

ISLAM AND GENDER
HIS-REL 268-01 (SPRING 2016)
GRINNELL COLLEGE

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OFFICE HOURS: T 1-2, F 2-3

This course provides you with the background to contextualize contemporary debates about gender and sexuality in and about Muslim communities. We will do so in two chief ways. First, we will examine foundational sources of Islamic devotional traditions, including the Qur'an and *sunnat al-nabi* (traditions of the Prophet Muhammad), and explore the different ways that Muslim communities have engaged with those sources, such as scriptural commentary and Islamic law. Second, we will investigate gender and sexuality in Muslim communities from historical and anthropological perspectives, particularly as they bear on colonial histories and the complex ethics of contemporary cross-cultural analysis.

Of particular importance in the materials we will work with are the voices of contemporary Muslims, some of whom argue that Muslims must fundamentally reinterpret significant elements of Islamic traditions with an eye toward gender justice. At the same time, we will examine voices—those of men *and* women—that will challenge the very heart of these claims about the nature of Islam. Working with a broad range of perspectives will provide us with insight into different ways in which Muslims understand what it means to be a man, what it means to be a woman, how men and women should relate to one another, how men and women understand and nurture the individual's (and society's) relationship with God, and what it means to be a sexual being in a manner God intended.

COURSE TEXTS

Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*

Aysha Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an*

Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: the Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*

Carolyn Moxley Rouse, *Engaged Surrender*

Judith Tucker, *In the House of the Law*.

These texts form the backbone of our course, but throughout the semester we will also be working with articles or excerpts from books. Some of these readings are accessible via "Library Resources" on our Blackboard course site, in which case they will have an

“R” next to them on the syllabus, or on the course site itself, in which case they will have “pweb” next to them.

You can read scholarly sources with a few questions in mind:

- Can you identify a sentence or sentences that constitute the thesis statement?
- Can you state the author’s thesis—even regarding a single chapter or article—succinctly in your own words?
- If part of a larger work, how does a particular chapter or chapters fit into the bigger picture? If a stand-alone piece, can you relate this reading to another that we have completed in the course?
- Can you identify at least two examples the author uses to support her or his argument?
- How does the reading relate to the broader questions we discussed at the beginning of the course?

As you read the primary sources with which we will work, please keep the following questions in mind:

- Who is writing? What do you think was her or his purpose in so doing?
- What is the larger relevant context? (Beware of anachronistic analysis!)
- What is the author’s relative position of power in the context of the document’s production?
- How does this document support or call into question claims made by the authors of our secondary sources?

From a skill-building perspective, then, **two important learning goals** of this course are (1) reading scholarly sources for argument and presenting that argument and exemplary evidence in succinct terms and (2) cultivating the ability to develop contextually sensitive understandings of primary source documents.

COURSE EVALUATION AND POLICIES

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. Your participation grade is a reflection of your **engagement** with the course. I understand that not everyone chooses to speak in each class. 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 you proof-read and edit *all* your written work carefully—

the quality of your efforts in this regard plays a role in your participation grade, too. At the same time, nothing illustrates engagement like a willingness to be a vocal participant in our course. In the end, your (individual and collective) engagement with the course will be a significant determinant of what kind of experience we have together.

Individual Treatment: 5%

Early in the semester, you will write a treatment of a course reading. Your treatment should identify the thesis, provide an overview how the author supports her/his argument, and provide a question that remains for you about the work in question. This assignment will provide you with an opportunity to work on course learning goals relating to reading scholarly sources. At two pages in length (double-spaced), success on this assignment depends very much on concise writing and sound organization. This assignment will push you to work on the first two skill-based learning goals I note above.

