

TRADITIONS OF ISLAM (REL 220-01)
FALL 2015

GRINNELL COLLEGE
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TRADITIONS OF ISLAM

Course Description

This course investigates elements of Islam that Muslims might identify as foundations of devotion regardless of time and place—such as the Qur’an, the Prophetic traditions (*hadith* and *sunnat al-nabi*), and the *shari‘a*—with an eye toward understanding how these foundations come to life in different historical and cultural contexts. We will spend much of the course focusing on these central elements of Islamic devotional traditions, including discussion of their development in particular historical contexts. As we do so, we will intermittently turn our attention to how particular traditions and practices function in the modern period. Toward the end of the course, we will turn our attention more fully to the modern period, inquiring how the conditions of modern life affect certain Islamic traditions and practices.

The materials in this course cover a wide spectrum of approaches to the study of Islam. Where possible and appropriate, I have selected sources from scholars who identify in some fashion as being part of the Muslim community. As you will also see, this identification means very different things to different people. Please be attentive to what kind of relationship each has to Islam and how that might affect how they present the tradition and its practices. Throughout, we will consider how the idea of tradition can help us make sense of the many different voices and perspectives in display in the history of the Muslim community.

By the end of the course, you will have gained an appreciation of the diversity of ways that Muslims answer the question, “What does it mean to be Muslim?” More broadly, this course will also help you consider the ways that individuals and groups in Muslim communities have and continue to grapple with a series of questions that are relevant across humanistic inquiry: What does it mean to be human? How do individuals and communities discern rules for living in a way that is consistent with human thriving? Are the answers to these questions timeless? Or do they depend on the historical and cultural circumstances in which people are asking these kinds of questions? In our own work, we will proceed from what I call an historically informed anthropological perspective. The truth of what we encounter is not at issue. Rather, we are seeking to understand how, in different historical and cultural settings, particular social formations and devotional practices have arisen out of Muslim communities’ engagement with the question “What does it mean to be human?”

Course Readings

I have kept the readings at a manageable level. In return, I expect that you will come to class each day having completed them. You will see that I make extensive use of reserve readings (any reading that is not from a required text); these are not optional or supplemental readings. Please treat these as you would treat readings from required texts. Those appearing in the syllabus with an (ER) beside them are available via the course site on electronic reserve. Occasionally, I post things directly to the course site. They have a (pweb) next to them in the syllabus.

Required Texts:

Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*

Carl Ernst, *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World*

Farid Esack, *The Qur'an*

Wael Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law*

Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'an*

Course Grading and Policies

Course Engagement: 20%

As the weighty percentage indicates, I consider your participation in this course to be an essential component of its success. Participation includes regular attendance. In this vein, anything beyond two unexcused absences will result in a reduction of your participation grade. (I realize that things come up – the key to managing your various responsibilities is open communication.) Chronic tardiness will not help your cause, either. However, participation includes much more than attendance. This part of your final grade is a reflection of your **engagement** with the course. I understand that not everyone chooses to speak in each class session, but there are lots of other ways to show engagement: Make eye contact during lecture. When I request that you post to the course site, do so thoughtfully and punctually. Come by office hours now and then – even if you don't have a particular agenda. Be sure to proof-read and edit your written work carefully – the quality of your efforts in this regard plays a role in your participation grade, too.

Reflexive Research Journal: New Information Has Come to Light! 15%

At the beginning of the semester, you will identify a question that you would like to explore. We will then spend some time finding a small number of sources related to your question, identifying the characteristics of each source and categorizing them accordingly (as popular or scholarly), and evaluating how these sources might help you answer your research question. You will then use these sources as a basis for reflecting on the materials we read for and discuss in class throughout the semester. You will use your weekly journal to keep an ongoing record of your reflection, using the following

questions as your guide: How does the material under consideration help you reevaluate your sources? What questions does the material under consideration help you ask about your sources? Along the way, you should also be thinking about how our progress in the course can help you reevaluate/refine your initial research question. You will use these weekly entries to help you write one-to-two-page (single-spaced) synopses of how the work we have done in a particular unit has helped you reevaluate or ask questions of your sources.

