

# Gendering the Old Testament

MEL 321 (41675); MES 342 (41930); RS 353 (43695); WGS 340 (46980); JS 363 (40205)

Spring 2017

Professor: Jo Ann Hackett



**Gendering the Old Testament** involves, rather obviously, an understanding of both gender and the biblical stories we will read. What makes a character masculine or feminine, besides the obvious factor of the character's biological sex? How do the characters perform their gender? What is involved in assessing gender expectations for ancient people and societies whom we can only know through highly selected and edited literary pieces? Along with questions like these, others come to mind. What previous life and educational experiences lead you to be interested in some characters and stories, but not in others? What can understanding how ancient peoples dealt with biological differences change the way you think about contemporary problems? And what can your experiences bring to the stories and their interpretations of gender?

We will concentrate on a small subset of biblical stories and milk them for all they're worth: the matriarchs and patriarchs in **Genesis**; the many salient stories from the book of **Judges** and the life of **King David**; and the books of **Ruth** and **Esther**. Through secondary readings we will learn of the societies described in the stories, of the differences between the Hebrew original and various English translations, of the contributions studies of more modern and accessible societies can make to our understanding of ancient Israel. We will also take advantage of each other for anything any of us can add to the class materials already assembled. The stories we explore can be unexpectedly bawdy; they are often funny or satirical; they can be surprisingly tragic or deceptive. They can generally be more easily explained and understood when their ancient context is taken into account, and finding that context will be some of the work we do in the course.

Most weeks the class content will follow the two day per week schedule. Most Tuesdays will be lecture classes, and most of the time the Thursday class will be a discussion class, including full-class discussions, small-group discussions, perhaps even a debate format.

The discussions will revolve around student interest in the assigned secondary readings (the non-biblical readings). By **midnight each Monday**, through the Discussion tab on Canvas, each student will post a question or a comment on the assigned secondary reading for the week— something you want to know more about, didn't understand, disagree with—and then by **midnight Wednesday**, each student will post a response to another student's question or comment; and the Thursday class will revolve around those posts.

The **Independent Inquiry** flag provides an opening for a student to become a researcher.

Everything about the final presentation and paper (see below) should come from the student, although a short list of possible approaches is provided in the syllabus. The student should choose an appropriate topic; find pertinent bibliography; and draft and create the presentation and paper based on her/his research. Hence the “**Independent**” modifier. As a realistic check on the **Inquiry**, however, these issues should be discussed with the professor at every point along the way.

### **Course Grading and Assignments:**

**Attendance.** Students are expected to attend class, and participation in class discussion and quality of that participation will be **25%** of your grade. Students are allowed two unexcused absences, **until Presentations start at the end of the semester.**

**Discussions.** Students are expected to post their own question/comment each week, and to post their reaction to another student's question/comment. We will have these assignments 10 times over the course of the semester (noted on syllabus); the initial post will be **10%** of your grade, and the reaction post will be **10%** of your grade. Like participation, posts will be graded for their intelligent engagement with the reading and with the other student's post. Your comments and replies should be a few sentences long and should be thoughtful. (Good and bad comments from previous years will be available in class.) You will receive 3 points for a good question or reply but only 1 point for merely writing something inadequate.

**Final projects.** The final projects will be **1) a presentation to the class (around 20 minutes)** that will rely on both the material taught in this course and the previous interest(s) of each student; plus **2) a 6-8 page paper** over the same topic, taking into account the reaction to the earlier presentation.

The projects might, for instance, use one of the characters discussed in this course and discover his/her later life, as a character in a modern novel or the topic of a work of art. How and how well has the character been represented? Was there an agenda behind the artist's/writer's/composer's use of the character, and if so, what was it? It might instead trace an Old Testament character's use in rabbinic writings, or in the New Testament or early church. It might be something I cannot imagine but that you will find yourself fascinated with. Deciding on the topic of the presentation will be different for each student and will be a major part of the project itself; a written description (one paragraph) of each topic **must** be approved by the professor.

The presentation will be worth **20%** of the student's grade, and an early draft paper and bibliography, to be discussed with the professor, will be worth another **10%** of the grade. The final write-up of the presentation (the 6-8 page paper) will be **25%** of your grade.

