

# “World(?)” “Religion(s)(?)”(?)

*Theory, Methodology, and Gender*

<b>TERM</b>	TBD
<b>LOCATION</b>	TBD
<b>INSTRUCTOR</b>	Emma Rifai

**DESCRIPTION** In this class, we will explore a number of practices or traditions that often get included on popular lists of “world religions.” Google tells us that “world religions” include Baha’i, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Shinto, Sikhism, Taoism, and Zoroastrianism. Though we will not consider all twelve of these religions in this class, we will spend time considering Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Taoism. We ignore Baha’i, Jainism, Shinto, Sikhism, and Zoroastrianism not because they are unimportant but because we simply cannot do justice to all twelve of these religions in one class. In addition, there are a number of traditions that do not make the list of “world religions” and we won’t consider them either - again not because they are unworthy of study but because our goal is not comprehensiveness. Instead, throughout the course of the semester, you will develop a number of analytical tools that you might apply to the study of not only other religions on the list of “world religions” but also other practices and traditions that might be considered “religious.”

In our exploration of some of the “world religions,” we will utilize three lenses:

1. Theory: We will spend the first two weeks considering the efficacy of employing the category of “religion” to begin with. Scholars now recognize the category of “religion,” as we typically understand it, to be a modern invention. We will consider the genealogy of “religion” as a descriptive category to attempt to understand why some practices are called “world religions” and why others are not. The work we do during the first two weeks should inform our study of each religion throughout the rest of the semester. Finally, the last “religion” we will consider is the “religion of thinness,” which will demonstrate how practices we might not consider to be traditionally “religious” can actually do the work of religion.

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2. Methodology: Throughout the semester, we will consider “world religions” from a variety of methodological perspectives, including the role of text, comparison, historical analysis, ethnography, sacred space, and ritual. We will consider what we gain and, perhaps, what we lose in our analyses depending on which methodological approach we utilize.
3. Gender: We will approach each of the religions we are studying through the lens of gender. Women play a crucial role in the creation, maintenance, and spread of all world religions but are often considered secondary actors in “World Religion” classrooms and textbooks. In this class, we will centralize the contributions and experiences of women as a corrective to this.

**OBJECTIVES** We will assess a number of trends, questions, and tensions in the handful of “world religions” we will be considering in this class utilizing all three lenses outlined above. The religions we will be considering most deeply are fairly arbitrarily chosen from the list of “world religions” and reflect primarily my areas of specialty, training, and research interests. This, of course, means that, by the end of the semester, you will be far from having a comprehensive understanding of “world religions.” In fact, by the end of the semester, you should feel confident rejecting the premise that it is even possible to be fluent in “world religions” in the first place. Instead, the intention of this class is that the questions and discussions we have throughout the semester, grounded in our three lenses, unfold in such a way that we develop tools and skills for analyzing and assessing other religions - both other “world religions” and religions that are not on the list of “world religions” - that are not directly covered in this course.

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**REQUIREMENTS** This course will be highly collaborative and discussion based. In order to facilitate discussion, you will be assigned and assessed on the following (please see rubrics included at the end of the syllabus for more specific expectations):

- (1) *Class Preparation*: You will be write a total of (10) two-page summary-analysis papers within which you will craft a thesis, briefly summarize, and carefully analyze one assigned text. Each paper is due on the day the text is being discussed in class. Percentage of Grade: 30%
- (2) *Class Participation*: You will be expected to engage with texts, lecture material, and each other during every class period. To actively participate in class, you will be expected to have read the assigned text and will have a hard copy of the text at your disposal at each class meeting. You are permitted to miss (2) class periods throughout the semester with no penalty; further absences will directly impact your participation points. If you will not be present for a particular class, you need not provide an excuse; you must, however, email me prior to the start of class. Percentage of Grade: 30%
- (3) *Final Paper*: You will craft a final research paper on a topic concerning some aspect of gender as it manifests in one or more “world religions” utilizing both assigned texts from class as well as outside resources. I’ve included a list of additional resources at the end of the syllabus. You might like to look through it to find inspiration for this project. This is a very flexible assignment; I encourage risk taking! This assignment is due the day you present, see below. Percentage of Grade: 30%
- (4) *Final Presentation*: You will present your research to your peers during the final week of class. Presentations need not be overly formal but should successfully communicate your research - including your thesis and findings. Your peers will be encouraged to ask you generative questions about your research. Percentage of Grade: 10%

