FEMINIST INTERPRETATION OF
THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES

Feminist biblical interpretation has undergone profound changes over the past forty years. Early work focused on honoring the voices and stories of women characters within the Bible and resisting gendered dynamics of oppression as those were identified in ancient socio-historical contexts, hermeneutical traditions over the centuries, and ongoing analysis of the Bible in the modern scholarly guild. Under the influence of feminist analysis and gender theory work done outside of biblical studies, more recent years have witnessed the emergence of sophisticated critical attention within biblical scholarship to questions of the formation of biblical subjects and implied audiences, reader agency in the construction of meaning, and reading practices as culturally situated performances. This course will examine contributions of feminist scholars to a variety of interpretations of texts within the Hebrew Scriptures, moving from the foundational work of second-wave feminist biblical scholars to contemporary feminist, womanist, and queer analyses that take into account late-modern and postmodern understandings of gender, sex, power, the body, and textual authority.

Course objectives

1. To facilitate students’ engagement with historical, literary, rhetorical, and ideological-critical trajectories in feminist scholarship on the Hebrew Scriptures.

2. To heighten students’ awareness of hermeneutical, theological, and cultural issues at stake in the interpretation of Hebrew Scripture texts as ideologically shaped and socially situated rhetoric.

3. To foster students’ development of increasingly sophisticated exegetical and analytical skills through attentive reading of biblical passages and thoughtful assessment of relevant secondary literature.

4. To equip students for critically informed reflection on ways in which feminist, womanist, and queer readers in communities of faith may appropriate, critique, or refuse Hebrew Scripture texts as resources meaningful for their perspectives on theological traditions, the agency of believers, the formation of community, and the promotion of justice.
Evaluative Measures

Please see the grading rubric laid out in Appendix A at the end of this syllabus. The default grading mode for this course is Credit/No Credit, but students may choose to take the course for a grade. Those choosing graded mode will need to submit a form to the registrar by the appropriate deadline. Please see the grading rubric appended to this syllabus.

Two important notes for students taking the class C/NC:

- Your performance must be at the level of HP minus or higher to receive Credit.
- You must complete every assignment in order to receive Credit.

Each student’s grade (or assessment of Credit/No Credit) will be determined according to the following evaluative measures:

1) A creative project due on March 21 in class (20% of the grade). This may be a theological reflection paper (1,000 to 2,000 words) OR a creative praxis project that uses one or more Hebrew Scripture texts in a poetic, artistic, or other creative response. Your project should address a clearly-identified issue involving gender, sex, embodiment, or power from a feminist perspective. “Feminist perspective” may be defined by you as you deem appropriate.

   • If you do a creative project (artistic work, sermon, short story, series of meditations, or the like), you must provide a written explanation (300 to 500 words) of what you have sought to accomplish. For example, you may draw on a Hebrew Scripture text in order to write a sermon, create a liturgy, design a church workshop or retreat, write a short story or poem, or craft the mission statement of a social justice organization. Your annotations should describe the goals of the project and the ways in which the project reflects what you have been learning in this class.

   • Be prepared to discuss your creative project briefly in class on the due date (March 21), even if your project will be turned in late. If it is a visual work and you’d like to project the image as you discuss it, please bring your laptop or other equipment. If necessary, you may e-mail the project as a PDF to the professor by 6:00 p.m. two days before class, for projection via the professor’s iPad.

2) Three written responses to feminist, womanist, or queer blog posts over the course of the semester (15% of the grade). These are to be posted in the Classes*v2 Forums section of the Rel. 567 web page, under the forum “Responses to feminist, womanist, or queer blog posts.” Each response should reflect on some way in which feminist biblical interpretation is relevant to the blog post’s topic or a way in which the blog post might be used to challenge, enrich, or otherwise prove significant for feminist biblical interpretation.
• When you post is up to you, within these parameters: one post must be in February, one must be in March, and one must be in April. When you have posted a response, please e-mail the professor to let her know.

