

### **Course Description**

This course will introduce you to the diversity of religious beliefs and practices in Islam, one of the world's major religions and multi-cultural traditions. It will bring out both traditional spirituality and the critical issues confronting Muslims today.

We will survey the origins and early history of the Islamic faith, with emphases on the role of Muhammad as Prophet and the revelation of the Qur'an. A major aim of this course is to give voice to Islamic texts and provide a window into how Muslims in varying socio-historical contexts view themselves. Among the specific topics addressed are: Islamic sacred sources such as Qur'an and Sunna, Islamic doctrine and law, philosophy, Sufi mysticism, gender and the role of women, and the ongoing debate between secularism and traditionalism in contemporary Islamic societies.

A premise of this class is that different Muslims have had vastly differing (at times complementary, at times opposing) interpretations of Islam, at times referring to different texts as authoritative, at times offering radically different interpretations of the same texts. Given this spectrum of interpretations, we will never assume that any one Muslim's perspective is somehow "orthodox" to the exclusion of all other perspectives. Our readings will include samples of primary sources from all 1400 years of Islamic civilizations in many regions of the Muslim world. It is, in short, a course on the idea of Islam, an idea which continues to take shape.

This course assumes no prior knowledge of the subject. In addition, one does not need to be a believer in any particular religion, or for that matter a skeptic, to realize the importance of Islam in history and in the contemporary world.

### **Objectives**

From the foregoing you can see that the ultimate aim of the course is to neither glorify nor critique Islam or Muslims but rather to equip you with the tools to evaluate the ways in which Islam is conceptualized. In short, the goals and objectives for you as a student enrolled in this course are:

- to gain factual knowledge of the Islamic religion,
- to gain a broader understanding and appreciation of the role of Islam and Muslim religious and cultural activity past and present,
- to develop the ability to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view related to the study of Islam, including the problems related to the study of Islam such as negative media stereotypes and "essentialism," and, of course,
- to develop skills in expressing yourself orally and in writing within and beyond the academic study of religion.

### **Required Readings**

- ❖ Carl Ernst. *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2003).
- ❖ Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations* (Ashland: White Clouds Press, 2007).
- ❖ Farid Esack. *On Being a Muslim: Finding a Religious Path in the World Today* (London: Oneworld Publications Ltd., 1999 [reprint 2009]).

Additional readings will be made available on Blackboard (BB) throughout the semester. We will also make extensive use of resources available on the Internet. The web is not a library but it can be a fabulous resource if navigated cautiously, i.e., if you critically evaluate and assess the information you find there.

## **Blackboard**

This course will use the communication tools on Blackboard. Announcements, readings, documents, and grades will be posted on Blackboard as well as some helpful Internet links. Many of our assignments require you to use Blackboard as well. You would do well to acquaint yourselves with some of the Blackboard features and use them as a frequent point of entry and exploration around many of the issues we will be discussing.

## **Grading**

This is a reading and writing intensive class. The class is listed at the 300 level, and I will treat it accordingly. You do not need to major in religion to take this class. However, I do expect you to work hard and to contribute to class discussions. While I will lecture for part of the class almost every day, it will be conducted much more on a seminar model of examining your reactions to the reading material. The readings are engaging, and heavy. If you have not done the readings, it will simply be impossible for you to participate in the discussion. While we will suffer from that, the main damage will be done to your own learning and your grade. This equally applies to the amount and quality of writing expected of you.

The Final Grade will be calculated as follows:

- |                                  |     |
|----------------------------------|-----|
| 1. Preparation and Participation | 10% |
| 2. One (1) Lecture Presentation  | 10% |
| 3. Academic Journal              | 10% |
| 4. Two (2) Tests (7.5% each)     | 15% |
| 5. Midterm Essay                 | 15% |
| 6. Final Essay                   | 15% |
| 7. Research Paper                | 25% |
| a. First Paper (10%)             |     |
| b. Final Revised Paper (15%)     |     |

## **Course Requirements**

### **1. Preparation and Participation (10%)**

Attendance: You must be present for class meetings in order to do well in the course. The assigned readings will be supplemented by in-class lectures, discussions, exercises, and more. Make sure you arrive for class on time. Latecomers will be counted absent at the very beginning of class. Should you be late, you are permitted to enter the classroom only if you do so silently and without disturbing class proceedings. You are allowed to be absent from a total of three (3) class sessions. With every additional absence your final grade for this class will go down 5%. This means you will have to plan ahead with your allowance of three absences. Talk to me ahead of time if you foresee any difficulties for yourself with this policy. My expectations of professionalism extend, of course, to classroom etiquette. Emailing, chatting, or web-browsing are not allowed. This includes the use of cell phones during class. If you use your phone, let's say, to tweet or to check the stock market, or if your phone goes off during class, you will be counted as absent for that day as well.

