

SURVEY OF ISLAMIC TRADITIONS

REL 370
SPRING 2007

<http://www.as.ua.edu/rel/rel370.html>

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MWF 11:00 - 11:50, 210 Manly Hall
Office Hours: M 12:30-1:30
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and by appointment

This course comprises a broad, comprehensive, and interdisciplinary introduction to the traditions of Islam. We will begin with a discussion of the components and history of Islamic traditions. We will then focus on different aspects of contemporary Islam in greater depth. First, we will consider the literary, theological, and ritual nature of the Qur'an. Second, we will address some of the contemporary practices within Islamic communities from a ritual studies perspective highlighting some differences among Muslims in different parts of the world. Third, we will discuss a few contemporary aspects of Islam, including issues of gender and mystical practices in Islam, commonly called Sufism. Finally, we will look closely at Islam in Iran and the ways it is understood and practiced in that cultural context.

In this room, we become a community of scholars, constantly refining our academic skills as well as developing our understanding of various subjects. Approaching religions in an academic setting requires that we think critically to analyze the persuasiveness and biases that our sources of information present. We need to approach a range of viewpoints with both a willingness to question them and an equal willingness to appreciate their strengths. To make the class successful, each scholar must listen respectfully to the opinions of others and contribute their insights honestly. No one has to accept a particular viewpoint, but everyone needs to understand the variety of opinions and the reasoning behind those opinions.

OBJECTIVES

- 1) Develop critical thinking and reading skills, particularly in relation to various representations of Islam.
- 2) Improve communication skills through writing assignments and discussions in class.
- 3) Create a general understanding of Islamic traditions and their histories.
- 4) Reflect on the relationship between Islamic practices and social issues.
- 5) Increase awareness of the diversity of Islamic practices and interpretations.

READINGS

The following texts are required. Additional articles will be made available during the term on the course webpage.

Denny, Frederick M. *Islam and the Muslim Community*. Waveland Press paperback, ISBN 978-1-57766-007-1

Ebadi, Shirin with Azadeh Moaveni. *Iran Awakening: A Memoir of Revolution and Hope*. Random House, 2006. ISBN 1-4000-6470-8

Sells, Michael. *Approaching the Quran*. White Cloud Press paperback book with CD, ISBN 1-883991-26-9

CONSULTATIONS

All students are encouraged to come to my office hours, set up an appointment, and/or contact me by phone (348-4218), or email sramey@bama.ua.edu for assistance.

Please speak with me well in advance if you are having difficulties satisfactorily completing the course's requirements on time or if you anticipate routine absences. Although I cannot guarantee that reasonable accommodations can be made, speaking with me before a problem arises will greatly enhance our ability to address the situation in a way that is both fair to your classmates and beneficial to you.

Students with documented physical and/or learning disabilities should contact me as soon as possible to provide copies of their documentation and to discuss the reasonable accommodations that can be made to meet their needs. Students must also contact the Office of Disability Services in Martha Parham East.

REQUIREMENTS

- Close reading of assigned texts
- Active participation in class discussions
- 3 Assigned presentations
- 2 critical papers analyzing representations of Islam
- Test, including short identifications and in-class essay
- Final exam, format To Be Announced

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

The success of this course requires the contribution of all scholars. When you are absent, you miss an opportunity to learn from the other scholars, and they miss an opportunity to learn from you. More than 3 absences of any type will significantly impact your attendance /participation grade. If the absences are beyond your control due to health or family reasons, let me know as soon as possible. The impact of such excused absences may be reduced. If you are late, please join the class as soon as possible without disrupting the learning experience. Habitual tardiness, however, is unacceptable and can be counted as an absence. You remain responsible for anything that you miss, including announcements. If you miss a scheduled test or presentations, you can only make-up the event with a documented, excused absence. All make-up tests will be oral.

Your positive participation in the class is also vital. Participation goes beyond the number of words someone speaks to include both their contribution to the overall class and their attentiveness. I expect everyone to speak up during classes. Be prepared to ask questions about the readings and class material and/or contribute your own ideas or analysis. Disruptive behavior or disrespect shown to others will not be tolerated.

PRESENTATIONS

Each student must make three presentations over the course of the semester. Each presentation will require a small amount of research outside of class, usually looking up either news articles or current information on a relevant topic. Based on the days each student selects on the distributed sign-up sheets, the student will describe what he/she has found to the entire class. Each presentation should be brief, about 5 minutes long, and the presenter must submit a copy of the article or source for their presentations. For most, if not all topics, multiple students will be presenting what they have found, allowing the class to identify different sources and ways that they

complement and/or contradict each other. When multiple students present, they are not expected to collaborate.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Each scholar will write two essays outside of class, due March 5 and April 9. Each essay should be a four page critical argument that responds to the prompt or passage distributed in class before the due date. Outside research is not required for these essays, but a developed analysis is vital. You will need to analyze the question and related materials critically before beginning to write.

Because expressing ideas persuasively is a vital skill, I will grade the essays both for the quality of the critical evaluation and the quality of the writing. The short length of the essay requires careful thought and the development of a focused argument. Each essay should present a clearly developed, concise and persuasive argument about the excerpt's representation of Islam. Please attend to the general writing guidelines attached to this syllabus.

