weekly set of two Discussion Board responses will be awarded up to 25 points. No credit will be given for late Discussion Board responses.

7. Essay: Field Observation, Book Review, or Editorial (300 points)

You will be required to complete either a field observation assignment, a critical book review, or an editorial, as described below. Please select an essay assignment that will stimulate and challenge you, while contributing to your academic program of study!

Prior to beginning this assignment, I strongly encourage you to complete the TWU "Research Skills Tutorial," which provides helpful and important guidance for doing research: <http://www.twu.edu/library/search/tutorial/index.htm>.

This assignment is due on Friday, August 8th no later than 5:00 p.m. (Earlier submissions are welcome!) Your essay should be 1) sent directly to me through the Assignments Feature in Bb (click on the Assignments button and follow the directions), AND 2) attached to a message on the Discussion Board, so that everyone in the class can read it, if they wish.

a. Field Observation Assignment

For this assignment you will visit in person and observe a worship service or religious ritual (e.g., a wedding, prayer meeting, eucharistic celebration) that represents a religious tradition with which you are generally unfamiliar. Ideally, you will observe a service or ritual that you have never seen previously. Observe the ritual, and based on your observations write an analysis and interpretation of its significance for women and/or the messages that the ritual presents about gender, sexuality, dis/ability, class, race, and/or nationality.

Your essay (5-7 typed pages) should address the following questions, wherever possible and applicable:

- Who are the principal participants, and what do they do?
- What images, teachings, doctrines are conveyed in this ritual through words, texts, symbolic gestures, manipulation of objects, etc.?
- What can we learn about authority and power in this religious tradition by studying the ritual?
- How does the ritual reflect in any way the reading and research you have done on women's roles and status within the religious tradition? How does the service/ritual reflect the religious tradition's theology of (i.e. ideas about) gender, race, sexuality, class, dis/ability, and/or nationality?

- What are your personal responses to the ritual? Is the ritual meaningful to you? Is there something about it that you find liberating or objectionable?

Your essay should incorporate your observations as well as research (additional reading you have done) about the religious tradition represented by the service/ritual. Your research should not rely solely on the Internet. Your paper should be an essay that argues in support of a thesis (main point) concerning the ritual. Your essay should include notes and a list of works cited, following a recognized style manual (MLA preferred, but other recognized formats are acceptable).

If applicable, your essay should, in the words of Deborah Rosenfelt, strive to “appreciate other cultures without glossing over practices deleterious to women, and to critique such practices as feminists without ethnocentric arrogance” (“Culturally Challenging Practices and Pedagogical Strategies,” in *Encompassing Gender: Integrating International Studies and Women’s Studies*, ed. Mary M. Lay, et. al., New York: The Feminist Press, 458).

Additional guidelines for this assignment, including a copy of Rosenfelt’s essay, ideas for possible sites to visit, and suggestions about etiquette, will be made available in Blackboard under “Documents.”

b. Critical Book Review

For this assignment you will write a critical book review (5-7 typed pages). The book that you review should be selected from one of the books on the list found in Blackboard (under “Documents”) or found in the lists of Suggested Readings in the text *Women’s Studies in Religion*. (You may also propose another scholarly book on some aspect religion written from a feminist perspective for my consideration.)

Write a book review that offers a clear position or argument about the book that is well-supported with explicit references to particular passages in the text. Your review should not simply summarize the book—it is not a book report!—but should evaluate and persuasively analyze some aspect of the book. Your essay should develop and defend a thesis about the book.

Here are some helpful guides for writing a critical book review:

<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/review.html>

<http://www.bluegrass.kctcs.edu/LCC/HIS/review.html>

<http://www.library.dal.ca/how/bookrev.htm>

<http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/CriNonfiction.html>

c. Editorial

For this assignment you will write an editorial—a position paper—in which you express your reasoned position on a current, controversial topic related to religion and women, gender, sexuality, race, nationality, class, and/or dis/ability. Your essay (approximately 5-7 typewritten pages) must address a specific topic, clearly present a thesis, and support your thesis with well-reasoned arguments and evidence.