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**MATERIALS NEEDED** Many of the readings assigned for this class will be available as a course pack from Zephyr. In addition you will need to purchase the following books (which you can find in many bookstores and online - both used and new):

- Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.
- Thomas Cleary, *Immortal Sisters: Secrets of Taoist Women*. Boston: Shambhala, 1989.
- Susan Grossman and Rivka Haut, *Daughters of the King: Women and the Synagogue*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1992.
- Michelle Mary Lelwica, *Starving for Salvation: The Spiritual Dimensions of Eating Problems among American Girls and Women*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Susan Murcott, *First Buddhist Women: Poems and Stories of Awakening*. Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2006.
- Kristy Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio: Marian Apparitions, Catholic Evangelizing, and Mexican American Activism*. New York: New York University Press, 2005

Please note that you will not be allowed to utilize technological devices of any kind during class. You are encouraged to take notes - with pen and paper. You will be required to bring a physical copy of the assigned text with you to every class meeting.

**GRADING SCALE** You will be assessed on the following scale:

94-100 A	74-77 C
90-93 A-	70-73 C-
88-89 B+	
84-87 B	
80-83 B-	
78-79 C+	

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## MILESTONES

### WEEK 1 Methods and Theories: What is “religion” and how do we study it?

Day 1: Introduction to the Course

Day 2: Jonathan Z. Smith “Religion, Religions, Religious”

(INSTRUCTOR NOTE: This reading should destabilize the idea of a universal, ahistoric definition of religion. It should help students start to understand how arbitrary it is to call something a “religion” or a “world religion.”)

### WEEK 2 Methods and Theories: What is religion and how do we study it?

Day 1: Jonathan Z. Smith “The Devil in Mr. Jones”

(INSTRUCTOR NOTE: This reading should encourage students to study religion with empathy such that they can study religions that are unfamiliar to them without feeling compelled to pass judgement.)

Day 2: Alex Mar - “Three Nights at the Castle” AND Rhyd Wildermuth “Eat, Prey, Learn Magic: Alex Mar’s Spiritual Tourism”

(INSTRUCTOR NOTE: Use these texts to help students explore methodological and ethical concerns that arise in the study of religion.)

### WEEK 3 Taoism: Religion through Text

Day 1: Thomas Cleary - *Immortal Sisters* 1-57

In class: Basics of Taoism Lecture

NOTE: For all class lectures, I will utilize a PowerPoint that incorporates data, images, graphics, and video clips. These PowerPoints will be available to you on ICON.

Day 2: Thomas Cleary - *Immortal Sisters* 58-99

### WEEK 4 Buddhism: Religion through Text

Day 1: Susan Murcott - *First Buddhist Women* 11-51

In class: Basics of Buddhism Lecture

Day 2: Susan Murcott - *First Buddhist Women* 53-104

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## **WEEK 5** Buddhism and Taoism: Religion through Comparison

Day 1: Susan Murcott - *First Buddhist Women* 105-152

Note: Be sure to bring your copy of *Immortal Sisters* to class.

Day 2: Susan Murcott - *First Buddhist Women* 153-217

Note: Be sure to bring your copy of *Immortal Sisters* to class.

## **WEEK 6** Islam: Religion through Historical Analysis

Day 1: Leila Ahmed - *Women and Gender in Islam* 1-37

In class: Basics of Islam Lecture

Day 2: Leila Ahmed - *Women and Gender in Islam* 39-123

Note: Discussion will focus on chapters three and four.

## **WEEK 7** Islam: Religion through Historical Analysis

Day 1: Leila Ahmed - *Women and Gender in Islam* 127-188

Note: Discussion will focus on chapters eight and nine.

Day 2: Leila Ahmed - *Women and Gender in Islam* 189-248

Note: Discussion will focus on chapter eleven and the conclusion.

## **WEEK 8** Christianity: Religion through Ethnography

Day 1: Kristy Nabhan-Warren - *The Virgin of El Barrio* 1-51

In class: Basics of Christianity Lecture

Day 2: Kristy Nabhan-Warren - *The Virgin of El Barrio* 52-102

## **WEEK 9** Christianity: Religion through Ethnography

Day 1: Kristy Nabhan-Warren - *The Virgin of El Barrio* 103-148

Day 2: Kristy Nabhan-Warren - *The Virgin of El Barrio* 149-218

## **WEEK 10** Judaism: Religion through Sacred Space

Day 1: Susan Grossman and Rivka Haut - *Daughters of the King* xxi-87

In class: Basics of Judaism Lecture

Note: Discussion will focus on the Introduction and “Tehines: A Brief Survey of Women’s Prayers.”

