Islam: Religion and Culture

Instructor
Mohsen Goudarzi

Description
This course introduces students to some of the major social, intellectual, cultural, artistic, and political dimensions of Islam. The lectures and assigned readings are structured into the following four units, providing a basic level of literacy in the chief events, narratives, rites, ideas, characters, localities, and movements associated with Islam:

Unit 1. Islamic history from its inception in the seventh century down to the present, with emphasis on the life of Prophet Muhammad and the early Caliphate.

Unit 2. The authoritative texts of Islam, i.e. the Qur’an and Prophet Muhammad’s traditions (Hadith).

Unit 3. The discursive and institutional traditions of Islamic civilization.

Unit 4. The transformation of Muslim life and thought in the modern period.

Requirements
1. Careful reading of the assigned materials, which amount to around 50 pages per session. To motivate timely study of the readings and measure student comprehension, five unannounced quizzes will be taken during the semester.
2. Participation and active engagement in class.
3. Three take-home exams: these exams test your understanding of the material covered in the first three components of the course (Historical Outline, Scriptures, Discourses and Institutions). Each exam poses a set of three questions. You need to write a two-paragraph essay in response to each question, in the process showcasing your ability to synthesize and analyze the material presented in the readings and lectures.
4. Islam in the Media: this is a five-page essay on a topic of interest to modern Western discourse about Islam (law, violence, democracy, etc.). The goal of this assignment is to improve your ability to think critically about the claims and analyses made in the media about Islam and Muslim societies. You first need to find a substantial and relevant news coverage in a national newspaper (as an example, see the following article in The New York Times, published July 10,
2016: “A Saudi Morals Enforcer Called for a More Liberal Islam. Then the Death Threats Began”). Your task is to write a review of the selected coverage by utilizing the knowledge you have gained in this course. In writing the review, you may criticize specific aspects of the coverage, corroborate some of its points, reflect on its underlying assumptions, and provide a more nuanced analysis when necessary.

**Honors Students**

This course is open to Honors students, who share the first three requirements (readings, participation, 3 take-home exams) with non-Honors members of the class. Instead of writing a 5-page “Islam in the Media” essay, however, Honors students should submit a 15 page research paper on a specific topic or theme discussed in the course. Each student will be expected to finalize a topic by September 25, and develop a pertinent reading list and reading plan for their paper by October 4. The paper topic, together with the reading list and plan, should be developed in consultation with the instructor, who will meet each Honors students two times (TBD) to discuss their readings and assess their progress.

**Books to Purchase**


**Grading**

**Grading for Honors Students**

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<td>Class Participation</td>
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**Academic Integrity**

You are welcome, indeed encouraged, to discuss any and all aspects of this course with other students. However, your take-home exams and the final essay must represent your own independent analysis of the material covered in readings and lecture. Any collaboration on the exams and the essay is, therefore, prohibited. Moreover, you need to acknowledge explicitly any sources that you use in your writing. For further information about the expected standards of academic integrity, please visit [https://oscai.umn.edu/content/plagiarism](https://oscai.umn.edu/content/plagiarism). Departure from these standards will have adverse
consequences for your grade and, in some cases, your standing at the university. If you have any questions in this regard, please let me know.

**No Laptop Policy**

The use of laptops in the classroom is prohibited. This is because laptop users often attend to online activities unrelated to the course. More importantly, research shows that even if you use your laptop only to take notes, you and those sitting next to you are likely to be distracted and perform poorly on the exams compared to students who do not use a laptop and do not sit next to laptop users.

**Absence and Late Submission**

You are allowed two absences in the course, for which you need to notify me before your planned absence. If you have more than two absences, or absences without prior notification, that will have a negative impact on your grade. No extensions will be granted for take-home exams and the final review unless under extenuating circumstances beyond your control. Late submissions will have a negative impact on your grade, with each day corresponding to a four-point grade loss for the assignment in question (on a 100-point scale).

**Students with disabilities:**

If you have a documented disability and need special accommodations for this course, please let me know as soon as possible. For the university policy in this regard, see [https://regents.umn.edu/sites/regents.umn.edu/files/policies/DisabilityServices.pdf](https://regents.umn.edu/sites/regents.umn.edu/files/policies/DisabilityServices.pdf).
Note: Items preceded by “PT” are primary texts in translation, which will be posted to the course website.

| Lecture 1 (Sep 4): Introduction |
|---------------------------------
| What is Islam and why does it matter? |
| What to expect from this course, and what it expects from you |

### Unit 1: Historical Outline

**Lecture 2 (Sep 6): Before Islam**

1. Fred Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*  
The Near East on the Eve of Islam, 1-38  

**Lecture 3 (Sep 11): The Prophet**

1. Michael Cook, *Muhammad*  
   Introduction, Maps, Background, Life, The monotheist universe, Monotheist history, Monotheist law, 1-50  
2. PT: An account of the beginning of revelation, from al-Bukhārī’s *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, “kitāb badʾ al-wahy,” no. 3; plus the first five verses of Sūrat al-‘Ālāq.

