REL 320 Religion, Sexuality, Ecology
Fall 2014

Instructor: Courtney O'Dell-Chaib
HL 514 Office Hours: Monday, 4pm-6pm and by appointment
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Course Description:
How do religion, sexuality, and ecology interact with one another? How have various religious traditions constructed what can be said about gender, sex, sexual orientation, and how humans should or should not interact with the “natural” world? Are women, queer individuals, and “nature” marginalized in similar ways? Do feminist and queer communities have something important to say to ecological theorists/activists and vice versa? In this course, we will examine how religion, sexuality, and ecology intersect, complicate, and shape our daily lives.

Course Goals:
As this course is an interdisciplinary exercise looking at where religion, ecology, and sexuality meet and influence each other, my hope is that collectively we will touch upon and develop these goals:

1) be able to articulate and navigate ongoing relationships between sex and “nature” that exist discursively, politically, religiously, and ethically
2) develop an understanding of religious traditions, practices, and spiritualities as both contributing to and actively resisting these relationships
3) see the plurality of interactions we have with immanent ecological concerns and begin to articulate how some ecotheorists, ecofeminists, and ecoactivists (re)envision and engage more sustainable lifestyles
4) for members of our class, if they feel so moved, to feel empowered to engage in these efforts for ecological change

Required Texts:

Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza
Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson, eds. Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire
David L. Haberman, River of Love in an Age of Pollution
Ivone Gebara, Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation

Additional readings found on Blackboard

Assignments and Grading:
Text Engagement and Participation

This is a reading intensive seminar course that will only function well if you come to class having read the material and ready to engage in discussion. A significant portion of your grade will be based on how you prepare and participate in communal discussion. Read the texts carefully and come with your questions, concerns, and connections.

At the end of each unit you will be asked to turn in a one page typed response to the readings for the week. You can choose to focus closely on a particular essay/chapter or expand on a theme you see in multiple readings. Your responses could include practical application of the theories/methods in the reading, further questions the readings bring up for you, push-back against the authors, etc. Post your responses to Blackboard before class.

For two class sessions you will be asked to start off our class with your own questions and commentary about the reading. Walk us through particular passages you find engaging, problematic, or in need of explication.

You will be allowed two unexcused absences and any absences after two (that are not related to critical emergencies, documented cases of religious holiday, and official university business) will drop your final grade by three points (ex. from 100-97).

Experiential Journals

You will have four occasions to reflect on an experience outside of our course. Pick two that you will then journal about and turn in on Blackboard. These journals are intended to be self-reflexive explorations of issues we talk about in class. Feel welcome to be honest about your experiences and how they perhaps reshape some of the material from our course. Some of these experiences will take longer to prepare than others so decide in advance which ones you would like to do and prepare accordingly. Do not wait until the end of the semester to complete your journals. There are dates on the syllabus when a journal entry is due. You may choose any of the four dates, and any of the four journals, but turn them in on those specified dates. Each journal should be about 800-1,000 words.

Elements Project

Split into four groups, you and your conversation partners will research and present on a current ecological concern and the community/communities impacted by this ecological issue.
The format of your presentation is up to your group and could include slides, film, creative exercises, or group discussion. Think about these macro issues within micro contexts and be prepared to articulate to the class the facets of your ecological issue, how it impacts specific communities of people on a daily basis, and how these communities may be coping with, resisting, or struggling with this ecological issue. Are there ecoactivists working on this issue? If so, what are their tactics? Do they employ strategies that your group feels could be categorized as religious or spiritual?

More information about how to work and present effectively as a group will be handed out further into the semester.

Please have a representative(s) from your group see me to discuss your topic and receive helpful resources by September 15th.

Learning Capstone

Option 1: Final Exam
The exam will consist of essay questions that give you the opportunity to demonstrate how you are able to synthesize and deploy concepts, themes, and texts from our course.

Option 2: Research Project
This final project option will give you the opportunity to go beyond our syllabus and explore a certain topic in greater depth. You will present your project in the final days of our course and produce a paper due 12/5/14 at Midnight. Your research topic should relate to our intersecting experiences of religion, sexuality, and ecology but could dig deeper into one of these three.

