

*Es Hethcox*

*WGST 491: "Gender, Media, and Religious Freedom"*

**Project Description:**

This course will examine women's roles and representations in contemporary media, through the organizing and researching of authors and public speakers for the spring 2018 Religious Freedom conference, hosted by the department of Classics, Philosophy, and Religion. With a series of small projects focusing on religious freedom and gender, this course will provide me the chance to examine how religion, gender, and media are intertwined. With the guidance of Dr. Jennifer Barry, Assistant Professor of Religion, I will research the challenges that women in contemporary media face by focusing on the works and history of the female authors and journalists speaking at the Religious Freedom conference.

**Preparation and Motivation for Project:**

My motivation for this project stemmed from my REL 310 class, Women's Sexuality in Early Western Christian Traditions taught by Professor Barry. During this course, I was interested in the sexualities of female martyrs, and how their lack of feminine characteristics determined their place and recognition in history. My motivation for this project is heavily influenced by my final paper for Professor Barry's class and the research I conducted after the finalization of that course.

For my final paper of Professor Barry's class, I argued that the only reason female martyrs gained recognition in history is because throughout their martyrdom, they took on masculine traits and transformed themselves from figures of femininity to figures of masculinity, raising them to the status of fully human in the eyes of society. During my research I explored the implications of female representations in ancient forms of media --otherwise known as martyrologies-- and posed the question of how many women in ancient media forms have been dismissed or ignored because of their feminine traits? With the use of numerous primary and secondary sources, I examined the martyrologies of three female martyrs, Blandina, Perpetua, and Felicitas and was able to provide detailed evidence supporting my claim.

Not only did this topic make for an interesting final paper, but it also provided the chance for me to present my research at the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges (COPLAC) conference held at Mansfield University in Pennsylvania this current fall. I met with Professor Barry numerous times prior to the conference to edit and tighten my research, and the responses I received from my peers and scholars at COPLAC were enthusiastic and encouraging. I expanded my research for this conference by shifting my attention to female representations in both ancient and contemporary forms of media. I compared how woman in contemporary media are held to

masculine standards, and how if they exhibit feminine traits and resist taking on masculine characteristics, they are rejected and criticized by media outlets and society.

My focus on religious studies as well as involvement in writing and communication at the university have prepared me for this course. I have taken several WGST electives that have focused on women's roles in religious traditions and have extensively studied issues related to representation of women in media. Several WGST courses that I believe will contribute to this course is PHIL 220 Feminist Philosophy, REL 23B8 Christianity After The New Testament, and WGST 101 Intro to Women's Studies. In one or more ways these courses all dealt with the lack of representation that women have historically faced and still face today in media.

In addition to my studies for my degree, I am heavily involved in the growing field of Journalism at our university. Last spring, I took Newsgathering (the foundation class for aspiring journalists) and quickly began writing articles for the school newspaper, the *Blue and Gray Press*. In the month of April I was elected to serve as online editor for the *Blue and Gray Press* till my graduation this coming spring. With these experiences as well as my position as a student aide for Marty Morrison in University Relations, I am confident in my abilities to use my journalism skills and knowledge to accurately report and investigate gender in media.

#### **Goals and Objectives:**

- **Complete a portfolio that reflects an in depth study of gender in media**
- **Gain deeper understanding of intersection of gender and media**
- **Sharpen journalism skills in regards to investigation, writing, and communication**
- **Consider the different areas in which I can apply my knowledge of journalism and WGST to bring representation of marginalized persons through news writing (I.e. Future investigation and writing on women's roles in contemporary religions)**

#### **Description of Assignments:**

1. Research the history of Rel. Freedom annual talk at UMW (design a set of interview question and interview Craig Vasey) \*create conference handout with history of Rel. Freedom @UMW
2. Research how the media has defined Rel. Freedom prior to the Nov. elections of 2016 and after 2016 (2-5 short paper, blogpost format for job portfolio)
3. Research and read the work of at least 5 of our female speakers who have engaged in public scholarship (the vast majority are women and have experienced some form of sexual harassment online) (2-5 short paper, blogpost format for job portfolio)
4. Write the introduction cards (3-5 paragraphs) on each speaker for the conference
5. Help facilitate the Rel. Freedom Essay
6. Write-up conference details for UMW newspaper (save for evidence of bi-line for job portfolio)

**Reading List:** The readings for this course will focus on the intersection of gender, religion, and religious freedom. Several readings will focus on female authors and the different types of reception their works received. These female authors have faced severe issues because of gender and race, and their experiences and writings are vital for the focus of this course. In addition, several of the readings will focus on religious freedom issues around the world, specifically on religions deemed as unsuitable in the eyes of certain societies. I will research the work of each of these articles along with the institutions that they are associated with.

*The Challenge of Diversity in the AI World* by Matt Scherer

*Claiming Identity in the Study of Religion: Social and Rhetorical Techniques Examined (Culture on the Edge: Studies in Identity Formation)* by Monica Miller (Mitchell)

“Altering Infamy: Status, Violence, and Civic Exclusion in Late Antiquity” / “Why We Need to Start Seeing the Classical World in Color” by Sarah Bond (Mitchell)

“Human Trafficking: Muslim Women Vulnerable in Myanmar” / “An Islamic Perspective on Religious Pluralism” by Engy Abdelkader (???)

*The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom* by Candida Moss (???)

“The Men Who Email Me / Can We Finally End the All-Male Panel?” / “Who’s Intolerant? Hamilton, Trump, and a Klan Essay Contest” / “After Charleston” / *Gospel According to the Klan: The KKK’s Appeal to Protestant America, 1915-1930* by Kelly baker (Es)

“Whose Christianity is ‘American’?: The Enduring Contest of Churches and the State” by Kathleen Flake (John)

Educated Children as Victims and Aggressors in Late Ancient Latin Martyr Poetry by Dianne Fruchtmann (John)

The God Who Saves and the God Who Kills by Emily Filler (Es)

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6LgurzFAXvA>)

**Schedule for assignments:** I will have weekly tasks and at least 6 full assignments to complete that will make up my final portfolio. Professor Barry will provide the dates for those assignments once the conference details are solidified.

**Schedule for conferences:** I will meet with Professor Barry once a week to report on the progress of my different research assignments and discuss the weekly readings.

**Description of terms of grading:** Professor Barry will grade my work by assessing my weekly tasks, my 6 assignments, and the overall quality of the final portfolio.

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