

Women and Religion in America Today

From Protestantism to Paganism

TIME TBD

LOCATION TBD

INSTRUCTOR Emma Rifai
emma-rifai@uiowa.edu

DESCRIPTION In this course, we will explore how women in America experience, interact with, and shape Christianity (and post-Christian spiritualities) today. By looking at texts concerning overt expressions of religiosity (e.g., Evangelical Christianity, Quiverfull, Catholicism) as well as spiritualities that are less obviously “traditionally” religious (long-distance running culture, environmental activism, yoga), we will explore the ways in which religion is shaping and being shaped by broader themes in American culture today. This approach destabilizes the idea of an American society that is inherently secular or religious; instead, we will examine the ways in which “religion” and “spirituality” are emerging categories that resist fixed definitions and static categorizations.

OBJECTIVES We will assess a number of trends, questions, and tensions in a variety of American Christian and post-Christian traditions with specific attention to different theoretical and methodological approaches and considerations during our time together in class. Because my training and research primarily concerns Protestant women (particularly white women) in America, this course embraces this specialty. The intention, however, is that the questions and discussions we have in class, grounded in both theory and methodology, unfold in such a way that we develop tools and skills for analyzing and assessing other geographies, religions, and identities beyond those explicitly addressed in class texts.

REQUIREMENTS This course will be highly collaborative and discussion based. In order to facilitate discussion, you will be assigned and assessed on the following (please see rubrics included at the end of the syllabus for more specific expectations):

- (1) *Class Preparation*: You will be write a total of (10) two-page summary-analysis papers within which you will craft a thesis, briefly summarize, and carefully analyze one assigned text. Each paper is due on the day the text is being discussed in

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class. Percentage of Grade: 30%

- (2) *Class Participation*: You will be expected to engage with texts, lecture material, and each other during every class period. To actively participate in class, you will be expected to have read the assigned text and will have a hard copy of the text at your disposal at each class meeting. You are permitted to miss (2) class periods throughout the semester with no penalty; further absences will directly impact your participation points. You need not provide an excuse; you must, however, email me prior to the start of class. Percentage of Grade: 30%
- (3) *Final Paper*: You will craft a final research paper on a topic concerning women and religion in America today utilizing both assigned texts from class as well as outside resources. This is a very flexible assignment; I encourage risk taking! This assignment is due the day you present, see below. Percentage of Grade: 30%
- (4) *Final Presentation*: You will present your research to your peers during the final week of class. Presentations need not be overly formal but should successfully communicate your research - including your thesis and findings. Your peers will be encouraged to ask you generative questions about your research. Percentage of Grade: 10%

MATERIALS NEEDED Nearly all the readings assigned for this class will be available as a course pack from Zephyr. In addition, you will need to purchase one book (which you can find in most bookstores and online - both used and new):

Sue Monk Kidd, *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter: A Woman's Journey from Christian Tradition to the Sacred Feminine*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, any edition.

Please note that you will not be allowed to utilize technological devices of any kind during class. You are encouraged to take notes - with pen and paper. You will be required to

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bring a physical copy of the assigned text with you to every class meeting.

GRADING SCALE Students will be assessed on the following scale:

94-100 A	74-77 C
90-93 A-	70-73 C-
88-89 B+	
84-87 B	
80-83 B-	
78-79 C+	

MILESTONES

WEEK 1 Methods and Theories - Destabilizing "Religion"

Day 1: Introduction to the Course; Kyla Wazana Tompkins "Notes on How to Ask a Good Question about Theory That Will Promote Conversation and Further Discussion from Your Colleagues"

Day 2: Jonathan Z. Smith "Religion, Religions, Religious"

WEEK 2 Methods and Theories - A Feminist Perspective

Day 1: Catherine A. Brekus "Introduction: Searching for Women in Narratives of American Religious History"

Day 2: Alex Mar from *Witches in America* "Keep Your Weapons Peace-Bonded," "Diana of the Prairies," and "Three Nights at the Castle" AND Rhyd Wildermuth "Eat, Prey, Learn Magic: Alex Mar's Spiritual Tourism"

(INSTRUCTOR NOTE: Use these texts to help students explore methodological and ethical concerns.)

