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, transgender, 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 fifteen years. 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 to that most often promulgated in the media by heterosexual religious leaders. Since this course assumes a queer-positive perspective, it is advisable that students not take the class if they feel unable to take on such a perspective for at least the duration of the semester.

Required texts:

- Thumma, Scott and Edward Gray, eds., *Gay Religion* (Walnut Creek, Ca.: AltaMira, 2004).

Additional reading assignments will be posted on the Blackboard site for this course. All course books will also be on reserve in Penrose.
Course requirements

Your grade in this course will be calculated as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance, preparation, and participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short essays (5 @ 10% each)</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final project proposal</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final project</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final project presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Remember to keep all papers I return to you so that you can track your own grade in the course.

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 to class unless you are physically unable to do so. Students who miss more than four class sessions without informing me in advance will lose 50% of this portion of their grade.

Short essays: Seven times during the semester (on days noted in the course schedule below), I will post an essay prompt on the Blackboard site for this class. Each prompt will ask you to spend 2-3 pages reflecting thoughtfully on the readings, lectures, and other course materials we’ve covered recently. You may choose any five of these seven prompts for your five essays, but keep in mind that each essay has a fixed due date, and you will be penalized for turning in that essay after the date when it is due. It’s a good idea to write all of the early essays so that you can skip essays later in the semester when you’re busier! Essays must be typed and proofread; they will be graded for grammar and style as well as content, and major deviations from the assigned length will be penalized.

Final project proposal: This will be a 1½ - 2 page (double-spaced) paper, and should be accompanied by an annotated bibliography containing at least 3 books and 5 journal articles or anthology chapters that you plan to use in preparing your final project. Since resources for research on queer religiosities are sometimes rare, please see me for permission if you need to use web pages as primary sources. Your proposal should include the topic and format of your project, a tentative thesis statement, and a summary of your anticipated argument. Project proposals are due in class on Thursday, April 7.

Final project: Your final project should be an analytical exploration of some aspect of queer religiosities in the United States. Your paper can be historical or contemporary, and it can focus on a person (such as Troy Perry), a group (such as the Radical Faeries), or an issue (such as queer Muslims’ approaches to the Qur’an). Other areas of focus are possible too, but please check them with me first. There are two format options for your project: a research paper or a creative project.

Research paper: If you choose this option, you will need to write your analysis in a formal paper of 10-12 pages (plus the bibliography).

Creative project: In this option, you will express your analytical argument through a work of art that you create. Almost any medium is acceptable: film, music, poetry, short story, painting, sculpture, photography, drama, dance, and so on. Your creative
project should be accompanied by a **5-6 page** (plus the bibliography) artist’s statement that explains your analysis, the research behind it, and how you attempted to express that analysis in your art.

Final papers will be due in our final exam session (Friday, May 13, 9:00 – 11:00 am).

*Final project presentation:* These presentations, held during the last week of class and during our final exam session, will be your opportunity to teach the rest of us about the subject you have researched for your final project, and your chance to try out the strength of your argument on an audience. You will be required to make an 8-10 minute presentation on your project, outlining your background research, your thesis, and your argument. Those doing performance-based projects will perform or present their projects during the final exam session; all others will present on Tuesday, May 3; Thursday, May 5; or Tuesday, May 10.
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.

_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”).

_“Late fees”:_ Essays, 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 final project presentation.

_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

Guide to abbreviations
BL = Readings on Blackboard
GR = Gay Religion
BB = Blessed Bi Spirit
TS = Two-Spirit People
QJ = Queer Jews
QD = Queer Dharma

Week 1: Introductions
Tuesday, 1/18: Introduction to course
  Video: Segment from In the Life (2002)
Thursday, 1/20: The origins of “homosexuality”
  Reading: Syllabus, BL – Halperin, Vicinus
Friday, 1/21: “Inverts” and communities
  Reading: BL – D’Emilio, Rupp, Marotta (Ch. 1)

Week 2: Revolution and backlash
Tuesday, 1/25: Stonewall and its aftermath
  Reading: BL – Marotta (Ch. 4)
Thursday, 1/27: Religion and sexuality after Stonewall
  Reading: BL – Melton, Umansky
Movie night! One Nation Under God (dir. Teodoro Maniaci and Francine Rzeznik, 1993)
Friday, 1/28: Biblical controversy and the “ex-gay” movement
  Reading: BL – Bible selections, Payne, Schow

