

Course Syllabus
KNB5331H – Gender and power in the Hebrew Bible and Hellenistic Jewish texts
Knox College
Toronto School of Theology
Winter 2025

Instructor Information

Instructor: Christine Mitchell, PhD, Academic Dean & Professor of Hebrew Bible
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E-mail: drchristine.mitchell@utoronto.ca. Emails will be answered Monday-Friday 9:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.; emails received after 4:30 p.m. on Friday will be answered on Monday. Otherwise, students can expect an answer within 24 hours.
Office Hours: TBA, or by appointment

Course Identification

Course Number: KNB5331H
Course Format: *In-class*
Course Name: Gender and power in the Hebrew Bible and Hellenistic Jewish texts
Course Location: Room X, Knox College
Class Times: Tuesday, 14:00-16:00
Prerequisites: Registration in a graduate degree program (MA, ThM, DMin, PhD)

Course Description

This course examines questions of gender, sexuality, embodiment, and power in the Hebrew Bible and texts from Second Temple Judaism. Several biblical and Hellenistic-period texts are used to explore these epistemological and methodological questions. Students will learn various theoretical approaches such as feminist, womanist, masculinity studies, and queer theory, from scholars both inside and outside of biblical studies. These approaches will be paired with a close reading of a variety of texts from the Hebrew Bible and early Jewish literature. Collaborative and decentering frameworks will be front and centre in both course material and pedagogy.

Language requirements: Students pursuing a program focused on Hebrew Bible, Second Temple Judaism, and/or Early Christianity (New Testament) are encouraged to read and translate from Hebrew and/or Greek. Students engaged in other areas of study are welcome to read from Hebrew and/or Greek should they wish. The course is designed to allow students with and without Hebrew or Greek proficiency to engage with the course questions.

A note about “trigger” warnings: This course, by its nature, includes many biblical and other ancient texts and contemporary examples that may stretch the limits of your emotional capacity. You may not necessarily receive a warning in advance because examples may come from either the professor or

other students. In your future vocation you will not necessarily have an opportunity to collect yourself before responding to uncomfortable emotions. It is vital that you learn coping skills and strategies for caring for yourself. If you are struggling with your emotions in this course, please reach out to the professor. Your faculty advisor, the Knox Registrar's Office staff, the staff at your home college, and the Ecumenical Chaplains can also direct you to resources for you to engage in care for your own self.

In this course, if you begin to lose control of your emotions, you may leave by yourself or with one colleague from the class until you can collect yourself, or you may engage in other practices (journaling, meditation) that allow you to regain control. If you or your colleague are concerned that you cannot regain control or are unduly distressed, you should seek assistance from the Knox Registrar's Office. Staff there have access to immediate assistance. In the end, your emotional safety is your own responsibility.

Course Resources

Required Course Texts/Bibliography

All required texts (except the Bible and primary sources) are available online through the University of Toronto Libraries and are linked in Quercus.

- A complete Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. Preferred English translations are NRSV, NJPS, CEB, NIV, NASB. Please check with me before using any other English translation. Students with biblical Hebrew proficiency should work with the Hebrew text in the BHS.
- Other primary sources:
 - A complete Greek Bible/Old Testament (Septuagint). The preferred English translation is the New English Translation of the Septuagint (NETS). Students with biblical Greek proficiency should work with the Greek text in Rahlfs' LXX.
 - Website: The Book of Ben Sira (www.bensira.org). (Hebrew and English)
 - Collins, John J., and James Nati. *The Rule of the Association and Related Texts*. New York: Oxford UP, 2024. (Hebrew proficiency desirable; English translation also provided)
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage, 1978. OR *Histoire de la sexualité 1: La volonté de savoir*. Paris: Gallimard, 1976.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. London: Routledge, 1990. (or any of the reprints)
- Ahmed, Sara. *Living a Feminist Life*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017.
- Koosed, Jennifer L. "Reading the Bible as a Feminist." *Brill Research Perspectives. Biblical Interpretation (Online)* 2, no. 2 (2017): 1–75.
- Thiede, Barbara. "Taking Biblical Authors at Their Word: On Scholarly Ethics, Sexual Violence, and Rape Culture in the Hebrew Bible." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 143 (2024): 185-205.
- Chapman, Cynthia Ruth. "Modern Terms and their Ancient Non-Equivalents: Patrilineality and Gender in the Historical Study of the Bible." *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 5 (2016): 78-93.
- Mitchell, Christine. "Coming, Going, and Knowing: Reading Sex and Embodiment in Hebrew Narrative." *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 5 (2016): 94-111.
- van der Walt, Charlene. "'Is There a Man Here?': The Iron Fist in the Velvet Glove in Judges 4." L. Juliana Claassens & Carolyn J. Sharp, eds. *Feminist Frameworks and The Bible: Power, Ambiguity, and Intersectionality*. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017, pp. 117–132.
- Yoo, Yani, "Han-laden Women: Korean 'Comfort Women' and Women in Judges 19-21." *Semeia* 78 (1997): 37-46.

