

Oxford College of Emory University, Spring 2009

REL_OX 307 Islam

Instructor: Dr. Florian Pohl

TTh 2:30-3:45, Humanities 201

Office: Seney Hall 115E

Office Hours: MW 1:00-2:30, F 11:45-1:00, and by appointment

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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, politics, fundamentalism and *jihad*, the ongoing debate between secularism and traditionalism in contemporary Islamic societies and Islam in America.

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).
- ❖ Farid Esack. *On Being a Muslim: Finding a Religious Path in the World Today* (London: Oneworld Publications Ltd., 1999).

Note that neither of these two books is an ordinary textbook on Islam or Muslims. For those who want additional background or textbook-style information, see the *Encyclopedia Britannica* article “Islamic World,” by Marilyn R. Waldman, and return to it periodically throughout the class; it is a superb summary, though too dense to be absorbed in a single sitting. Electronic access is available through [DiscoverE](#) (search for “Britannica online”). Alternatively, introductory textbooks to the study of Islam such as Mahmoud Ayoub’s *Islam: Faith and History* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2004; call number for Oxford: 297 A983I) are fine choices to supplement your study.

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. Finally, we will view numerous films from Emory’s large collection of films on Islam and the Middle East. While I will show some of these films during class, other films have optional viewing times outside of class or can be checked out at the library’s circulation desk for personal viewing.

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. Lecture Presentation (10%)
3. Academic Journal (20%)
4. Midterm Essay (20%)
5. Final Essay (20%)
6. Research Paper (20%)

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.

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. Additional activities and assignments including peer assessments on written and oral work will also count toward your participation grade. I expect you to keep up with all readings and assignments and to get the notes for missed class sessions from your peers. 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.

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 a brief 3-minute presentation 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 three minutes of talking time. 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. 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). Your lecture will be graded based on content, organization, and delivery. As you will be covering important course content, your audience's responsibility is to listen actively and attentively, take notes, keep track of main ideas, and think critically in order to evaluate and pose questions after the lecture. Furthermore, everybody will write one peer assessment for another class member's lecture presentation over the course of the semester (guidelines available on Blackboard).

3. Academic Journal (20%)

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.

Content: In your reading response you will respond to the assigned readings. These responses are meant as free reflection opportunities and provide you with outlets for your

thoughts pertaining to the topics raised in the sources. Each journal entry should (1) briefly quote or summarize one passage in one assigned text for that one day, (2) record your honest and informed reflections on the reading, (3) include one discussion question on the assigned readings for the week. I usually post study prompts, questions or topics for each week's reading on Blackboard, but you are free to formulate your own response.

Although most of the journal entries will focus on the readings, there are two exceptions: (1) one journal entry must reflect on a site visit to a Muslim community in the Atlanta metropolitan area (see guidelines on BB); (2) another entry may be written in response to an approved event outside of class such as a film, lecture, or performance relating to Islamic civilization. For these special event items, you will need to think about how to relate the event to themes discussed in class.

Format and Due Date: Journal entries should be approximately 300 words, one typed page. Each entry must be posted to Blackboard before the class during which we treat the texts discussed in your journal entry. The only exceptions are films, site visits, and approved outside events which are to be turned in before the very next class. Late postings will not be accepted. The journal entry for the last day of class is required of everyone. No journal entries can be posted after the final class session.

Grading: These entries will be graded as either acceptable (check) or unacceptable (minus). A check means that you posted the entry on time and followed the instructions fully. I do not grade journals for thesis and organization, as I do other written work. Rules of grammar and style, however, still apply. Put forth your best effort as there will be no opportunities to re-write unacceptable journal entries. You are free to explore a variety of writing styles and voices and do not have to arrive at some finished view or conclusion. The entries are thus informal in the sense that they are exploratory. You control how well you do on this journal assignment, since your grade is determined by how many acceptable journal entries you submit (ones graded with a check, that is). Here is the scale:

- A=14 entries (scattered over at least 10 weeks);
- B=11 entries (scattered over at least 8 weeks);
- C= 8 entries (scattered over at least 6 weeks);
- D= 6 entries (scattered over at least 5 weeks);
- F= 4 or fewer entries.

4. Midterm Essay (20%) & 5. Final Essay (20%) or Soliya Connect Program (20%)

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. They will ask you to relate the readings of the course to their religious and historical contexts.