Week 3: From repression to self-determination
Tuesday, 2/1: Dilemmas of the ex-gay movement
  Reading: GR – Ponticelli
  BL – Ponticelli, Warner
  Video: The Transformation (dir. Carlos Aparicio and Susana Aiken, 1995)
Thursday, 2/3: Protestant homophobia in U.S. culture?
  Reading: BL – Brintnall, Curran
  Finish and discuss The Transformation
  ➔ Prompt for essay #1 available on Blackboard
Friday, 2/4: Other sides to the story – Introduction to MCC
  Reading: BL – Perry
  Video: God, Gays, and the Gospel: This is Our Story (dir. Mary Anne McEwen, 1984)
**Week 4: The growth of MCC and queer theology**  
Tuesday, 2/8: MCC’s growth  
  Reading: BL – Wilcox, Wilson  
  Video: Cathedral of Hope infomercial (1999)  
Thursday, 2/10: Queer Christian theologies and practices  
  Reading: BL – McNeill  
  GR – Lukenbill  
→ **Essay #1 due in class**  
Friday, 2/11: Cutting-edge queer theology  
  Reading: BL – Goss, Tanis

**Week 5: A rainbow of queer Protestants**  
Tuesday, 2/15: Mainstream Protestantism opens up  
  Reading: GR – Cadge (Ch. 2)  
  BL – Suárez, Law, Miller  
  BB – All three pieces by Craig (pp. 101, 197, 226), Andrew  
Thursday, 2/17: Queer Black church movements  
  Reading: BL – Monroe, Cone  
  GR – Bates  
  Video: *All God’s Children* (dir. Sylvia Rhue, 1996)  
Friday, 2/18: Queer conservative Protestants  
  Reading: GR – Drumm, Crapo  
  BB – Kloppovic

**Week 6: Queer Catholicism**  
Tuesday, 2/22: Reclaiming Catholic history  
  Reading: BL – Boswell, Brooten  
Thursday, 2/24: Claiming contemporary Catholicism  
  Reading: GR – Primiano, Savastano  
  BB – Ehrig, Soriano  
Friday, 2/25: Queer Catholics in the ranks  
  Reading: BL – Jordan, Curb  
→ **Prompt for essay #2 available on Blackboard**

**Week 7: Bread on the Seder Plate? Queering Judaism**  
Tuesday, 3/1: Gender and Jewish tradition  
  Reading: BL – Alpert, Boyarin  
→ **Extra credit opportunity! Judy Shepard talk (more info to come)**  
Thursday, 3/3: Wrestling with Jewish tradition(s)  
  Reading: QJ – Greenberg, Michels and Cannon, Anonymous, Dubowski, Kadish  
  BB – Rosenthal  
→ **More extra credit? Wendy Doniger lecture (more info to come)**  
Friday, 3/4: Queer Jewish theology  
  Reading: BL – Alpert  
→ **Essay #2 due in class**  
→ **Prompt for essay #3 available on Blackboard**
Week 8: Queering Judaism, cont. / Native American perspectives
Tuesday, 3/8: Individual expressions of Judaism
   Reading: QJ – Nestle, Dubowsky (44), Nagle, Litman, Hirschmann and Wilson
   BB – Kolodny
Thursday, 3/10: Two-spirit histories
   Reading: TS – Lang, Medicine, Thomas, Tafoya
Friday, 3/11: Contemporary two-spirit people
   Reading: TS – All of Part 3 (“Life stories”)
   BB – Bowen
→ Essay #3 due in class

March 12 – March 27: SPRING BREAK!!