- Bar Mymon, Meir. "This Season You'll Be Wearing God: On the Manning of Gideon and the Undressing of the Israelites (Judges 6:1-8:32)." Athalya Brenner & Gale A. Yee, eds. *Joshua and Judges*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013, pp. 191-207.
- Carman, Jon-Michael. "Abimelech the Manly Man? Judges 9.1-57 and the Performance of Hegemonic Masculinity." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 43.3 (2019): 301-316.
- Thiede, Barbara. "Hidden in Plain Sight: Saul's Male Trauma Narrative in 1 Samuel." *Biblical Interpretation* 32 (2024): 221-242.
- Kim, Hyun Chul Paul, and M. Fulgence Nyengele. "Murder S/He Wrote: A Cultural and Psychological Reading of 2 Samuel 11-12." Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan, ed. *Pregnant Passion: Gender, Sex, and Violence in the Bible*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003, pp. 95-116.
- Guest, Deryn. "Modeling the Transgender Gaze: Performance of Masculinities in 2 Kings 9-10." Teresa J. Hornsby & Deryn Guest. *Transgender, Intersex, and Biblical Interpretation*. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016, pp. 45-80.
- Shields, Mary. "Multiple Exposures: Body Rhetoric and Gender Characterization in Ezekiel 16." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 14 (1998): 5-18.
- Morse, Holly. "'Judgement was Executed Upon Her, and She Became a Byword Among Women' (Ezek. 12:10): Divine Revenge Porn, Slut-Shaming, Ethnicity, and Exile in Ezekiel 16 and 23." Katherine E. Southwood & Martien A. Halvorson-Taylor, eds. *Women and Exilic Identity in the Hebrew Bible*. London: T&T Clark, 2018, pp. 129-154.
- Graybill, Rhiannon. "Embodiment in Ezekiel." Corrine Carvalho, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Ezekiel*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020, pp. 418-436.
- Camp, Claudia V. "Understanding a Patriarchy: Women in Second Century Jerusalem Through the Eyes of Ben Sira." Amy-Jill Levine, ed. *"Women Like This": New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991, pp. 1-39.
- Calduch-Benages, Núria. "Good and Bad Wives in the Book of Ben Sira: A Harmless Classification?" Christl M. Maier & Núria Calduch-Benages, eds. *The Writings and Later Wisdom Books*. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014, pp. 109-125.
- Calduch-Benages, Núria. "'Cut Her Away From Your Flesh': Divorce in Ben Sira." Géza Xeravits & József Zsengellér, eds. *Studies in the Book of Ben Sira*. Leiden: Brill, 2008, pp. 81-95.
- Ilan, Tal. "Reading for Women in 1QSa (Serekh ha-Edah)." Armin Lange, Emanuel Tov, and Matthias Weigold, eds. *The Dead Sea Scrolls in Context: Integrating the Dead Sea Scrolls in the Study of Ancient Texts, Languages, and Cultures*, volume 1. Leiden: Brill, 2011, pp. 61-76.
- Taylor, Joan. "Women, Children, and Celibate Men in the 'Serekh' Texts." *Harvard Theological Review* 104 (2011): 171-190.
- Wassen, Cecilia. "Women, Worship, Wilderness, and War: Celibacy and the Constructions of Identity in the Dead Sea Scrolls." Joel Baden, Hindy Najman, and Eibert J.C. Tigchelaar, eds. *Sibyls, Scriptures, and Scrolls: John Collins at Seventy*. Leiden: Brill, 2017, pp. 1361-1385.
- Mermelstein, Ari. "Conceptions of Masculinity in the Scrolls and the Gendered Emotion of Anger." *Dead Sea Discoveries* 26 (2019): 314-338.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You're so Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You." *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003, pp. 123-151.