This journal assignment relates to one of the core learning goals of the course, which is to help you think about how the research process works free from the pressure of completing a final research paper. An ideal weekly entry will consist of one paragraph of general synopsis and one paragraph connecting the material to your question. Sometimes you will have to think broadly about what is at stake in the material to apply it to your question.

Short Assignments: 20%

These assignments will come in slightly different forms, but each is ultimately connected to the semester long research process you will be engaged in. Early in the semester you will write a short essay comparing and contrasting the sources you identify in your initial research (5%) and over the course of the semester you will be writing three one-to-two-page (single-spaced) synopses of your weekly journal reflections (5% each). You will have your pick from among four possible unit synopses, of which you will select three. Typically, these will be due about one week from the end of a unit.

Take (at) Home Mid-Term: 15%

This exam will have two sections (short answer and essay). As much as possible, we will mimic in-class exam conditions. I will provide further instruction about logistics as the time approaches.

Final Exam: 20%

The final exam will be cumulative and will occur on Wednesday, December 16, from 9 a.m. until noon. Format to be decided.

Final Reflection: 10%

Due any time during finals week, this 5-7 pp. essay will serve as a culmination of your work on the research process. It should include an extended discussion of how and why your research question changed over the course of the semester.

A note about written work: In all cases, unless otherwise noted, you are to use normal margins and 12-point font. In text (parenthetical, with author and page number) citation is acceptable when accompanied by a works cited page. Please include a minimal header – your name, the course name and, if you choose, a title. All papers should have page numbers where applicable. You will find due dates and submission instructions for all assignments **in bold** in the syllabus. Unless I instruct otherwise, **submit all written assignments to elfenbei.grinnell@gmail.com**. Please be sure to submit all work as pdf.

The subject heading of your submission should include “REL 220” and the name of the assignment.

Course Policies:

- Email policy part I: I am generally good about returning email in a reasonable amount of time. Please always reach out to your colleagues first with logistical questions about our course; you can do so via the email function on the course site. If no one can figure out the answer, then by all means get in touch. You can always ask in class, too, and you will find that I am quite accessible outside of class. I’d much rather meet you in person—and you can email to set up an appointment! [This policy does not apply to real emergencies.]
- Email policy part II: I encourage you to use email to share interesting news or course-related information you come across. This is actually a great way to help promote a collective learning experience.
- Know that I am pre-disposed to saying no to requests for extensions. I provide plenty of notice for each of the assignments—it is your responsibility to plan your time accordingly. That said, please do not be shy about approaching me for an extension if you have extenuating circumstances. It is essential to keep lines of communication open.
- If I suspect that you are using computers in class for anything other than note taking or document viewing, you will lose your computer privileges for the remainder of the semester. (If I suspect that you are texting in class I will ask that you leave your phone with me at the start of each class. Cell phones should be set on silent.)
- If you are involved in an extracurricular activity that will take you away from campus be sure to let me know beforehand. Regardless of the reason (except for dire family emergency, hospitalization), if I do not hear from you *before* you miss class I will assume you are simply skipping class.
- Breaches of academic integrity will result in an official disciplinary process guided by the Dean’s office. Although I will inform you of any action I take, I will not negotiate with you privately about such matters. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism I suggest you consult the Student Handbook immediately.
- It is essential to me that everyone in the class has the same opportunity to thrive. Please let me know of any particular learning needs you have (assuming they are on file with the College) and we will work together to make sure that you get the most out of this learning experience.

Course Schedule

UNIT ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF ISLAM

Friday, August 28: What *is* Islam? And why do we think so?