• Each written response should be between 300 and 400 words. Please include a link to the blog post, a title for your piece, and a word count at the top of each response. See Appendix B at the end of this syllabus for a list of some blogs that might be helpful for this assignment. Please feel free to share information in class about other blogs that you deem relevant.

3) **A term paper** of 11 to 14 pages that engages an issue relevant to feminist interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures; due on **Monday April 30 at noon** in the basket outside my office (55% of the grade). Your paper should engage at least one feminist, womanist, or queer theorist who does not work in biblical studies.

4) **Regular class participation** (10% of the grade). The category of class participation includes conscientious preparation of biblical and secondary material for class, attentive listening, active engagement in class discussions, and preparation of a 300- to 350-word abstract for the term paper, copies to be shared with the professor and classmates in the last class.

   ➢ If you choose not to speak up in class, you should post a reflection after our discussion roughly every other class. These can be quite short but should demonstrate clear engagement with secondary material or class discussion. Put these posts under the Forums topic, “Extra posts for additional reflections.” It is your job to remember to do this; you will not receive prompts about this from the professor.

**Attendance policy:** Each student may have two absences from class with no consequences. If you are absent on a day on which you were scheduled to lead discussion, it will count as two absences. Because your presence matters for the learning of everyone in the class, three absences will result in your class participation grade being lowered; four absences will directly affect your overall course grade. Chronic lateness may eventually be counted as an absence, at the professor’s discretion and with no prior warning to the student.

**Policy on late work:** There is no grade penalty for late work, but any work turned in after the due date will likely receive no feedback from me other than its grade. Graduating seniors must turn in all work by the due date for the term paper.

All written work submitted by you must be your own. If you cite, paraphrase, or in any other way rely on ideas, distinctive phrases, or argumentation from a written source, that source must be properly acknowledged. For more information, consult Appendix C at the end of this syllabus.

Papers are to be typewritten in a 12-point font, double-spaced, paginated, with margins between 1” and 1 1/4” on all sides. If the paper has notes, they should be footnotes (i.e., located at the bottom of the relevant page) rather than endnotes. Block quotations and footnotes should be
single-spaced. A separate bibliography is not necessary if full initial citations of works are provided in the notes. If you are unsure as to proper footnote style, consult *The SBL Handbook of Style* (Hendrickson, 1999), available in the Divinity Library, or another accepted authority such as *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

**Required Books**

The following books will be used heavily in this class. Additional required reading is available via electronic reserves on Classes*v2 or on Divinity Reserve. The required books will be on Reserve in the Divinity library, should you wish to consult them there rather than purchase them.


The following books will not be read in their entirety, but selections from them are on the syllabus. They will be on Divinity Reserve.


The following books will be read in their entirety, but students will be assigned to present on one OR the other. You may wish to delay your purchase until the assignments are made. They are on Reserve.


The following books are not on the syllabus, but they are available in the Divinity Library for your reference.


------------------ Schedule of Class Sessions and Readings ------------------

Please bring a Bible and all relevant secondary readings to class. When leading discussion, each student leader should be prepared to engage the following kinds of questions with classmates:

- What are the strengths of the arguments made in the material you are presenting? What is compelling or imaginative or original about the piece?

- On which points is the argument weakest, methodologically or conceptually?

- How is this piece useful (or not) for helping us to understand the biblical text?

- What hermeneutical claims and implicit assumptions govern the reading proposed in the piece? How might a feminist critic fruitfully interrogate those claims and assumptions?

**For book reviews and presentations on secondary literature:** The best scholarly assessment is judicious and balanced. If you have a strong negative reaction to a reading, work all the harder to give due credit for the piece’s strengths. If you are thrilled by a reading and wish you had written it yourself, work all the harder to identify the piece’s weaknesses. Neither polemical screeds nor gushing paeans qualify as good critical assessment.

