

Religious Studies 283
Spring 2003
Que(e)rying Religious Studies

1. Instructor: Susan Henking, Department of Religious Studies Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Geneva, NY 14456 USA <henking@hws.edu>

2. Course Level: undergraduate seminar/discussion course

3. Hours: It met for 3 hours a week for a semester.

4. Enrollment: I just taught it Spring 2003 with 15 students.

5. Pedagogical reflections: The teaching of a course at the intersection of lesbian/gay/queer studies and religious studies poses some special challenges. Like many such interdisciplinary offerings (e.g., women and religion), students sometimes enroll in the course with preparation in one area and not the other. In addition, students who enroll in a course on this topic often have experiential or existential reasons for being there which can pose a variety of problems -- ranging from "I am X so I do not need to read about X" to emotional difficulties with material. Current events and the cultural location of religion and sexuality at any given moment seem also to shape the course; thus, the first time I offered it (about 5 years ago) all student began with the notion that religion and homosexuality were hostile to one another. In 2003, my students all assumed that they were congruent initially. In any case, the course tries to offer a critical introduction to religious studies (understood as a nontheological approach to the study of the human cultural phenomenon of religion) and to lesbian/gay/queer studies (understood as focusing on the social construction of sexualities) and to the ways these two topics are related in our time. It is an exciting course to teach; and it is sometimes painful. But, given the centrality of sexuality in many of the most heated disputes about religion these days, it seems an important way to help students think intellectually about some things that our culture may be teaching them are outside of the realm of intellectual reflection.

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Que(e)rying Religious Studies

What do religion and sexuality have to do with each other? This course considers a variety of religious traditions with a focus on same-sex eroticism. In the process, students are introduced to the fundamental concerns of the academic study of religion and lesbian/gay/queer studies. Among the topics considered are the place of ritual and performance in religion and sexuality, the construction of religious and sexual ideals, and the role of religious formations in enforcing compulsory heterosexuality.

The following books are available from the bookstore. (Additional readings will be available as handouts or reserve readings.)

Alpert, Like Bread on the Seder Plate
Brown, Immodest Acts
Comstock and Henking, Que(e)rying Religion: A Critical Anthology
Douglas, Sexuality and the Black Church
Herdt, Same Sex, Different Cultures
Jordan, The Silence of Sodom
Shokeid, A Gay Synagogue in New York
Siker, Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate

Course Requirements and Grading Policies:

1. Informed **participation and attendance** in class are mandatory. Attendance is not merely showing up; it means showing up prepared for an intelligent, thorough and critical discussion of readings as they are assigned and as they relate to one another. And, it means showing up with an idea about how to make discussion fun and meaningful.

If you miss a class, **you** are responsible for obtaining notes, finding out about and doing (on time) any assignments, etcetera. In addition, should you miss a class, you will need to write an acceptable paper on the following topic within one week of the absence. Failure to do so – or writing an inadequate paper – will negatively affect your class grade. Your paper should address the following assignment:

Write a 3-5 page essay in which you summarize and critically analyze readings for the day you missed. In doing so, identify key themes from the reading. Be thorough and thoughtful in your presentation. IN the final paragraph, indicate at least one connection to course readings and raise any questions you may have which require clarification.

2. **Comprehensive essay(s):** Throughout the term, you will work on a comprehensive reflection on course materials. This essay will be turned in three times for grading; each iteration of the paper will address comments I make on earlier versions and modify your ideas based on consideration of new materials. A detailed assignment is attached. **Be aware that significant mechanical or grammatical flaws may lead me to return the paper ungraded.** These essays will comprise 60% of your final course grade (essay #1 will be worth 10% of your grade; essay #2 will be worth 20% and essay #3 will be worth 30%).
3. **Reading Reflection:** For this essay, you will choose a book which is located at the intersection of gay/lesbian lives and religion. You will write a critical response to the book based on your experience in this course. A list of some possibilities and a detailed assignment are attached. You will submit a proposal identifying the book you would like to explore. Please see me if you wish to discuss an alternative type of book. The reading reflection will be worth 10% of your grade.

4. **Team Work:** Each class participant will work in a small team throughout the semester. Each team will identify a religion which we have not examined in depth and undertake research on the religion as it relates to course topics throughout the semester. Teams will write a presentation proposal, create an annotated bibliography of resources for your topic, write a joint paper offering an overview of your subject area, and identify a reading for the class to consider. (Both your paper and the reading will be circulated to the class prior to your presentation. We will all read and prepare for one another's presentations.) This will culminate in a class presentation based on your research. Taken together, this team work will count for 25% of your course grade.
5. **Blackboard work:** In addition to any use of blackboard that teams may adopt to facilitate working together across the semester, we will use blackboard to extend our opportunities for class discussion. We will have a session teaching us how to do so. After that, each individual should contribute a minimum of one entry per week to the discussion, beginning with an introduction. As you do so, be sure to be responsive to other people's views and to connect what you have to say to class discussion and to readings. Blackboard entries will be worth 5% of your class grade.