Your essay will be evaluated according to how clearly, cogently, and creatively it expresses your own position—not according to whether or not it happens to be in agreement with my personal views on the subject. You should research your topic, since the best position papers present evidence in support of the position as well as display good understanding of the complexity of the issues. Your position paper should include notes and a list of works cited, following a

recognized style manual (MLA preferred, but other recognized formats are acceptable). You must not rely exclusively on websites for sources of information. Internet sources should only be used critically, sparingly, and appropriately. You are required to consult a minimum of 3-5 sources (books and/or scholarly journal articles) on your subject. At least three of your sources must have been published after the year 2003.

The following is a list of possible topics, many of which will need to be narrowed down even further. You are not, however, limited to these general topics.

- “faith-based” initiatives
- some aspect of religion and the current presidential race
- the ordination of women
- gender-inclusive translations of the Bible
- religious marriage ceremonies for gay or lesbian couples
- Christian weight loss programs or Christian exercise centers
- religion and violence against women and children
- Catholic policies about abusive priests
- religion and the legality of abortion in the U.S.
- religious views of therapeutic cloning or stem cell research
- religious intermarriage
- gay or lesbian ministers/rabbis
- religious perspectives related to the war in Iraq
- religious views about the death penalty
- the impact of Christian fundamentalism on cuts in U.S. funding for family-planning agencies around the world

You may wish to write your position paper specifically in response to something you recently saw in the news, and I highly encourage you to consider this. Helpful guidelines for writing effective editorials or position papers can be found on the following websites:

<http://homepages.uhwo.hawaii.edu/~writing/position.htm>

<http://www.sfu.ca/cmns/130d1/WritingaPositionPaper.htm>

Grading

Your work and contributions to this course will not be judged according to the personal positions that you take. Rather, evaluations will be based on your engagement with course materials, thoughtful reflection, and the clarity of your communication. Points will be awarded as follows:

Assignment	Point Value
1. Attendance and Participation in Five Class Sessions	100 points (20 points per class session)
2. Initiating Class Discussion	25 points
3. Four Reading Interaction Postings	300 points (75 points each)
4. Blackboard Responses (4 Weeks)	100 points (20 points for each week)
5. Five Weekly Blog Entries	75 points (15 points for each week)
6. Five Weekly Contributions to Wikis	100 points (20 points for each week)
7. Essay	300 points
TOTAL	1,000 possible points

Course Grades

Final course grades will be assigned as follows:

GRADE	POINTS
A	900-1000 points
B	800-899 points
C	700-799 points
D	600-699 points
F	Below 600

Grades of incomplete ("I") are given only in keeping with the University's policy on incompletes, which is found in the TWU Graduate Catalog. Students must request a grade of incomplete and sign a petition prior to the end of the semester by the deadline set by the Registrar's Office.

Academic Dishonesty

Honesty in completing assignments is essential to the mission of the university and to the development of the personal integrity of the student. Cheating, plagiarism, or other kinds of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and will result in appropriate sanctions that may include failing an assignment, failing the class, or being suspended or expelled. Suspected cases in this course may be reported to Student Life. The specific disciplinary process for academic dishonesty is found in the TWU Student Handbook.

Plagiarism, which is a form of both stealing and lying, is a serious offense and includes presenting words or ideas from other sources as your own. For all writing assignments, be careful to properly document quotations and ideas from other sources. You must always use quotation marks around words that are not your own and properly acknowledge your sources according to a recognized style manual. Even when you are summarizing someone else's ideas in your own words, you must acknowledge your source through proper methods of citation. Make sure to select one style manual (MLA documentation style preferred) and follow it consistently.

Tools to help you avoid plagiarism are available through the TWU Libraries at <http://www.twu.edu/library/tutorial/plagiarism/player.html>. For further assistance, I suggest that you consult the following websites: <http://library.duke.edu/research/citing/> or <http://www.twu.edu/library/search/refworks.htm>

If you are not sure what constitutes plagiarism, please contact me, and I'll be happy to work with you.

Although it is often useful to build on or extend work you have done in other contexts or courses, you may not turn in work produced for another course or previously written for another purpose without discussing this with me first and gaining prior permission.

Policy on Deadlines

Since the pace of this summer session course moves quickly, announced dates for the submission of written assignments and Blackboard postings are firm and will not be extended unless an actual emergency prevents you from conforming to them. Requirements of other courses and of your employment, as well as other events that could have been foreseen, do not count as emergencies under this policy. Requests for extensions must be made before the announced dates unless it is actually impossible for you to do so. Penalties will be assessed for late assignments.