**January 9** Introduction; purposes of the course

**January 11** Foremothers in the Faith

Be prepared to discuss:
Genesis 16 and 21; Judges 19-21
Gifford, “Politicizing the Sacred Texts: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and The Woman’s Bible” [in Resources on our Classes*v2 course site]
Trible, Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives (all)

January 16  Martin Luther King Day – no class

January 18  Ancient and Contemporary Contexts I

Be prepared to discuss:

Ackerman, “And the Women Knead Dough’: The Worship of the Queen of Heaven in Sixth-Century Judah,” pp. 21-32 in Women in the Hebrew Bible
Ackerman, “The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Israel,” pp. 179-94 in Women in the Hebrew Bible

Optional:


January 23  Ancient and Contemporary Contexts II

Be prepared to discuss:

Bird, “The Place of Women in the Israelite Cultus,” pp. 3-20 43 in Women in the Hebrew Bible

January 25  Theory I

Be prepared to discuss:

Bach, “Reading Allowed: Feminist Biblical Criticism Approaching the Millennium”
January 30  

**Theory II**

Be prepared to discuss:

Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, pp. 1-58

these introductory essays in *The Africana Bible*:

- James, “The African Diaspora as Construct and Lived Experience” (pp. 11-18)
- Bailey, Kirk-Duggan, Maseny, & Sadler, “African and African Diaspora Hermeneutics: Reading the Hebrew Bible as Journey, Exile, and Life through My/Our Place” (pp. 19-24)
- Maseny, “Women, Africana Reality, and the Bible” (pp. 33-38)
- Davidson, Ukpong, & Yorke, “The Bible and Africana Life: A Problematic Relationship” (pp. 39-44)
- Gafney, “Reading the Bible Responsibly” (pp. 45-51)

February 1  

**The Garden of Eden**

Be prepared to discuss:

- Genesis 1-3
- Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, pp. 59-79

February 6 & 8  

**Reading Week – no class**

February 13  

**The Garden of Eden (continued)**

Be prepared to discuss:

- Sadler, “Genesis,” pp. 70-79 in *The Africana Bible*
February 15       Joshua

Be prepared to discuss:

Joshua 2 and 6
McKinlay, “Rahab: A Hero/ine?” [Classes*v2]
Rowlett, “Disney’s Pocahontas and Joshua’s Rahab in Postcolonial Perspective” [Classes*v2]

February 20       Judges

Be prepared to discuss:

Judges 4-5, 11, 17-21
Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, pp. 35-67

February 22       Ruth

Be prepared to discuss:

Ruth 1-4
Greenstein, “Reading Strategies and the Story of Ruth,” pp. 211-31 in *Women in the Hebrew Bible*
Fewell & Gunn, “‘A Son is Born to Naomi!’ Literary Allusions and Interpretation in the Book of Ruth,” pp. 233-39 in *Women in the Hebrew Bible*
Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, pp. 89-108
Pa, “Reading Ruth 3:1-5 from an Asian Woman’s Perspective,” pp. 47-59 in *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World*
Gafney, “Ruth,” pp. 249-54 in *The Africana Bible*
February 27        Hosea

Be prepared to discuss:

Hosea 1-14
Keefe, *Women’s Body and the Social Body in Hosea* (all)

February 29        Hosea (continued)

Be prepared to discuss:

Stone, “Lovers and Raisin Cakes: Food, Sex and Divine Insecurity in Hosea” [Classes*v2]
Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, pp. 81-110
Hartsfield, “Hosea,” pp. 164-68 in *The Africana Bible*

March 5, 7, 12, & 14   Spring Break – no class

March 19        Theory III

Be prepared to discuss:

Milne, “Toward Feminist Companionship: The Future of Feminist Biblical Studies and Feminism” [Classes*v2]
Dube, “Toward a Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible” [Classes*v2]
Grosz, pp. vii-24 in *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* [Classes*v2]

March 21

*The creative project is due in class today.* Be prepared to discuss your creative project, even if you will be turning it in late.

