

Queerly Religious

QSX/REL 357 | Spring 2017

Who is teaching our course?

Professor William Robert

Office hours: Monday 10:30–12:30 and by appointment, Tolley 305

Email: wrobert@syr.edu

Twitter: @profwrobert

Teaching Assistant Duygu Yeni

Office hours: Monday 15:45–16:45 and by appointment, Hall of Languages 514

Email: dyeni@syr.edu

Twitter: @dyeni100

What is our course about?

Is religion queer? Could it be? What would it mean to be queerly religious? Our course is about these questions and our responses to them. To help us respond, we will examine ways in which religion and sexuality, and their materials and performances, do not stay still or in place but resist, escape, or elude easy determinations or fixed identities.

As we shape and reshape our responses, we will consider related questions. How do religions and sexualities interact? How do religions and sexualities affect, and effect, each other? How do religions and sexualities, these two modes of experience, form, deform, reform, and transform each other and the humans who inhabit them?

To respond to these questions, we will go on interdisciplinary and intersectional explorations. Our explorations will blend theoretical inquiry and concrete case study. Doing so will enrich our responses, as they become nuanced and textured. It will also give us senses of how plural, how pliable, “queerly religious” can be, as a nexus for understanding and action—and how plural, how pliable, religion and sexuality can be in what they mark and affect.

What do we hope to gain from our course?

Our course materials, discussions, and activities work together in the service of our course’s learning goals:

- (1) to articulate, individually and collectively, how religion and sexuality work, what religion and sexuality do, and why religion and sexuality matter, in multiple contexts;

- (2) to interpret written and performed expressions of religion and sexuality using a variety of approaches, methods, and theories;
- (3) to explain the difficulties and possibilities of studying religion and sexuality as a mode of humanistic inquiry;
- (4) to develop critical and self-critical habits of reading, thinking, and writing;
- (5) to demonstrate how these habits reflect on the humanities' relevance to contemporary ethical and social issues.

What skills will we develop?

Critical reading, thinking, and writing skills are probably the most important and most applicable skills you can learn in college. Because they are skills, they are learnable. But like any skill, they require practice. They can be learned, and ultimately mastered, if you are willing to devote time and effort to practicing them. Think of these critical skills as investments that require large initial deposits but that provide substantial returns with interest on those deposits. We will develop these skills in tandem as we develop 5 critical practices: examination, interpretation, consideration, communication, and reflection. These practices form our course's learning rubric and will guide our learning and our assessments of it.

What will we read?

Sophokles, *Antigone* (9780941051255)

Additional texts will be available on Blackboard. Be sure to bring to class a paper copy of each text we are discussing that day.

How is our course organized?

At heart, our course is a series of conversations: among our course materials and among ourselves. Our class meetings stage these conversations as live opportunities for interactive learning, with as many conversation partners as possible. Our course is *ours*, not only mine or yours. It is our responsibility to engage in these ongoing conversations with the materials and each other.

How will we approach our study of religion?

In our course, we will act as—and become—scholars, studying religion and sexuality. So we will adopt a scholarly approach to our work. Doing so calls for adopting the following perspectives.

Reflexive awareness

Reflexive awareness means being mindful of our assumptions, convictions, and values, shaped by our historical and cultural locations. These assumptions, convictions, and values affect how we understand religion and sexuality.

Reflexive awareness also means recognizing that the study of religion and of

sexuality can be unsettling, since other religions and other sexualities can unsettle our assumptions, convictions, and values. Other religions and other sexualities are other ways of imagining and inhabiting the world: other ways of being and doing, religiously and sexually. To study them responsibly, we must bracket judgment and engage their otherness.

Imaginative sympathy

Imaginative sympathy means taking seriously the world of a religious and sexual subject. It means assuming that a religious or sexual thought, desire, activity, or object carries real meaning for a religious and sexual subject. Doing so involves imaginatively crawling inside this subject's world and understanding how, for this subject, this world makes sense. It requires that we take seriously assumptions, convictions, values, stories, materials, rituals, and identities very different from ours.