Preparation and Participation: There will be ample opportunity for you to participate in our class. Apart from my lectures you will be involved in activities such as class discussion, group work with subsequent presentations, and in-class writing assignments. While I will call on you often and ask about the content of assigned readings you are strongly encouraged to ask questions and suggest topics for discussion in class on your own. I expect you to keep up with all readings and assignments. That means reading the material several times, making notes, and coming to class with specific questions; part of this preparation should include consultation with recommended readings and standard reference works in order to fully understand the argument in the text.

Student Minutes and Presentation: Taking notes on lectures and class discussion is a critical part of your learning experience. You are all expected to take notes during class as you will have to draw on them for your own work as well as when preparing for the essays. Your notes will also be the basis for **brief 2-minute presentations** that each of you is to give in class as part of your participation grade. Every day our meetings will start with one of you presenting on the previous class session. Be concise as you only have two minutes of talking time, and resist the temptation to provide a summary of the previous class. Instead, highlight the main points and provide details only when relevant. Your peers will provide you with feedback on your presentation's content, structure, and delivery. Additional tips and guidelines for presentations and public speaking can be found on our Blackboard site.

## **2. Academic Journal (10%)**

For this class you are asked to keep an academic journal. The academic journal is designed to encourage you to keep up with your reading, keep you engaged with the material, enrich class discussion (as you will already have something to say), help you practice your skills in thinking critically and writing fluidly, and, finally, provide a log of your thoughts at this state in your studies. We will use Blackboard's blog function to collect your entries which also allows us to read and comment on each other's writing. Additional guidelines and descriptions can be found on our Bb site.

## **3. Lecture Presentation (10%)**

During the course of the semester we will be discussing a wide range of concepts, events, or people in the history and contemporary reality of Islam. Frequently we will benefit from additional information and analysis that goes beyond what our readings offer. Therefore, you will be assigned a particular topic for which to develop expertise through additional out-of-class research. You will be responsible for an eight-to-ten minute lecture presentation based on your topic in order to deepen the class' understanding of the subject (see additional guidelines on Blackboard). Furthermore, everybody will write one peer assessment for another class member's lecture presentation over the course of the semester (guidelines available on Blackboard). All presenters are required to meet with me prior to the presentation date to discuss the results of their initial research and ideas for the presentation.

## **4. Two Tests (15%; 7.5% each)**

Twice during the semester, we will have a quiz based on names and terms of importance for understanding the subject of the course. These quizzes will be given outside of the regular meeting times (see course schedule for dates and times). The names and terms will be drawn from a larger list to be distributed in advance (BB). Additional guidelines and samples of answers that would qualify for different grades can be found on Blackboard.

## **5. Midterm Essay (15%) & 6. Final Essay (15%)**

The midterm and final essays on an assigned topic (to be announced on Blackboard) encourage you to study one topic carefully and in its context, as you refine your ability to write clearly and argue persuasively. Both the midterm and final essay will be take-home essays of 1,200-1,500 words. I will post in advance on Blackboard, both for the midterm and the final, a set of essay questions from which to choose your topic, as well as guidelines on how to write essays. I will be looking for two things in your writing: a) evidence of your knowledge and understanding of class material and b) your ability to use or apply the material in ways that go beyond what you have read or heard in class. I encourage you to write a thesis paragraph ahead of time and to discuss it with me. Many students have found that it improves the quality of their writing. Support for your writing will also come from your peers through a peer review process (see guidelines on Bb).

## **7. Academic Research Paper Project (25%): First Paper (10%), Revised Paper (15%)**

The research paper is an opportunity to engage more deeply with a particular topic of your choice related to this course. Your research paper must be 3,000-3,600 words. The grade for the research paper project will be calculated as follows: First Paper (10%) and Final Revised Paper (15%). You cannot expect to produce your best writing when you first get started. Thus, revising your work is an integral part of successful writing. Revising is a process of rethinking your paper and differs from simple proofreading. As you revise your paper you will have to reconsider your argument, review your evidence, refine your purpose, and reorganize your presentation. You will find that I indicated different dates and deadlines for these activities on the course schedule at which I expect you to discuss your results to date with me and/or your peers. Please familiarize yourself with the additional guidelines and instructions on our Bb site.