- Butler, Judith. “Conclusion: The Fear of Destruction, the Struggle to Imagine.” *Who’s Afraid of Gender?* Toronto: Knopf, 2024, pp. 245-264.

Course Website

Quercus: <https://q.utoronto.ca/>

This course uses Quercus for its course website. To access it, go to the UofT Quercus login page at <https://q.utoronto.ca/> and login using your UTORid and password. Once you have logged in to Quercus using your UTORid and password, look for the **My Courses** module, where you’ll find the link to the website for all your Quercus-based courses. (Your course registration with ACORN gives you access to the course website in Quercus.) Information for students about using Quercus can be found at: <https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10701>. Students experiencing difficulties accessing Quercus should contact the registrar’s office of their college.

Course Schedule (subject to change)

Note about texts listed as “translate” in Primary sources – In Weeks 6 through 11, students working from Hebrew or Greek will be encouraged to provide a translation of a passage from one of the texts for the week. Passages will be assigned at the end of the previous class meeting to those participating in translation activity.

Week 1

Tues., Jan. 6

Course introduction

Content introduction: Gender and power, texts and contexts

Reading: Ahmed, “A Killjoy Manifesto” (pp. 251-268 in Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*)

Week 2

Tues., Jan. 13

The root of it all: Foucault on power

Reading: Foucault, *History of Sexuality volume 1* (in English or French)

Week 3

Tues., Jan. 20

Contemporary gender theory – origins: Butler

Reading: Butler, *Gender Trouble*

Week 4

Tues., Jan. 27

Gender and power today: Ahmed

Reading: Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*

Week 5

Tues., Feb. 3

Gender, feminism, and the Bible

Reading: Koosed, “Reading the Bible as a Feminist”; Thiede, “Taking Biblical Authors at Their Word”; Chapman, “Modern Terms and Their Ancient Non-Equivalents.”

Week 6

Tues., Feb. 10

Judges and women

Readings: Mitchell, “Coming, Going, and Knowing”; van der Walt, “Is There a Man Here?”; Yoo, “Han-laden Women.”

Primary sources: Judges 4-5; 19-21

TRANSLATE – Judg 4:4-10 + 17-22 from MT or LXX (use Rahlfs’ “A” text)

Reading Week

Tues., Feb. 17

No class

Week 7

Tues., Feb. 24

Judges and masculinities

Readings: Bar Mymon, “This Season You’ll Be Wearing God”; Carman, “Abimelech the Manly Man?”

Primary sources: Judges 6-9

TRANSLATE – Judg 9:46-57 from MT or LXX (use Rahlfs’ “A” text)

Week 8

Tues., Mar. 3

Samuel & Kings: Trauma, Trial, Trans

Readings: Thiede, “Hidden in Plain Sight”; Kim & Nyengele, “Murder S/He Wrote”; Guest, “Modeling the Transgender Gaze.”

Primary sources: 1 Samuel 9-31; 2 Samuel 11-12; 2 Kings 9-10

TRANSLATE – 2 Kgs 9:4-14 from MT or LXX (4 Kgdms 9:4-14)

Week 9

Tues., Mar. 10

Ezekiel: Embodiment

Readings: Shields, “Multiple Exposures”; Morse, “Judgement”; Graybill, “Embodiment in Ezekiel.”

Primary sources: Ezekiel 16, 23, 37

TRANSLATE – Ezek 37:1-14 from MT or LXX

Week 10

Tues., Mar. 17

Ben Sira: husbands and wives, fathers and daughters

Readings: Camp, “Understanding a Patriarchy”; Calduch-Benages, “Good and bad wives” and “Cut Her Away.”

Primary sources: Sirach 23-26, 42 (in NETS)

TRANSLATE – Sir 42:1-14 from Hebrew (bensira.org or handout) or LXX

Week 11

Tues., Mar. 24

The *Serekh* texts from Qumran: sexuality and celibacy

Readings: Ilan, “Reading for Women”; Taylor, “Women”; Wassen, “Women, Worship”; Mermelstein, “Conceptions of Masculinity.”

Primary sources: Collins & Nati, pp. 36-154 (1QS, 1QSa – English translations only; notes and commentary optional)

TRANSLATE – 1QSa 1:1-11 (pp. 145 & 147 in Collins & Nati)

Week 12

Tues., Mar. 31

Course conclusion: Reparative reading

Readings: Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading”; Butler, “Conclusion.”