Critical distance

Critical distance means raising questions that a religious and sexual subject might not raise about his or her or zir religion or sexuality. What are a religion's or a sexuality's acknowledged and unacknowledged assumptions, convictions, and values? How does a religious and sexual subject adopt them? What effects does a religious or sexual idea, activity, or object have on a religious and sexual subject—and on a society? In what ways is a religion or a sexuality significant and meaningful for its subjects? How do its materials and practices conceive of beings (botanical, animal, human, divine, and otherwise) and their interactions? What does a religion or a sexuality hold as fundamental to human well-being? Questions like these, and the issues they raise, are ones we should keep in mind.

How will we orient ourselves?

In our course, we take the following statements as among our guiding principles.

- (1) None of us knows everything.
- (2) Each of us is here primarily to learn.
- (3) Each of us can contribute to our learning—our own and others'.
- (4) Learning requires differences. Differences are how we learn.
- (5) Questions are usually more illuminating, and more interesting, than answers.
- (6) Answers are primarily ways of asking better next questions.
- (7) Queer queries. Queer is a question.
- (8) So is religion.

What kind of community will we foster?

A class is a community, in which any member's actions affect other members. As members of this community, we share responsibility for making our community the best it can be. To do so, we commit to the following communal responsibilities.

Punctual attendance

We will be on time for and attend every class meeting from beginning to end. Attendance is a crucial component of learning, since it gives us opportunities to interact with course materials and with one another. Each absence after the second will lower your course grade by 20 points. Absences may be excused in documented cases of religious observance or university affairs, so long as you notify us officially in writing at least 5 days before your absence. Absences may also be excused in documented cases of critical and unforeseeable emergency.

Shared respect

We will be respectful and responsible—particularly in this course, whose charged materials require sensitivity. Being respectful and responsible includes preparing for and attending class from beginning to end, listening to others, appreciating differences, using inclusive language, refraining from eating and using electronic devices, and abstaining from any activity not productively contributing to our course. Anyone who does not act respectfully and responsibly may be excused from class for the day.

Academic integrity

We will uphold academic integrity. Because academic integrity forms the foundation of a learning community, it is absolutely imperative that we be honest and honorable members of this community. You are responsible for understanding academic integrity and for the integrity of your work. Academic dishonesty, in any form and to any degree, is an affront to this community that we will not tolerate. Academic dishonesty includes giving or receiving aid when prohibited, submitting the same work in more than one course, plagiarism, fraud, falsification, collusion, or any related act of deception or dishonesty. Anyone who commits such an act will fail this course and will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity, who may level additional sanctions. For more information, see the Academic Integrity Policies and Procedures (<http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>).

Staying enrolled in our course will indicate your understanding of and agreement to its approaches, goals, principles, policies, responsibilities, and requirements.

What will we do to help ourselves learn and to demonstrate our learning?

You may engage in the following activities that afford opportunities to deepen and to assess your learning.

Active participation

Participation depends on preparation. Before class, spend time carefully reading each text, marking important passages, jotting down questions, and engaging the text and its author as conversation partners. Then in class, comment on the passages you marked, ask the questions you jotted down (and others that arise),

and engage other class members as conversation partners. Simply showing up is not enough. Come to class ready to interact with texts and with each other in a dynamic, cooperative learning environment of inquiry and exploration. Then extend our discussion beyond the classroom—onto Twitter, for example, using the course hashtag, #queerlyreligious. You will earn points based on the quality, not the quantity, of your participation in and contributions to our learning.

Making a case

In our course, we will consider a wide variety of understandings of “queer” and “religious.” You will have an opportunity, on 1 of the designated dates, to formally make a case for your understanding of our course’s title, “queerly religious,” and what these terms mean. Working with a partner, you will develop and then present, in 5 minutes, a compelling, oral argument that makes your case (i.e., explains your view). Your presentation’s aim is to persuade your classmates to agree with your argument. Making a case combines critical skills of reading, thinking, and communicating with your insights and viewpoint and your ability to articulate them.

Study circle

The study circle creates a community within a community to aid and enhance your learning. The study circle community collaborates on understanding a text by approaching it from multiple angles. For each study circle, you will share with your group (by posting on Blackboard and by distributing paper copies) a 1-page analysis of a designated text written from a particular vantage point. Together, you will discuss how your collective analyses illuminate in new and insightful ways the text under examination. The study circle is 1 learning activity, in 6 parts. To earn points for this learning activity, you must submit all 6 analyses and (given its collaborative nature) be in class for 5 of the 6 study circle conversations.