Week 9: Buddhism
Tuesday, 3/29: Scholars’ perspectives on queer Buddhism
   Reading: QD – Reader’s Note (11), Cabezón, Zwilling, begin Jackson
Thursday, 3/31: Queer Buddhism past and present
   Reading: QD – Finish Jackson, Sunseri
   GR – Cadge (Ch. 8)
Friday, 4/1: Personal experiences in Buddhism
   Reading: QD – Whitney, Marion, Bernie, Hall, Karuna, Conkin
   BB – Nellhaus
→ Prompt for essay #4 available on Blackboard

Week 10: Hinduism and Islam
Tuesday, 4/5: Undergraduate conference – no class.
   Reading: Work on your project proposal!
Thursday, 4/7: Sexual and gender diversity in Hinduism
   Reading: BL – Pattanaik, Wilhelm
   BB – Durgadas
→ Final project proposals due in class
Movie night!  I Exist (dir. Barbosa and Lenoir, 2003)
Friday, 4/8: Sexual and gender diversity in Islam
   Reading: BL – Islam, Dossani, Al-Fatiha, Al-Haqq Kugle
→ Essay #4 due in class
→ Prompt for essay #5 available on Blackboard
Week 11: Reclaiming and (re)creating
Tuesday, 4/12: Reclaiming Aztec and African traditions
Reading: GR – Vidal-Ortiz
BL – Anzaldúa, Monroe
BB – Threatt
Thursday, 4/14: Wicca and the Radical Faeries
Reading: GR – Hasbrouck, Neitz
BB – Starhawk, Kaldera
Friday, 4/15: Religion in queer cultures
Reading: GR – Sell, Gorrell, Boisvert (be prepared to discuss these!)
Video: “Backstage with the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence” (dir. F. Backman, 2003)
→ Essay #5 due in class
→ Prompt for essay #6 available on Blackboard

Week 12: Social scientific perspectives I
Tuesday, 4/19: Seekers, Sheilalism, and sifting
Reading: BL – Shallenberger
BB – OchO, Rosefire, Wolf
→ Sign ups begin for final project presentations
→ Starting on Thursday, please bring the readings or your notes on the readings to class, and come prepared to discuss and evaluate the articles.
Thursday, 4/21: Identity negotiation – Evangelical Christianity
Reading: GR – Thumma (Ch. 4)
BL – Mahaffy
Friday, 4/22: Identity negotiation – Comparing Judaism and mainline Protestantism
Reading: GR – Shokeid
BL – Yip, Rodriguez and Ouellette
→ Essay #6 due in class

Week 13: Social scientific perspectives II
Tuesday, 4/26: Vernacular religion
Reading: BL – Primiano (“Vernacular Religion”), Shokeid (“A Gay Space”)
GR – Gray and Thumma (Ch. 16)
Thursday, 4/28: Identity negotiation in Catholicism
Reading: BL – Dillon
→ Prompt for essay #7 available on Blackboard
Friday, 4/29: Where are the women?
Reading: BL – Primiano (“I Would Rather”), Shokeid (“Getting around”), Shokeid (“The Women are Coming”)
Week 14: Final project presentations

Please respect your classmates by being in class and awake for ALL presentation sessions!

Tuesday, 5/3: Final project presentations
Thursday, 5/5: Final project presentations
→ Essay #7 due in class

Friday, 5/6: No class. Work on your final project!

Week 15: Final project presentations

Please respect your classmates by being in class and awake for ALL presentation sessions!

Tuesday, 5/10: Final project presentations

Friday, 5/13, 9:00-11:00 a.m. (Our final exam session): Creative project presentations
→ Final papers are due IN CLASS on Friday, May 13
“I Had a Bad Dream!”
Ibrahim Farajajé

I had a bad dream
That lasted too long
That started some weeks,
Some months, some years, some centuries ago
Of way too many people, places, laws and things
Telling me
That my coloured body was not good,
That it had no value,
Telling me that it could not be fat or too tall or too short or too skinny;
Telling me that bones-and-wheelchair bodies,
Bones and braces bodies,
Deaf bodies and blind bodies
Were bodies without value
Telling me that we could not be coloured and kweer at the same time,
Telling me that black and white were the only realities
(and that if we were anything else or more than one thing at a time,
or, goddess forbid, too many things!
Then we were
Doomed to be erased)
Telling me that desire and sexualities were not fluid,
Telling me that everything had to be either/or,
Telling me that I could not be a shape-shifter, a border bandit
Telling me that gender was fixed and that there were only two
(and that male definitely equalled superior)
Telling me that I (!) was confused
Telling me that the sharing of erotic power was wrong
Telling me that I could not raise my children
Telling me that I could not live and work in this country, because I was suspect
Telling me that I could not claim my lover’s body because I was not family
Telling me that my relationships did not merit any recognition by law;
Telling me that I was wrong,
Telling me that I was a shade
a shadow
a half-life.
Telling me that I should not be allowed to exist
Telling me that I had no rights:

You know what?