### **Required Textbooks:**

an English Bible (the *Harper-Collins Study Bible, Student Edition*, and the *New Jewish Publication Society Tanakh* have been ordered by the Co-op)

**Grading Scale:** I do use + and – grades in this class.

95–100=A; 90–94=A-; 88–89=B+; 83–87=B; 80–82=B-; 75-79=C+;  
70-74=C; 68-69=C-; 65-67=D+; 63–64=D; 60–62=D-; below 60=F.

Please refer to <http://registrar.utexas.edu/calendars/16-17> for information on drop/add deadlines and penalties.

**Use of Canvas and e-mail for this class:**

All announcements, additional handouts, and additional information for the class will be available on Canvas. Outside of office hours, students may contact me by e-mail, and I, in turn, will use e-mail for contact of students.

All students should become familiar with the University's official e-mail student notification policy. It is the student's responsibility to keep the University informed of changes in his or her e-mail address. Students are expected to check e-mail on a frequent and regular basis in order to stay current with University-related communications, recognizing that certain communications may be time-critical. It is recommended that e-mail be checked several times each day. The complete text of this policy and instructions for updating your e-mail address are available at <https://security.utexas.edu/policies/aup>.

**Academic Integrity:**

**University of Texas Honor Code**

*The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.*

Each student in this course is expected to abide by the University of Texas Honor Code. Any work submitted by a student in this course for academic credit will be the student's own work.

You are encouraged to study together and to discuss information and concepts covered in class with other students, and we will also use Canvas for such a forum. You can give "consulting" help to or receive "consulting" help from such students. However, this permissible cooperation should never involve one student having possession of a copy of all or part of work done by someone else, in the form of an e-mail, an e-mail attachment file, a diskette, or a hard copy.

Should copying occur, both the student who copied work from another student and the student who gave material to be copied will both automatically receive a zero for the assignment. Penalty for violation of this Code can also be extended to include failure of the course and University disciplinary action.

**Documented Disability Statement:**

Any student with a documented disability who requires academic accommodations should contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at (512) 471-6259 (voice), 512-410-6445 (video phone), or reference SSD's website for more disability-related information: [ssd@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:ssd@austin.utexas.edu). Faculty are not required to provide accommodations without an official accommodation letter from SSD.

Please notify the instructor as quickly as possible if the material being presented in class is not accessible (e.g., course readings are not readable for proper alternative text conversion).

**Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL):**

If you are worried about someone who is acting in an unusual manner, you may use the Behavior Concerns Advice Line to discuss by phone your concerns about another individual's behavior. This service is provided through a partnership among the Office of the Dean of Students, the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC), the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and The University of Texas Police Department (UTPD). Call 512-232-5050 or visit <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal>.

**Q drop Policy:**

The State of Texas has enacted a law that limits the number of course drops for academic reasons to six (6). As stated in Senate Bill 1231:

“Beginning with the fall 2007 academic term, an institution of higher education may not permit an undergraduate student a total of more than six dropped courses, including any course a transfer student has dropped at another institution of higher education, unless the student shows good cause for dropping more than that number.” For more information, see <https://ugs.utexas.edu/vick/academic/adddrop/qdrop>.

**Religious Holidays:**

By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

**Emergency Evacuation Policy:**

Occupants of buildings on The University of Texas at Austin campus are required to evacuate buildings when a fire alarm is activated. Alarm activation or announcement requires exiting and assembling outside. Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of each classroom and building you may occupy. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering the building.

Students requiring assistance in evacuation shall inform their instructor in writing during the first week of class.

In the event of an evacuation, follow the instruction of faculty or class instructors. Do not re-enter a building unless given instructions by the following: Austin Fire Department, The University of Texas at Austin Police Department, or Fire Prevention Services office. Link to information regarding emergency evacuation routes and emergency procedures can be found at: [www.utexas.edu/emergency](http://www.utexas.edu/emergency).

