REL 2605 – Women’s Spirituality

Spring Term II 2014
Wed. 6:00-10:15
Instructor: Cassie Lipowitz
Office: TBD
Office hours: by appointment
clipowitz@ndnu.edu

“To love. To be loved. To never forget your own insignificance. To never get used to the unspeakable violence and the vulgar disparity of life around you. To seek joy in the saddest places. To pursue beauty to its lair. To never simplify what is complicated or complicate what is simple. To respect strength, never power. Above all, to watch. To try and understand. To never look away. And never, never to forget.” ~Arundhati Roy

“I know God won't give me anything I can't handle. I just wish he didn't trust me so much.” ~Mother Teresa

“All the natural movements of the soul are controlled by laws analogous to those of physical gravity. Grace is the only exception. Grace fills empty spaces, but it can only enter where there is a void to receive it, and it is grace itself which makes this void. The imagination is continually at work filling up all the fissures through which grace might pass.”
— Simone Weil

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This class will focus on the history and experience of women’s spirituality through a close reading of texts written by women in the Christian, Islamic, and Hindu traditions. While the readings will be drawn primarily from the Christian and Islamic traditions, we will also engage with readings and media from women of other faiths. Throughout the course, we will examine spirituality as it has been envisioned by women through time, as well as how this spirituality has been wed to feminism in modern society.

NDNU CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION

REL2605 Women's Spirituality (CDiv) (3) Focuses on history and experience of women in Christian churches using women's writings to better understand how women view themselves and their spiritual development. Explores underlying questions: "How do women live within the Christian community and express their spirituality?" "What influences might Christian feminist views have on our world? Fulfills Core Curriculum Religious Studies Requirement.

TEXTBOOKS

• Mystics, Visionaries, and Prophets: A Historical Anthology of Women’s Spiritual Writings, ed. Shawn Madigan / ISBN-10: 0800634209
• Lying Awake, by Mark Salzman / ISBN-10: 0375706062
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- **Bible** – *New Revise Standard Version* is preferred but not required. *NRSV* can be found at [http://www.devotions.net/bible/00bible.htm](http://www.devotions.net/bible/00bible.htm)

  **Additional readings will be posted on the portal or distributed in class**

**COURSE OBJECTIVES/LEARNING OUTCOMES**

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate a preliminary understanding of women’s spirituality in the Christian and Islamic religious traditions
2. Articulate the various ways in which women have expressed and enacted their spiritual experiences, insights, and understandings
3. Demonstrate a sensitivity to the ways in which gender issues shape women’s spirituality
4. Analyze and discuss religious symbolism in the spiritual writings of women across cultures
5. Compare and contrast the spiritual values of women across multi-cultural and multi-religious perspectives

**GRADING**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance &amp; Class participation</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction paper</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Reflection papers</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>30%</td>
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</tbody>
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**Total points possible = 1000**

A= (1000-900); B= (899-800); C= (799-700); D= (699-600); F= (599-0)

If at any time you are concerned about your grade, consult with the instructor.

**Attendance and Class Format:** Your presence and participation in class is vitally important, as it furthers not only your own education, but also the education of others. Intensive classes require a stringent absence policy since even once absence may significantly affect achievement of course learning objectives. With only 28 class contact hours as opposed to the traditional 45 contact hours, all class time is critical. A student who misses more than one class period or the equivalent (four accumulated hours) **must withdraw** from the class and will be assigned a failing grade for the course unless officially dropping the class. It is the student’s responsibility to initiate the drop or withdrawal. There are no exceptions.

As the instructor, I promise to do all I can to create a lively and engaging class environment. In order to include various learning styles and opportunities, class sessions will generally include lecture, small group work, class discussion, as well as video clips and films.

**Assignment Policy:** The intensive program penalizes late work. Late assignments will be marked down. **Late assignments will not be accepted more than 2 weeks past the due date.** If you are absent for one class, you must complete the reflection paper for that class session and submit it
online via the NDNU web portal by the due date. Please note that the very first class has required reading and a writing assignment (the Introduction Paper must be submitted during the first class, or may be submitted beforehand on the NDNU class web portal).

