



**JOHN FELICE
ROME CENTER**

THEO 278: Religion and Gender
John Felice Rome Center
Fall 2026
Thursdays | 10:00am-12:30pm
Dr. Deborah F. Sawyer
Email: dsawyer2@luc.edu
Office Hours: Thursdays, 2:00-3:00pm

Course Description

In current political debates gender and identity have been propelled center stage. These concepts focus attitudes and put down markers for stances on the right and left of political discourses. Religious groups are also divided on these issues, split between those upholding tradition beliefs and those calling for reform. Study and discussion of gender and identity are perhaps more relevant today than at any other time in history. This course provides an historical and global grounding for understanding one of the most challenging issues facing religions and their faith communities today.

In Theo 278 you will be introduced to contemporary gender theories, and discuss how they can be applied as a critical tool for examining religion past and present. Contemporary perspectives are woven consistently throughout the course with analysis and discussion on sexualities, gender identities and feminist critique.

In the first part of the course we focus initially on the Garden of Eden in biblical narrative, and study its history of interpretation in relation to constructed female and male gender roles. Further biblical texts that relate to this narrative will be analysed, as well as how its content has impacted on Christian beliefs down the centuries. This text is foundational, providing archetypes that both consciously and unconsciously inform gender identity in Western and Post-Colonial contexts.

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

A central feature on Theo 278 is the project. Your project, selected with consultation and supervised during the second half of the course, will provide a unique opportunity to delve in depth into a particular aspect of religion and gender. These projects highlight the distinctive roles and expectations prescribed for gendered identities, illustrated, for example, by sacred texts, rites of passage, leadership, festivals, pilgrimages and other ritual practices. You will research your chosen subject's context in terms of its history, its concept of the divine and spirituality, its beliefs and practices, and its contemporary outlook and development – examined through the lens of gender. As well as exploring your subject's origins and belief system, your project can include archival material, images, interviews and other appropriate empirical data.



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Important note

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

Learning Outcomes

On completion of the course students should be able to:

Students who successfully complete this course will have the ability to:

- Develop their academic skills to construct a well-informed argument in writing and oral presentation
- Demonstrate their critical skills to evaluate secondary sources in relation to primary texts
- Understand diversities and similarities in gender roles across major world religions
- Identify and explain key issues in gender studies and religion from an historical and global perspective
- Synthesize information from a variety of academic disciplines as it relates to the impact of religion on people's lives around the world.

Required Text / Materials

All assigned readings are posted on Sakai

Attendance Policy

In accordance with the Rome Center mission to promote a higher level of academic rigor, and in compliance with full-time student visa status, all courses adhere to the following attendance policy.

Prompt attendance, preparation and active participation in course discussions are expected from every student and synonymous with academic success. Attendance is mandatory at every class meeting for each course. Lateness or leaving class early will impact the course grade at the professor's discretion. All absences, including medical absences, will be treated the same, unless they are documented long-term conditions or emergencies. Such situations will be evaluated case-by-case by the Academic Affairs office.

Once-a-week classes:

- After 1 absence, a 2% final grade reduction will be applied for each missed class.
- Missing 3 classes or more will result in an automatic failure (F).



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Assessment Components

Participation and Project Paper Presentation 10%

Midterm:

Exam - Critical Reading Responses 35%

Finals:

Annotated Project Paper Plan 10%

Project Paper 25%

Exam - Critical Reading Responses 20%

Grading

94-100: A

90-93: A-

87-89: B+

84-86: B

80-83: B-

77-79: C+

74-76: C

70-73: C-

67-69: D+

60-66: D

59 or lower: F

The Project

The selection of viable topics in the field of Religion and Gender for your projects begins in earnest after the Fall Break. During class workshops we discuss your project plans, your research materials and schedules for completion. The workshops and consultations aim to ensure projects are underway and progressing in good time to meet the submission date.

Readings and Responses

For each class you will be given questions based on the reading/s for that week - posted on **SAKAI Lessons pages**. Your responses to these questions discussed in your groups will prepare you for Midterm and Finals assignments. **Also, throughout the semester your involvement in discussions will be assessed towards your 'Participation' grading.**

The aim of these exercises is to ensure that you are consistently building on your knowledge base and developing your reflections in this subject, as well as honing your skills in critical reading and analysis.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct are unacceptable at the the Rome Center and will be dealt with in accordance with Loyola University Chicago's guidelines. Please familiarize yourself with Loyola's standards here: <https://catalog.luc.edu/academic-standards-regulations/undergraduate/>. You are responsible to comply with the LUC University Catalog.



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Late or Missed Assignments & Exam Policy

Late or missed assignments will not be accepted for grading without the authorization of the instructor. ***As per the JFRC academic policies, students who miss any scheduled exam or quiz, including a final exam at the assigned hours will not be permitted to sit for a make-up examination without approval of the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs. Permission is given rarely and only for grave reason; travel is not considered a grave reason. Make-up exams will only be given for documented absences.***

Accessibility Accommodations

Students registered with the Student Accessibility Center (SAC) requiring academic accommodations should contact the Academic Affairs office at the John Felice Rome Center during the first week of classes.