I had a bad dream!

I had a bad dream
That if I escaped the
Razor blades and pills of my mind
I would only encounter bigger,
More brutal tortures,
More constant threats of violence,
   Of annihilation,
   Of massacre;
I had a bad dream!

I had a bad dream
That they would still say that
there is no such thing
as persecution of queers in gold mountain:
I had a bad dream!

I had a bad dream
That we kweers would still say that
We didn’t care about what happened to others
As long as we got ours

I had a bad dream
That we would say
That there is no such thing as kweers
Who need public assistance
Or kweers in prison;
That affirmative action is not our issue;

Those nasty old isms are all just things of the past; why
Don’t we just get on with life?
(after all the playing ground is already level)

Why don’t they just stop dividing our movement with all of their
Diversity and inclusion???????
(after all we’re all equal here on Turtle Island):

We’re free and happy:
(after all, we don’t have any political prisoners or prisoners of war here in the US)

Why don’t they just stop whining?
After all, no one suffers more than we kweers.
Why can’t we all just get along?

I had a bad dream!
I had a bad dream that we would be afraid of
Delighting in the dazzling display of our differences
And that instead,
We would
Run to new closets of ‘we’re-
Just-like-everyone-else’:
New and renovated closets that would confirm our belief that
Different equals wrong;
Condo-closets that would promise equality if we but erase
Ourselves;
Duplex-closets that would close in on us and
Suffocate us:
I had a bad dream!
I had a bad dream
That we would begin to believe, as we had been taught,
That spirit
And body did not belong together
That body was bad and coloured, full of desire, needing to be
Policied, dominated and controlled,
Just like we had been taught that women and the earth had to be
Controlled;
I had a bad dream that we would forget that we were the
Dreamers of the dream, the tellers of the tale, the keepers of the
Rhythm,
The tribes of the moon, the people of the rainbow
A sacred people,
I had a bad dream!
I had a bad dream:
That the violence against us would increase
That in Oakland and in Richmond,
In the military and in prisons,
In Veterans' Administration hospitals and in reservations,
In breast cancer wards and farm towns
In aids wards and homeless shelters,
In abortion clinics and parks;
In immigration detention centres and sex clubs,
In shrines, places of prayer and prostration, and mental hospitals
We could still be lynched and executed at will,
Bitter fruits of a bitter tree:
I had a bad dream!
I had a bad dream
That once dispersed to the four directions
We would be forgotten like the countless others
Victims of a media white-out
Killed twice
Our voices no longer heard:
I had a bad dream!
But now my sound is carried through you
My bad dream
Becomes
Sweet dream
As you
Scream
That there can be no renewed hope,
No equality and justice for all
As long as there is no equality and justice for all of us;
For each one of us,
With all of our madly beautiful pieces, parts, fears,
Contradictions and dreams.

That there can be no postmodern/post-colonial equality and
Justice for all
As long as our bodies and minds are still colonized,
Are still kept as someone’s occupied territories,
As long as dreams are still squashed,
As long as kweers and Chumash and post-nuclear Pacific Islanders
And Bosnians and Pilipinas and women with cervical cancer
And Miwoks and Yokuts and Iraqis
And immigrants and women with HIV
And Chechnyans and Kashmiris and Pilipino Moros
And poor, coloured butch dykes and mixed blood people
Drag kings and drag queens and Rwandans and Israeli refugees
And people living with HIV and Palestinians
And Chicanas and pagan leatherkweers
And south Asians and people without healthcare
And intersex and polysex and Puertorriqueñas and transgender Sufis
And black folks and sex workers and Persian Muslims
And Ethiopian Jews and Tibetans
And Maidu and Pomo and Muslims
And people with disabilities and Sri Lankan freedom fighters
And prisoners and Asian teenagers
And homeless people and Arabs
And who knows how many others
Of all sizes, shapes, colours, and combinations of all of
The above (and then some!)
Continue to be made erased,
Continue to be suffocated,
Continue to be killed.
You, you, you are
my sweet dream.
Through you
I live on
From generation to generation
From everlasting to everlasting
And fiercely, proudly,
Tenderly, queerly,
I come home to
Run to
Fly, to float,
To shout, to say: no more nightmares!

Fulfill my sweet dream!