

WRT 205-M063:
CRITICAL RESEARCH AND INQUIRY
— *Gender in Religion* —

MWF 11:40A.M.–12:35P.M. HBC 213B

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“[A] piece of clothing cannot in itself be oppressive or emancipatory. The significance of the headscarf is always a matter of context . . .”

— Sarah Bracke and Nadia Fadil, “Is the Headscarf Oppressive or Emancipatory?”

“I have a soft spot in my heart for literalists because I used to be one. However, when someone says to me ‘this is what the Bible says,’ my response to them is, ‘No, that’s what the Bible reads.’ It is the struggle to understand context and language and culture and customs that helps us to understand the reading, or what it is saying.”

— Rev. Dr. Laurence Keene, in *For the Bible Tells Me So*

Course Description

Welcome to WRT 205, a sophomore-level writing course focusing on methods of analysis, argumentation, and research as critical inquiry. A working premise for this course is the recognition that we all now write or compose in a cultural environment saturated by an unprecedented level of information — the so-called “data glut” of late capitalism. In order to succeed as writers and thinkers and engaged citizens in such an environment, it becomes important for us to grow accustomed to locating, evaluating and processing reliable information. Part of this task involves asking good questions — questions that trigger an active engagement with issues and concepts. Over the next few



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weeks, we’ll learn to ask and pursue such questions. Reading, understanding the composing process, and of course writing itself are all inseparable components of this course. This means you will need to “unpack” texts, react to these texts in writing, and develop your own writing around topics and subjects that are meaningful to you (and intersect with our shared topic of inquiry, “Gender in Religion”). Throughout the course of the semester you will compose two shorter papers (6 pages), one sustained argument essay (8 pages), and a final “translation project,” as well as completing a series of informal/invention writing assignments.

Course Goals

WRT 205 focuses on the rhetorical strategies, practices, and conventions of critical academic research writing.

1. Students will investigate a shared topic of inquiry and develop research questions that engage the complexities (social, political, ideological, economic, historical) of and current debates about that topic.	7. Students will produce texts that demonstrate a nuanced understanding of and an ethical relationship with sources and research participants.
2. Students will learn multiple research strategies, including primary research, and develop more extensive knowledge of library databases in order to identify sources appropriate to their research questions.	8. Students will demonstrate how their dialogue with sources has broadened and enhanced their own thinking about the issue.
3. Students will evaluate the validity of their sources in the context of their research questions.	9. Students will practice and produce analysis, argument, synthesis and summary as central components of researched writing.
4. Students will read sources rhetorically, which involves considering authors' positions in relation to audiences, recognizing points of congruence and difference among texts, and establishing a genuine dialogue with others' ideas.	10. Students will write a series of informal assignments as part of their composing process, and at least three sustained, finished texts that respond to specific rhetorical situations.
5. Students will understand the role of genres, sources, styles and media in communicating with particular audiences and for specific purposes.	11. Students will practice the strategies of incorporating the research of others into their own texts in a variety of ways (including summary, paraphrase, quotation) and will provide textual evidence of where, how, and why sources are being used.
6. Students will understand the ways in which digital media shape all stages of the research and writing process — invention, composing, revision, delivery — and will understand how the effects of digital media vary according to audience, genre, context, and purpose.	12. Students will develop revision and editing strategies for organization, prose style, and technical control.

Our Topic of Inquiry

They're the three taboos of dinner-party conversation: religion, sex, and politics. But religion and gender, and the politics of both, represent some of the most significant and meaningful ways by which we identify



ourselves, and they're concepts that determine how we perceive the world. Our own experiences within these often fundamental categories help shape our understanding of not just "big ideas" like politics and philosophy and "hot topics" like gay marriage and birth control, but also everyday life and the ways we perceive each other. How we react to a niqabi woman at Hancock Airport, how we appreciate Lady Gaga's "Alejandro,"

and how we interpret the Bible quotes on the placards of Marshall St. protestors have all been filtered through our experiences — even slight ones — with practices of religion and gender.

