

**Religion 287A: Queer Religiosities**  
**Professor Melissa M. Wilcox**  
**TTh 1:00-2:20, Olin 210**  
**Whitman College**  
**Fall 2012**

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Office hours: M 3:00-4:30, Th 10:30-12:00  
(If you can't make these times, see me for an  
appointment)

**Course summary and goals**

This course offers a unique opportunity to examine religion from a queer perspective, exploring the ways in which lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer people have created religious spaces for themselves in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. We'll begin with a brief historical overview of the development of LGBTQ communities in the U.S., then hone in on the rich variety of religious developments that have taken place in such communities since the 1960s. Course readings include historical, autobiographical, sociological, and theological discussions of religion and spirituality in the lives of LGBTQ people, and the course concludes with an examination of the sociological studies of queer religiosities that have been conducted over the past two decades. At the end of the semester, I hope you will have gained a sense of the vast diversity of religious beliefs and practices in queer communities, an appreciation of how people grapple with religious challenges to their identities, an understanding of the formation of breakaway, "identity-focused" religious organizations, and—perhaps most importantly—an alternative perspective on queer religiosities to that most often promulgated in the media.

**Required texts:**

- Thumma, Scott and Edward Gray, eds., *Gay Religion* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira, 2004).
- Debra R. Kolodny, ed., *Blessed Bi Spirit: Bisexual People of Faith* (New York: Continuum, 2000).
- Dzmura, Noach, ed., *Balancing on the Mechitza: Transgender in Jewish Community* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2010).
- Gilley, Brian Joseph. *Becoming Two-Spirit: Gay Identity and Social Acceptance in Indian Country* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

**Recommended texts:**

- Leyland, Winston, ed. *Queer Dharma: Voices of Gay Buddhists*, Vol. 1 (San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press, 1998).

Additional reading assignments will be posted on the CLEo site for this course. All course books will be on reserve in Penrose, and you are welcome to share books with a classmate in order to keep your expenses down.

## Course requirements

Your grade in this course will be calculated as follows:

Attendance, preparation, and participation.....	10%
Take-home exams (3 @ 20% each).....	60%
Final essay.....	30%

Remember to keep all papers I return to you in case there are any discrepancies at the end of the semester. If you keep your papers, you can also track your own grade!

*Attendance, preparation, and participation:* Since this course relies partly on discussion, it is extremely important that you be in class, on time and prepared, each day. Please do the day's reading before coming to class, and be prepared for the possibility that we might discuss the reading assignments. You are expected to bring the day's reading materials, or detailed notes on the reading, to class each day. Students who miss more than four class sessions without informing me in advance will lose at least 50% of this portion of their grade.

*Take-home exams:* Three times during the semester, you will complete a take-home exam on the material we have covered since the last take-home exam (or, for the first one, since the beginning of the course). Take-home exams are open-book, open-film, and open-note but not open-friend or open-internet. Exams will cover readings, films, and lectures. You will have one week to complete each take-home exam. The take-home exams are due in your CLEo drop box **by 1:00 p.m. on Tuesday, September 24 and Thursday, November 1, and by 2:00 p.m. on Monday, December 10.**

*Final essay:* You will have several choices as to the focus of this reflective essay, which will ask you to integrate the material you have covered during the semester. The essay will be 6-8 pages in length, and will be due in the course's CLEo drop box **by 1:00 p.m. on Thursday, November 29.**

There will be no final exam session for this course.

## Course policies

*Students with disabilities:* If you have a disability and need my help in making this course fully accessible to you, please feel free to contact me, either in person or through the Academic Resource Center (527-5213). I'll be happy to help in whatever way I can. If you suspect you have a learning difference but have not had your suspicions confirmed, the Academic Resource Center can help you to identify that difference and figure out how to adjust your learning style accordingly. *The only thing wrong with a learning difference is an inflexible educational system.*

*Inclusive language:* Inclusive language is the use of accurate and unbiased gender terminology, and it is required in this course. It's important for a number of reasons. For one thing, language shapes how people think. When religious studies was considered to be the study of the beliefs of *man*, for instance, people (usually male scholars) tended to study male writers, male believers, male religious leaders, and so on simply because it didn't occur to them to study women specifically. As a result, they had a less accurate understanding of religion than we have today. "Humanity" and "humans" are gender-inclusive terms; "man" and "men" are not.