Weekly Journal: 10%

Beginning with week three, you will be responsible for writing a weekly journal entry (approximately 250-300 words) relating to course readings and discussion. Your journal entries should be brief treatments of the readings built around the above “scholarly source” or “primary source” reading questions and should note something from readings or discussion that was of particular interest to you, that helped you grab onto some of the larger ideas or themes we discuss. I also encourage you to use the journal as a means of keeping track of your personal reflections on course material and discussion. I will not formally grade/comment on each of your journal entries (though I will be reading them), but the more time and effort you put into them the easier your reflection essays, which I describe below, will be. The “points of interest” from your journals will also figure centrally into your final reflection essay, and any personal reflection you do will make the final reflection essay easier. You will be responsible for completing a total of twelve journal entries. They should be complete by noon on Sunday. The journal is thus the foundation for a **third learning goal** in the course: developing the capacity to reflect on material over time, developing new understandings of things you have already learned based on new information or material.

Unit Reflections: 20%

You will be responsible for completing two two-page, single-spaced, reflection essays in the first half of the semester (10% each). Successful essays will make specific reference to your weekly journal entries and course materials, using your “points of interest” to reflect on how they illuminate core topics of the unit and of the course.

Discussion Leadership: 15%

We will close out the semester with student led class sessions. In groups of three, you will work with me to develop and execute a lesson plan for an entire class session. Over the course of the semester, I will employ a number of different pedagogical strategies in class sessions. Please take note of which ones work best for you—and why. This will

likely influence what you and your group choose to do in planning your own class session. This exercise relates to a **fourth learning goal**, namely, how to work with others in planning an extended and interactive presentation of information.

Final Reflections: 15%

You will complete two-part, seven-page, double-spaced reflection essay for submission on the final day of classes. Part I will consist of a five-page essay drawing together course materials and themes. Successful essays will use at least five of the points of interest you articulated in your weekly journals to illuminate what you consider to be the course “thesis.” Reflecting the larger liberal arts and humanistic settings for the course, Part II will consist of a two-page essay providing you with an opportunity for more personal reflection about how the course may or may not have affected the way you think about questions of gender. Specific reference to journal entries a plus.

Final Essay: 15%

Over the course of the semester, I would like for you to take note of news stories related to our course that catch your attention. You should keep a running log of the stories you select, and I highly suggest that you jot down a few sentences about why you chose what you chose. At mid-term, you will submit a bibliography of sources you have selected up until that point. (You will also submit a bibliography with your final essay.) Toward the end of the semester, you should have selected about 10 stories, and you will select three articles from reputable news sources about Muslim communities and/or Islamic devotional traditions and explain how these stories relate to our course. There should be a logic to your final selection of articles, meaning that you should be able to draw them together into a coherent discussion in your essay. In your essay, I would like for you to address in some fashion the following questions: How do the materials we have read help you understand these particular stories? What kinds of questions can you ask of the stories based on the work we have done together? Do the stories raise questions for you about the materials we have read/discussed as a class? This essay will be due by the end of finals week.

The format of this essay should be as follows: One single-spaced page summarizing the three articles, followed by approximately five pages of double-spaced analysis.

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.
- Unless I instruct otherwise, submit all written work to elfenbei.grinnell@gmail.com. Please be sure to submit all work as pdf. The subject heading of your submission should include “HIS-REL 268” and the name of the assignment. Assignments are always due by 5 p.m. on the due date.
- 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. An after-the-fact note from Health Services will not suffice.
- 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

BACKGROUND

JANUARY 25:

- Introductions

JANUARY 27:

- Leila Abu-Lughod, “The Muslim Woman” (pweb)
- Blackboard Post: In one paragraph, explain what you think it means to explore the question of Islam and gender from the perspective of humanistic inquiry.

JANUARY 29:

- Joan Scott, “Gender, A Useful Category of Historical Analysis.” (R)
- Blackboard Post: In 100-150 words identify Joan Scott’s thesis and describe one point in support of that thesis that you find particularly compelling.