Day 2: Susan Grossman and Rivka Haut - *Daughters of the King* 89-202

Note: Discussion will focus on “Are Women Obligated to Pray,” “Piety: The Separation of Menstruants from the Sancta,” and “Language and Liturgy.”

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## **WEEK 11** Judaism: Religion through Sacred Space

Day 1: Susan Grossman and Rivka Haut - *Daughters of the King* 203-236

Day 2: Susan Grossman and Rivka Haut - *Daughters of the King* 237-305  
Note: Please read at least five of the fifteen personal vignettes.

## **WEEK 12** Hinduism: Religion through Ritual

Day 1: Mary McGee - “Invented Identities: The Interplay of Gender, Religion, and Politics in India”

In class: Basics of Hinduism Lecture

Day 2: Ann Grodzins Gold - “From Demon Aunt to Gorgeous Bride: Women Portray Female Power in a North Indian Festival Cycle”

## **WEEK 13** The Religion of Thinness: A Secular Religion?

Day 1: Michelle Mary Lelwica - *Starving for Salvation* 3-65  
In class: Going Beyond “World Religions” Lecture

Day 2: Michelle Mary Lelwica - *Starving for Salvation* 67-124

## **WEEK 14** The Religion of Thinness: “Religion” and Globalization

Day 1: Michelle Mary Lelwica - *Starving for Salvation* 125-147

Day 2: Michelle Lelwica, Emma Høglund, and Jenna McNallie - “Spreading the Religion of Thinness from California to Calcutta: A Critical Feminist Postcolonial Analysis”

## **WEEK 15** Presentations

Day 1: Presentations

Day 2: Presentations

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## CONTACT INFORMATION

Instructor: Emma Rifai  
Email: [emma-rifai@uiowa.edu](mailto:emma-rifai@uiowa.edu)  
Office: 322 Gilmore Hall  
Office Hours: TBD

## POLICIES

**EMAIL:** I encourage you to contact me via email with questions or concerns about class. During the week, I will respond within 24 hours. Please do not, however, direct questions to me that can easily be answered by consulting the syllabus.

**FEEDBACK:** I am happy to work with you on your assignments during office hours or by appointment. I will not read drafts of papers and provide feedback, however, through email.

**LATE WORK:** Late work should not be an issue in this class. You will turn in all summary-analysis papers on the day we discuss the text you analyzed. Your final paper is due the day you present. Barring truly extenuating circumstances, no extensions will be given.

## RESOURCES

I encourage all of you to make use of the resources available to you on campus, particularly the following:

- Writing Center <http://writingcenter.uiowa.edu/>
- Speaking Center <http://speakingcenter.uiowa.edu/>
- Tutor Iowa <https://tutor.uiowa.edu/>



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## RUBRICS

**NOTE:** We will also more thoroughly discuss these expectations in class with plenty of time for questions and answers.

For all written assignments:

- (1) A stapled hard copy is required and should be submitted at the start of class.
- (2) Use inclusive language.
- (3) Please bold your thesis statement.

## SUMMARY-ANALYSIS PAPERS

These papers are designed to encourage you think more deeply about ten of the texts we read in class. Each paper will include a thesis, a brief summary, and a thoughtful analysis.

- (A) An “A” paper will have a clear, developed thesis that provides insight beyond a statement of the topic. The summary will only be as long as necessary to support the thesis. The analysis will be insightful, concise, and developed, utilizing short passages from the text to support the thesis of the paper.
- (B) A “B” paper will have a clear thesis supported by a short summary and a thoughtful analysis.
- (C) A “C” paper will still follow the structure of thesis-summary-analysis but will less successfully fulfill the expectations outlined above.
- (D) A “D” paper will not follow the structure of thesis-summary-analysis and will fail to communicate and support a cohesive analysis of the assigned text.

## PARTICIPATION

Our class will be highly collaborative and discussion based. As a result, participation is crucial. Though attendance is important, it alone will not contribute to your participation grade. Consider the following guidelines:

- (A) An “A” participant will miss no more than the allowed (2) absences; will reference the assigned text extensively, including page numbers; will have well-formed questions and thoughts to share; will regularly contribute to the topic under discussion; may attend office hours; and will respectfully listen while others are speaking.
- (B) A “B” participant will miss no more than the allowed (2) absences; will regularly contribute to discussion in a thoughtful manner; and will listen respectfully while others are speaking.
- (C) A “C” participant will miss no more than the allowed (2) absences; will occasionally contribute to the discussion; and will listen thoughtfully while others are speaking.
- (D) A “D” participant will have inconsistent attendance and will contribute very little to discussion.

