WOMEN, RELIGION AND THE FUTURE OF FAITH COMMUNITIES

Instructor: Adair Lummis, Faculty Associate in Research

Contact Information: Email: alummis@hartsem.edu  Office telephone: 860-509-9547
No specified office hours: telephone/email best to ask questions or make appointment

Course Path:
What will happen in this new 2020 decade in regard to women’s kind and extent of involvement in faith communities? What will women want to drop, change or create in local congregations/worship organizations – or even in the policy and program decisions of regional and national faith officials? That can be a worry! Yet a greater concern might better be: what if many women simply 'lose interest' in trying to strengthen their faith communities, and just stop all involvement? This theme will intertwine with research and discussion on other topics in the course weeks.

Women are usually the gender majority attending worship or undertaking congregational responsibilities. Women are also a typical minority in filling top leadership positions. Nonetheless, whether women are leaders, active volunteers, or mainly worship attenders, women’s kind and degree of participation are key factors in whether the particular congregation will flourish in contemporary US. To be sure, congregations differ in resources, culture and location, along with degree of consensus on what their faith community or congregation should be doing, all of which can affect implementation of new approaches. These aspects will be raised in possible reasons for attempting changes and the success of change efforts undertaken.

How probable is it that in the next five years there will be more women in full-time positions as sole or senior religious worship leaders? Certainly, the number of ordained/certified women has increased substantially since the turn of the century (with major denominational exceptions). Yet, for growing numbers of women under age 40, the goal of being ordained or becoming the official religious leader of an established worshipping community, has declined. Protestant women's diminishing interest in parish ministry as a full-time calling is partly due to limited career and financial rewards. There are better-paying secular positions available for women, with more opportunity for career advancement. Further, some seminary-educated women are ever less interested in following traditional clergy career paths, since they are more drawn to implementing their own vision for a non-traditional ministry.

The major focus of this course, therefore, is on what roles women are taking in US faith communities in the 21st century: why, with what support, and possible consequences for the women and congregations going forward.
Learning Objectives and Procedures

In this graduate level course the reading assigned is intended to give students an overview and understanding of themes and trends (not historical or empirical details). The instructor’s on-line lectures will summarize findings of research studies on situations and changes in religious organizations, women’s concerns, and congregational priorities. The expectation for students is that they will consider and reflect on these aspects, and where relevant, apply to comparative situations they have encountered or anticipate.

For this purpose, a major weekly assignment is that students respond online to a question posed by the instructor on the subject focus of the week’s reading, and to the response of at least one other student. Although this course focuses on women in North American communities of faith, similar trends and situations are likely occurring in countries and cultures. These comparisons students are welcomed to use in weekly responses.

Students are NOT expected to read articles that include many tables of numbers. These studies will be summarized in lectures, and may be available for full reading under a category called “Empirical Studies.”

Seminary Course Learning Outcomes

The MAJOR focus of this “RS” course is MA #5, “To demonstrate the ability to relate theory and practice in the social contexts in which a religion’s communities exist.” Of importance also are MA #2, #3, #4: “To demonstrate knowledge (in/of): #2: respectfully engaging other religions and world views”; #3: “practices of one’s own religious tradition…and appreciate those of others”; #4: “skills for …constructive engagement with diversity.” Although MA #1: “foundational and critical knowledge of one’s own religion” is important, this is neither a major focus nor a course grading component.

ALL reading assigned is available ON-LINE in CANVAS
No purchase of books is required.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Weekly: Doing the week’s reading, answering one of the questions posed by the instructor with each lecture, and commenting on at least two other student’ answers on the course discussion course site is expected. 40% of final grade.

Mid-term proposal for final essay: 500-800 words on describing the final paper planned about the extent of women’s participation in your choice of faith-related community over the last decade, with references to assigned reading done. 15% of final grade.

Final essay: About 4,500 (or more) words, About 15 pages double-spaced, 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.) 45% of final grade.
COURSE SYLLABUS

After the 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, “Underling 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.

2020 spring semester

**WEEK 1: Jan 21. Introduction to Women’s Place in World Religions**

1. **Reading:** Only the on-line lecture introduction.

2. **Students:** Introduce themselves online, give some information about their religious backgrounds, and explain what their particular interests are in this course.

**SECTION I HEAD SRTART FOR THE MOSTLY MAINLINE: PROTESTANT WOMEN IN PREDOMINANTLY WHITE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES**

**WEEK 2: Jan 28. Women’s Leadership in USA Churches in 18th- early 19th Centuries**

Reading for themes, similarities and differences


Reading for themes, similarities and differences:


5. Empirical Studies and Web Articles:

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

WEEK 4: Feb 11. Roman Catholic Women Leadership and Divisions

Reading for themes, similarities and differences


New Empirical Study

WEEK 5: Feb 18. Overview: Women’s Roles and Identity in Conservative/ Faith Communities in the USA and “Neo-Liberal” English-Speaking Nations

Reading for themes, similarities and differences


Recent Empirical Studies (skim)


WEEK 6: Feb 25. Women’s Roles in US Muslim Communities in of Faith


New Empirical Studies (Skim):
WEEK 7: March 3. Women Members and Becoming Leaders of Christian African-American USA Congregations: A Different Situation?

Reading for themes, similarities and differences


WEEK 8: March 10. Women Taking Leadership in Asian Congregations: A Similar Journey?

Reading for themes, similarities and differences


SECTION III: UNDERLYING ISSUES, NEW CHANCES AND THE FUTURE

WEEK 9: March 17: Socioeconomic Differences affecting Women’s Religiosity

Reading for themes, similarities and differences


Reading for themes, similarities and differences


New Empirical Studies and Web Articles:


WEEK 11: March 31. Week of Reading/Writing Catch-up: Proposals for Final Essay due No other assignments

WEEK 12: April 7: Gender, Sexual Orientation, and Congregations

Reading for themes, trends, differences


Additional Reading to skim: Scott Thumma and Edward R. Gray, eds., *Gay Religion.* (Walnut Creek, Altamira Press, 2005

WEEK 13: April 14. Women's Leadership in Faith Communities: Possibilities and Probabilities

Reading for themes, similarities and differences


Review and new research studies in the area of women’s ministry.


Students are asked to write an essay of 4,500 (or more) words on what they see as the future of women’s leadership and congregational strength in their denomination, faith tradition, OR on a contemporary topic concerning the role of women in faith communities.

Students may use their scholarly and personal observations, reflections they have written on lecture questions, some new insights, and reading from relevant *chapters and articles in this syllabus*.