- Brainstorming
- “Allah Hoo,” Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan
- “Salaams,” Mos Def

Monday, August 31

- Please craft a one-paragraph reflection on your brainstorming list. What does your list tell you about your prejudgments about Islam? In turn, please use this paragraph to formulate a question that can help you learn more about an issue on your list. **Post your one-paragraph brainstorming reflection and your question on the “Brainstorming” discussion board on P-Web by Sunday at 5 and be prepared to talk about both in class.**
- Chapter one (“Islam in the Eyes of the West”) in *Following Muhammad*, pp. 1-36

Wednesday, September 2

- To prepare for this class session, please:
 - Read and explore the executive summaries of the Pew Research Council’s “Mapping the Global Muslim Population” and “Unity and Diversity.” You can find a links to these reports on our course site.
 - Prepare a one-page (single-spaced) reflection piece, which you will submit in class, explaining how/why these reports help answer the question “What is Islam?”

Friday, September 4

- Asad, “Introduction,” “Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category,” pp. 1, 27-39 (R)

Monday, September 7

- Asad, “Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category,” pp. 40-54 (R)

Wednesday, September 9

- Chapter two (“Approaching Islam in Terms of Religion”) in *Following Muhammad*, pp. 37-70

Please post your research question to the “Research Question” Wiki by the evening of Wednesday, September 9

Friday, September 11

- Library Session: Searching for an answer, evaluating what you find.
 - Please bring your research questions with you to the library.

UNIT TWO: THE EARLY COMMUNITY, MUHAMMAD, AND THE *QUR’AN*

Monday, September 14

- Chapter two (“The Mediterranean Middle East”) and Chapter three (“Women and the Rise of Islam”) in *Women and Gender in Islam*, pp. 25-63

Wednesday, September 16

- Chapter four (“The Transitional Age”) in *Women and Gender in Islam*, pp. 64-78
- Chapter five (“Elaboration of the Founding Discourses”) in *Women and Gender in Islam*, pp. 79-101

Friday, September 18

- Chapter three (“The Sacred Sources of Islam”) in *Following Muhammad*, pp. 71-106
- Chapter two (“The Life and Work of the Prophet”), FE Peters, *A Reader on Classical Islam* (selections) (R)

Compare and Contrast Essay Due Sunday, September 20, by 5 p.m.

Monday, September 21

- Introduction, *The Qur’an*, pp. 1-13
- Chapter seven (“Belief in the Qur’an”), *The Qur’an*, pp. 176-200
- Chapter two (“The Qur’an in the Lives of Muslims”), *The Qur’an*, pp. 14-33

Wednesday, September 23

- Chapter three (“The Word Enters the World”) and Chapter four (“The Qur’an as Written Word”), *The Qur’an*, pp. 34-92

Friday, September 25

- Library Session: Using different kinds of sources appropriately and to greatest effect.

Monday, September 28

- Chapter five (“Gathering the Qur’an”) and Chapter six (“The Prophet and the Begotten-Not-Created Qur’an”), *The Qur’an*, pp. 93-144

Wednesday, September 30

- Chapter seven (“Understanding and Interpreting the Qur’an”), *The Qur’an*, pp. 145-175
- Highly recommended: “Foreword” and Chapter six (“Qur’an, Gender, and Interpretive Possibilities”), Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, pp. vii-xiv, 187-216 (ER)

Friday, October 2

- Chapter one (“Engaged Surrender”) *Engaged Surrender: African American Women and Islam*, pp. 1-23 (ER)

Monday, October 5

- Chapter three (“Gender Negotiations and Qur’anic Exegesis”), *Engaged Surrender: African American Women and Islam*, pp. 36-80 (ER)

Wednesday, October 7

- “Preface to the 2006 Edition,” *Approaching the Qur’an*, pp. xi-xv.
- “Introduction: Approaching the Qur’an” and “Hearing the Qur’an,” *Approaching the Qur’an*, pp. 1-35, 161-196 (selections)

Friday, October 9

- Ernst, *Following Muhammad*, pp. 182-198

Take (at) Home Mid-Term Due On Blackboard By 11:59 P.M. on October 11

Monday, October 12

- Exploring the Qur’an in the Grinnell Collection
 - Qur’anic manuscript pages
 - “American Qur’an”
- Discussion: The Qur’an as art?

