

**Rel 314Q Islam**

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**Note:** Student work submitted as part of this course may be reviewed by Oxford and Emory faculty/staff for the purposes of improving instruction and enhancing Emory education.

**General Education Program Requirements:** This course fulfills HSC (History, Society, Cultures), CWR (Continuing Writing), and INQ (Ways of Inquiry) requirements.

*"Ways of Inquiry" courses are designed to introduce students to the specific ways knowledge is pursued in each discipline through active engagement in the discipline's methods of analysis. INQ courses start with questions, are student-centered and often collaborative, and place increasing responsibility on students for their own learning. Students not only experience each discipline's distinctiveness but also move beyond its boundaries to understand connections with other disciplines and fields. These explorations often consider ethical issues and social responsibility and expand classroom learning with real-world experiences.*

**Course Description**

This writing-intensive, inquiry-based course explores the diversity of religious beliefs and practices in Islam, one of the world's major religions and multi-cultural traditions. It 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. 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.

The course's INQ designation calls attention to inquiry and analysis as main features of our class. Inquiry is a systematic process of exploring issues, of seeking for information by asking questions and using the methods of an academic discipline to find answers. Inquiry-based learning requires that you embark on a journey of questioning within our scholarly study in order to learn also about the academic discipline of the comparative study of world religions. In other words, you will be asked to investigate the Islamic traditions we study via your own increasing scholarly vocabulary and analysis projects. You will learn to apply some the approaches, methods and categories employed in the comparative study of world religions. In addition, you will be asked to apply in a disciplined manner what you learn in our course readings in Islam in order both to cultivate an appreciation for such methods and categories and to critique and offer improvements to them in the manner of an independent religion scholar.

An aim of any study of religious traditions is an understanding of the basic assumptions and practices of different peoples. The discipline of comparative religious studies is not a means to evaluate traditions for worth, but a scholarly means of determining patterns, commonalities and differences between religious practices, beliefs, and traditions in general while recognizing the unique characteristics of and pluralities within each. Islam is a highly diverse tradition with many internal vicissitudes. 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, one can 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. These materials will allow us to question essentializations of the religion and hopefully achieve a de-centered, new understanding of the idea of Islam, an idea which continues to take shape.

## 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 some basic information about the diversity of religious beliefs and practices in Muslim history and present;
- to learn how to ask useful questions according to the methods of the academic study of religion;
- to learn how to think about Islamic religious traditions rather than what to think about them;
- 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.

## 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).
- Additional readings: Other required 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 rich and useful resource if navigated cautiously, i.e., if you critically evaluate and assess the information you find there.

You will be **expected to have the assigned readings with you**, whether from the textbook or the Blackboard files, in class each day. Please include the printing of online documents as part of your book budget.

## Blackboard

This course will involve using the online communication tools on Blackboard as well as readings and documents located there. Please acquaint yourself with Blackboard's features 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.

## 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. Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

1.	Preparation and Participation	10%
2.	Academic Journal	10%
3.	Five (5) Inquiry Essays	40%
4.	Research Paper Project	30%
	a. First Paper (15%)	
	b. Final Revised Paper (15%)	
5.	Course Portfolio	10%

(Grading Scale: A, B, C, D, F. Plus and minus grades may be given on individual assignments and final grades.)

## 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.

**Professional Classroom Behavior:** My expectations of professionalism extend, of course, 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, packing up only when class has finished, and using a computer only for class purposes. You must not use cell phones and other wireless devices 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.

**Preparation:** Reading assignments for each week are due at the beginning of each week unless noted otherwise. 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. Here are some hints for studying and learning new names and terms:

- Use the glossaries and indexes in Ernst and Sells.
- Write down notes in the margins of the books or articles after you look things up, or take notes on your computer.
- Think about names and terms in relation to key issues in the course.
- Use study questions to stimulate your intellectual journal entries.
- Outline complicated readings so you can create an overview of the subject for greater familiarity.

**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.

**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 three 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.

**Midpoint Reflections:** In order to give substantial focus to your observations, questions, and ideas in our class, I will be asking each of you to take a turn doing a "midpoint reflection"--one of you each class session. Roughly half-way through our class, we will shift gears and turn the time over to you. You will summarize **one** key point or idea from the discussion so far, and then direct our attention to one question or issue you feel has NOT been covered enough in the discussion to that point. (This might be something you noticed in your own reading that seemed striking, puzzling, moving, or annoying. Or it might be one of the study questions that we have not yet had time to address.) You should plan on using no more than 1-2 minutes for both of these steps combined. After you raise your question/issue, the other class members will join in discussion with you on that topic and ones related to it that occur to them. I will be completely silent for at least 5 minutes during this time in order to let you facilitate the discussion and encourage you to talk among yourselves. After 5 minutes I may re-join, summarize the discussion, or I may just let the discussion keep rolling along. The object of this activity is to enable us to take a fresh turn in our class discussions, to focus on questions or angles that might not otherwise occur to us as a whole group, and to receive contributions to the discussion from all members of the class.

## **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. Five (5) Inquiry Essays (40%)**

The inquiry essays (see course schedule for dates) encourage you to study one topic carefully and in its context, as you refine your ability to write clearly and argue persuasively within the academic study of religion. All inquiry essays will be **take-home essays of 1,000 words (+/- 10%)**. I will post in advance of each assignment essay prompts as well as guidelines on how to write essays. There will be eight (8) opportunities to write inquiry essays throughout the semester. **You must write a total of five (5) inquiry papers throughout the semester.** This means that you have the freedom to choose which essays you want to write in accordance with your interest and schedule. However, in **Week 7** of the semester (See course schedule for exact dates.) I will ask you to select one of the essays you have written up to that point for me to grade. Additionally, I will choose a second of your essays in the semester's first half at random and grade it as well. We will repeat this process in **Week 12** of the semester for two of the inquiry essays you wrote between Week 7 and 11. Regardless of which papers you choose to write, all essays must be submitted on time as indicated on the course schedule. Late papers will not be accepted. **Each of the four graded essay will be worth 10% of your final grade.**

## **4. Academic Research Paper Project (30%): First Paper (15%), 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 (15%) 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.

### 5. Course Portfolio (10%)

The portfolio allows you to exhibit your efforts, progress, and achievements as a thinker and writer in the academic study of religion this semester and gives you a chance to reflect on your own learning by identifying strengths and weaknesses as well as growth over time. Your task for the portfolio is to choose **three (3) pieces of writing** from this semester that demonstrate your development as a scholar of religion in relationship to the central learning goals for the course. You have the freedom to include any piece of writing from this semester, with one exception: You must include one of the inquiry essays you wrote but for which you did not receive a grade. In a **reflective essay of 1,000 words**, you will make an argument about your development as a scholar of religion and explain why you have chosen the works you have and how they show your development. It will be important for you to remember that the portfolio is not just a collection of your work this semester, but a deliberate **selection**. In other words, you should think carefully about which pieces you choose to include and spell out in the reflective essay the reasons that justify their inclusion. (Additional guidelines will be made available on Bb.)

### 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. Lisa Bolding or the ESL program headed by Ms. Stacy Bell. If a disability requires special circumstances for you in the classroom, taking notes, or taking tests or exams, please contact Emory's Access, Disability Services, and Resources to initiate the accommodation request process. More detailed information is available on their 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.