March 26        Ezekiel

Be prepared to discuss:
Ezekiel 1, 16, 20, and 23
Shields, “Multiple Exposures: Body Rhetoric and Gender Characterization in Ezekiel 16” [Classes*v2]
Yee, Poor Banished Children of Eve, pp. 111-34

March 28  Ezekiel (continued)

Be prepared to discuss:

Tarlin, “Utopia and Pornography in Ezekiel: Violence, Hope, and the Shattered Male Subject” [Classes*v2]

April 2  Theory IV

Be prepared to discuss:

Plaskow, “Transforming the Nature of Community: Toward a Feminist People of Israel,” pp. 403-18 in Women in the Hebrew Bible
Stone, “Queer Commentary and Biblical Interpretation: An Introduction” [Classes*v2]

April 4  Proverbs

Be prepared to discuss:

Proverbs 1-9 and 31
Maier, “Conflicting Attractions: Parental Wisdom and the Strange Woman in Proverbs 1-9” [Classes*v2]
Yee, Poor Banished Children of Eve, pp. 135-58
Franklin, “Proverbs,” pp. 244-48 in The Africana Bible

April 9  Job

Be prepared to discuss:

Job 1-3, 38-42
Magdalene, “Job’s Wife as Hero: A Feminist-Forensic Reading of the Book of Job”
April 11  Other biblical texts

Be prepared to discuss:

Song of Songs 1-2 and Lamentations 1-5
Dobbs-Allsopp, “‘I am Black and Beautiful’: The Song, Cixous, and Écriture Féminine,” pp. 128-40 in Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World
West, “The Gift of Voice, the Gift of Tears: A Queer Reading of Lamentations in the Context of AIDS” [Classes*v2]

April 16  Other biblical texts (continued)

Be prepared to discuss:

Genesis 38 and Psalm 22
Schneider, “Yahwist Desires: Imagining Divinity Queerly” [Classes*v2]

April 18  Theory V

Please be prepared to discuss:

Scholz, Introducing the Women’s Hebrew Bible
Schüessler Fiorenza, Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation

Note: class will be structured around two group discussions configured in concentric circles.

Group 1 will discuss the Scholz book for 30 minutes while Group 2 listens attentively from the sidelines.
Group 2 will discuss the Schüessler Fiorenza book for 30 minutes while Group 1 listens attentively from the sidelines.
Plenary discussion in any remaining time will cover both books. Students are expected to read at least part of the book on which they are not presenting.

April 23 Conclusion

Be prepared to discuss the topic of your term paper.

* * * *

The term paper is due in the basket outside my office at noon on April 30.

On-time papers must be submitted in hard copy. You may mail your paper so long as it is postmarked by April 30. If you do mail your paper, please send it to me at the below address:

    135 Maple Shade Road
    Middletown, CT 06457

Late papers should be e-mailed to me.
APPENDIX A

Grading rubric and guidelines for discussion

For my seminars that do not require biblical Hebrew, the evaluative mode is Credit/No Credit. The C/NC mode is intended to free students to learn and grow intellectually in a collaborative environment marked by collegiality and creativity. I invite you to take intellectual risks, venture into new hermeneutical territory, and support one another’s learning with delight and generosity.

For my Old Testament Interpretation lecture courses, the default is Credit/No Credit, but students may choose to take the course for a grade. Those choosing graded mode will need to submit a form to the registrar by the appropriate deadline.

For my courses requiring biblical Hebrew, the default is to take the course for a grade, but I warmly encourage students to choose the Credit/No Credit option. Those choosing C/NC will need to submit a form to the registrar by the appropriate deadline.

Per vote of the YDS faculty, work must be at the level of HP minus or better to earn a grade of Credit for the course. All assignments must be completed for you to earn Credit in a class of mine. Even if a zero for a particular assignment might not give you a course grade of P or F in mathematical terms, I will not give course credit if any assignments are left uncompleted.

For those taking this class for a grade: the following criteria are intended to support your learning by making transparent my expectations for Master’s-level work at Yale.