Non-inclusive language also can be misleading, inaccurate, or vague. Traditional formal English, for example, requires that you use the singular pronoun "he" as a generic pronoun. Thus, you might say that "when a new member is initiated into the secret society, he must undergo several hours of ordeals." People who read that sentence are left wondering whether "he" includes women or whether this secret society is for men only. The solution? When you use singular generic terms (like "one," "anyone," "a person," etc.), use the combined pronoun "she or he." Or, for a less awkward sentence, simply use a plural noun ("people," "initiates," "members," etc.), because English has a non-gendered plural pronoun ("they").

I am always happy to help you find more inclusive language for what you want to say – see me in office hours if you'd like assistance with this.

*"Late fees":* Project proposals and final projects will lose **5 percentage points** for each day they are late (including weekends and holidays). Unless you make arrangements with me in advance, you may not make up a missed term project presentation, late quiz, or missed exam.

*Academic dishonesty:* Honesty is an integral part of academic learning; any form of cheating expresses gross disrespect for the efforts of your teacher, the hard work of your classmates, and your own privilege in having access to a high-quality education. I will not hesitate to report and pursue incidents of suspected academic dishonesty, including plagiarism and copying others' assignments. **The maximum penalty for academic dishonesty at Whitman is permanent expulsion.**

**This class is an educational safe zone. It welcomes and respects the viewpoints of students of all sexual orientations and genders as well as all races, ethnicities, religions, and abilities. All members of this learning community are expected to treat each other with respect and dignity, and to listen especially carefully to the voices of cultural and social minorities.**

## Course Schedule: Queer Religiosities

➔ Watch for the arrows! They tell you when things are due.

### Guide to abbreviations

CL = Readings on CLEo

GR = *Gay Religion*

BB = *Blessed Bi Spirit*

BM = *Balancing on the Mechitza*

BT = *Becoming Two-Spirit*

QD = *Queer Dharma* (out of print; on reserve in Penrose)

### Unit 1: Background

Tuesday, 8/28: Introduction to the course

No reading

Thursday, 8/30: The origins of “homosexuality”

Reading: Syllabus, CL – Halperin, Vicinus, D’Emilio

Tuesday, 9/4: “Inverts” and communities

Reading: CL – Rupp, Marotta (Ch. 4)

Thursday, 9/6: Religion and sexuality after Stonewall

Reading: CL – Melton, Umansky, Bible selections, Schow

Tuesday, 9/11: Biblical controversy and the “ex-gay” movement

Reading: CL – Payne, Gritz, Ponticelli

Film: *The Transformation* (dir. Carlos Aparicio, Susana Aiken, 1995, 52 min.)

### Unit 2: Queering Christianities

Thursday, 9/13: The Metropolitan Community Church

Reading: CL – Perry, Wilson, Goss

Start film: *Call Me Troy* (dir. Scott Bloom, 2007, 100 min.)

Tuesday, 9/18: Queer Christian theologies

Reading: CL – Tanis, Sneed (Ch. 2)

Finish film

**Take-home exam #1 available on CLEo at the end of class**

Thursday, 9/20: Mainstream Protestantism opens up

Reading: GR – Cadge (Ch. 2)

CL – Suárez, Law, Miller

BB – All three pieces by Craig (pp. 101, 197, 226), Andrew

Tuesday, 9/25: Queer Black church movements

Reading: CL – Leong, Sneed (Ch. 3), Ward

➔ **Take-home exam #1 due in your CLEo drop box by 1:00 p.m.**

Thursday, 9/27: Reclaiming socially conservative Christianity

*No class - I will be out of town at a conference on Harry Hay. Please do the following reading, and come to class on Tuesday prepared to discuss it.*

Reading: GR – Drumm, Savastano

BB – Klopovic, Ehrig, Soriano

Tuesday, 10/2: Queer Catholics in the ranks

Reading: CL – Jordan, Curb/Manahan

### Unit 3: Queering Judaism

Thursday, 10/4: Claiming Judaism

Reading: CL – Sass

BM – Introduction, Ch. 1 (5 selections of your choice)

Film: *Keep Not Silent* (dir. Ilil Alexander, 2004, 52 min.)

