

Women and Religion
REL 234—Fall 2020
TR 12:30-1:45

Dr. K. Merinda Simmons
Email: merinda.simmons@ua.edu

Office: Manly 300 (348-9911)

REL main office: Manly 212 (348-5271)

“From the outset, people’s experiences of desire and rage, memory and power, community and revolt are inflected and mediated by the institutions through which they find their meaning—and which they, in turn, transform.”

—Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*

Course Overview/Description:

This course will examine how certain social phenomena come to be identified as “religion” and “gender,” looking at how these are naturalized and performed within racialized, sexualized, and economic frameworks. We will pay specific attention to US case studies highlighting the intersection of gender, religion, race, and politics.

(Course carries HU designation)

Texts and Web Resources:

*Leslie Dorrrough Smith. *Compromising Positions: Sex Scandals, Politics, and American Christianity* (Oxford UP, 2019. ISBN: 0190924071)

*Blackboard (for other readings and assignment completion)

Statement on COVID-19:

All University faculty, staff, and students are expected to maintain a commitment to the health and safety of our campus community. Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, specific health and safety standards are in place to minimize exposure and community spread on campus. In the interest of your health and safety and that of all UA students, faculty and staff, the University reserves the right to change the mode of instruction or schedule of instruction at any time, based upon prevailing public health and other guidance. While the method of delivery may change, educational instruction and opportunities will continue. As such, the University will not provide a refund of tuition, in whole or in-part, based on any such changes. Detailed information on changes in format or schedule can be found at <https://studentaccounts.ua.edu/> and <https://financialaid.ua.edu/>.

All students must be familiar with and abide by the requirements outlined in the UA Return Plan | UA System Comprehensive Health and Safety Plan. Students must (1) wear a mask or face covering at all times while participating in face-to-face class; (2) adhere to social distancing standards; and (3) comply with all other health and safety restrictions. If a student refuses to comply with the requirements, the student will be asked to leave the class and reported for a conduct violation. Unless a student has an exemption from the requirement to wear a face covering, (more information can be found at <http://ods.ua.edu/covid-19-disability/>), the student will be reported to Student Life for further disciplinary action. More information on these requirements and UA Healthcheck system and screening can be found at healthinfo.ua.edu/returnplan. You are expected to visit the site and comply with all noted requirements related to in-person class attendance.

**how this affects REL: See [this blog post](#) by Department Chair Russell McCutcheon, outlining REL’s approach and response to UA policy and safety measures.

****how this affects our class:** We will be meeting together synchronously on Blackboard Collaborate during class time each Tuesday, having a regular out-of-class reading/assignment every Thursday—a written response to provided questions/prompts—that you'll complete on your own time but will upload before 5pm each Monday (see below for details). These responses will help guide the following Tuesday's discussion.

Requirements and Course Policies:

- **Participation:** Participation is required in this course: each unexcused absence will cost you 10 points on your final grade (a full letter grade). If you know you will need to miss a class meeting, please email me in advance and still turn in your writing for that week. I expect everyone to do the readings and to speak up during our meetings. Be prepared to ask questions about the readings and class material and/or contribute your own ideas. If the absences are beyond your control due to health or family reasons, let me know as soon as possible. You remain responsible for anything that you miss in class, including announcements.
****note on reading:** You are expected to complete all of the readings for each day and be prepared to discuss them. Don't worry if something doesn't make sense or has you confused—bring your questions and issues to the class for discussion! But make sure always to work your way through the reading assignments.
- **Response Papers** of no more than one page (though it should be a full page) that engage the readings and link them to the larger themes of the course and/or to your own intellectual interests will be due **each Monday by 5pm** (uploaded to Blackboard). Responses should reflect a thorough reading of the assignments and thoughtful consideration of ideas, problems, and/or issues or questions they raise for you. Ideally, they're specifically taking up the texts/videos from each Thursday and the following Tuesday—we'll talk more on the first day of class to make sure the timing makes sense. **Every response must include at least two questions or ideas you'd like us to address as a group in the next day's discussion.** These will receive one of the following grades: 1 (insufficient evidence of understanding and analysis), 15 (adequate understanding and analysis), or 30 (exemplary understanding and analysis).
- **Midterm:** The midterm exam in this course will be an open-notes/book set of short essay questions out of which students will answer 2 of 3. My hope is that the basis for these questions will come from those that are included in weekly responses. Each essay will be worth 100 points (so 200 points in total).
- **Final Project:** With the choice of several prompts discussed in advance, you will create a final project whose form is up to you (zine, video presentation, playlist with thorough/research-based liner notes, traditional essay, etc). Specific guidelines will be provided and discussed in greater detail in class.