Other Policies

If you miss class, you are responsible for finding out about announcements, changes in the schedule, handouts, and assignments that you miss during your absence. Please contact another student in the class prior to contacting me for this information.

Closely and consistently follow the MLA guidelines (or another style manual) for writing and citing your sources. For assistance, I recommend visiting the Write Site or soliciting feedback from the Online Writing Lab.

Your Reading Response Postings and final essay should be typed and double-spaced with 1" margins and 11- or 12-point font (Arial or New Times Roman preferred). Indent each paragraph, and do not add extra spaces between paragraphs. Number each page of your writing assignment.

Submit your documents in Microsoft Word, as a Rich Text File, or as a PDF. I will not be able to read documents submitted in other formats.

Revise your work. Eliminate typographical, spelling, and grammatical errors before turning in your papers or making your postings in Blackboard.

Students with Disabilities

To participate in this course, you will need to be able to read computer screens or have access to adaptive devices that can assist you with reading. You will need to be able to input data into a computer using a keyboard or some other appropriate adaptive device. You also will need to be able to word process or use adaptive devices to help you with this (e.g. dictation software).

If you anticipate the need for reasonable accommodations to meet the requirements of this course, you must register with the office of Disability Support Services (HDB 002, 940-898-3835, dss@twu.edu) in order to obtain the required official notification of your accommodation needs. Please plan to meet with me by appointment or during office hours to discuss approved accommodations and how my course requirements and activities may impact your ability to fully participate.

Other University Services

TWU offers a wide range of free and confidential counseling services. If you are experiencing personal difficulties, do not let them prevent you from doing your best. Contact the **Counseling Center** in West Jones Hall at 940/898-3801 (<http://www.twu.edu/o-sl/counseling/>). The Counseling Center also offers on-line workshops on such topics as "How to Get Along with your Professor" <grin>, "Test Anxiety," "Stress," "Reducing Procrastination," and "Time Management." You can find these workshops at <http://www.twu.edu/o-sl/counseling/workshops.html>

The **Write Site** provides free, individualized assistance with writing assignments for both undergraduate and graduate students. Visit the Write Site in CFO 131 or call 940/898-2341 to make an appointment. For further information, see <http://www.twu.edu/writesite/>.

You can also send email to the **On-Line Writing Lab** to ask questions about your writing (owl@twu.edu). For more information about this service and how to submit assignments for feedback on your writing, see <http://www.twu.edu/writesite/OWL.asp>.

Schedule of Readings, Class Meetings, and Assignments

Note: The following is a tentative schedule. I reserve the right to alter assignments, as needed, so please check Blackboard regularly for announcements. In addition to the assignments listed here, please read information or go to related web sites that I may post on Blackboard.

Week 1: Tuesday, July 8 through Saturday, July 12 An Introduction to Women's Studies in Religion

1. Class Meeting: Tuesday, July 8, 6:00-9:50 p.m.

Introduction to course and course participants

Ground rules for discussion

Questions for discussion: What is religion? Why are human beings religious? Why should feminists be concerned with religion? Why study religion? How have feminists approached the study of religion?

Discussion of Readings (handouts):

- 1) Paul Tillich, "The Lost Dimension in Religion"
- 2) Ninian Smart, "The Nature of Religion"
- 3) Timothy K. Beal, "Seeking Out Lives of Faith in All Their Awesome Absurdity"
- 4) Sheila Ruth, "Women's Spirit and Men's Religion"

Film (to be viewed and discussed in class, as time allows): "What Do You Believe? American Teens, Spirituality, and Freedom of Religion" by Sarah Feinbloom. For more information, see www.whatdoyoubelieve.org.

2. Blackboard Participation

July 9-10: Acquaint yourself with Blackboard! Post a message to the "Coffee House" on the Bb Discussion Board, and create a personal homepage (click on "Homepages").

Read: 1) Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*

Questions for thought and consideration:

- Why does Celie write to God? What sorts of things can she tell God that she cannot tell others? What sorts of things does she learn to tell Shug that she is afraid to tell God? Does God ever listen to Celie?
- What does this book reveal about Walker's criticisms of traditional Christianity and proposals for re-formulating the concept of God?
- How does Walker envision relationships between the sacred and society? Between the sacred and personal empowerment?
- What are your personal responses to this novel in general? More specifically, what are your personal responses to Walker's theology—her ideas about God, the relationship between the human and the divine, the relationship between spirituality and sexuality?