### OCTOBER 6-9: FALL BREAK (start early on Thursday's readings!)

Thursday, 10/11: Individual expressions of Judaism (partial discussion day)

Reading: BM – Ch. 2 – Group A: Madsen and Ladin, Devor, Fornari, Lieberman

Group B: Rawlings-Fein, Strassfeld, Plaskow and Kukla, Greenhough

Ch. 3 – Dzmura (both pieces), Zellman and Kukla, Litman

BB – Rosenthal

Assign discussion groups for next week

### Unit 4: Identity Negotiation – Sociological Perspectives

*I will be out of town this Tuesday and Thursday, taking part in the accreditation of another college. Please (1) read the following articles; (2) meet with your discussion group, and (3) write a three-page reflection on the readings to turn in next Tuesday (10/23). This reflection paper will count toward your attendance and participation score.*

Readings for this week:

CL – Yip (“Queering”), Schnoor, Dillon (*through 131 only*), Primiano, Shokeid (“The Women are Coming”), Wilcox

GR – Gray and Thumma (Ch. 16)

### Unit 5: Queering Islam

Tuesday, 10/23: Sexual and gender diversity in Islamic theology

Reading: CL – Ali, Kugle

Explore Safra Project web site (link on CL)

Film: *A Jihad for Love* (dir. Parvez Sharma, Halal Films, 2007, 81 minutes)

➔ **Reflection paper from last week due in your CLEo drop box by 1:00 p.m.**

Thursday, 10/25: Queer Muslim identities (partial discussion day)

Reading: CL – Dossani, Minwalla et al., Rouhani

Finish film

**Take-home exam #2 available on CLEo at the end of class**

### Unit 6: Two-Spirit Identities

Tuesday, 10/30: Two-Spirit identities and organizations

Reading: BT Chs. 1, 2

Thursday, 11/1: Two-Spirit activism

Reading: BT Chs. 3, 4

➔ **Take-home exam #2 due in your CLEo drop box by 1:00 p.m.**

Tuesday, 11/6: Developing an identity

Reading: BT Chs. 5-7

### Unit 7: Queering Asian Traditions

Thursday, 11/8: Scholars' perspectives on queer Buddhism

Reading: QD – Reader's Note, Cabezón, Zwilling, Jackson, Sunseri

**Final essay topics available on CLEo at the end of class**

Tuesday, 11/13: Personal experiences in Buddhism (discussion day)

Reading: QD – Whitney, Marion (p. 163), Bernie, Hall, Karuna, Conkin

GR – Cadge (Ch. 8)

BB – Nellhaus

**Extra credit: LGBT-RAN treasure hunt available in class**

*Thursday, 11/15: No class! I will be out of town at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion.*

## **NOVEMBER 17-25: THANKSGIVING BREAK**

Tuesday, 11/27: Sexual and gender diversity in Hinduism

Reading: CL – Pattanaik

BB – Durgadas

**→ LGBT-RAN treasure hunt due in class**

### **Unit 8: Finding Religion in the Queerest of Places**

Thursday, 11/29: Reclaiming and recreating traditions

Reading: GR – Vidal-Ortiz, Hasbrouck

CL – Anzaldúa

BB – Starhawk, Kaldera

**→ Final essays due in your CLEo drop box by 1:00 p.m.**

Tuesday, 12/4: Seekers, Sheilaism, and sifting

Reading: CL – Shallenberger

BB – OchO, Rosefire, Wolf

Film: *Each of Us* (dir. M. Wilcox, 2006, 54 min.)

Thursday, 12/6: Religion in queer cultures (partial discussion day)

Reading: GR – Gorrell, Boisvert

CL – Glenn

**Take-home exam #3 available on CLEo at the end of class**

**→ Take-home exam #3 due in CLEo drop box by 2:00 p.m. on Monday, December 10**