PAPERS

H = Exemplary

A paper earning the grade of Honors will likely be characterized by:

- excellent writing marred by very few or no syntactical, grammatical, or spelling errors
- an original thesis that may build on the insights of others but does not simply restate what others have said
- clear, compelling argumentation that anticipates potential objections and takes account of alternative positions as may be necessary for comprehensiveness
- an effective rhetorical structure, which normally will include an introduction that clearly lays out the interpretive problem or analytical issue to be addressed and a conclusion that synthesizes the preceding arguments with grace and clarity
• outstanding fulfillment of other stated parameters for the assignment
• formatting that conforms to the specifications in the syllabus

H- = Excellent

A paper earning the grade of Honors Minus will likely be characterized by:

• excellent or very good writing marred by few syntactical, grammatical, or spelling errors
• an original thesis that may build on the insights of others but does not simply restate what others have said
• argumentation that is, in the main, clear and persuasive
• an effective rhetorical structure, which normally will include an introduction that clearly lays out the interpretive problem or analytical issue to be addressed and a conclusion that synthesizes the preceding arguments with grace and clarity
• excellent fulfillment of other stated parameters for the assignment
• formatting that conforms to the specifications in the syllabus

HP+ = Very Good

A paper earning the grade of High Pass Plus may be characterized by:

• clear writing with only a few syntactical, grammatical, or spelling errors
• a reasonably clear thesis, perhaps not articulated as forcefully as it might have been or lacking in originality even though well expressed
• solid argumentation that is reasonable but unnuanced, not very complex, or mainly descriptive (whether of the biblical text or relevant scholarly literature) rather than analytical
• a fair rhetorical structure, normally including an introduction that goes some distance toward laying the groundwork for the arguments that follow and a conclusion that synthesizes the preceding arguments with reasonable adeptness
• reasonably good fulfillment of other stated parameters for the assignment
• formatting that conforms to the specifications in the syllabus
**HP = Good**

or

**HP- = Satisfactory**

A paper earning **High Pass** or **High Pass Minus** may be characterized by:

- significant problems in logic or flow of argument
- unclear writing marred by a significant number of syntactical, grammatical, and/or spelling errors
- ineffective or poor rhetorical structure
- inadequate fulfillment or ignoring of other stated parameters for the assignment
- formatting that fails to conform to the specifications in the syllabus

**Special notes:**

- If your paper has margins that are significantly too wide or other formatting issues that depart from the parameters listed on the syllabus, the paper can earn only an HP+ at best.
- If your paper is shorter than the minimum length stipulated in the syllabus, it can earn only an HP+ at best. Please note that title page, bibliography, and appendices do not count toward paper length for these purposes.
- If you are not an experienced writer of formal English or if you have had problems with written expression in the past, I encourage you to take a draft of your paper to the YDS Writing Consultant before turning it in to me. Every writer, from the novice to the Pulitzer Prize winner, can benefit from someone reviewing her or his writing.
- If I comment on a draft of your paper: please know that there is no guarantee that your revised paper will earn Honors. (Perhaps the starting level of the draft was an HP and your improvements turn out to be only cosmetic in nature. Perhaps the paper was a weak HP+ to begin with and your revisions made it a strong HP+.) I will not comment on what grade a draft would have earned before revisions.
- As time permits, I provide substantial typed comments in addition to handwritten marginalia in the paper itself. Because of the time required to meet this pedagogical commitment, I will not necessarily be able to hand your first paper back before you submit your second paper. If you would prefer to receive the first paper back quickly with a grade but very little written feedback, please let me know when you submit the paper.
**ATTENDANCE and CLASS PARTICIPATION**

Attendance is not taken in the Old Testament Interpretation lectures but is recorded for the sections led by Teaching Fellows. It is expected that you will attend all section meetings.

