



*Marla J. Selvidge is currently director, professor, and founder of the Center for Religious Studies at the University of Central Missouri. The Center currently offers online programs in religious studies. Selvidge has authored or edited at least ten books including The New Testament: A Timeless Book for All Peoples*

*(Prentice Hall, 1998) and*

*Notorious Voices: Feminist Biblical Interpretation, 1550–1920*

*(Paragon House, 1996). Recently she produced a collection of articles entitled “Slavery and Nineteenth Century Feminist Biblical Interpretation,” and contributed an article, “Menses, De Secretis Mulierum, and the Dead Sea Scrolls: A Comparative and Theoretical Analysis,” to a forthcoming book. Selvidge earned her PhD from Saint Louis University. An avid member of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature, she has presented papers at the Annual Meetings almost every year since 1980. She served two terms as co-Chair of the Religions, Social Conflict, and Peace Group at the AAR and as president of the Central States meeting of the SBL. She resides in Missouri with her companion and husband, Thomas C. Hemling, a PhD chemist and vice president of an animal health company.*

## **Enlivening the Dance with Audiovisual Aids**

Effective online teaching is analogous to dancing. Each partner must pay attention to the feet and body of the other while listening to the music. To walk away and lose sight of your partner ends the dance.

In all of my classes I attempt to keep students engaged in dancing with me throughout the entire semester. That dance includes constant assignments that feature videos, photographs, music, and objects of art that claim their interest. They discuss, report, take an exam, or create a presentation over materials that illuminate a textbook. Invited online specialists answer questions or analyze assignments. I have even invited the authors of our textbooks to chat with the students online in a discussion board format.

I have always been a “sound and light” professor. Face-to-face classes teemed with at least six different types of teaching strategies each time we met. I started with music, demonstrated key concepts with visual presentations, and involved students in discussion questions every fifteen minutes or so in the class. On most days I brought in art objects that illustrated the topic and began class with reports on religion and the news. Invited guest speakers brought diversity to

the assigned topics.

Audiovisual aids help to bring religions to life. Comprehending religious traditions takes more than words on a page. Students experience religions through viewing pictures and videos of the people, rituals, art, and architecture, and through listening to music. Bringing art objects to class was a thrill for students. For instance, students could touch a Tibetan prayer flag or wheel, or statue of a deity, or try on a Jewish prayer shawl in class, but online they would have to experience these objects through video or photograph.

For every class I search the Web and university library to find free audio and video examples that will help illustrate the textbook or topic. During the past twenty years I have invited scores of speakers to campus. With their permission, we taped all of those lectures and use them in our classes. I also received copyright permission for scores of videos. Only a few producers rejected my requests. So now we have hundreds of short clips of speakers and religious practices that are housed on a closed server and that can be used in any of our classes.

Here are two examples: In my “Islam” class, I received permission to use the video *Empire of Faith*. Since the drop-add period is almost ten days at my university, I have students enrolling after we have been in class for two weeks. I solved the problem of needing students to catch up in the “Islam” class by beginning with a very long video that covers the history of Islam. Students produce a report on key places, characters, and movements at the end of this film. We begin the regular assignments after the showing of the film, which gives an excellent historical view of Islam. I have also used *Who Wrote the Bible?* for both “Ancient Israel and Judaism” and “The Bible as Literature” classes. Students produce a report that asks them to answer questions based on the film.

Using videos is an excellent strategy to employ in order to make the topic live and keep the dance exciting for students who are visually oriented. The films keep them interested and asking questions. Many students thank me for taking the extra time to add videos that illustrate the religions. While the same videos may be viewed in a face-to-face class, online students can fit the video into their schedule. They may watch all or part of it and may repeat it often if they did not understand it. They may even share it with their families.

Free videos illustrating important historical and ethical issues in religions can be linked directly

to an online class using YouTube, the History Channel, PBS *Frontline* videos, JSTOR videos, Open Education Resources, National Geographic videos, Films on Demand (Films Media Group), NBC Learn, and more. Companies like Ambrose Video Publishing allow faculty to rent an online film for a semester for a price.

Obtaining copyright permission is not very difficult. Every religion hopes for an audience that understands it, and many produce informative videos explaining their history and traditions. After teaching such courses as “Religions in America” and “New Religions,” I e-mailed the headquarters of several religions and asked for permission to house their videos on our closed server. Almost every religion has their own Website these days, and most have their own server that houses videos or audios that can be linked to your online class. If you can’t find what you want for free, consider requiring students to buy a DVD.

- Start
- Prev
- 1
- [2](#)
- [3](#)
- [Next](#)
- [End](#)