

REL 370RW - Islam in America - Spring 2017

MW 4:20-6:00 p.m. (Student Center 27)

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Office: Seney Hall 115B

Hours: MW 3:00-4:00 p.m., or by appointment

Course Description

In what ways can we make sense of the popular fear and suspicion of Islam and Muslims—something we currently are witnessing in our local community in attempts to block a proposed Muslim burial ground—that has become a widespread element in the climate of public opinion in the United States? This course aims to understand representations of Islam and Muslims in American history and analyze how those representations are framed, and why. We will pay particular attention to the ways in which Muslims in America have continued to make space for themselves and their modes of religious expression in the American public square despite, and in dialogue with, this challenging history—one that dates back at least to the 1600s. We will critically investigate the hypothesis that the marginality of Islam and Muslims—like that of other minority religions in America—owes less to the religion's novelty or the community's historical lateness in the United States than to their perceived failure to approximate dominant cultural norms about race, class, gender, and sexuality. The course proceeds chronologically with emphases on (1) Muslim immigration prior to 1900, through slavery and voluntary immigration; (2) the rise of Islamic black nationalism; (3) the role of race, class, gender, and sexuality in contemporary Islam; and (4) the experiences of American Muslims in the post-9/11 world. Class materials will include current events articles and newscasts, fictional and autobiographical accounts, ethnographic, historical, and political science texts, plus a series of films about Muslims in America. We will have guest speakers and experiential components that include visits to specific mosques and Islamic centers in the Atlanta Metro Area.

Course Objectives

The course does not aim to defend Islam or Muslims or to present an uncritical and idealized image of “good Muslims.” Nor will we try to set straight all of the grotesque conspiracy theories that frame Muslim-Americans as dangers to America because of their religion. Instead we will examine the multiple ways in which Muslim communities in the United States have been both maintaining and reconfiguring their cultural, ethnic and religious identities in a society where they face marginalization, prejudice and misunderstanding.

The goals and objectives for you as a student in this course are:

- to investigate Islamic traditions in America through the multidisciplinary lens of religious studies

- to analyze representations of Islam and Muslims in American culture, and comprehend how those representations are framed, and why
 - to develop your ability to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view related to the study of religion, including the problems related to the study of Islam such as negative media stereotypes and “essentialism”;
 - to construct your own arguments within the framework of the academic study of religion to convince others that your way of conceptualizing a matter is correct; and
 - to develop further your critical skills as a thinker, reader, writer, and speaker within and beyond the academic study of religion.
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Readings

Textbooks

- Juliane Hammer and Omid Safi. 2013. *The Cambridge companion to American Islam*. New York: Cambridge University Press. [[Online access](#)]
- Louise Cainkar, Louise. *Homeland Insecurity: The Arab American and Muslim American Experience after 9/11*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2009. [[Online access](#)]
- Edward E. Curtis. 2008. *The Columbia sourcebook of Muslims in the United States*. New York: Columbia University Press. [Recommended]

All other required and optional readings for the course will be accessible to you electronically through our Canvas site. Often you will find pdf files of a specific journal article or section from a book you are required to read for a class session. In other instances, you will be taken to the Library’s Electronic Reserve site or to sites such as JSTOR, Proquest, MUSE or Lexis-Nexus—all useful research tools for scholarly journals which I discuss later.

Canvas Learning Technology

This course will involve using the online communication tools on Canvas as well as readings and documents located there. You would do well to acquaint yourself with the features Canvas offers and different usages and use them as frequent points of entry and exploration around many of the issues we will be discussing as well as in preparation for the assignments.

Course Requirements and Grading

The Final Grade will be calculated as follows:

1. Preparation and Participation (10%)
2. Reading Responses (10%)
3. Lecture Presentation (10%)

4. Midterm Essay (20%)
5. Life Story Interview Project (30%)
6. Social Issue and Advocacy Assignment (20%)

1. Preparation and Participation (10%)

Preparation: I expect you to keep up with all readings and assignments and to get the notes for missed class sessions from your peers. Appropriate preparation 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 understand fully the argument in the text.

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. 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.