For other classes of mine: you may have *two* absences from class with no consequences. If you are absent on a day on which you were scheduled to lead discussion, it will count as two absences. Because your presence matters for the learning of everyone in the class, *three* absences will result in your class participation grade being lowered; *four* absences will directly affect your overall course grade. Chronic lateness may eventually be counted as an absence, at my discretion and with no advance warning to the student.

Those whose attendance record is unmarred (that is, who have two, one, or no absences) will receive an **H** or **H-** for class participation if they have spoken up frequently in class discussions or—if they choose not to speak up in class—if they have frequently posted thoughts on the Classes*v2* forum *in addition to* any required posts that the entire class must do. Whether a student receives an **H** or **H-** will depend on the degree to which his/her contributions have been articulate, relevant, and substantive.

**HP+** will be given for class participation if a student has an unmarred attendance record and regularly offers comments in class or regularly posts additional thoughts on Classes*v2.*

**HP** will be given for class participation if a student has offered contributions infrequently or has had three absences or more.

If a student has four absences or more, the student’s course grade will be reduced by 1/3 of a grade (for example, an earned **H-** would become an **HP+**) and in any case will not be higher than **HP+**.

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**GUIDELINES FOR DISCUSSION**

In order to maximize the chances that our conversations will be fruitful and rewarding for every learner in the classroom, we will observe the following guidelines:

1) **Respect the right of everyone to speak.** Please do not dominate the conversation by speaking at unusual length or volunteering your thoughts noticeably more often than others. Here are some signals that you might be dominating the conversation: if your hand shoots into the air for every single question posed to the class; if the professor has to restrain you by saying, “Hold on – let’s allow some others to get into the discussion” or “Let’s hear from some who haven’t spoken yet”; or if you find yourself prefacing your comments with, “Maybe I’m talking too much, but . . .”

2) **Use positive language about what you think, rather than negative language about what another person has said.** Indeed, it’s best to avoid “cross-talk”—referring to the comments of others—
even if your remarks are positive. Why? Because some students might experience the positive affirmation of certain students as factionalism or as a pointed ignoring of what others have said.

3) Do not interrupt; wait your turn. Do not speak while someone else is speaking. If there is a moderator of the discussion (whether the professor or another), wait to be acknowledged by the moderator before speaking. This is important in order to allow introverts adequate “space” to get into the conversation.

4) The following Inclusivity Statement was adopted by the YDS faculty on 6 May 2010. I invite you to join me in honoring these principles in our classroom:

   By history, intention and design, the Yale Divinity School community embraces a wide range of Christian traditions. Committed to serving church and world, it also welcomes people of various religious and non-religious traditions, drawing wide the circle to include a myriad of perspectives.

   Seeking to foster the knowledge and love of God through critical engagement with the traditions of the Christian churches, the Divinity School upholds the value of broad inclusivity and diversity in our academic, worship, and communal life.

   We celebrate the fullness of race and color, denominational, political, theological, and cultural difference, the range of expressions of sexual and gender identity, the varied voices that come with age, life experience, national and community service, and socioeconomic status.

   In ecumenical conversation and in the space created that crosses traditionally entrenched positions, profound educational value is gained and diverse perspectives are presented.

   To this end, we foster inclusivity and diversity through our academic, social and spiritual practices. At the core of our intention is the deliberate encouragement of conversation across the lines of difference; attention to offering access to all aspects of our common life; consistent sensitivity to the uniqueness of each person’s background; and particular attentiveness to our words in speech, writing, prayer, and praise.