Although the conversations we have on gender in religion can be divisive (for instance, movements to ban headscarves in school or the gay community from temple participation can trigger uproar on all sides), making sense of the arguments being made, and *why* they're being made, is that much more



important — especially in the digital age, when a music video can start a media storm and a Facebook status can break a Friendship. Some of the voices we'll encounter in our course readings will speak directly to the politics of religious gender, such as Bracke and Fadil, who analyze the arguments for and against government regulation of the hijab, and Jodi Rudoren, who addresses the arrest of women using men's prayer



garments at the Wailing Wall. Other voices will speak from the margins of religious authority, including the gay Christians and their families interviewed in *For the Bible Tells Me So* and William Dalrymple's account of Hinduism's "sacred sex workers." In this course, then, we'll write about interpreting gender in religion: its clash with politics, the stakeholders in the debates, the "projects" of those writing about it, and ultimately our own "projects" as you take a stand in a current argument

that *you* have researched — perhaps it's gender-segregation city planning in Jerusalem, Muslim bioethics in sex-reassignment surgery, representations of Mormon masculinity in *Twilight*, or another debate you've picked up on in the world of religion in gender.

To this end, as a class we'll ask questions like . . .

- How does religion influence our identity, relationships, and sense of community as men and women and sexual humans?
- What are the power relations involved in religious production and policing of gender norms?
- What roles do class, race, nationality, and culture play in the formation of one's religious and gender expressions?
- How do the politics of religious philosophies and practices of gender affect even the nonreligious?
- And, perhaps most importantly — What is at stake in these questions?

Course Texts and Materials

(the books are available in the SU Bookstore)

- Harris, Joe: *Rewriting: How to Do Things with Texts*
- Wysocki, Anne & Dennis Lynch: *The DK Handbook*
- Various PDFs available on Blackboard (Bb)
- Approximately \$20 for copy expenses over the course of the semester

I will post materials on Blackboard (<http://blackboard.syr.edu>) with great regularity. You will need your MySlice ID and password to access our course, and I ask that you check your @syr.edu account frequently, since it is the only email address with which Blackboard provides me to communicate with you.

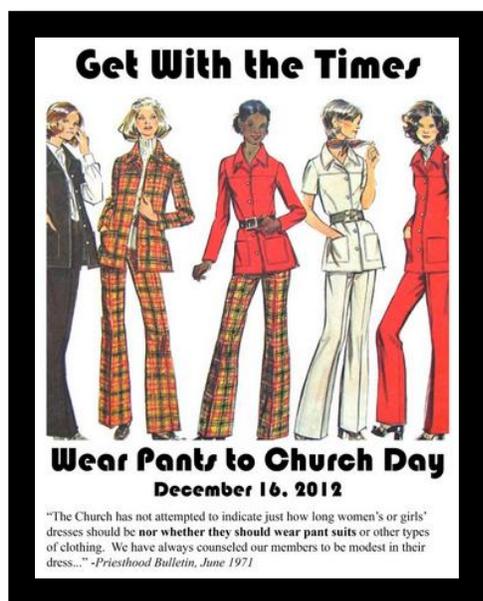
- **All homework, essays, and graded assignments must be submitted *in hard copy*** unless otherwise indicated in the assignment. If you have a laptop, you're encouraged to bring it to class for digital readings and work on drafts, but as a rule I do not accept emailed submissions.

Grading

Unit 1: Flashpoints Portfolio (20%)	Using the critical reading guidelines outlined in Chapter 1, “Coming to Terms,” of Joe Harris’s book, you will compose critical summaries of three assigned readings and one text you locate through database research. You will also generate a researchable question specific to the course inquiry.
Unit 2: Source Analysis Essay & Rhetorical Précis (20%)	In a 6-page text you will analyze the secondary sources you locate specific to your research question and account for how your perspective on your research topic has changed as a result of your encounters with other ideas and perspectives and positions.
Unit 3: Synthesis Essay Drawing on Primary and Secondary Research (30%)	You will write an 8-page research essay, directed toward a specific audience, and drawing on no more than three secondary sources and primary research.
Unit 4: “Translation Project” and Reflection (10% & 10%)	You will translate your research essay into a visual presentation or “trailer” using some form of technology (PowerPoint, Pecha Kucha, Prezi, etc.) and drawing on a range of new sources. You will also compose a final reflection in which you analyze and otherwise account for your rhetorical choices in the presentation.
Course Invention Work (10%)	You will be responsible for completing and submitting all assigned homework and classwork across the semester.