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**Weekly Classes**

**Readings listed under each week should be done before the Tuesday class. All readings for this class are in the class Module for the week in question.**

**Week 1: 1/17-19 Introduction: Syllabus, Old Testament studies**

<b>Reading</b> (for Thursday's class): •Carol Meyers, "An Introduction to the Bible"
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**Week 2: 1/24–26      Gender**

**Readings** (to be done in order): •Diane Richardson, “Conceptualizing Gender”;  
•Michael Kimmel, “Introduction: Human Beings, an Endangered Species”;  
•“National Geographic 1/17, Gender” + “Definitions”

**Question concerning Readings (due 11:59 pm Monday)**  
**Reply (due 11:59 pm Wednesday)**

**Week 3: 1/31–2/2      Family Dynamics in Genesis, I**

**Readings:** •Gen 1–2; 11:27–12:9; 15–18; 21:125:34; 26:12–33:20; 35; 37:1–38:30

•Susan Niditch, “Genesis”;  
•Ronald Hendel, Chana Kronfeld, and Ilana Pardes, “Gender and Sexuality”

**Question concerning Readings (due 11:59 pm Monday)**  
**Reply (due 11:59 pm Wednesday)**

**February 2: Deadline for topic for Presentation and Paper approved.**

**Week 4: 2/7–9      Family Dynamics in Genesis, II**

**Readings:** •Gen 12:10–20; 20; 26:1–11;  
Genesis 13–14; 19  
Genesis 34; 38

•Re-read Niditch, wife/sister tales, pp. 18–19; Dinah, pp. 23–24; Tamar, pp. 21–23

**Question concerning Readings (due 11:59 pm Monday)**  
**Reply (due 11:59 pm Wednesday)**

**Week 5: 2/14–16      Judges, I**

**Readings:** •Judges 4–12

- Susan Niditch, “Eroticism and Death in the Tale of Jael”;
- Alice Logan, “Rehabilitating Jephthah”;
- Peggy Day, “From the Child is Born the Woman: The Story of Jephthah’s Daughter”

**Question concerning Readings (due 11:59 pm Monday)**

**Reply (due 11:59 pm Wednesday)**

**Week 6: 2/21–23**

**Judges, II**

**Readings:** •Judges 13–16; 19; re-read Genesis 19

- Gregory Mobley, “The Wild Man in the Bible and the ancient Near East”;
- Ken Stone, “Gender and Homosexuality in Judges 19: Subject-Honor, Object-Shame?”

**Question concerning Readings (due 11:59 pm Monday)**

**Reply (due 11:59 pm Wednesday)**

**February 23: Deadline for turning in first draft and bibliography for Presentation and Paper.**

**Week 7: 2/28–3/2**

**Deity/Deities in ancient Israel**

**Readings:** •Deut 16:21; Judg 6:25–26; 1 Kgs 15:13; 2 Kgs 21:1–7

- Handouts from Kuntillet Ajrud inscriptions;
- William Dever, “Asherah, Consort of Yahweh? New Evidence from Kuntillet Ajrud”

**Question concerning Readings (due 11:59 pm Monday)**

**Reply (due 11:59 pm Wednesday)**

**Week 8: 3/7–9**

**Ruth**

**Readings:** •Ruth

- Eunny Lee, “Ruth the Moabite: Identity, Kinship, and Otherness”;
- Paula Hiebert, “The Biblical Widow”

**Question concerning Readings (due 11:59 pm Monday)**

**Reply (due 11:59 pm Wednesday)**

**March 9: Deadline to meet with Hackett about draft and bibliography. Sign-up sheet.**

## **SPRING BREAK**

**Week 9: 3/21–23**

**Esther**

**Readings:** •Esther

- Sidnie White Crawford, “Esther”

**Question concerning Readings (due 11:59 pm Monday)**

**Reply (due 11:59 pm Wednesday)**

**Sign up for Presentation date and time.**

**Week 10: 3/28–30**

**The Life and Times of King David, I**

**Readings:** •1 Samuel 16–2 Samuel 20

- David A. Bosworth, “Evaluating King David: Old Problems and Recent Scholarship”

**Question concerning Readings (due 11:59 pm Monday)**

**Reply (due 11:59 pm Wednesday)**

**Week 11: 4/4–6      The Life and Times of King David, II**

**Readings:** • 1 Samuel 8–15; re-read 2 Samuel 1–3

• Yaron Peleg, “Love at First Sight? David, Jonathan, and the Biblical Politics of Gender”

**Question concerning Readings (due 11:59 pm Monday)**

**Reply (due 11:59 pm Wednesday)**

**Week 12: 4/11–13      The Life and Times of King David, III**

**Readings:** • Re-read 2 Samuel 6; 1 Samuel 25; 2 Samuel 11–12;  
read 2 Kings 1–2

• Jon Levenson, “1 Samuel 25 as Literature and History”

**Weeks 13, 14, 15      Presentations**