Both the midterm and final essay will be take-home essays of 1,200-1,500 words. Please use 12 point font (TNR), 1" margins, and double-spacing throughout. 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 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). We will use the wiki function on Blackboard for this purpose. A draft of your Midterm Essay (minimum of 1,000 words) must be posted for your peers on Tuesday, February 17. Give your editing comments on your partners' papers by Thursday, February 19 (2:30PM). The final draft is to be submitted through Blackboard no later than Sunday, February 22 (11:59 PM). Your first draft of the Final Essay (minimum of 1,000 words) must be exchanged with your peer reviewers on Friday, April 24. Provide your suggestions and feedback for revisions on your partners' papers by Tuesday, April 28 (2:30PM). The complete version must be submitted

through Blackboard no later than 12:00 NOON on Monday, May 4. Late submissions will not be accepted. Refer to the guidelines on peer editing on Blackboard.

The Soliya Connect Program (alternative to final essay assignment): The Soliya Connect Program directly links students from universities throughout the US, Europe and the Middle East via Soliya's customized online videoconferencing application. Soliya's program compliments the course work for Religion 307 by giving you the opportunity to discuss matters relating to tensions between the Arab & Muslim World and the West with students throughout the Muslim World. You will meet in your discussion groups for eight 2-hour sessions throughout the semester and, under the guidance of trained facilitators, discuss topics such as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the war on Iraq, religion and politics, terrorism, and the role of the media. Soliya's goals are for students to become more aware of the complexities of the situation in the Middle East and its relations to the US and Europe, to start observing media more critically. In addition to participating in discussion, you will complete a final project as part of your partaking in the Connect Program. See me at the beginning of the semester to discuss your participation in the program.

6. Academic Research Paper (20%)

The research paper is an opportunity to engage more deeply with a particular topic of your choice related to this course. It is of greatest importance that you choose a topic of interest to you. The research paper should ideally use both primary source material and appropriate secondary and theoretical studies to focus more closely on a particular subject. You can find a list of recommended resources on the [research guide](#) available on the library webpage. Your paper must not merely summarize the position maintained by another, but present your own argument, scholarly analyses and reflections. Your argument must be amply supported by the data reviewed.

Format, Length, Deadlines: Your research paper should be 3,000-3,600 words long. Use 12 point font (TNR), 1" margins, and double-spacing throughout (except for block quotations). Consistently follow one method for citing sources. Any established method is acceptable. That might mean, for instance, the methods outlined in the [MLA, APA, or Chicago Manual of Style](#). The paper must include a bibliography that lists all the works cited in your paper. Number your pages. Include a separate title page listing your name, the title of your paper, "Religion 307 Islam," and the date.

The research and writing process consists of different stages and includes a wide variety of activities such as making a decision about your research topic, locating the appropriate references and texts, devising an outline and initial bibliography for your paper, presenting your initial findings to a group of peers and eliciting feedback from them, writing a preliminary draft, and usually ends in editing and revising your paper before you turn in your final draft. 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.

- **Week 5 (2/9-2/13)**: Determine research paper topic and clear it with me
- **Friday 2/27**: Three annotations
- **Friday 3/6**: Annotated bibliography (minimum of six sources)
- **Tuesday 3/17**: Thesis statement and outline
- **Tuesday 3/31**: Draft for peer review (minimum of 2,400 words, completed bibliography)
- **Thursday 4/2**: In-class peer reviews (refer to peer review handout for guidelines)
- **Tuesday 4/14 (in class)**: Turn in final draft with copy of initial draft and peer reviews attached. Late Papers will not be accepted.

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 [Jessalyn P. Smiley](#), the Coordinator for Disability Services for Students at Emory.

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

1. Jan. 15 Syllabus and Introduction

MLK Day (Jan. 19)

I. Islam in the Eyes of the West

Week 2

2. Jan. 20 Clash of Civilizations?

Reading: Ernst, *Following Muhammad*, Preface and Chapter 1, "Islam in the Eyes of the West." Additional readings on BB (Huntington, Esposito, Said, Erikson, Sen)

Assignment (BB): Polls & Perceptions of the “Other”

3. Jan. 22 The Study of Islam and the Nature of Religion

Reading: Ernst, *Following Muhammad*, Chapter 2

Assignment (BB): webservation

II. The Sacred Sources of Islam

Week 3

4. Jan. 27 The Prophet Muhammad

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

5. Feb. 29 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.

Week 4

6. Feb. 3 Introduction to the Qur'an: The Qur'an as Recitation

Reading: Ernst, *Following Muhammad*, pp. 93-105. Surah al-Fatiha and Juz Amma (30th and final part of the Qur'an). Reading (BB): Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations* (Ashland: White Clouds Press, 1999), pp.1-40.