Other important information:

1. As noted above, active and informed participation is crucial to making this class successful. Come to class prepared to discuss readings in detail. Bring your questions, ideas, and the readings themselves!
2. My office is located in Demarest 208. Office hours will be posted. If you are unable to visit my office during those times, please notify me at the start of the semester. Please do not expect to substitute email conversations or quick questions after class for serious time in office hours.
3. I can be reached via telephone at 3889 and via email at henking@hws.edu.
4. Please retain photocopies of all material submitted to me. To avoid computer related excuses, please be sure to back up your work and keep copies! If you are dependent on campus computers, be aware that they are busy (especially printers) at certain times of the semester. Also: be aware that reserve readings are required reading – and getting to them is easier at certain times of the day (or night) than others.
5. Please proofread your papers! Also: unless specifically announced, my expectation is that ALL papers will be submitted in hard copy and on time.
6. If you have a disability and require accommodation, please be sure that you have been to the Center for Academic Support Services and that they notify me of your needs.

Tentative Class Schedule

Section 1: Opening the Door: Introducing Lesbian/Gay/Queer Studies and Religious Studies

January 14 **Course Introduction**

January 16 **A Tall Order: What is Religious Studies? What is (or are) Lesbian/Gay/Queer Studies? How do they relate?**

Reserve: Chapter 28 or 29 in Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader (hereafter LGR)

Handout: Comstock, Unrepentant, Self-Affirming, Practicing, chapter 1

Comstock and Henking, Que(e)rying Religion (hereafter QR), introduction, chapter 11.

Herd, Same Sex, Different Cultures, preface and chapters 1 and 2

If you have never taken a religious studies course, please also read the following material on reserve: Hall Pilgrim and Cavanagh, Religion: An Introduction, chapter 1 **OR** Cavanagh et al., Introduction to the Study of Religion, chapters 1 and 2

January 21 **Required Blackboard Training Session**

January 23 **Required Library Session**

January 28 **Experiential Dimensions I: The Meeting of LGQ and Religion**

Comstock and Henking, QR, chapters 15-17, 20, 29, 35

January 30 **Experiential Dimensions II: Lesbians and Religion**

Handout: Lesbians and Religion

February 4 Group Meetings

February 6 **Contradictions and Controversies Sampled**

Siker, Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate, parts 1-3 as assigned
See also, QR, chapters 36, 38.

February 11 **The Debate Continues**

Siker, parts 4-6 as assigned.

Section 2: Complicating the Crossroads: Theory, History, Culture

February 13 **Theoretical and Comparative Excursus**

QR, chapters 2, 6, 11

Herdt, review chapters 1 and 2

Reserve: Duberman, ed., A Queer World, chapters 13 and 8

February 17 **Comprehensive Essay #1 Due 10 am, Demarest 208.**

February 18 **Complications of History**

QR chapter 8 or 9

Brown, Immodest Acts, chapters 1-3

February 20 **The Historical Complicated**

Immodest Acts, chapters 4-end

QR, chapter 5

Reserve: Bell, "Renaissance Sexuality and the Florentine Archives: An Exchange"

Renaissance Quarterly 40: 485-511.

February 25 **Complications Across Cultures: Same Gender Relations and Rites of Passage**

Herdt, Same Sex, Different Cultures, chapters 3-4

QR chapters 24, 4, 39

February 27 **More Complications Across Cultures**

Herdt, chapter 5

QR, chapters 22, 23

March 4 **Complicating Religion Too?**

Herdt, chapter 6

QR, 12, 13, 21, 25, 26

Handout: Herdt, "Coming Out as a Rite of Passage: A Chicago Study"

March 6 **Comprehensive Essay 2 due in class. Attendance Mandatory. Our in-class discussion will be part of this essay.**

Section 3: Contemporary Religions, Contemporary Sexualities

March 18 **Male Homosexuality and Modern Catholicism**

QR, chapter 18

Jordan, The Silence of Sodom, chapters 1-3

March 20 **Modern Catholicism and Male Homosexuality**

Jordan, The Silence of Sodom, chapters 4-9

March 25 **Race Matters I**

QR, chapter 35,
Douglas, Sexuality and the Black Church, Part 1

March 27 **Race Matters II**

Douglas, Sexuality and the Black Church, Part 2

April 1 **Race Matters III**

Douglas, Sexuality and the Black Church, Part 3
Handout: Selections from A Whosoever Church: Welcoming Lesbians and Gay Men into African American Congregations

April 3 **Contemporary Judaism: Tradition and Transformations**

QR 10, 31, 32
Alpert, Like Bread on the Seder Plate 1-3

April 8 Alpert Like Bread on the Seder Plate 4-6

April 10 Alpert, Like Bread on the Seder Plate 7-10

April 15 Hobart and William Smith Day

April 17 **Contemporary Judaism: Institutions Transformed**

Shokeid, A Gay Synagogue in New York, chapters 1-6

April 22 Shokeid, A Gay Synagogue in New York, chapters 7-12

Section 4: Drawing Conclusions, Expanding our Questions

April 24 Class Presentations

Papers written by the groups presenting as well as additional readings as assigned by presenters

April 29 Class presentations

Papers written by the groups presenting and additional readings as assigned by presenters

Sunday May 4, 7-10 pm. Attendance required. Comprehensive Essay #3 due. If necessary class presentations will extend into this time slot.