   We value the worth and dignity of every member of the Divinity School community, as we build an environment where inclusivity and diversity are central and consistently affirmed.
APPENDIX B
Some feminist, womanist, and queer blogs

Any descriptors below are those offered on the web sites themselves. Please feel free to share information about other relevant sites. You may also choose to respond to a feminist-, womanist-, or queer-related post on a general religion or spirituality blog site.

http://allhypomnemata.wordpress.com/

http://www.amendment10a.org/ Building a Church that Reflects God’s Heart

http://bibliofeminista.com/

http://christianfeminism.wordpress.com/ Christian feminism – because we’ve read the whole Book!


http://www.feministe.us/blog/

http://feministing.com/

http://feministtheology.blogspot.com/ Feminist Theology in an Age of Fear and Hope

http://www.harpyness.com/ The Pursuit of Harpyness, as narrated by five of the most charming and vicious women on the internet

http://jessicavalenti.com/category/blog/ the personal blog of the founder of Feministing

http://www.lilith.org/blog/ Independent, Jewish and frankly feminist

http://microaggressions.com/ Microaggressions: on power, privilege, and everyday life

http://thenewcivilrightsmove.com/

http://qlatb.com/ Queer Look at the Bible: sacred texts and commentary . . . from a different point of view

http://www.queerpublicradio.com/

http://queertheology.blogspot.com/ Explores questions of faith for lesbian, gay and trans Christians, and celebrates progress toward full LGBT inclusion in church

http://www.racheladelman.com/
http://www.sarahlaughed.net/

http://shakespearessister.blogspot.com/  Shakesville

http://silentvoicesbible.com/blog/index.html  Silent Voices/The Feminist Bible

http://speakeristic.blogspot.com/2008/05/sappho-bible-and-feminism.html  Aristotle’s Feminist Subject

http://www.thefeministwire.com/category/religion/

http://tranarchism.com/

http://www.womanist-musings.com/

http://womanistntprof.blogspot.com/  Womanist Biblical Scholar Reflections

http://womenofspiritandfaith.org/

http://yolandapierce.blogspot.com/  Reflections of an Afro-Christian scholar: thoughts on the academy, ministry, and the intersections of race and religion in American life

http://www.youngclergywomen.org/  Fidelia’s Sisters: a publication of the Young Clergy Women Project
APPENDIX C

Inadequate Acknowledgement of Secondary Sources (Plagiarism)

Written assignments at Yale Divinity School often require consultation of and critical reflection on secondary sources. Secondary sources include books, articles, reviews, Web sites, published or orally delivered sermons, poems, and any other written, oral, or electronically mediated communication. Failure adequately to acknowledge secondary sources in a written assignment is a matter that, per YDS policy, must be forwarded to the Professional Studies Committee for review. Depending on the disposition of the matter by the Committee, consequences for the student can include a mandate to rewrite the flawed paper or to write a new paper unrelated to the flawed paper; the recording of an F on the student’s transcript for the class; or expulsion from YDS.

Per YDS policy, a student’s stated lack of intent to plagiarize cannot be considered material to a case under investigation. It is therefore in students’ best interest to inform themselves fully about the kinds of plagiarism that exist so that they may avoid those errors in their written work. Toward that end, I supply the clarifications of plagiarism below. These are intended for your instruction only and are not to be taken as an exhaustive or definitive list.

Kinds of Plagiarism

1. Wholesale failure to acknowledge a source. If you use information, an idea, a line of argument, or a distinctive turn of phrase without noting explicitly the source in which you found the material, you will have plagiarized. Well known information, such as the fact that Amos may have prophesied in the 8th century B.C.E. or that the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem in 587, need not be footnoted or otherwise acknowledged. If you are unsure whether you need to acknowledge a source, do acknowledge it. It is always better to err on the side of caution. For our purposes here, my lectures and our class discussions as such do not need to be footnoted, but if a classmate offers a particularly effective or unique formulation in discussion that you then use in a paper, it would be desirable, although not required, to credit that classmate appropriately.

2. Failure to indicate a verbatim quotation. The verbatim (word-for-word) quotation of secondary material in your written work must be indicated in every instance by the use of quotation marks. If you do not use quotation marks, the reader will take the material as your own words, and you will have plagiarized. This is the case even if you supply a footnote at the end of the verbatim material or attribute the material in a general way to the source in question. If material is used verbatim, it must always be marked by quotation marks. Note that for lengthy quotations block-indented in single-spaced format, the block indentation stylistically takes the place of quotation marks as such, so quotation marks are not needed in that kind of situation.
3. Failure to indicate more general dependence on a secondary source. If you use an idea from another source without acknowledgement, or follow another writer’s line of argument without acknowledgement, you will have plagiarized, even if you paraphrase the idea or sequence of ideas rather than rendering the material verbatim.