Wednesday, October 14

- Self-screening of *The Taqwacores*
- Discussion: Is this an *Islamic* film?

Friday, October 16

- “The Early Suras with Commentary,” *Approaching the Qur’an* (selections)

UNIT THREE: THE QUR’AN, THE PROPHETIC TRADITIONS, AND THE SHARI‘A □

Monday, October 26

- Chapter four (“Ethics and Life in the World”) in *Following Muhammad*, pp. 107-126
 - Please note that this reading consists of the first part of the chapter
- Chapter nine (“Righteous Conduct in the Qur’an”), *The Qur’an*, pp. 201-232

Wednesday, October 28

- Chapter five (“The Quran, the Prophet, and the Law”), FE Peters, *A Reader on Classical Islam*, pp. 213-257 (selections) (R)
- Hadith of Gabriel (R)

Friday, October 30

- **Reflection #1 (unit 2) due before beginning of class**
- “Introduction,” Chapter one (“Who’s who in the Shari‘a”), Chapter two (“The Law: how is it found?”), and Chapter three (“The legal schools”), *Introduction to Islamic Law*, pp. 1-37

Monday, November 2

- Chapter four (“Jurists, legal education and politics”), Chapter five (“Shari‘a’s society”), and Chapter six (“Pre-modern governance: the circle of justice”), *Introduction to Islamic Law*, pp. 38-82

UNIT FOUR: THE *TARIQAH*: SUFISM AND THE PATH TO GOD

Wednesday, November 4

- Chapter five (“Spirituality in Practice”) in *Following Muhammad*, pp. 163-198
- “Introduction,” Michael Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 11-26 (pweb)

Friday, November 6

- Chapter one (“Sources of Islamic Mysticism”), Michael Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism* (selections from 29-74) (ER)

Monday, November 9

- **Reflection #2 (unit 3) due before beginning of class**
- Chapter eight (“Junayd”), Michael Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 251-265 (ER)

Wednesday, November 11

- *Nizam ad-Din Awliya: Morals for the Heart* (selections), trans. Bruce Lawrence (ER)

Friday, November 13

- Self screening: *I am a Sufi, I am a Muslim* (Available on Films on Demand through the Library Database collection)
- Discussion: Sufism, spirituality, and ethical cultivation

UNIT FIVE: MODERN TRANSFORMATIONS

Monday, November 16: Law

- Chapter four (“Ethics and Life in the World”), *Following Muhammad*, pp. 127-136
- Chapter seven (“Colonizing the Muslim world and its Shari‘a”), *Introduction to Islamic Law*, pp. 85-114.

Wednesday, November 18: Law

- Chapter eight (“The law in the age of nation-states”), *Introduction to Islamic Law*, pp. 115-139.

November 20-25, American Academy of Religion (no class meetings)

Friday, November 20

- Work Day

Monday, November 23

- **Reflection #3 (unit 4) due by 5 p.m.**

Monday, November 30: Law

- Chapter nine (“State, ulama, and Islamists”), *Introduction to Islamic Law*, pp. 140-162.

Wednesday, December 2: Hajj

- Chapter six (“Steamships and Cholera: The Hajj in Modern Times”), FE Peters, *The Hajj*, pp. 266-316 (ER)

Friday, December 4: Hajj

- Self-screening, *Inside Mecca* (R)

UNIT SIX: WHAT IS ISLAM? AND WHO DECIDES?

Monday, December 7

- “The Ugly Modern and the Modern Ugly: Reclaiming the Beautiful in Islam,” Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Progressive Muslims*, pp. 33-77 (ER)
- “Postscript” in *Following Muhammad*, pp. 199-214.

Wednesday, December 9

- Work Day
- **Reflection #4 (unit 5) due by 5 p.m.**

Friday, December 11:

- Wrap-up