WS 304-4: Women and Religion

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Regardless of how "religious" or "non-religious" we consider ourselves to be, we are all affected by the religious ideologies and symbols, past and present, that have helped shape the societies and cultures in which we live. The interaction of religion with other aspects of culture is an ongoing dance of mutual cause and effect that probably began with the emergence of the human race. Although the dance involves both women and men, the traditional academic study of religion has (surprise!) been androcentric in content and methodology. It was not until a few decades ago, under the influence of second-wave feminism, that large numbers of feminist scholars in several cultures began in earnest to make up for lost time. Since then, the interdisciplinary study of women and religion has become one of the fastest-growing and prolific fields in the academic world, paralleling the growth of feminist religious and spiritual activism both within and outside of established religious traditions.

In this course we will touch on several of the topics that have interested feminist scholars of religion, such as: women's subjective experience of religion; women's religious customs and practices in diverse cultures; women's contributions to the ongoing religious life and wisdom of humankind; ancient and modern Goddess-centred spiritualities as expressions of the "divine feminine"; and how sexism and misogyny in religious language/symbols/doctrines/laws/practices have affected people's lives across the globe. We will also look at how women in various cultures are seeking to challenge sexism and participate more authentically in their own traditional religious communities; and how others are creating new, innovative forms of spiritual expression and community outside the traditional religious groupings. One goal of the course in to encourage students to reflect on how their own life experiences may be influenced by gender-related religious factors in their own consciousness or in society.

Required readings:
A custom courseware package will be available in the University bookstore.

Course requirements and Grading Structure:
15% - attendance and participation
25% - major essay (2,000 – 2,500 words)
15% - group presentation
10% - journal
10% (each) - two journal article reviews (approximately 500 words each)
25% - final take-home exam (short essay questions)

Prerequisites:
Six credits in Women's Studies including WS 101 or WS 102.

Lecture: Thursday, 12:30-14:20
Tutorial: Thursday, 14:30-16:20

The Department of Women's Studies encourages clarity of thought and expression and good writing. Students will be evaluated on these skills in all courses given by the Department.