Illustrations of the above kinds of plagiarism will draw on the following excerpt from J. Gerald Janzen, *Exodus* (Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), p. 78:

If, as Whitehead says, “we are never very free,” we do usually have a margin of freedom within which we can reflect on our situation, with all its constraints, and respond to it in ways that promise to make our continued life possible and perhaps even better. But from time to time we wonder whether we have enough freedom to enable us to get out of the dead-end streets our exercise of freedom has gotten us into. If human freedom arises in what we call our will and finds its direction in what we call our imagination, the question is, Do we have the imagination to modify a social arrangement or course of action that our imagination once devised for what seemed good reasons but that now threatens to become a straitjacket on ourselves or others? In the biblical view, such freedom, such imagination, is the gift of God who, according to the word at the burning bush, is most deeply named in the words, “I will be who I will be.” As I suggested earlier, such a name implies at least this much: However much we have known God in terms of our past typical experiences, needs, practices, and patterns of life, God is not limited to this past but remains free to respond to whatever new circumstances may arise in God’s creation.

Example #1: a student’s wholesale failure to acknowledge a source.

In considering the terrifying judgment oracles of the book of Amos, and especially the absence of promise material except for that brief bit at the end of Amos 9, it seems that Amos would argue against free will. Repentance no longer seems possible for the people of Israel. They no longer have enough freedom to enable them to get out of the dead-end street that their sinning has gotten them into. In the biblical view, freedom is the gift of the God who appeared to Moses at the burning bush, but according to Amos, the Israelites have consistently used this freedom only in order to sin, so they are now faced with utter destruction.
Example #2: a student’s failure to indicate a verbatim quotation.

Even if Ezekiel does stress personal rather than corporate and generational responsibility for sin in Ezekiel 18, still, as Janzen suggests, from time to time we wonder whether we have enough freedom to enable us to get out of the dead-end streets our exercise of freedom has gotten us into. Even if we are free theoretically, in practical terms we continually reforge our chains of slavery to sin. But thanks be to God that God is not limited in the way that we are. However much we have known God in terms of our past typical experiences, needs, practices, and patterns of life, God is not limited to this past but remains free to respond to whatever new circumstances may arise in God’s creation.¹


Note that in the above example, even though Janzen is mentioned in the body of the student’s essay and the student has supplied a footnote, the student’s paragraph is still plagiaristic. The absence of quotation marks leaves the impression that the passages taken verbatim from Janzen are in fact the student’s own words, which is not the case.

Example #3: a student’s failure to indicate more general dependence on a source.

The Garden of Eden story raises some difficult and compelling questions regarding the whole theological problem of free will versus determinism. Alfred North Whitehead has suggested that humans are never very free, in real terms. But do the prophets not proclaim that we have a certain kind of freedom in that we can reflect on our life, repent, and try to improve it? We may have enough freedom to do that, to try to lift ourselves up by our bootstraps and get out of the traps of sin that we set for ourselves. But imagination is also needed, the imagination to see new ways of living as Christians. We may be bound as if in a straitjacket to choices we once made, thinking they were good ideas at the time, and lack the spiritual imagination to see how we might be transformed, how we might walk a new path in a new situation.

Note that although the above essay is written in the student’s own words, the general line of argument, from Whitehead to free will to the roles of reflection and imagination to the image of straitjacket, is followed by the student without acknowledgement of the source. This too is plagiaristic.

Per the section “Integrity of Work” in the Divinity Bulletin, students may not submit the same or similar written material in more than one course without the advance approval of all instructors involved. Submission of the same or similar work in different courses is a serious breach of academic integrity and is subject to disciplinary action.