Exam Week

TBD

Evaluation

Requirements

The course participants as a group will determine the course requirements and evaluation formats in the first session. The consensus of the group will then be recorded and posted on Quercus before the second session, forming an addendum to the syllabus. Requirements will include some combination of class participation, oral presentation(s), and written assignment(s); for students in programs focused on biblical studies, it will include translation.

Grading System - Graduate Degree Students

5000, 6000 and 7000 level courses use the following alpha grading scale:

A+	(90-100)	Profound & creative
A	(85-89)	Outstanding
A-	(80-84)	Excellent
B+	(77-79)	Very Good
B	(73-76)	Good
B-	(70-72)	Satisfactory
FZ	(0-69)	Failure

Please see the appropriate Conjoint Degree handbook for more details about the grading scale and non-numerical grades (e.g. SDF, INC, etc.).

Policies

Class attendance. Students are expected to conduct themselves in a manner congruent with the vocation they are seeking to enter and in which they desire to give leadership. To that end, it is a regulation of Knox College that a minimum of approximately 80% attendance at courses (10 of 12 weeks) is required for credit; 100% attendance is expected at seminar courses. Habitual lateness for class will be counted as absence.

Teaching and learning are interactive, not passive, activities. Therefore, students may not “attend” an in-person class through unauthorized audio or video streaming or by watching or listening to a recording; I am not obligated to record or permitted to stream my in-person classes. Students requiring accommodations to attend class must present medical and/or Accessibility Services documentation that outlines the type and duration of accommodation(s) required.

Class recording. Much of the learning that goes on in the virtual or in-person classroom is founded upon mutual disclosure that takes place between instructor and student, and between students. Parties outside of this learning community have not committed themselves to this relationship of trust. A

student without an approved accommodation who wishes to make an audio recording of an in-person class must secure my agreement and the agreement of all classmates; livestreaming and video recordings are not permitted. Personal recordings may be used only by the student who made the recording; no recording may be reproduced, posted, or distributed without my written permission.

Late work (Graduate). The prima facie deadline for the completion of work in a course is the last day of the examination week for the trimester in which the course is taken. Students are expected to meet the course deadlines of the instructor offering the course and are advised to plan their research projects accordingly. Although I don't penalize late work, students are required to communicate ahead of the due date if they won't be able to submit on time. Students who find themselves unable to meet deadlines for completing coursework can, under certain conditions, receive extensions for completing the work after the dates set by the college in which the course is offered.

The authority to grant an extension for the completion of work in a course beyond the original TST or Knox deadline (whichever is earlier) for that course rests with the student's college Graduate Director, not me. Nevertheless, my signature is required for course extension requests to be processed. Students will petition their college Graduate Director for extensions, using a standard form provided by TST on its website. See Section A7.11 of the Conjoint Graduate Degree Handbook.

Course grades. Consistently with the policy of the University of Toronto, course grades submitted by an instructor are reviewed by a committee of the instructor's college before being posted to ACORN. Grades are not official until they are posted to ACORN. Course grades may be adjusted where they do not comply with [University Assessment and Grading Practices Policy](#), policies found in the TST conjoint program handbooks, or college grading policy.

Inclusive Language. Knox College has an [inclusive language policy](#). I expect students to use inclusive language, recognizing that in a course dealing with gender and power we may debate what inclusive language means and looks like.

Accessibility. Students with a disability or health consideration, whether temporary or permanent, are entitled to accommodation. Students in conjoint degree programs must register at the University of Toronto's [Accessibility Services offices](#). The sooner a student seeks accommodation, the quicker we can assist.

Plagiarism. Students submitting written material in courses are expected to provide full documentation for sources of both words and ideas in footnotes or endnotes. Direct quotations should be placed within quotation marks. (If small changes are made in the quotation, they should be indicated by appropriate punctuation such as brackets and ellipses, but the quotation still counts as a direct quotation.) Failure to document borrowed material constitutes plagiarism, which is a serious breach of academic, professional, and Christian ethics. An instructor who discovers evidence of student plagiarism is not permitted to deal with the situation individually but is required to report it to their head of college or delegate according to the Graduate program Handbook linked on the [TST Handbooks page](#) and the University of Toronto [Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters](#). A student who plagiarizes in this course will be assumed to have read the document "[Avoidance of plagiarism in theological writing](#)" published by the Graham Library of Trinity and Wycliffe Colleges.