GENDERING THE HISTORY OF THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY

FEBRUARY 1:

- Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 1-8; skim 25-38; 39-78

FEBRUARY 3:

- Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 79-124

CONTESTED FOUNDATIONS

FEBRUARY 5: TWO-PAGE TREATMENT DUE

- Tamara Sonn, “Introducing,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur’an*, ed. Andrew Rippin (R)
- Selection from Tafsir ibn Kathir (14th century) (pweb)

FEBRUARY 8:

- Muhammad Qutb, “Women and Islam.” (pweb)

FEBRUARY 10:

- Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur’an*, 1-45

FEBRUARY 12:

- Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur’an*, 65-109

FEBRUARY 15:

- Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur’an*, 110-122
- Amina Wadud, “What’s in a Name?” (pweb)

FEBRUARY 17:

- Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur’an*, 125-145 and 178-196
- *The Noble Struggle of Amina Wadud*

FEBRUARY 19

- Herbert Berg, “Context: Muhammad,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur’an*, ed. Andrew Rippin (R)
- Kecia Ali, “‘A Beautiful Example’: The Prophet Muhammad as a Model for Muslim Husbands” (R)

LIVING GENDER TRADITIONS

FEBRUARY 22:

- Judith Tucker, *In the House of the Law*, 1-36

FEBRUARY 24:

- Judith Tucker, *In the House of the Law*, 37-77

FEBRUARY 26: UNIT REFLECTION DUE

- Judith Tucker, *In the House of the Law*, 78-112, 179-186

FEBRUARY 29:

- Ziba Mir-Hosseini, “Muslim Women’s Quest for Equality.” (R)

MARCH 2:

- Discussion of Ziba Mir-Hosseini’s *Divorce Iranian Style*

RE-FORMING SOCIETY: SOURCES AND PROCESSES OF HISTORICAL CHANGE

MARCH 4:

- Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 125-143.
- Emily Jordan, “Making Good Wives and Mothers?” (R)

MARCH 7:

- Lisa Pollard, “Learning Gendered Modernity.” (R)

MARCH 9: UNIT REFLECTION DUE

- Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, pp. 144-168.
- Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women* (selections) (pweb)

MARCH 11:

- Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, pp. 169-188.
 - Huda Sha'rawi (pweb)
 - Zaynab al-Ghazali (pweb)

MARCH 14:

- Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, pp. 189-208.
 - Nawal El Sadawi (pweb)

MARCH 16:

- Leila Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution* (selections)

MARCH 18: ENJOY!

- PLEASE SUBMIT A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF NEWS ARTICLES YOU HAVE COLLECTED THUS FAR

FAMILY AND SEXUALITY

APRIL 4:

- Kecia Ali, "Marriage, Family, and Sexual Ethics" (R)
- Judith Tucker, *In the House of the Law*, 148-178

APRIL 6:

- Kecia Ali, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell: Same-Sex Intimacy in Muslim Thought" (R)
- Khaled El-Rouayheb, "Introduction" and "Conclusion," *Before Homosexuality in the Islamic World*. (R)

APRIL 8:

- Scott Kugle, "Introduction" and "Islam on Trial: A Case Study," from *Homosexuality in Islam*. (pweb)

APRIL 11:

- Discussion of *Jihad for Love*

APRIL 13:

- Discussion of *For the Bible Tells Me So*

CASE STUDIES IN CONTEMPORARY COMMUNITIES

APRIL 15:

- Moxley Rouse, *Engaged Surrender*, 1-23

APRIL 18:

- Moxley Rouse, *Engaged Surrender*, 24-80

APRIL 20:

- Moxley Rouse, *Engaged Surrender*, 81-126

APRIL 22:

- Moxley Rouse, *Engaged Surrender*, 127-174

APRIL 25:

- Moxley Rouse, *Engaged Surrender*, 175-218

APRIL 27:

- Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 1-39

APRIL 29:

- Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 40-78

MAY 2:

- Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 79-117

MAY 4:

- Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 118-152

MAY 6:

- Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 153-188

MAY 9: WORK DAY

MAY 11: WORK DAY

MAY 13: FINAL REFLECTION ESSAY DUE

- Wrap-Up/Discussion