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WEEK 3 Protestantism and Evangelical Christianity

Day 1: R. Marie Griffith from *God's Daughters* "Introduction" and "For Such a Time as This: Aglow and American Culture"

Day 2: Alison Sargent "Life on Mars [Hill]: In the Nation's Fastest-Growing Megachurch, Faith and Feminism Don't Mix"

(INSTRUCTOR NOTE: In addition to the text, we will explore the collapse of the Mars Hill empire.)

WEEK 4 Protestantism and Evangelical Christianity

Day 1: Tamara Winfrey Harris "Sunday Kind of Love: Sex and Spirituality in the Black Church"

Day 2: Kathryn Joyce from *Quiverfull* "Introduction" and "Be Fruitful and Multiply"

(INSTRUCTOR NOTE: In addition to the Joyce, we will look at some primary source texts from *So Much More* by the Botkin girls.)

WEEK 5 Protestantism and Evangelical Christianity

Day 1: Watch *Jesus Camp*

Day 2: Discuss *Jesus Camp*

WEEK 6 Catholicism

Day 1: Kristy Nabhan-Warren "Little Slices of Heaven and Mary's Candy Kisses: Mexican American Women Redefining Feminism and Catholicism"

(INSTRUCTOR NOTE: Connect back to the Griffith reading re: empowerment outside of feminism.)

Day 2: Sarah McFarland Taylor from *Green Sisters* "The Green Catholic Imagination" and "Standing Their Ground"

WEEK 7 Lived and Material Christianity

Day 1: Susan Crawford Sullivan from *Living Faith* "Introduction: Listening to Poor Mothers about Religion" and "'God Has a Plan': Making Meaning"

Day 2: Colleen McDannell from *Material Christianity* "Christian Kitsch and the Rhetoric of Bad Taste"

WEEK 8 Bodies and Christianity

Day 1: R. Marie Griffith from *Born Again Bodies* "Introduction" and "Pray the Weight Away: Shaping Devotional Fitness Culture"

Day 2: Michelle Mary Lehwica from *Starving for Salvation* "Introduction" and "Bodies of Evidence, Bodies of Knowledge"

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WEEK 9 Bodies and Christianity

Day 1: Colleen McDannell from *Material Christianity* "Mormon Garments: Sacred Clothing and the Body"

Day 2: Pamela E. Klassen from *Blessed Events* "Introduction" and "Procreating Religion: Spirituality, Religion, and Transformations at Birth"

WEEK 10 Adolescence

Day 1: Sara Moslener "Don't Act Now! Selling Christian Abstinence in the Religious Marketplace"

Day 2: Tom Shachtman "Rumspringa: To Be or Not To Be Amish"

(INSTRUCTOR NOTE: Possibly utilize excerpts from Irene Garrett's *Crossing Over: One Woman's Escape from Amish Life*)

WEEK 11 Young Adulthood

Day 1: Hanna Rosin from *God's Harvard* "Elisa Muench, Republican, for Idaho's Senator. She will Make a Difference" and "Farahn's Attempt to Hide Her Midriff"

Day 2: Jaclyn Geller from *Here Comes the Bride* "'I Do' The Contemporary Wedding Ceremony"

WEEK 12 Leaving Christianity

Day 1: Sue Monk Kidd from *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter* "Introduction," "Awakening," and "Initiation"

Day 2: Sue Monk Kidd from *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter* "Grounding" and "Empowerment"

WEEK 13 American Mysticism

Day 1: Watch *American Mystic*

Day 2: Discuss *American Mystic*

(INSTRUCTOR NOTE: Reference Mar readings from the second week - she directed this film.)

WEEK 14 Neo-Paganism and Environmental Activism

Day 1: Starhawk from *The Spiral Dance* "Witchcraft as Goddess Religion," "The World View of Witchcraft," and "The Coven"

Day 2: Julia Butterfly Hill from *The Legacy of Luna* "Prologue," "Fighting Fear with a Fork," "Initiation," "Getting to Know You," "Call to Action," and "Embodying Love"

(INSTRUCTOR NOTE: Reference *Green Sisters* readings re: environmental activism.)