Class Discussion: While I will lecture from time to time, the class will be conducted much more on a seminar model of examining your informed responses to the reading material. High-quality participation is key to the overall success of our class discussion. This means that I expect you to: raise thoughtful questions, analyze relevant issues, build on others' ideas, synthesize across readings and discussions, expand the class' perspective, and appropriately challenge the texts' and each other's assumptions and perspectives. We will use a number of different techniques to prepare and conduct class discussion throughout the semester. All place a premium on mastering the content of a reading, evaluating it, and preparing cogent ways to convey your ideas before class. All also rely on public performance and evaluation.

Student Minutes: 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 Canvas site.

2. Reading Responses (10%)

For this class you are asked to write short analytical responses to the assigned readings (250-300 words). This task 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 the discussion function on Canvas to collect your entries which also allows us to read and comment on each other's writing. [See Canvas for more details.](#)

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 western religious traditions. 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. Furthermore, everybody will write one peer assessment for another class member's lecture presentation over the course of the semester.

4. Midterm Essay (20%)

The midterm essay will be take-home assignment that ask you to study a specific topic related to our class discussion carefully and in its context. You will write an essay of 1,000-1,200 words. I will post in advance of the assignment essay prompts as well as guidelines on how to write the essay. 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. This second part can be done in many ways: you can critique the material, apply it to something else, or even just explain it in a different way. Regardless of your particular approach to the topic, you must have a specific point or claim to argue in your essay. 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 Canvas for more details.](#)

5. Life Story Interview Project (30%)

You will conduct a life history or topic-driven interview with a member of a Muslim-American community to explore questions related to Muslim life in the United States, citizenship and religious identity. The goal is to add to the growing body of historical knowledge on Muslim life in the United States through living people's testimony about their own experiences. Over the course of the semester you will formulate a central question or issue for your project, engage in some background research, conduct and transcribe the interview(s), evaluate your data by identifying a central theme from the interviewee's testimony and relates to an idea or topic discussed in class, and create a final (multi-modal) project that can be shared in class and beyond.

6. Social Issue and Advocacy Assignment (20%)

There are many social issues facing Muslims communities in the US society today. As citizens and servant leaders we have a responsibility to understand and engage social issues in our communities. One of the foundational components of becoming an advocate/active citizen is to learn and understand a social issue in depth and how it is impacting the community. The purpose of this project is for you and your team to go deeper regarding a specific issue affecting the Muslim community by educating your peers on campus, and advocating for ways to bring about change and involvement. Groups are expected to produce an educational tool such as a professional power point presentation, films, videos, role plays, op-ed writing, handouts, etc. to actively engage others on the issue. All members of the group should be involved and included in the project. Guiding questions to consider in the design of this assignment: What is the social issue? What is the root cause(s) of this issue? Why is this an important issue to address? How does it impact our community? What is our response as servant leaders? How do we get involved? Next to their educational tool student groups will submit: 1) a one to two page (double-spaced summary) of the social issue and why it is important to understand as a leader/citizen 2) a reference page (web sites or references utilized).

Policies

Attendance

You must be present for class meetings in order to do well in the course. You should aim to arrive to class meetings a couple minutes early having read the assignment and taken notes, including at least two questions or observations to contribute to discussion. 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 to classroom etiquette. This includes such behavior as arriving on time, staying in the classroom until an official break or the end of the class period, and packing up only when class has finished.

Devices in Class

You may utilize laptops and tablets in their capacity as learning aids during class. You may not use them for communicating, browsing, gaming, doing schoolwork for other courses, or otherwise departing from the task at hand during the brief periods of the week we will spend together. Your phone(s) should be powered down, or in airplane mode, and stowed during class. If you find yourself needing to access the day's reading on your phone, or are expecting a time-sensitive call, announce it before class begins.

Academic Integrity

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. See the Honor Code:

<http://oxford.emory.edu/academics/student-services/student-honor-code>

Access, Disability Services, and Resources

It is the policy of Emory University to make reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. Students with any condition such that the requirements of this class present a problem should make this known to the instructor as soon as possible and contact Access, Disability Services, and Resources for documentation:

<http://equityandinclusion.emory.edu/access>

Affirmative Action & Sexual Harassment

All persons shall have equal access to programs, facilities, admission, and employment without regard to personal characteristics not related to ability, performance, or qualifications as determined by university policies. Discrimination against any person because of age, ancestry, color, disability or handicap, national origin, race, religious creed, gender, sexual orientation, or veteran status is unacceptable.