Grading:

The course includes a total of 1000 points possible, distributed as follows:

Participation	200 points
Weekly Responses	300 points
Midterm	200 points
Final Project	300 points

Final grades will be based on the following ranges: 970-1000 = A+; 920-969 = A; 900-919 = A-; 870-899 = B+; 820-869 = B; 800-819 = B-; 770-799 = C+; 720-769 = C; 700-719 = C-; 600-699 = D; 0-599 = F

All academic work must be the product of the scholar submitting it. Cheating will not be tolerated. Plagiarizing the work of someone else (quoting or summarizing another person's ideas or intellectual labor without giving them credit through proper quotations, citations, and

acknowledgment) is a serious offence. If I discover that a scholar has copied the work of another author (whether a peer, classmate, or published author), the case will be referred to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

Classroom Environment:

In this small group setting, students are responsible for contributing to both their own learning experiences and the learning experiences of others. Because the contribution of ideas from each student is critical to the learning process, any behavior that creates an uncomfortable learning environment will not be tolerated. This includes interrupting others while they are talking, or making comments that could be perceived as offensive in terms of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, nationality, disability, etc. Meanwhile, in cases when a student might unintentionally offer up commentary that is deemed offensive, it is expected that all students will understand the moment as a teachable one that affords us, as a community of scholars, the opportunity to bring our diverse perspectives to bear on creating a classroom space governed by civil discourse. Please make every effort to maintain an atmosphere where everyone feels comfortable sharing and responding to ideas.

Names & Pronouns: (Adapted from [Wooster College, Sample Syllabus Statements](#))

All people have the right to be addressed and referred to in accordance with their personal identity. I include pronoun introductions, recognizing that our own identifications do not always correspond to how we are perceived or read by others. I will do my best to address and refer to all students by the names and pronouns that they share in class, regardless of what is listed on the roster.

Consultations/Safe Zone:

All students are encouraged to email me or arrange a conversation with me for assistance or with any questions (socially distant outdoor meetings are possible if a virtual meeting is not viable or preferable). Please speak with me well in advance if you are having difficulties satisfactorily completing the course's requirements on time or if you have any other concerns I can help with. Although I cannot guarantee that accommodations can be made, speaking with me before a problem arises will greatly enhance my ability to address the situation in a way that is both fair to your classmates and beneficial to you. Also, please note that I am a Safe Zone Ally, one of many resource people on campus who provide an open door for individuals seeking information or assistance regarding sexual orientation, gender identity, harassment, and/or discrimination. Feel free to talk to me any time if you or someone you know has questions or concerns.

** The University of Alabama is committed to an ethical, inclusive community defined by respect and civility. The UAct website (www.ua.edu/uact) provides a list of reporting channels that can be used to report incidences of illegal discrimination, harassment, sexual assault, sexual violence, retaliation, threat assessment or fraud.*

Disability Accommodation:

If you are registered with the Office of Disability Services, please discuss with me as soon as possible any course accommodations that may be necessary. If you have a disability, but have not contacted the Office of Disability Services, please call 348-4285 or visit Houser Hall, Suite 1000, to register for services.

UA Severe Weather Protocol:

UA's primary communication tool for sending out information is through its web site at www.ua.edu. In the event of an emergency, students should consult this site for further directions. In the event of an emergency, I will provide additional course information via email. If you have not done so already, please set up your weather advisory through Connect-ED--faculty, staff and students ([sign up on myBama](#)). Alternatively, you can listen to weather advisory broadcasts over WVUA 90.7 FM, Alabama Public Radio 91.5 FM or use [WVUA 7 Storm Watch](#), which provides a free service you can subscribe to that allows you to receive weather warnings for Tuscaloosa via e-mail, pager or cell phone.

Statement on Academic Misconduct:

Academic misconduct is a serious offense and is taken very seriously at UA and in the class. Suspected cases of plagiarism, cheating, or other forms of academic misconduct will be referred to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. You are bound by UA's Honor Code in this class.