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WEEK 15 Spirituality and Bodies

Day 1: Christopher McDougall from *Born to Run* Chapters 10-16

Day 2: Claire Dederer from *Poser* "Crow," "Headstand," and "The Jump-Through"

WEEK 16 Presentations

Day 1: Presentations

Day 2: Presentations

CONTACT INFORMATION

Instructor: Emma Rifai
Email: emma-rifai@uiowa.edu
Office: 322 Gilmore Hall
Office Hours: TBD

POLICIES

EMAIL: I encourage you to contact me via email with questions or concerns about class. During the week, I will respond within 24 hours. Please do not, however, direct questions to me that can easily be answered by consulting the syllabus.

FEEDBACK: I am happy to work with you on your assignments during office hours or by appointment. I will not read drafts of papers and provide feedback, however, through email.

LATE WORK: Late work should not be an issue in this class. You will turn in all summary-analysis papers on the day we discuss the text you analyzed. Your final paper is due the day you present. Barring truly extenuating circumstances, no extensions will be given.

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RUBRICS

NOTE:

We will also more thoroughly discuss these expectations in class with plenty of time for questions and answers.

For all written assignments:

- (1) A stapled hard copy is required and should be submitted at the start of class
- (2) Use inclusive language
- (3) Please bold your thesis statement

SUMMARY-ANALYSIS PAPERS

These papers are designed to encourage you think more deeply about ten of the texts we read in class. Each paper will include a thesis, a brief summary, and a thoughtful analysis.

- (A) An "A" paper will have a clear, developed thesis that provides insight beyond a statement of the topic. The summary will only be as long as necessary to support the thesis. The analysis will be insightful, concise, and developed, utilizing short passages from the text to support the thesis of the paper.
- (B) A "B" paper will have a clear thesis supported by a short summary and a thoughtful analysis.
- (C) A "C" paper will still follow the structure of thesis-summary-analysis but will less successfully fulfill the expectations outlined above.
- (D) A "D" paper will not follow the structure of thesis-summary-analysis and will fail to communicate and support a cohesive analysis of the assigned text.

PARTICIPATION Our class will be highly collaborative and discussion based. As a result, participation is crucial. Though attendance is important, it alone will not contribute to your participation grade. Consider the following guidelines:

- (A) An "A" participant will miss no more than the allowed (2) absences; will reference the assigned text extensively, including page numbers; will have well-formed questions and thoughts to share; will regularly contribute to the topic under discussion; may attend office hours; and will respectfully listen while others are speaking.
- (B) A "B" participant will miss no more than the allowed (2) absences; will regularly contribute to discussion in a thoughtful manner; and will listen respectfully while others are speaking.
- (C) A "C" participant will miss no more than the allowed (2) absences; will occasionally contribute to the discussion; and will listen thoughtfully while others are speaking.
- (D) A "D" participant will have inconsistent attendance and will contribute very little to discussion.

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FINAL PROJECT

The final project is your opportunity to explore a topic related to women and religion in America today that goes beyond the focus of this class. Think creatively and take risks! Almost any topic will work as long as you can make a strong argument and incorporate both assigned texts and outside research. There is no page minimum or maximum but most papers will be roughly 8-10 pages in length.

- (A) An "A" paper will have strong, thoughtful, and insightful argument that is supported by textual evidence from both assigned readings and outside research. It will have been revised and edited carefully. It will be formatted consistently and well structured and organized..
- (B) A "B" paper will have a thoughtful argument that is supported by textual evidence incorporating textual evidence from both assigned readings and outside research. It will have been revised and edited carefully. It will be formatted consistently and well structured and organized..
- (C) A "C" paper will be well structured and organized around a clear topic, which will be supported by textual evidence from both class readings and outside research. It might lack consistency and may lack quality revisions and editing.
- (D) A "D" paper will lack organization and structure as well as a clear topic. It may or may not utilize evidence from assigned texts or outside research. It will be poorly edited and revised.