2) *Women's Studies in Religion: A Multicultural Reader*, pp. 1-18.

Blackboard Assignments:

- Post on your personal Blog (due by 10 p.m., Thursday, July 10)
- Contribute to a class Wiki (due by 10 p.m., Thursday, July 10)
- Reading Interaction Posting on *The Color Purple* (due by 10 p.m., Friday, July 11; it should be 1) sent directly to me through the Assignments Feature in Bb [click on the Assignments button and follow the directions], AND 2) pasted into a message on the Discussion Board, so that everyone in the class can read it.)
- Minimum of two Discussion Board Responses to at least two different class members' reading interaction postings (due by 10 p.m., Saturday, July 12)

Recommended readings (under Documents):

- 1) Alice Walker, "The Only Reason You Want to Go to Heaven Is That You Have Been Driven Out of Your Mind (Off Your Land and Out of Your Lovers Arms) . . ." *On the Issues: The Progressive Woman's Quarterly* 6.2 (April 30, 1997), p. 16.
- 2) Pamela A. Smith, "Green Lap, Brown Embrace, Blue Body: The Ecospirituality of Alice Walker," *Crosscurrents* 48 (Summer 1998), <http://www.crosscurrents.org/smith2.htm>.
- 3) Stacie Lynn Hankinson, "From Monotheism to Pantheism: Liberation from Patriarchy in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*," *Midwest Quarterly* 38:3 (Spring 1997): 320-28.

Week 2: Sunday, July 13 through Saturday, July 19
Feminist Perspectives on Judaism

1. Class Meeting: Tuesday, July 15, 6:00-9:50 p.m.

In preparation for class, read the following:

- 1) Uma Narayan, "Undoing the 'Package Picture' of Cultures" (posted in Blackboard)
- 2) Web pages on Judaism posted in Blackboard under Announcements
- 3) Levine, *Mystics, Mavericks, and Merrymakers*, pp. 1-138, 191-233 (additional chapters recommended)

Film (to be viewed and discussed in class): "The Return of Sarah's Daughters" by Marcia Jarmel (1997).

2. Blackboard Participation

Read:

- 1) *Yentl's Revenge: The Next Wave of Jewish Feminism*, ed. Danya Ruttenberg (Select chapters of particular interest to you, but read at least one-half of the book.)
- 2) *Women's Studies in Religion*, pp. 174-175, 211-220.
- 3) Additional information on the *mikvah* (posted in Blackboard).

Questions for consideration:

What does it mean, according to the writers in *Yentl's Revenge*, to be a "third-wave" Jewish feminist? What surprised you in this book? What did you find inspiring? What did you question? What significant questions does this book raise concerning feminism, religion, and spirituality?

Blackboard Assignments:

- Post on your personal Blog (due by 10 p.m., Thursday, July 17)
- Contribute to a class Wiki (due by 10 p.m., Thursday, July 17)
- Reading Interaction Posting on a passage from *Yentl's Revenge* or one of Judith Plaskow's articles in *Women's Studies in Religion* (due by 10 p.m., Friday, July 18; it should be 1) sent directly to me through the Assignments Feature in Bb [click on the Assignments button and follow the directions], AND 2) pasted into a message on the Discussion Board, so that everyone in the class can read it.)
- Minimum of two Discussion Board Responses to at least two different class members' reading interaction postings (due by 10 p.m., Saturday, July 19)

**Week 3: Sunday, July 20 through Saturday, July 26
Feminist/Womanist/Mujerista Perspectives on Christianity**

1. Class Meeting: Tuesday, July 22, 6:00-9:50 p.m.

In preparation for class, read the following:

- 1) Karen Jo Torjesen, *Women Women Were Priests*, pp. 1-176, 247-271.
- 2) Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, "Every Two Minutes: Battered Women and Feminist Interpretation (to be made available in Blackboard)
- 3) Web pages on Christianity at the BBC "Your Guide to the Religions of the World":
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/>
- 4) Selections from the New Testament (bring a Bible to class if you have one; also available online at <http://unbound.biola.edu/>): Romans 16, Galatians 3:26-27, Ephesians 5:21-33, 1 Timothy
- 5) Web pages linked to "Women in Ancient Christianity: New Discoveries":
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/first/women.html>

Film on Mary Magdalene to be viewed and discussed in class as time allows.

