RS-661 WOMEN, RELIGION AND
THE FUTURE OF FAITH COMMUNITIES

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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 church leadership positions. Whether women outnumber men attending religious events in faith communities of other religions, they are also unlikely to hold top leadership positions in these.

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. By the second decade of the 21st century, substantial numbers of women have been recognized as having these capacities. In the theologically liberal-moderate Protestant denominations now, many more women are sole and senior pastors, regional and national denominational leaders. Women's present opportunities for church 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 in USA mainline Protestant churches over the last forty years has provided encouragement to some women in traditionally patriarchal congregations to strive for a more gender inclusive religious leadership, while other women do not wish their tradition changed.

In illustration, although women are the minority of most attending Muslim worship services, as well as a minority in senior leadership positions in mosques and Islamic centers, they provide much of the supportive labor needed. In the United States, however, some Muslim women are gaining recognition for their leadership capacities within their mosques, often expedited by their observations of women as leaders in their and other religions.

Although this course focuses on women in North American communities of faith, similar trends are occurring among women and religious leadership in other continents. Additionally the instructor's lectures will summarize the major findings of very recent empirical studies on religion and women. Students are NOT expected to read articles with many numerical tables; although some recent research articles and web reports will be available for download in the reading list category called "New Empirical Studies."

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.

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 WEEKLY SYLLABUS

**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:


**WEEK 3**  Moving through the 20th Century and into the 21st Century: Protestant Women Seek Official Recognition in Christian Churches.

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
Reading for themes, similarities and differences

   (and web articles on “Ordain Women” – A Mormon feminist organization)


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

**Reading for themes, similarities and differences**


**New Empirical Studies (Other Countries) and Web Articles.**


**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 and Web Articles (more to be added)


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.