Statement on Title IX

The Rome Center follows Loyola's [Comprehensive Policy and Procedures for Addressing Discrimination, Sexual Misconduct, Retaliation](#) and will comply with those as indicated and instructed.

Email Communication

I will do my best to reply to emails sent **during business hours (Monday to Friday, 8.00 am– 6.00 pm)**. Emails sent after 6.00 pm will be considered received the next day. The best way to communicate with me is directly: after class, during my office hour or by making an appointment via email.

Computer, Phone & Internet Use in the Classroom

Use of phones is always prohibited. Turn your phones off when in class. Use of laptop computers during class time is permitted only for note taking, group work and class research activity.

Course Schedule

Friday Class Days: Friday, 23 October

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| Week One | 09/03 | <u>Introduction to the course and the subject: gender studies and religion</u> |
| | i. Syllabus | |
| | ii. 'Introduction' and 'Notes' from Bates, Laura, <u>The New Age of Sexism : How AI and Emerging Technologies Are Reinventing Misogyny</u> . Sourcebooks, 2025,
https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/lucsystem/detail.action?docID=31903325 . | |
| Week Two | 09/10 | <u>The Creation of Humanity and its significance for gender construction</u> |
| | i. Text Genesis 1-3 | |
| | ii. Fewell, Danna Nolan and Gunn, David M. 'Shifting the Blame', <u>Gender, Power and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story</u> , pp.22-38. | |
| Week Three | 09/17 | <u>The Biblical legacy of the Garden of Eden: Gender, Sex and Sexuality</u> |



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- i. 'The Bible and Sex', David H. Jensen, in The Embrace of Eros: Bodies, Desires, and Sexuality in Christianity, Editor, Margaret D. Kamitsuka, pp.15-31
- ii. 'Vatican Views', in Butler, Judith, Who's Afraid of Gender, pp.72-92
(for reference iii.Vatican Document, "'Dignitas Infinita" On Human Dignity'.)

Week Four 09/24 Islam and Gender

- i. McCloud et al Ed., 'Ethics and Law, the Five Pillars' from An Introduction to Islam in the 21st Century, pp.41-49
- ii. Abu-Lughod, Lila, 'Do Muslim Women (Still) Need Saving?' From Do Muslim Women Need Saving? pp.27-53

Week Five 10/01 Judaism and Gender

- i. Kuikman, Jakoba, 'Women in Judaism', in WRT, 2 pp. 51-73
- ii. "Was I afraid to get up and speak my mind? No, I wasn't": The Feminism and Art of Jewish Orthodox and Haredi Women. Harris, Rachel S., Skinazi, Karen E. H., 2020

Week Six 10/08 Midterm: Review and Reading Responses Exam

-----**Fall Break**-----

Week Seven 10/22 Introduction Asian Traditions: Hinduism

- i. 'Beliefs' Anna King, from Tim Dowley ed. A Brief Introduction to Hinduism, pp.67-74.
- ii. 'Vrats: Ritual Vows and Women's Auspiciousness', in Everyday Hinduism, Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger 2015

Week Seven FRIDAY Class 10/23 Contemporary Cultural Gender Essentialism and its critique



- i. NYT Film Review https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/18/movies/barbie-movie-review.html?unlocked_article_code=1.nE4.fxPq.FIDngxJX4Lxn&smid=url-share
- ii. Guardian Film Review <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2023/jul/23/barbie-review-greta-gerwig-margot-robbie-ryan-riotous-candy-coloured-feminist-fable>

Week Eight 10/29 1. Hinduism and Gender 2. Project Plan Workshop

- i. Anderson, Leona M., 'Women in Hindu Traditions' pp. 9-10 and 24-27.
- ii. John Stratton Hawley, "Introduction", in *Sati, the Blessing and the Curse: The Burning of Wives in India*. Edited by John Stratton Hawley, Oxford University Press, 2023.

Week Nine 11/05 Buddhism and Gender



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- i. Neumaier, Eva K., 'Women in the Buddhist Traditions', pp.78-91 from Women and Religious Traditions
- ii. Sasson, Vanessa R., The Gathering: A Story of the First Buddhist Women, 2023, pp.1-6.

Week Ten 11/12 Gendered Roles in Indigenous Spiritual Traditions

Martin-Hill, Dawn, 'Women in Indigenous Traditions', pp.152-177 Women and Religious Traditions
Smithers, Gregory D. "Cherokee 'Two Spirits': Gender, Ritual, and Spirituality in the Native South." *Early American Studies*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2014, pp. 626–51, <https://doi.org/10.1353/eam.2014.0023>.

Week Eleven 11/19 1. Ecofeminism 2. Project Presentations: Workshop

Gaard, Greta, "EcoFeminism", survey chapter N, Hulme M, Proctor JD, eds. Companion to Environmental Studies. 2018.
Gaard, Greta. "Ecofeminism and Native American Cultures: Pushing the Limits of Cultural Imperialism?" Ecofeminism, edited by Greta Gaard, Temple University Press, 1993, pp. 295–314.

Week Twelve 11/26 Thanksgiving – No Class

Week Thirteen 12/03 Group Project Presentations