2. Blackboard Participation

Read:

- 1) *Women's Studies in Religion* (selections to be determined)
- 2) *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society* (selections to be determined)

Blackboard Assignments:

- Post on your personal Blog (due by 10 p.m., Thursday, July 24)
- Contribute to a class Wiki (due by 10 p.m., Thursday, July 24)
- Reading Interaction Posting on a passage from an article in *Women's Studies in Religion* (due by 10 p.m., Friday, July 25; it should be 1) sent directly to me through the Assignments Feature in Bb [click on the Assignments button and follow the directions], AND 2) pasted into a message on the Discussion Board, so that everyone in the class can read it.)
- Minimum of two Discussion Board Responses to at least two different class members' reading interaction postings (due by 10 p.m., Saturday, July 26)

Week 4: Sunday, July 27 through Saturday, August 2**Feminist Perspectives on Religious Fundamentalisms**1. Class Meeting: Tuesday, July 29, 6:00-9:50 p.m.

In preparation for class, read the following:

- 1) Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

In preparation for class, please also do the following:

- 1) Find a recent news story or website related to a political effort by religious fundamentalists (from any religious tradition) to restrict women's sexuality or reproductive choices. What is your personal response to their effort? Be prepared to share your news story and perspectives with the class.

OR

- 2) Find a recent news story or website related to a political effort to work against the political activities or influence of religious fundamentalisms. What is your personal response to this effort? Be prepared to share your news story and perspectives with the class.

Film (to be viewed and discussed in class): "Battle for the Minds" by Steven Lipscomb,
<http://www.battlefortheminds.com>

Feminist Perspectives on Islam2. Blackboard Participation

Read:

- 1) Web pages on Islam at the BBC "Your Guide to the Religions of the World," found here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/>
- 2) Fatima Mernissi, *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*

Consider the following questions:

According to Mernissi, what is the meaning and significance of the *hudud* (the sacred frontier/boundary) and the harem in the lives of men and women of Moroccan society. What is a cosmic frontier? An invisible harem? What explanations does Mernissi offer for the existence of the *hudud* and the harem? What is the meaning and significance of the title of the book—*Dreams of Trespass*? Describe the range of ways in which the women of Mernissi's family resisted the limitations placed upon them. How did this book enlarge or enrich your own self-understanding? In what ways did this book prompt you to reflect on U.S. society, Western imperialism, the relationship between religion and culture, social inequalities, and/or the status of women in Western society?

Blackboard Assignments:

- Post on your personal Blog (due by 10 p.m., Thursday, July 31)
- Contribute to a class Wiki (due by 10 p.m., Thursday, July 31)
- Reading Interaction Posting on a passage from *Dreams of Trespass* (due by 10 p.m., Friday, August 1; it should be 1) sent directly to me through the Assignments Feature in Bb [click on the Assignments button and follow the directions], AND 2) pasted into a message on the Discussion Board, so that everyone in the class can read it.)
- Minimum of two Discussion Board Responses to at least two different class members' reading interaction postings (due by 10 p.m., Saturday, August 2)

Week 5: Sunday, August 3 through Friday, August 8

Feminist Perspectives on Islam

1. Class Meeting: Tuesday, August 5, 6:00-9:50 p.m.

In preparation for class, read the following:

- 1) Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (selections to be determined)

Recommended reading: *Women's Studies in Religion*, pp. 35-47, 143-163.

In preparation for class, please also do the following:

Find a thought-provoking image of or article about Muslim women and the veil on a Web site or in a newspaper or magazine. Bring a copy of your image or article with you to class and come prepared to discuss it with others.

Film (to be viewed and discussed in class): "Under One Sky: Arab Women in North America Talk about the Hijab" (1999). For more information, see <http://www.umanitoba.ca/cm/vol7/no7/underonesky.html>

2. Blackboard Participation

Blackboard Assignments:

- Post on your personal Blog (due by 10 p.m., Thursday, August 7)
- Contribute to a class Wiki (due by 10 p.m., Thursday, August 7)
- Field Observation, Book Review, or Editorial Essay (due by 5:00 p.m., Friday, August 8). Your essay should be 1) sent directly to me through the Assignments Feature in Bb (click on the Assignments button and follow the directions), AND 2) attached to a message on the Discussion Board, so that everyone in the class can read it, if they wish.