Other academic offences. TST students come under the jurisdiction of the University of Toronto [Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters](#).

Use of Generative AI, e.g., ChatGPT, Copilot, Gemini, Claude. You may use generative artificial intelligence tools for learning and practicing the concepts in this course, but these tools may **not** be used for completing assignments in this course. That is, you may use these tools in the same ways you might discuss course content and assignments with your peers, but just as you may not collaborate with your peers to complete assignments, you may not use these tools to complete any assignment or exercise. If you use a GenAI tool, you should use the version of Microsoft Copilot licensed to the University of Toronto, which doesn't retain data for training purposes. Other tools may and do use data entered by users to train the AI, and unless you hold the rights to the prompts you use, you may be entering copyrighted material without the rights-holder's permission.

All of this said, I encourage you to think about the moral, ethical, and pedagogical implications of using GenAI. A first step is to complete the University of Toronto's "[Coursework and GenAI: A Practical Guide for Students](#)" in Quercus. Another step is to read the University of Alberta Library's "[Ethical Considerations for Using Generative AI](#)." You might also read this research paper, "[Your Brain on ChatGPT: Accumulation of Cognitive Debt when Using an AI Assistant for Essay Writing Task](#)," which reports on experiments showing that using GenAI literally makes students stupider.

This is a graduate-level research course. Any responses by a GenAI tool to questions you may pose are unlikely to be sufficiently complex or nuanced to meet the outcomes of the course; they may not even be factually correct. Reading sophisticated prose, writing, translating, and presenting are how we learn and how we learn to think creatively. There's no short-cut.

Back-up copies. Please make back-up copies of assignments before handing them in.

Obligation to check email. At times, I may decide to send out important course information by email. To that end, all students in conjoint programs are required to have a valid utoronto email address. Students must have set up their utoronto email address which is entered in the ACORN system. Information is available at www.utorid.utoronto.ca. I'm not able to help you with this. 416-978-HELP and the Help Desk at the Information Commons can answer questions you may have about your UTORid and password. Students should check utoronto email regularly for messages about the course. **Forwarding** your utoronto.ca email to a Hotmail, Gmail, Yahoo or other type of email account is not advisable. In some cases, messages from utoronto.ca addresses sent to Hotmail, Gmail or Yahoo accounts are filtered as junk mail, which means that emails from me may end up in your spam or junk mail folder.

Email communication with the course instructor. I aim to respond to email communications from students in a timely manner. All email communications from students in conjoint programs must be sent from a utoronto email address. Email communications from other email addresses are not secure, and also I cannot readily identify them as being legitimate emails from students. I'm not obliged to respond to email from non-utoronto addresses for students in conjoint programs, and I will not.

Course Learning Objectives/Outcomes

TST GRADUATE “DEGREE LEVEL EXPECTATIONS”	CORRESPONDING COURSE GOALS AND OUTCOMES	CORRESPONDING COURSE ELEMENTS / ASSIGNMENTS
EXPECTATIONS: <i>In this course students are expected to demonstrate the following:</i>		
1. Depth and Breadth of Knowledge	<i>Students will be able to explain and evaluate primary and secondary sources relating to gender and power in the Hebrew Bible and other early Jewish texts. Students will be able to assess the value of several methodological approaches to biblical texts.</i>	<i>Lectures, readings, seminars, assignments (including translation).</i>
2. Research and Scholarship 3. Level of Application of Knowledge	<i>Students will be able to design a research question and develop an argument about a Hebrew Bible text(s); and assemble and assess the relevant scholarship to create an innovative analysis of the question.</i>	<i>Presentation(s), written assignment(s).</i>
4. Professional Capacity or Autonomy	<i>Students will be able to formulate further research questions in biblical studies and create connections between the skills and knowledge gained in this course and contemporary contexts.</i>	<i>Presentation(s), written assignment(s).</i>
5. Level of Communication Skills 6. Awareness of the Limits of Knowledge	<i>Students will be able to communicate research results clearly both orally and in writing in ways consistent with the conventions of biblical studies at a scholarly level, while recognizing the limits of their knowledge and expertise.</i>	<i>Presentation(s), written assignment(s), class participation.</i>