### **Office Hours and Opportunities for Conferencing about Your Writing**

The number and nature of the writing assignments make this a writing-intensive course. Peer reviews, class discussion, and written feedback that I give you on your assignments are meant to help you reflect on your writing and to enhance your written work through a series of revisions. In addition to these formal procedures, I also encourage you to see me during my office hours in order for us to reflect together on how to improve your writing. If my office hours conflict with your schedule, I will be happy to make an appointment with you at a more convenient time. At a minimum, I expect everyone to stop by my office at least once in the semester—by yourself, in pairs, or in small groups. Bring a piece of writing together with feedback and comments so that we have something to start our discussion.

### **Facilitating a Stronger Learning Experience**

Those students needing help with writing, English, or research, please also note the support provided by the Writing Center run by Dr. Adrian Ivey or the ESL program headed by Dr. Stacy Bell. If a disability requires special circumstances for you in the classroom, taking notes, or taking tests or exams, please contact the Office of Disability Services to initiate the accommodation request process. More detailed information is available on the website at [www.ods.emory.edu](http://www.ods.emory.edu).

### **Academic Fairness**

All students deserve an atmosphere of fairness, honesty and maturity. All of us at Oxford College live by the standards set forth in the Honor Code, which includes the “responsibility for maintaining standards of unimpeachable honesty in all academic work.” The Honor Code also indicates that we cannot tolerate actions in others that violate this code, so we (and you) are obligated to report violations. Oxford College takes this honor code very seriously, as do I, and penalties for violations are severe. Please read the Honor Code carefully; I will trust you to conduct yourselves accordingly.

## Course Schedule

### Week 1

**Jan. 12**            **Syllabus and Introduction**

**MLK Day (Jan. 17)**

## **I. Islam in the Eyes of the West**

### Week 2

**Jan. 19**            **Clash of Civilizations?**

Reading: Ernst, *Following Muhammad*, Preface and Chapter 1, "Islam in the Eyes of the West." Additional readings (BB): Huntington et al.

### Week 3

**Jan. 24**            **The Study of Islam and the Nature of Religion**

Reading: Ernst, *Following Muhammad*, Chapter 2. Additional reading (BB): description of lecture presentation assignment (incl. peer assessment guidelines)

## **II. The Sacred Sources of Islam**

**Jan. 26**            **The Prophet Muhammad: The Muhammad of History**

Reading: Ernst, *Following Muhammad*, pp. 71-93 (108-119). Additional reading (BB): Selections from Alfred Guillaume's translation of Ibn Ishaq's *Sirat Rasul Allah*.

### Week 4

**Jan. 31**            **The Muhammad of Authority and the Muhammad of Grace**

Reading: "[The Hilya, or the Adornment of the Prophet](#)", from the website of Pakistani calligrapher Rashid Butt. Qasidah al-Burdah (in translation).

**Feb. 2 Introduction to the Qur'an (as Written Text)**

Reading: Ernst, *Following Muhammad*, pp. 93-105. Reading: Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations* (Ashland: White Clouds Press, 1999), pp.1-40.

### Week 5

**Feb. 7 The Qur'an: Translation and Recitation**

Reading: Sells (cont.). Additional reading (BB): Andrea Useem, "Islam, a Vocal Exercise of Faith," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 47:13 (2000), A72.

**Feb. 9 The Qur'an: Translation and Recitation (cont.)**

Group project: Translation/Recitation of the Qur'an

### Week 6

**Feb. 14**            **The Qur'an as Guidance**

Reading (BB): Selections from Bruce Lawrence, *The Qur'an: A Biography* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2007).

## **Feb. 16 Contemporary Scriptural Interpretation: Qur'an and Woman**

Reading (BB): Excerpts from Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Reading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Penerbit Fajar Sdn. Bhd., 1992).

### **Quiz I: Thursday, Feb. 17 (9:00-9:30 a.m.)**

- Post drafts of midterm essays (minimum of 1,000 words) on Monday, February 21 (3:30 p.m.; use wiki function on BB)
- Review midterm essay drafts in your peer group (use the wiki function on BB) by Wednesday, February 23 (3:30 p.m.)

## **III. Islamic Ethics and Society**

### **Week 7**

#### **Feb. 21 Introduction to Islamic Law: History and Early Developments**

Reading: Ernst, *Following Muhammad*, Chapter 4, pp. (108-119) 119-127. Additional reading (BB): Selections from Shafi'i's *Risala* on the authority of the Prophet Muhammad's Sunna. Web Sources: [Forty Hadith](#).

#### **Feb. 23 Hadith and Woman**

Reading (BB): Excerpts from Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1991), pp. 1-4, 49-61, 62, 64, 70-81, excerpted in Charles Kurzman, ed., *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook* (Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 112-26.

