Course Description and Objectives:
In the United States, women are the majority of most attending Christian worship services, but are a minority of those in top leadership positions. Women are also unlikely to hold top leadership positions in congregations of other faiths. At the same time, whether women are leaders, active volunteers, or worship attenders, women’s kind and degree of participation in their faith community is a key factor in whether the particular congregation and larger religious community will flourish in America.

Over the last couple of centuries, women have shown they can be as capable as men in guiding a congregation spiritually, as well as in developing or directing programs and providing oversight on financial and staffing decisions. Women’s present opportunities for congregational leadership in the mainline Protestant denominations, although still lower than men’s, are far better on the average than those for women in the more conservative Protestant, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic congregations, as well as those of Jewish, Muslim, and Eastern religions.

The relative success of women gaining leadership in USA mainline Protestant churches over the last fifty years has provided encouragement to those women in more patriarchal congregations who have little or no authority in the congregation. Still, other women are content with the historic male-led faith tradition in their more conservative Christian and Jewish denominations and congregations.

Muslim women are the minority of most attending worship services, as well as a minority in senior leadership positions in mosques and Islamic centers, including the United States and other English-speaking nations. Yet more Muslim women here and in other countries are gaining recognition for their leadership capacities, as they become actively engaged in planning and carrying out educational and outreach events. However, this has not resulted in women’s gaining anywhere near equal position to men in administration or worship in most mosques — so far.

Although this course focuses on women in North American communities of faith, similar trends are occurring among women and religious leadership in other continents. Recent research done in this country and others will be included in the reading assigned or summarized and cited in the lectures.

By examining women’s roles in congregations of other religious and societal contexts, a course premise is that students may observe possible present implications and futures for women in their own faith communities.

ALL reading assigned is available ON-LINE. No purchase of books is required. Reading assigned is primarily for students to gain understanding of themes and trends (not historical details or specific numbers).
COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

**Weekly**: doing all of the assigned reading, answering one of the questions posed by the instructor with each lecture, and commenting on at least one other student’s answers. Weekly participation on the discussion course site is expected. Missing more than two weekly discussions will lower your final grade.  **40% of final grade.**

**Mid-term proposal for final essay**: 500-1000 words on describing the final paper planned about the extent of women’s participation in your choice of faith-related community over the last 10-20 years, with references to assigned reading done. **20% of final grade.**

**Final essay**: About 1500-2000 at words on what the recent history indicates as the future of women’s participation and leadership in your choice of faith-related community, and the outcomes you see for the future vitality of this faith community— AND WHY (using, assigned & other readings, discussions, and insights.) **40% of final grade.**

COURSE SYLLABUS

*After introductory week, the course is divided in three sections:*

**Section I, “Head Start for the Mostly Mainline: Protestant Women in Predominantly White Churches,”** discusses factors in how women emerged more visibly as leaders of Christian congregations and denominations from the early 19th to the late 20th century America and challenges they still face in the 21st century.

**Section II, “Catching the Spirit and Divisions Among American Women Outside the Protestant Mainline,”** describes women’s situations and aspirations who belong to Roman Catholic, Evangelical Protestant, Muslim, Black, Hispanic or Asian congregations.

**Section III, “Underlying Issues, New Chances, and the Future,”** explores arguments about gender differences in fitness for leadership and opportunities for women’s leadership in communities of faith, with consequences for women and congregations

**WEEK 1**  **Introduction to Women’s Place in World Religions**

1. **Reading:** Only the on-line lecture introduction.
2. **Students:** Introduce themselves one line, given some information about their religious backgrounds, and what their particular interests are in this course.

**SECTION I** **THE EMERGENCE OF WOMEN AS CHURCH LEADERS: PROTESTANT WOMEN IN PREDOMINANTLY WHITE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES**

**WEEK 2**  **Women’s Leadership in USA Churches in 18th- early 19th Centuries**

Reading for themes, similarities and differences

Reading for themes, similarities and differences:


Empirical Studies and Web Articles:

SECTION 2: CATCHING THE SPIRIT FOR CHANGE AMONG WOMEN OUTSIDE THE MAINLINE PROTESTANT CHURCHES

WEEK 4: Roman Catholic Women Leadership and Divisions
Reading for themes, similarities and differences


New Empirical Studies (Other Continents)
WEEK 5: Overview: Women’s Roles and Identity in Other Conservative/Patriarchal Faith Communities in the USA and other “Neo-Liberal” English-Speaking Countries

Reading for themes, similarities and differences


WEEK 6: Women’s Roles in Muslim Communities in of Faith

Reading for themes, similarities and differences


New Empirical Studies in Countries (Skim)

WEEK 7: Women Members and Becoming Leaders of Christian African-American USA Congregations: A Different Situation?
Reading for themes, similarities and differences


WEEK 8: Women Taking Leadership in Asian Congregations: A Similar Journey?
Reading for themes, similarities and differences


WEEK 9 Week of Reading/Writing Catch-up: Proposals for Final Essay Due
No other assignments
SECTION III: UNDERLYING ISSUES, NEW CHANCES AND THE FUTURE

WEEK 10  The Nature-Nurture-Opportunity Debates: Are Women More Religiously Inclined than Men, and if so Why?
   Reading for themes, similarities and differences
   Web Articles

WEEK 11  Gender, Sexual Orientation, and Congregations
   Reading for themes, trends, differences

WEEK 12  Women’s Leadership in Faith Communities
   Reading for themes, similarities and differences

   New Empirical Studies to skim

WEEK 13  Final Lecture: Women and the Future of Faith Communities
   NO Reading Assigned:
WEEKS 14-15  Final Essays Due
Students are asked to write an essay of 1500-2000+ words on what they see as the future of women’s leadership and congregational strength in your denomination, faith tradition, OR on your interest in the role of women in faith communities – using your scholarly reflections, your responses to the lecture questions, your insights, and the assigned and other reading.