The summer CAT grant came at a wonderful time. One of my longstanding courses that I first developed for Goucher College over 10 years ago, “Jewish and Christian Feminism,” was overdue for revisioning, and given a number of factors in my department and at the college, I decided that fall 2015 would be a good time to reinvent the course, Rel 240, “Religion and Feminist/Gender Studies.”

As I was at work building a list of resources to consult for this project, I learned that the Religion Department had remaining library funds to make book purchases for Reeve’s. My colleagues in the department agreed that this would be a serendipitous opportunity not only to update the course, but the library collection accordingly. Donna Moyer and Janet Ohles from the library were most helpful with a quick response to purchase as many of the books on my long “wish list” as possible. Please see the appended list of new books we have purchased for our collection in concert with this course.

As the new books began to come in, Donna further suggested that we might store them in the CAT meeting room on the second floor of Reeve’s, in order for me to begin to peruse this considerable quantity of material (most of it new to me). I have to say that this was the beginning of the most satisfying and enjoyable part of my CAT summer project: I began to take long quiet sessions in the library CAT meeting room, poking through this new treasure trove, reading, thinking, learning, and beginning to imagine what the course might look like. What a pleasure!

I believe that providing these kinds of opportunities to faculty is perhaps one of CAT’s most significant functions. This summer I was reminded of a similar pleasure I took a number of years ago, when Bob Mayer and I jointly received a CAT summer grant to develop our course, “The Civil Rights Movement and the Moral Life.” Then as also this summer, being supported to further my own intellectual development and background in a particular area of my field, for the purpose of sharing this new knowledge with students, is a benefit of the liberal arts professor that I consider to be invaluable.

As I read, learned and imagined, a number of distinct goals were at the center of my thinking. I wished to update the course with new material that represented a much wider diversity of religious traditions from global regions. I also wanted to incorporate recent research from gender studies, and invite students to contemplate the differences between gender and feminist studies. Additionally, I hoped to have the course in some way address this year’s InFocus, “Poverty and Inequality”; and lastly, to incorporate digital storytelling in the course as a learning method and goal.
I enjoyed the sense of creating a complex puzzle as I worked to develop and incorporate all these elements into the course. I had decided to use the organizational method of “flashpoints” in the course; this would give us the opportunity to focus quickly and dive deeply into very specific issues/religions/experiences. Another serendipitous opportunity arose when I learned that the Women’s Ordination Conference would be holding an international gathering in Philadelphia, in Sept. 2015, just prior to the visit of Pope Francis. A new documentary about this group of Roman Catholic women also was released this fall, Radical Grace, that provided a very human and even intimate portrayal of Roman Catholic nuns, disrupting common stereotypes and portraying their strength, resolve and feminist orientation for social justice.

I simultaneously worked with the Mellon Digital Storytelling faculty group to sort through diverse applications to imagine how digital storytelling could be incorporated into this course. From its inception I have concluded the course with an assignment that uses feminist method and values to enact an in depth interview conducted by student pairs. We use HIRB process to deeply listen to diverse adult women regarding the intersection of their sense of feminist consciousness and religious/spiritual convictions, practice and identity. As I updated this element of the course, after reviewing many options, I decided to include a very user-friendly digital application, “VoiceThread,” to invite students to develop a story based on their interview. This final project’s goal is to portray a careful and deeply heard narrative of this woman’s life, and students’ own analysis of the same, drawing from course methods and materials.

I also decided to experiment with use of a course blog for shorter writing assignments connected to our flashpoints. This has proven to be a wonderful experiment for me. I’ve learned a lot about blog writing, and it has been fascinating to observe the students finding their own voices and speaking with something of a different, more empowered voice, as a result of the blog.

Please see the two attachments I enclose with this report of my activities: 1) the book purchase list for Reeve’s; and 2) the syllabus for the course.

As I conclude this report, and as the semester of teaching this revised course comes to its end, I feel a lot of satisfaction about what students are taking from the course. I think our flashpoint on Mizuko Kuyo has been most fascinating for us, and has provided the deepest learning. I never would have developed such a specific and finely tuned focus point in this course, had it not been for the time, the resources and the opportunity provided to me by this CAT support. The deep quiet space and time for my own learning and development inspired me throughout the summer and this fall, and I believe this has been infectious with the eight women students who are completing the course. When I present at the CAT seminar in spring 2016, I hope to share some of their VoiceThread stories and provide a glimpse of what they have accomplished. Thank you!