EXAMS

We will have one test (Feb 23) and a final exam. The test will consist of an in-class essay that draws on the major issues surrounding Islamic history and the Qur'an and short answer questions covering the specific terms and events that we have discussed. The final exam will be comprehensive, following a format to be determined later.

GRADING

The grades will be averaged according to the following percentages.

Attendance and participation		100
Presentations		100
2 Critical essays	(200 points each)	400
Test		200
Final exam		200

Letter grades will be determined based on the following ranges:

930-1000 = A; 900-929 = A-; 880-899 = B+; 830-869 = B; 800-829 = B-; 780-799 = C+; 730-769 = C; 700-729 = C-; 600-699 = D; 0-599 = F

All academic work must be the product of the student submitting it. Cheating will not be tolerated. Plagiarizing the work of someone else (quoting or summarizing another person's ideas or intellectual labor without giving them credit through proper quotations, citations, and acknowledgment) is a serious offence. If I discover that a student has copied the work of another author (whether a peer, classmate, or published author), the case will be referred to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF TOPICS, READINGS, AND ASSIGNMENTS

We may revise this schedule or adjust the readings as needed during the semester.

SP refers to days with assigned student presentations

CW designates readings available on the Course Webpage

January 10 Introductions

12 Representations of Islam

Denny, chp. 1

*** Each student must bring in an article from the media referring to Islam.

17 Pre-Muhammad Arabia

Denny pp. 18-23

- 19 Muhammad
SP and Denny pp. 23-32
- 22 Rightly Guided Caliphs
Denny pp. 32-39
- 24 Historical Sunni/Shia tensions
SP
CW A. A. Salamah, Selections of "Shia and Sunni Perspective on Islam"
- 26 Islamic Expansion beyond the Middle East
CW R. Eaton, "Approaches to the Study of Conversion to Islam in India"
- 29 Islam and Colonialism
SP
CW Muddathir 'Abd al-Rahim, "Decline and Colonial Domination"
- 31 Basics of Islamic Thought
Denny pp. 40-46
- February 2 Introduction to the Qur'an
Denny 57-64 and Sells pp. 1-13
- 5 The Early Meccan Suras of the Qur'an
SP and Sells pp. 13-28
- 7 Literary Interpretations
Sells pp. 183-204
- 9 Reading and hearing the Qur'an I
Sells pp. 42-89, esp Suras 81, 82, 83, 85
- 12 Reading and hearing the Qur'an II
Sells pp. 90-141 esp. Suras 97, 98, 99, 101, 103
- 14 Reading the Medinan Suras
CW Selected readings from the Qur'an
- 16 Historical critical approach to the Qur'an
CW Toby Lester "What is the Qur'an?"
- 19 Qur'an in practice
Denny pp. 77-86
- 21 Review and Test preparation
- 23 **TEST** on History of Islam and Qur'an
- 26 Sunna and Hadith
Denny pp. 64-71
- 28 Sharia - Islamic Law I
CW J. Esposito, selections of *Islam: The Straight Path*
- March 2 Sharia - Islamic Law II
CW Review website providing decisions based on Islamic Law
- 5 Five Pillars
Denny pp. 47-56
Writing assignment 1 due
- March 7 Prayer
Sells pp. 145-147, 150-153
CW Review discussion of Five Pillars, especially Prayer, on Islamicity.com
- 9 Ramadan and the Observance of Islamic Practices
SP
CW C. Fluehr-Lobban, "The Five Pillars of Islam as Observed by Muslims"
- 19 Hajj I
SP
CW R. Martin, "Religious Renewal Through Pilgrimage"
- 21 Hajj II
CW Review aspects of www.islamicity.com discussing the Hajj

- 23 Festivals
CW M. Hermansen "Women's Celebration of Muhammad's Birth"
- 26 Islamic Festivals - Muharram
Denny pp. 71-76
CW F. Korom, "Muharram Rituals in Iran"
- 28 Islam and Gender I
Denny pp. 98-106, 117-127
- 30 Islam and Gender II
SP
CW Selections from M. Thanawi *Perfecting Women*
- April 2 Islam and Gender III
SP
CW Riffat Hassan "Challenging the Stereotypes of Fundamentalism"
- 4 Sufism
SP and Denny pp. 88-98
- 6 Sufism
CW C. Ernst, "What is Sufism?"
- 9 Sufism in South Asia I
CW M. Mir, "Teachings of Two Punjabi Sufi Poets"
Writing Assignment 2 due
- 11 Sufism in South Asia II
CW J. Flueckiger, "Religious Identities at the Crossroads"
- 13 Islam in Iran
SP and Ebadi, Prologue and chp 1
- 16 Islam in Iran cont.
Ebadi chp. 2
CW T. Ward, "Prologue" *Searching For Hassan*
- 18 Islam in Iran cont.
SP and Ebadi chp. 3
- 20 Islam in Iran cont.
SP and Ebadi chp 4
CW M. Taleqani, "Taleqani's Last Sermon"
- 23 Islam in Iran cont.
SP and Ebadi chps. 5 and 6
- 25 Islam in Iran cont.
Ebadi chps. 7 and 8
- 27 Islam in Iran cont.
SP and Ebadi chps. 9 and 10
- 30 Islam in Iran cont.
Ebadi chp. 11 and Epilogue
- May 2 Islam in the United States
SP and Denny pp. 107-117
- 4 Review and Conclusions
- May 11 8:00 am Final Exam