**Lecture 4 (Sep 13): The Prophet (cont.)**

1. Michael Cook, *Muhammad*  
   Monotheist politics, The sources, Origins, Conclusion (51-89)  
   The Story of the Aws and the Khazraj, 145-8  
   The Incident at Khaybar, 91-4  
3. PT: The poem *Ṭalaʿ al-badr*, thought to have been sung by the Medinese upon the Prophet’s arrival, to be played and discussed in class.
Lecture 5 (Sep 18): **Rise of an Empire (Expansion)**

3. PT: The alleged dialogue between Patriarch John Sedra (631-648) and an Arab commander, the earliest recorded Muslim-Christian debate (Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, 459-465).

Lecture 6 (Sep 20): **Rise of an Empire (Infighting)**

   

2. PT: Maʿmar b. Rāshid, *Expeditions*
   
   The Oath of Fealty to Abū Bakr at the Portico of the Sāidah Clan, 193-204

3. PT: Husayn’s alleged sermon on the day of Karbala.

Lecture 7 (Sep 25): **Disintegration and Diffusion**

Adam Silverstein, *Islamic History: A very short introduction*

The Story, 9-48

Sep 27: No Class

Lecture 8 (Oct 2): **Disintegration and Diffusion (cont.)**

Adam Silverstein, *Islamic History: A very short introduction*

Peoples and Cultures, 49-62

Religious Significance, 108-118

Political Significance, 119-132

**First Exam Distributed in class, due next week**

**Unit 2: Scriptures**

Lecture 9 (Oct 4): **The Qur’an**
1. Farid Esack, *The Qur’an: A user’s guide*
   - Introduction, 1-12
   - The Qur’an in the Lives of Muslims, 13-29
   - The Qur’an as Written Word, 56-77
2. PT: The following chapters from the Qur’an: 1, 112, 91.

**Lecture 10 (Oct 9): The Qur’an (cont.)**
1. Farid Esack, *The Qur’an: A user’s guide*
   - Belief in the Qur’an, 146-165
   - Righteous Conduct in the Qur’an, 166-190
2. PT: Qur’an, chapter 19 (Maryam), verses 1-60.

**Lecture 11 (Oct 11): The Prophetic Corpus**
1. Jonathan Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad’s legacy*
   - Hadith and Its Terminology, 1-14
   - The Transmission and Collection of Prophetic Traditions, 15-23
   - Prophetic Traditions in Shiite Islam, 123-129
2. PT: The chapter headings of al-Bukhari’s collection.

**Lecture 12 (Oct 16): The Prophetic Corpus (cont.)**

**Second Exam: Distributed in class, due next week**

**Unit 3: Discourses and Institutions**

**Lecture 13 (Oct 18): Law (schools)**

**Lecture 14 (Oct 23): Law (case study: women)**
2. Amina Wadud-Muhsin, *Qur’an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective*
Rights and roles of women: some controversies, 62-93.

Lecture 15 (Oct 25): Theology (schools)
2. Oliver Leaman and Sajjad Rizvi, “The Developed kalām Tradition,” The Cambridge Companion to Islamic Theology, 77–96
3. PT: A selection of Qur’anic passages pertaining to the question of free will

Lecture 16 (Oct 30): Theology (Case study: free will vs. predestination)
2. PT: Commentary on the Creed of Islam
   The Creator and the Actions of His Creatures, 80-87
   The Creature’s Legal Responsibility and Allah’s Sustenance and Guidance, 88-98

Lecture 17 (Nov 1): Philosophy (developments and major figures)

Lecture 18 (Nov 6): Philosophy (case study: Illuminationism)

Lecture 19 (Nov 8): Sufism (developments and major figures)

William Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-ʿArabī’s metaphysics of imagination
   Introduction (ix–xxii), Overview (3–30)
Lecture 21 (Nov 15): **Sufism (case study: Persian literature)**

   Introduction, xiii-xxxv
   The Song of the Reed, 7-9
   The Greek and Chinese Painters, 319-321
2. Selections from Dick Davis, *Faces of Love: Hafez and the Poets of Shiraz*

**Third Exam: Distributed in class, due on November 27**

Nov 20: No Class

**Unit 4: Controversy and Conflict**

Lecture 22 (Nov 27): **Westerners in Muslim Lands**


Lecture 23 (Nov 29): **Muslims in the West**


Lecture 24 (Dec 4): **War on Terror**

John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*
Religion and Politics, 207-247.

Lecture 25 (Dec 6): **War on Terror (cont.)**

   ([http://theweek.com/articles/589924/brief-history-isis](http://theweek.com/articles/589924/brief-history-isis))

Islam in the Media essay: Due on December 18