Please meet with me about the topic of your choice by November 5th.

| Participation | 20% |
| Journals (2) | 20% |
| Elements Project | 30% |
| Final Exam/Research Project | 30% |

Please Note: No late work will be accepted. All work is turned in via email. You will receive a response from me to confirm I’ve received your assignments.
Academic Integrity

Academic integrity forms the foundation of any learning community, so it is imperative that you exhibit honesty and integrity as a member of this community. Cheating, in any form and to any degree, is an affront to this community that will not be tolerated. Cheating includes giving or receiving aid when prohibited, plagiarism, fraud, falsification, collusion, or any related act of deception or dishonesty. If you commit such an act, you will receive an XF grade for this course and will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity. For more information, see the Academic Integrity Politics and Procedures available at (http://academicintegrity.syr.edu).

Learning Accommodations

If you think you might need accommodations for a learning disability, please contact the Office of Disability Studies (http://disabilityservices.syr.edu) to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. The Office of Disability Services is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will, as appropriate, issue accommodation authorization letters to students with documented disabilities. Since accommodations may required early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, contact the Office of Disability Services and discuss your situation with me as soon as possible.

Inclusive Language Policy

It is expected in this course that all participants use inclusive language in all verbal and written assignments especially with respect to humanity, cultures, nationalities, ethnicities, races, and religions, with regard to characteristics such as sex, gender, sexual identities, social class, age, and dis/abilities. We are all a part of creating a space for dialogue and engagement where the importance of differences within relationships are engaged in a substantive manner. One of the goals of this class is to think carefully about the words we use and the images, metaphors, and linguistic ideas that we are invoking. In keeping the vision of thinking thoughtfully about language, here are some resources for further reflection on the importance of inclusive language:

Related Links:

Guidelines for Gender-Fair Use of Language, from the website of National Council of Teachers of English.
http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/genderfaireoflang
Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Orientations and Interactions


September 1st. Labor Day No Class but please read: “Otherworldly Conversations, Terran Topics, Local Terms” Donna Haraway and selections from Dr. Tatiana’s Sex Advice to All of Creation
September 3rd. “The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature” William Cronon (BB)

September 8th. Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera
September 10th. Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera
September 12th. Journal Entry Due by Midnight Via EMAIL

September 15th. Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera
*Meet with Courtney about Elements Project by this date
September 17th. Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera
RESPONSE PAPER DUE- EMAIL BEFORE CLASS

Ecofeminisms

September 22nd. “The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism” and “Nature is a Feminist Issue: Motivating Ecofeminism by Taking Empirical Data Seriously” Karen J. Warren (BB)
September 24th. “Gender” Amanda Baugh and “A Genealogy of Ecofeminism” Catriona Sandilands (BB)

October 3rd. Journal Entry Due By Midnight Via EMAIL

October 6th. Selections from The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess, Starhawk (BB)
October 8th. Selections from The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess, Starhawk (BB)
RESPONSE PAPER DUE- EMAIL BEFORE CLASS
Queer Ecologies

October 13th- Elements Projects Presentations
October 15th- Sandilands and Erickson, *Queer Ecologies*

October 20th- Sandilands and Erickson, *Queer Ecologies*
October 22nd- Sandilands and Erickson, *Queer Ecologies*
October 24th- Journal Entry Due By Midnight Via EMAIL

October 27th- Sandilands and Erickson, *Queer Ecologies*
October 29th- Sandilands and Erickson, *Queer Ecologies*
RESPONSE PAPER DUE- EMAIL BEFORE CLASS

Ecospiritualities

November 3rd- Haberman, *River of Love*
November 5th- Haberman, *River of Love*
*Meet with Courtney about Final Project ideas by this date*

November 10th- Haberman, *River of Love*
November 12th- Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation*
November 14th- Journal Entry Due by Midnight Via EMAIL

November 17th- Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation*
November 19th- Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation*
RESPONSE PAPER DUE- EMAIL BEFORE CLASS

November 24th- No Class Fall Break
November 26th- No Class Fall Break

December 1st- Project Presentations
December 3rd- Last Day of Class, Project Presentations
December 5th- Final Papers Due by Midnight- turned in electronically