7. Feb. 5 The Qur'an as Guidance

Reading (BB): Selections from Bruce Lawrence, *The Qur'an: A Biography* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2007), chapters on, Abu Ja'far at-Tabari, Ibn Arabi, W. D. Mohammed, Osama bin Laden.

Note: Week 5 is the last week to determine research paper topics and clear them with me.

Week 5

8. Feb. 10 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), pp. 1-10 and 64-74, excerpted in Charles Kurzman, ed., *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook* (Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 127-138.

9. Feb. 12 Contemporary Scriptural Interpretation: Qur'an 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.

Exchange drafts of midterm essays (minimum of 1,000 words) on Tuesday, Feb 17 (2:30 PM; use wiki function on BB).

III. Islamic Ethics and Society

Week 6

10. Feb. 17 The Practice of Faith: Pilgrimage

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 following web sites: 1. Deluxe Hajj 2008 from [USA](#) + [UK](#), 2. [Egypt's Hajj Visa Business](#). 3. [Virtual Hajj](#)

11. Feb. 19 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).

Final copy of midterm essay due Sunday, February 22 (11:59 PM)

Week 7

12. Feb. 24 Introduction to Islamic Law: History and Developments/Shari'ah Mindedness (legal orientation; mode of piety)

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.

13. Feb. 26 Islamic Ethics on the Internet

Reading (BB): Charles Hirshkind, "Cassette Ethics: Public Piety and Popular Media in Egypt," in Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors (eds.), *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006), pp. 29-51. Emily Wax, "The Mufti in the Chat Room: Islamic Legal Advisers Are Just a Click Away From Ancient Customs," *Washington Post*, July 31, 1999, C1. Web resources: [Islam on the Internet](#) (click on " Part I: Building Islamic Communities Online.")

Three annotations due Friday, February 27

IV. Islam in the Modern World

Week 8

14. Mar. 3 Islamic Ethics in the Colonial Age

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

15. Mar. 5 Liberal Islam: Islamic debates on Democracy and Modernity

Reading: Ernst, *Following Muhammad*, Chapter 4, pp. 139-141. Kurzman, *Liberal Islam*, Chapters 1 and 7 (pp. 29-36.73-84). Electronic access is available through [DiscoverE](#) (search for "Kurzman Liberal Islam"). Optional web resources: [Liberal Islam Websites](#) (for exploration).

Annotated bibliography (minimum of six sources) due Friday, March 6

Last day for dropping courses without academic penalty: Friday, March 6

Spring Recess: Monday, March 9-Friday, March 13

Thesis statement and outline due Tuesday, March 17

Week 9

16. Mar. 17 Rethinking Women in Islamic Society

Reading: Ernst, *Following Muhammad*, Chapter 4, pp. 142-151. Source Text: Surah 4

17. Mar. 19

Reading (BB): selections from Bouthaina Shaaban, *Both Right and Lefthanded: Arab Women Talk about Their Lives*, 1988. Syed Ali, "Why Here, Why Now?" *Muslim World* 95 (October 2005), pp. 515-30.

Week 10**18. Mar. 24 Islam and Science**

Reading: Ernst, *Following Muhammad*, Chapter 4, pp. 151-162; additional reading on BB (TBA)

IV. Ascending into Paradise, and Returning to Earth: Spirituality and Mysticism**19. Mar. 26 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.

Exchange first drafts of research papers in class on Tuesday, March 31.

Week 11**20. Mar. 31 Mystical Poetry: Rumi**

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

21. April 2 Peer Review (in-class discussion)**Week 12****22. April 7 The Spirituality of Shi'ism**

Reading: Ernst, *Following Muhammad*, pp.168-174. Blackboard: "A Shi'i Creed." Web resources: [Photos of tombs of the Imams in Medina](#) (Why would the Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia have destroyed all these tombs in 1925?); [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](#); [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](#).

23. April 9 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](#).

Turn in final draft of your research paper along with peer reviews on Tuesday, April 14.

V. Rethinking Islam in the 21st Century

Week 13

24. Apr. 14 **Progressive Islam: Farid Esack's *On Being a Muslim***

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

25. Apr. 16 **Progressive Islam: Farid Esack's *On Being a Muslim***

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

Week 14

26. Apr. 21 **Open Class**

27. Apr. 23 **Open Class**

Final Essay: Exchange drafts (minimum of 1,000 words) on/by Friday, Apr. 24 (11:59 PM, use wiki function on BB)

Final Week (Week 15)

27. Apr. 28 **Conclusions**

Reading: Ernst, *Following Muhammad*, Postscript.

Finished final essay due Monday, May 4 (12:00 noon)