**Academic Honesty**: Academic honesty is a cornerstone of our values at NDNU. If any words or ideas used in an assignment submission do not represent your original words or ideas, you must cite all relevant sources and make clear the extent to which such sources were used. Words or ideas that require citation include, but are not limited to, all hard copy or electronic publications, whether copyrighted or not, and all verbal or visual communication when the content of such communication clearly originates from an identifiable source. **First offense of plagiarism will result in an F on the assignment. Second offense will result in an F for the class.** Consult the NDNU Student Handbook regarding consequences of misrepresenting your work.

**Privacy and Confidentiality**: One of the highlights of the NDNU academic experience is that students often use real-world examples from their organizations in class discussions and in their written work. However, it is imperative that students not share information that is confidential, privileged, or proprietary in nature. Students must be mindful of any contracts they have agreed to with their companies.

**Learning and Other Disabilities**: If you have a learning disability or other circumstance that requires accommodations in this class, you must bring it to the attention of Program for Academic Support and Services (PASS) to arrange for possible accommodations (650-508-3670).

**ASSIGNMENTS**

**Introduction Paper**: Students will be required to write an introduction paper of 2-3 pages, due on the first night of class (prompt for this paper will be posted on the portal and emailed to students ahead of time—please check your NDNU email account).

**Reflection Papers**: Students will be required to write a total of 4 (four), 3-4 page reflection papers based on the assigned readings, to be submitted in class on the day they are due, or on the NDNU portal. Prompts for the reflection papers will be posted on the NDNU portal website. The purpose of writing the reflection papers is to assist you in clarifying and refining your ideas as you engage with the readings. Writing the papers will also better prepare you to engage in class discussions. Have fun with these—be creative and reflective!

**Final Paper**: This assignment, due on the last day of class, will require students to write a 7-8 page paper. The paper should engage the texts we covered this semester, as well as the student’s own reflections on the subject (prompt will be posted on the portal).

**Workload**: Intensive classes at NDNU stipulate 3 hours of work (per unit) each week outside of class. For a 3 unit class, this means 12 additional hours a week should be spent on assignments. The distribution of weekly instruction/study for this course should follow (approximately) the following model:

Distribution of Average Weekly Study/Instruction (total = 16 hours):
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Classroom Instruction 4  
Text Readings 5  
Weekly Writing Assignments 5  
Term Paper Research/Writing 2  

NOTES

- Please be respectful during class. Turn off cell phones or switch them to silent. Although we live in an electronic age where texting and facebooking have become the norm, please be mindful of the class community and refrain from such activities during class time.
- Keep copies of all your written work (hard copies or electronic copies on your computer) in case something is lost.

SCHEDULE

This schedule is subject to revision. Any major changes will be discussed with the students.

3/12 – Biblical and Early Church Literature

Readings due:
  - Mystics, Visionaries & Prophets Chapter 1
  - Excerpt from Gospel of Mary Magdalene (on portal)

**Introduction paper due

3/19 – Early Islamic Literature

Readings due:
  - Excerpt from My Soul is a Woman: The Feminine in Islam, Preface, Introduction, & Chs. 1 and 3 (on portal)

**1st reflection paper due

3/26 - Sufism (Islamic Mysticism) and Hinduism

Readings due:
  - Excerpt from My Soul is a Woman, Ch. 4 (on portal)
  - Excerpts from Rabi’a poetry (on portal)
  - Rumi’s story: “The Poor Bedouin and his Wife” (on portal)
  - Excerpts from Mirabai’s poetry (on portal)

**2nd reflection paper due
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4/2 – Medieval, Late Medieval, & Reformation Christian Mystics

Readings due:
- *Mystics, Visionaries & Prophets*, Chapters 6, 8, 14

**3rd reflection paper due

4/9 – 19th and 20th Century Women

Readings due:
- *Mystics, Visionaries & Prophets*, Chapters 16, 19, 22, 23

**4th reflection paper due

4/16 – Women’s Spirituality in a Contemporary Context

Readings due:
- *Lying Awake* by Mark Salzman

4/23 – Modern Qur’anic Interpretation

Readings due:
- “Islam and the Status of Women” from *An Introduction to Islam* (on portal)
- “The Qur’an and Muslim Women: Reading Patriarchy, Reading Liberation” from *Believing Women in Islam* (on portal)

**Final paper due