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## FINAL PROJECT

The final project is your opportunity to explore a topic related to women and “world religions” that goes beyond the focus of this class. Think creatively and take risks! Almost any topic will work as long as you can make a strong argument and incorporate both assigned texts and outside research. There is no page minimum or maximum but most papers will be roughly 8-10 pages in length.

- (A) An “A” paper will have strong, thoughtful, and insightful argument that is supported by textual evidence from both assigned readings and outside research. It will have been revised and edited carefully. It will be formatted consistently and well structured and organized..
- (B) A “B” paper will have a thoughtful argument that is supported by textual evidence incorporating textual evidence from both assigned readings and outside research. It will have been revised and edited carefully. It will be formatted consistently and well structured and organized.
- (C) A “C” paper will be well structured and organized around a clear topic, which will be supported by textual evidence from both class readings and outside research. It might lack consistency and may lack quality revisions and editing.
- (D) A “D” paper will lack organization and structure as well as a clear topic. It may or may not utilize evidence from assigned texts or outside research. It will be poorly edited and revised.

## FINAL PRESENTATIONS

The final presentations are your opportunity to share your research with your classmates. They should last about seven minutes with three minutes following for questions. I would suggest not using PowerPoint unless absolutely necessary.

- (A) An “A” presentation will make good use of the allotted seven minutes. It will be thoughtfully organized around a well-developed argument supported with evidence from both assigned texts as well as outside research. An effective presentation style will be utilized including eye contact and a conversational tone.
- (B) A “B” presentation will make good use of the allotted seven minutes. It will be organized around an argument that is supported from both assigned texts as well as outside research. An effective presentation style will be utilized including eye contact and a conversational tone.
- (C) A “C” presentation will make less effective use of the allotted seven minutes. It will be organized around a topic utilizing some textual evidence. It may or may not utilize an effective presentation style.
- (D) A “D” presentation will not effectively use the allotted seven minutes. It will lack organization, a coherent topic, and/or evidence. It may or may not utilize an effective presentation style.

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**ADDITIONAL READINGS** The following is a list of additional resources. You might consult this list for inspiration for your final paper. It is a fairly limited list that reflects my own areas of speciality, training, and interest.

Janet Afary, *Sexual Politics of Modern Iran*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Usui Atsuko, “Women’s “Experience” in New Religious Movements: The Case of Shinnyoen,” in *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 30(3-4) (2003), 217-241.

Kristin Aune, “Feminist Spirituality as Lived Religion: How UK Feminists Forge Religio-spiritual Lives” in *Gender and Society* 29(1) (February 2015), 122-145.

Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

Ana Castilla, *Goddess of the Americas: Writings on the Virgin of Guadalupe*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1996.

Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992.

Elizabeth A. Clark and Herbert Richardson, *Women and Religion: The Original Sourcebook of Women in Christian Thought*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996.

Claire Dederer, *Poser: My Life in Twenty-three Yoga Poses*. New York: Picador, 2011.

Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God’s Name: Islamic Law, Authority, and Women*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2008.

John L. Esposito with Natana J. DeLong-Bas, *Women in Muslim Family Law*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001.

Barbara Flores, “The Garifuna *Dugu* Ritual in Belize: A Celebration of Relationships,” in *Gender, Ethnicity, and Religion*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002, 144-172.

Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger, *When the World Becomes Female: Guises of a South Indian Goddess*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013.

Dawn-Marie Gibson and Jamillah Karim, *Women of the Nation: Between Black Protest and Sunni Islam*. New York: New York University Press, 2014.

Christina K. Gilmartin, Gail Hershatter, Lisa Rofel, and Tyrene White, *Engendering China: Women, Culture, and the State*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.

R. Marie Griffith, *God’s Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

Rita Gross, *Feminism and Religion: An Introduction*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

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Kim Gutschow, *Being a Buddhist Nun: The Struggle for Enlightenment in the Himalayas*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2004.

Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito, *Islam, Gender and Social Change*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Kelly E. Hayes, *Holy Harlots: Femininity, Sexuality, and Black Magic in Brazil*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.

Susannah Heschel, *On Being a Jewish Feminist: A Reader*. New York: Schocken Books, 1983.

Julia Butterfly Hill, *The Legacy of Luna: The Story of a Tree, a Woman and the Struggle to Save the Redwoods*. New York: HarperCollins, 2000.