Attendance & Participation

Attendance and active engagement in the course is critical. Your absences will affect your classmates’ work as well as your own. All the work is designed to develop your research skills and will feed directly into your writing.



Each unit calendar will outline the following weeks’ assignments, but we may shift assignments around or change direction occasionally as it seems appropriate, necessary, or interesting. If you must miss a class, you are responsible for making up the work and getting yourself back on track. Please realize that you cannot make up class time.

If you miss the equivalent of three weeks of classes or more without any official documented excuse you will not be able to pass the course. I don’t anticipate any of you will be in that position, however, so let’s all agree to do the work, come to class, learn a lot, and make the course a meaningful experience.

Student Writing

All texts written in this course are generally public. You may be asked to share them with a peer, the class, or with me. It is understood that registration for and continued enrollment in this course constitutes permission by the student for the instructor to use any work resulting from the course.

Communication

I am most readily accessed via e-mail. While I do not have a smartphone, I do try to read my e-mail a couple times during normal business hours. Generally, I do not check my e-mail Saturday afternoon through Sunday.

Remember that this class is a professional setting, and professional e-mail etiquette applies. Be sure to include a descriptive subject along with your course number. Also, be specific in the body of the e-mail, especially if you have questions about a draft.

The Writing Center

Experienced consultants at the Writing Center (101 HB Crouse Hall, on the Quad) are available to work one-on-one with you at any stage of your writing process and with any kind of writing you're creating. Whether you need help understanding an assignment, brainstorming ideas, revising subsequent drafts, or developing editing strategies, face-to-face and online chat appointments are available for 25- or 50-minute sessions throughout the semester. Appointments can be reserved up to seven days in advance via their online scheduling program, WCOnline. In addition, drop-in appointments are welcome Monday through Thursday from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. and brief concerns or questions can be emailed to consultants via their eWC service. For more information on hours, location and services, please visit <http://wc.syr.edu>. This is a free resource to all students and highly recommended for every assignment you work on in this class.



Special Needs and Situations

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu>, located in Room 309 of 804 University Avenue, or call (315) 443-4498 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is



responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented disabilities Accommodation Authorization Letters, as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

Syracuse University and I are committed to your success and to supporting Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This means that in general no individual who is otherwise qualified shall be excluded from participation in, be denied benefits of, or be subjected to

discrimination under any program or activity, solely by reason of having a disability.

You are also welcome to contact me privately to discuss your academic needs although I cannot arrange for disability-related accommodations.

Religious Observance

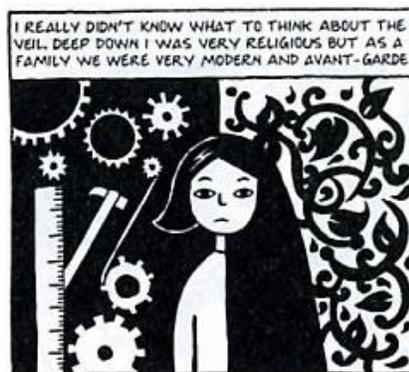
SU's religious observances policy, found at http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm, recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holy days according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes. For fall and spring semesters, an online notification process is



available through [MySlice>Student Services>Enrollment>My Religious Observances](#) from the first day of class until the end of the second week of class.

Academic Honesty

The academic community requires ethical behavior from all of its participants. For writers, this means that the work we claim as ours must truly be ours. At the same time, we are not always expected to come up with new ideas; we often build our thinking on the ideas of others. We are expected, however, to credit others with their contributions and to clearly indicate the boundaries of our own thinking. In cases where academic dishonesty is detected (the fraudulent submission of another's work, in whole or part, as your own), you may be subject to a failing grade for the project or the course, and in the worst case, to academic probation or expulsion. For a more detailed description of the guidelines for adhering to academic honesty in the College of Arts and Sciences, go to <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>.



*“In you God’s love is revealed.
You are always our children.”*

*— Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message
to Parents of Homosexual Children*