FINAL PRESENTATIONS

The final presentations are your opportunity to share your research with your classmates. They should last about seven minutes with three minutes following for questions. I would suggest not using PowerPoint unless necessary.

- (A) An "A" presentation will make good use of the allotted seven minutes. It will be thoughtfully organized around a well-developed argument supported with evidence from both assigned texts as well as outside research. An effective presentation style will be utilized including eye contact and a conversational tone.
- (B) A "B" presentation will make good use of the allotted seven minutes. It will be organized around an argument that is supported from both assigned texts as well as outside research. An effective presentation style will be utilized including eye contact and a conversational tone.
- (C) A "C" presentation will make less effective use of the allotted seven minutes. It will be organized around a topic utilizing some textual evidence. It may or may not utilize an effective presentation style.
- (D) A "D" presentation will not effectively use the allotted seven minutes. It will lack organization, a coherent topic, and/or evidence. It may or may not utilize an effective presentation style.

RESOURCES

I encourage all of you to make use of the resources available to you on campus, particularly the following:

- Writing Center <http://writingcenter.uiowa.edu/>
- Speaking Center <http://speakingcenter.uiowa.edu/>
- Tutor Iowa <https://tutor.uiowa.edu/>

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THE COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

ADMINISTRATIVE HOME The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is the administrative home of this course and governs matters such as the add/drop deadlines, the second-grade-only option, and other related issues. Different colleges may have different policies. Questions may be addressed to 120 Schaeffer Hall, or see the CLAS Academic Policies Handbook at <http://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook>.

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION University policy specifies that students are responsible for all official correspondences sent to their University of Iowa e-mail address (@uiowa.edu). Faculty and students should use this account for correspondences ([Operations Manual](#), III.15.2, k.11).

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR DISABILITIES A student seeking academic accommodations should first register with Student Disability Services and then meet with the course instructor privately in the instructor's office to make particular arrangements. See <http://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/> for more information.

ACADEMIC HONESTY All CLAS students or students taking classes offered by CLAS have, in essence, agreed to the College's [Code of Academic Honesty](#): "I pledge to do my own academic work and to excel to the best of my abilities, upholding the [IOWA Challenge](#). I promise not to lie about my academic work, to cheat, or to steal the words or ideas of others; nor will I help fellow students to violate the Code of Academic Honesty." Any student committing academic misconduct is reported to the College and placed on disciplinary probation or may be suspended or expelled ([CLAS Academic Policies Handbook](#)).

CLAS FINAL EXAMINATION POLICIES The final examination schedule for each class is announced by the Registrar generally by the fifth week of classes. Final exams are offered only during the official final examination period. No exams of any kind are allowed during the last week of classes. All students should plan on being at the UI through the final examination period. Once the Registrar has announced the date, time, and location of each final exam, the complete schedule will be published on the Registrar's web site and will be shared with instructors and students. It is the student's responsibility to know the date, time, and place of a final exam.

MAKING A SUGGESTION OR A COMPLAINT Students with a suggestion or complaint should first visit with the instructor (and the course supervisor), and then with the departmental DEO: Diana Cates 316 Gilmore Hall, 335-2162, diana-cates@uiowa.edu, office hours by appointment. Complaints must be made within six months of the incident ([CLAS Academic Policies Handbook](#)).

UNDERSTANDING SEXUAL HARASSMENT Sexual harassment subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. All members of the UI community have a responsibility to uphold this mission and to contribute to a safe environment that enhances learning. Incidents of sexual harassment should be reported immediately. See the UI [Comprehensive Guide on Sexual Harassment](#) for assistance, definitions, and the full University policy.

REACTING SAFELY TO SEVERE WEATHER In severe weather, class members should seek appropriate shelter immediately, leaving the classroom if necessary. The class will continue if possible when the event is over. For more information on Hawk Alert and the siren warning system, visit the [Department of Public Safety website](#).

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