Guided discussion

The guided discussion gives you a direct opportunity to shape our conversations and to contribute to our learning. Working with a partner, you will, on a designated day, open our discussion and guide it for 15 minutes. How you do that is up to you, so long as what you do guides us through that day’s readings in helpful, insightful, illuminating, original ways.

Harkness discussion

A Harkness discussion is a cooperative discussion in which everyone contributes, working together to respond to a particular prompt. Think of it as an interactive laboratory for live learning. In a Harkness discussion, a group manages pace, balance, and order, adjusting when the discussion is not or no longer working. A Harkness discussion involves zooming in and out on texts and topics, supporting assertions with textual references, resolving questions, taking risks, digging for

new meanings. It demands preparation and engagement. Because a Harkness discussion is a collective learning activity, each discussion group will earn the same score. (An exception may be made if a student does not prepare and participate or if a student performs an exceptional feat that “saves” the discussion.) Harkness discussions form 1 learning activity, in 4 parts. To earn points for this learning activity, you must participate in 3 of the 4 Harkness discussions. Because it depends on collaborative, group dynamics, a Harkness discussion may not be made up.

Learning self-assessment

The learning self-assessment offers an opportunity to reflect on your learning in our course: what and how you have learned and how you have taken responsibility for your learning. For your learning self-assessment, you will post directly in your Blackboard journal (i.e., not as an attachment) a report (700–800 words) recounting and evaluating your learning—and your role in it—in our course. Use our course’s learning goals to assess your learning performance. Be sure to mention specific skills and knowledges in relation to specific course goals, materials, and activities. Your self-assessment should include the number of points (out of 60) that you judge best represents your learning performance in our course.

Learning log

The learning log presents you with specific opportunities to learn, and to think and write critically about your learning, at different moments in our course. In doing so, the learning log links course contents, critical practices, and reflexive reflections. For each learning log entry, you will post directly in your Blackboard journal (i.e., not as an attachment) a response (700–800 words) to a particular, proposed prompt. Each learning log entry should respond thoroughly to the prompt, support its claims and conclusions, integrate course readings and discussions, be written clearly and precisely, and show thoughtfulness, reflection, and insight. The learning log is 1 learning activity, in 4 parts. To earn points for this learning activity, you must submit 3 of the 4 learning log entries.

Learning finale

Your learning in this course will culminate in our learning finale. It is the capstone of your learning in our course. It will give you a significant opportunity to demonstrate and use the knowledges, skills, and practices you have developed in our course. For your learning finale, you will post in your Blackboard journal a response (1100–1200 words) to a pre-circulated prompt.

How will our learning be assessed and evaluated?

Your assessed opportunities for learning and achievement (i.e., assignments) will comprise your course grade based on the following point values.

Active participation	120
Making a case	60
Study circle	120
Guided discussion	60
Harkness discussion	120
Learning self-assessment	60
Learning log	120
Learning finale	<u>140</u>
	800 points

Active participation and the learning finale are required. You choose which other learning activities you will do. You may do as many or as few as you choose. We will calculate your course grade based on the number of points you earn, according to the following scale.

		B+	598–611	C+	530–543	D	408–475
A	626–800	B	558–597	C	490–529		
A-	612–625	B-	544–557	C-	476–489	F	0–407

Learning activities are due by 12:45 on the designated dates. Submit written learning activities to Blackboard. Because you have choices about the learning activities you do, we will not accept a learning activity once it is past due. An exception may be granted in a case of critical and unforeseeable emergency. If an exception is granted, you must submit a makeup learning activity within 5 school days of your return to class. No extra credit will be given.

What if I will miss a learning activity because of university affairs?

You may make up a learning activity missed due to university affairs (including varsity athletics) provided that you notify us of your absence officially in writing at least 5 days before your absence and provided that you schedule, before the missed learning activity, to make it up within 5 days of your return to class.

What if I will miss a learning activity because of a religious holiday?