Calendar

(subject to adjustment as necessary)

August

- 20 (R) Introduction: What are we talking about when we talk about "religion" and women"?
Assignment: personal reflection, due Monday by 5pm.

Terms of Engagement: Religion, Feminism, and "Freedom"

- 25 (T) *From Religion in 5 Minutes:*
 *Robyn Faith Walsh, *What does it take for something to be classified as a "religion"?*
 *Ian Alexander Cuthbertson, *Why is religion so often involved in politics?*
 *Leslie Dorrough Smith, *Is it true that women play a lesser role in most religions?*
 *Leslie Dorrough Smith, *Why do women in some religions cover up their faces, or even their whole bodies?*
- 27 (R) *Rebekka King, *Can one study one's own religion objectively? (REL in 5)*
 Muslim veiling controversy:
 **The Immanent Frame, Response to Charter of Quebec Values*
 **Debate on Quebec Charter of Values*
 **CNN debate on French burqa ban*

September

- 1 (T) Craig Martin, "Religion and the Problem of Definition" (from *A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion*)
- 3 (R) Judith Lorber, "The Social Construction of Gender"
 **Butler's big think video*
 *Leslie Dorrough Smith, "Who Are You? I'm a Feminist"
 *Nicole Goulet, "What Is a Feminazi?"
- 8 (T) CP, Introduction ("Sex Scandals, National Fantasies, and the Stories We Tell", 1-22)
- 10 (R) *Culture on the Edge* posts:
 *Smith, "Dinner Dates: Mike Pence, Family Values, and Washington Masculinity."
 *Simmons, "Marketable Misogyny"

Believing is Seeing

- 15 (T) CP, Ch. 1 ("Scandal: The Story of Wayward Men")
- 17 (R) **Judith Butler on gender norms and coercion*
 **Kimberlé Crenshaw on intersectional feminism*
- 22 (T) Judith Butler, "Endangered/Endangering: Schematic Racism and White Paranoia"
- 24 (R) *From Religion in 5 Minutes:*
 *Sarah Dees, *How does religion spread and what is its appeal?*
 *Craig Martin, *Why do people fight so much over their religious beliefs?*
- 29 (T) CP, Ch. 2 ("Religion: The Story of Right and Wrong")

October

- 1 (R) *Culture on the Edge* post:
*Craig Martin, "[The Power of Subtle Arrangements and Little Things](#)"
- 6 (T) Video lecture, Judith Butler: "[Who's Afraid of Gender?](#)" (first 45 minutes?)
Sugar, Spice, and Everything Vice
- 8 (R) *Culture on the Edge* post:
*Leslie Smith, "[The Most Disgusting Picture Ever](#)"
- 13 (T) *CP*, Ch. 3 ("Sex: The Story of Feminists and Whores")
- 15 (R) *Still Processing* podcast episode, "[We Need Bad Women](#)"
- 20 (T) Janet R. Jakobsen, "He Has Wronged America and Women: Clinton's Sexual Conservatism" (291-314, *Our Monica, Ourselves*)
- 22 (R) Micki McElya's "Trashing the Presidency: Race, Class, and the Clinton/Lewinsky Affair" (156-174, *Our Monica, Ourselves*)
- 27 (T) *CP*, Ch. 4 ("Nation: The Story of American Values")
- 29 (R) Elizabeth Johnston, "[The Original 'Nasty Woman'](#)" (*The Atlantic*—see related video)

Media, Myth-making, and Masculinity

November

- 3 (T) *CP*, Ch. 5 ("Media: The Story of Just Desserts")
- 5 (R) Racquel J. Gates, "The Circumstantial Negativity of Halle Berry" (from *Double Negative: The Black Image & Popular Culture*)
- 10 (T) **CP*, Epilogue
*K. Merinda Simmons, "Privatized Publics and Scholarly Silos: Gender, Religion, and their Theoretical Fault Lines"
- 12 (R) *Lili Loofboorouw, "[Brett Kavanaugh and the Cruelty of Male Bonding](#)"
**Still Processing* episode, "[Psychobros](#)"
- 17 (T) Linda Kintz, "Tender Warriors" (from Castelli's *Women, Gender, Religion: A Reader*; or excerpt from *Between Jesus and the Market*)
- 19 (R) *Salon* excerpt from *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era*
- 24 (T) no class
- 26 (R) Thanksgiving

December

- 1 (T) Final Project discussion
- 3 (R) Final Project due