- Final copy of midterm essay due Sunday, February 27

### **Week 8**

#### **Feb. 28 The Practice of Faith**

Reading (BB): "Ritual Worship: Selections from the Qur'an." Web Resources: Prof. Alan Godlas' ["The Sunnah: Practice and Law"](#) page -- read section on Islamic Practice and explore some links to the five pillars. On the hajj, browse the web site: [Virtual Hajj](#)

#### **Mar. 2 Sacred Ritual: The Hajj**

Reading (BB): Chapter 17 of Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X / with the assistance of Alex Haley* (New York: Grove Press, 1965). Browse the following web sites: Deluxe Hajj 2010 from [USA, Canada](#), and [the UK](#).

- Last day for dropping courses without academic penalty: Friday, March 4
- Spring Recess: Monday, March 7-Friday, March 11
- Preparation statement on research paper topic (BB): Monday, March 14

## **IV. Islam in the Modern World**

### **Week 9**

#### **Mar. 14 Islamic Ethics in the Colonial Age**

Reading: Ernst, *Following Muhammad*, Chapter 4, pp. 127-139-141. Charles Kurzman, "[Bin Laden and Other Thoroughly Modern Muslims](#)," *Contexts* 1:4 (Winter 2002), pp. 13-20.

## **Mar. 16      Library Workshop**

- *Turn in “Discover Your Topic” (worksheet): Monday, March 21*

### **Week 10**

#### **Mar. 21      Rethinking Women in Society: Modern Debates on Women’s Rights**

Reading: Ernst, *Following Muhammad*, Chapter 4, pp. 142-151. Additional reading (TBA).

#### **Mar. 23      Modern Debates on Women’s Rights (cont.)**

Reading (BB): selections from Bouthaina Shaaban, *Both Right and Lefthanded: Arab Women Talk about Their Lives*, 1988. Additional reading (TBA).

- *Annotated Bibliography (BB): Monday, March 28*

## **IV. Ascending into Paradise and Returning to Earth: Spirituality and Mysticism**

### **Week 11**

#### **Mar. 28      Qur'an and Spirituality: The Nature of Islamic Mysticism**

Reading: Ernst, *Following Muhammad*, Chapter 5, pp. 164-168, 174-182. Web resources: Listen to the recordings from the NPR programs “[Rumi](#)” and “[Spirit of Islam](#)” and browse the associated websites for information on and samples of Islamic mysticism, poetry, and music.

#### **Mar. 30      Islamic Mysticism (cont.)**

- *Outline and Thesis Statement (BB): Sunday, April 3*

### **Week 12**

#### **Apr. 4 Mystical Poetry: Rumi**

Reading (BB): Prologue to Rumi’s *Masnavi*. Selections from Mystical Writings

#### **Apr. 6 The Spirituality of Shi‘ism**

Reading: Ernst, *Following Muhammad*, pp.168-174. BB: “A Shi’i Creed.” Web resources: [Photos of tombs of the Imams in Medina](#); [Photos of shrines relating to Ali](#); [Photos of shrines relating to the martyrdom of Husayn](#); [Photos of shrines relating to the 10th, 11th, and 12th Imams](#); [Tears for Kerbala, a children's book on the martyrdom of Husayn](#); [Chart of the 14 Infallibles](#); [Chart of Shi’i Groups](#); for comprehensive information on the Isma‘ili tradition, see the web site of the [Institute of Isma‘ili Studies](#).

#### **Quiz II: Thursday, April 7 (9:00-9:30 a.m.)**

- *Exchange Drafts of Research Papers with Peer Group Members: Monday, April 11*

### **Week 13**

#### **Apr. 11      Shi’i Spirituality: Lamentation and Redemptive Suffering**

Web resources: Michael Muhammad Knight, “[Bleeding for the Imam: Heartbreak and Catharsis in Muharram](#).” [Muharram Procession 1427](#) (video of procession in New York, February 2006); see also [Newsday report on violent Sunni protest](#).

**Apr. 13          In-class Peer Review of RP Drafts**

- *First Paper along with peer reviews is due on Saturday, April 18 (11:59 p.m.)*

**V. Rethinking Islam in the 21st Century**

**Week 14**

**Apr. 18          Progressive Islam: Farid Esack's *On Being a Muslim***

Reading: Esack, *On Being a Muslim*, pp. 1-110.

**Apr. 20          Progressive Islam: Farid Esack's *On Being a Muslim***

Reading: Esack, *On Being a Muslim*, remaining chapters.

**Final Week (Week 15)**

**Apr. 25          Conclusions**

Reading: Ernst, *Following Muhammad*, Postscript.

- *Turn in Final Revised Paper along with memo and abstract: Tuesday, April 26 (11:59 p.m.).*
- *Finished final essay due Sunday, May 1 (11:59 p.m.)*