You may make up a learning activity missed due to a religious holiday provided that you notify us of your religious holiday through MySlice by 27 January 2017 and provided that you schedule, before the missed learning activity, to make it up within 5 days of your return to class. For more information, see the Religious Observances Policy (http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm).

What if I have a question?

Office hours provide you with weekly opportunities to extend class discussions, ask questions, or seek assistance. We strongly encourage you to take advantage of these

opportunities, especially if you are having difficulties. You're welcome to drop by without an appointment. And you can email us anytime.

What if I need an academic adjustment?

If you think you might need an academic adjustment for a learning disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (<http://disabilityservices.syr.edu>) to discuss your needs and the process for requesting academic adjustments. The Office of Disability Services is responsible for coordinating disability-related academic adjustments and will, as appropriate, issue an accommodation authorization letter to a student with a documented disability. Since academic adjustments may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, contact the Office of Disability Services and discuss your situation with us as soon as possible.

Any tips for success in our course?

- (1) Read our course texts thoroughly, closely, and carefully.
- (2) Read them again.
- (3) Ask questions.
- (4) Reread the texts.
- (5) Ask more questions.
- (6) Reread the texts again.

Any words of wisdom?

"Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence." (David Halperin)

What will we do, and when?

Week	Date	Topic	Text	Learning activity
1	18 January	Opening		
2	23 January	Queerly	Eve K. Sedgwick, "Queer and Now" Judith Butler, "Critically Queer"	
2	25 January	Religious	Malory Nye, "Religion" J.Z. Smith, "Map Is Not Territory"	

Week	Date	Topic	Text	Learning activity
3	30 January	Things, Queerly	Sara Ahmed, "Disorientations and Queer Objects"	Study circle analysis #1
	1 February		Jacques Derrida, "Choreographies" + "Voice II"	Guided discussion #1
4	6 February	Identities, Queerly	Sue-Ellen Case, "Tracking the Vampire"	Study circle analysis #2
	8 February		Jewelle Gomez, "The Event of Becoming" E. Patrick Johnson, "'Quare' Studies"	Guided discussion #2 Learning log entry #1
5	13 February	Desires, Queerly	Elizabeth Grosz, "Experimental Desire"	Study circle analysis #3
	15 February		Luce Irigaray, "When Our Lips Speak Together" Lynne Huffer, "Are the Lips a Grave?"	Guided discussion #3
6	20 February	Relations, Queerly	Joshua Weiner + Damon Young, "Queer Bonds"	Study circle analysis #4
	22 February		Elizabeth Freeman, "Queer Belongings" Richard Rodríguez, "Making Queer <i>Familia</i> "	Guided discussion #4
7	27 February	Times, Queerly	Carla Freccero, "Queer Times"	Study circle analysis #5

Week	Date	Topic	Text	Learning activity	
7	1 March	Times, Queerly	José Esteban Muñoz, "Queerness as Horizon" Lee Edelman, "The Future Is Kid Stuff"	Guided discussion #5	
8	6 March	Queerly Revisited	Eve K. Sedgwick, "Thinking Through Queer Theory"	Study circle analysis #6	
	8 March		Judith Butler, "Acting in Concert"	Guided discussion #6 Learning log entry #2	
Spring break					
9	20 March	The Queerly Religious Case of Antigone	Sophokles, <i>Antigone</i>		
	22 March		Sophokles, <i>Antigone</i>	Harkness discussion #1	
10	27 March		Sophokles, <i>Antigone</i>		
	29 March		Sophokles, <i>Antigone</i>	Learning log entry #3	
11	3 April		Sophokles, <i>Antigone</i>	Making a case #1	
	5 April		Sophokles, <i>Antigone</i>	Making a case #2	
12	10 April		Sophokles, <i>Antigone</i>		
	12 April		Sophokles, <i>Antigone</i>	Harkness discussion #2	
13	17 April		Sophokles, <i>Antigone</i>		
	19 April		Sophokles, <i>Antigone</i>	Learning log entry #4	
14	24 April		Sophokles, <i>Antigone</i>		
	26 April		Sophokles, <i>Antigone</i>	Harkness discussion #3	
15	1 May		Closing		
	9 May				Learning finale