Homa Hoodfar, *Between Marriage and the Market: Intimate Politics and Survival in Cairo*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

Shui Jingjun and Maria Jaschok, “The Culture of ‘Associational Leadership’ in the Hui Muslim Women’s Mosques of Central China,” in *Asian Journal of Social Science* 42 (2014), 641-656.

Hiroko Kawanami, “The Religious Standing of Burmese Buddhist Nuns (*thila-shin*): The Ten Precepts and Religious Respect Words,” in *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 13 (1990), 17-28.

Kristen E. Kvam, Linda S. Scheearing, and Valarie H. Ziegler, *Eve and Adam: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.

Julia Leslie and Mary McGee, *Invented Identities: The Interplay of Gender, Religion and Politics in India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Stephanie Wellen Levine, *Mystics, Mavericks, and Merrymakers: An Intimate Journey Among Hasidic Girls*. New York: New York University Press, 2003.

Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

Alex Mar, *Witches in America*. New York: Sarah Crichton Books, 2015.

Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.

Shabana Mir, *Muslim American Women on Campus: Undergraduate Social Life and Identity*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014.

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Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013.

Robert A. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

Arzoo Osanloo, *The Politics of Women's Rights in Iran*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ, *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989.

Bandana Purkayastha, "Intersectionality in a Transnational World: in *Gender and Society* 26(1), 55-66.

Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religions of the Great Goddess*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999.

Sarah McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters: A Spiritual Ecology*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2007.

Mohan Wijayaratna, *Buddhist Nuns: Birth and Development of a Women's Buddhist Order*. Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 2010.

Jeff Wilson, *Mourning the Unborn Dead: A Buddhist Ritual Comes to America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Serinity Young, *An Anthology of Sacred Texts By and About Women*. New York: Crossroad, 1995.

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## THE COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

**ADMINISTRATIVE HOME** The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is the administrative home of this course and governs matters such as the add/drop deadlines, the second-grade-only option, and other related issues. Different colleges may have different policies. Questions may be addressed to 120 Schaeffer Hall, or see the CLAS Academic Policies Handbook at <http://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook>.

**ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION** University policy specifies that students are responsible for all official correspondences sent to their University of Iowa e-mail address (@uiowa.edu). Faculty and students should use this account for correspondences ([Operations Manual](#), III.15.2, k.11).

**ACCOMMODATIONS FOR DISABILITIES** A student seeking academic accommodations should first register with Student Disability Services and then meet with the course instructor privately in the instructor's office to make particular arrangements. See <http://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/> for more information.

**ACADEMIC HONESTY** All CLAS students or students taking classes offered by CLAS have, in essence, agreed to the College's [Code of Academic Honesty](#): "I pledge to do my own academic work and to excel to the best of my abilities, upholding the [IOWA Challenge](#). I promise not to lie about my academic work, to cheat, or to steal the words or ideas of others; nor will I help fellow students to violate the Code of Academic Honesty." Any student committing academic misconduct is reported to the College and placed on disciplinary probation or may be suspended or expelled ([CLAS Academic Policies Handbook](#)).

**CLAS FINAL EXAMINATION POLICIES** The final examination schedule for each class is announced by the Registrar generally by the fifth week of classes. Final exams are offered only during the official final examination period. No exams of any kind are allowed during the last week of classes. All students should plan on being at the UI through the final examination period. Once the Registrar has announced the date, time, and location of each final exam, the complete schedule will be published on the Registrar's web site and will be shared with instructors and students. It is the student's responsibility to know the date, time, and place of a final exam.

**MAKING A SUGGESTION OR A COMPLAINT** Students with a suggestion or complaint should first visit with the instructor (and the course supervisor), and then with the departmental DEO: Diana Cates 316 Gilmore Hall, 335-2162, [diana-cates@uiowa.edu](mailto:diana-cates@uiowa.edu), office hours by appointment. Complaints must be made within six months of the incident ([CLAS Academic Policies Handbook](#)).

**UNDERSTANDING SEXUAL HARASSMENT** Sexual harassment subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. All members of the UI community have a responsibility to uphold this mission and to contribute to a safe environment that enhances learning. Incidents of sexual harassment should be reported immediately. See the UI [Comprehensive Guide on Sexual Harassment](#) for assistance, definitions, and the full University policy.

**REACTING SAFELY TO SEVERE WEATHER** In severe weather, class members should seek appropriate shelter immediately, leaving the classroom if necessary. The class will continue if possible when the event is over. For more information on Hawk Alert and the siren warning system, visit the [Department of Public Safety website](#).