

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

**REL 3362: ISLAMIC FAITH & SOCIETY**

Instructor: Dr. Iqbal Akhtar (Edin.)  
Office: Deuxieme Maison (DM) 359B  
Phone: +1 305.348.7098  
Email: [iakhtar@fiu.edu](mailto:iakhtar@fiu.edu)

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The Islamic tradition has played an important role in the social, economic, and political development of societies in Africa, Asia, and Europe since Late Antiquity. The theological core of Islam is the belief in the unity of God (*tawhīd*) as expressed in the central text of the tradition, the Quran. In addition to the Quran as Divine revelation, the sum total of Muhammad's (570-632 CE) actions, thoughts, and beliefs (*sunna*) form the foundation of Islamic law (*sharī'a*) which guides the lives of the world's currently estimated 1.6 billion Muslims. In the intervening 1400 years since the beginning of Muhammad's prophesy an immense body of jurisprudence has developed to meet the changing needs of Muslims in various cultural and historical contexts. While unified by a faith tradition, the historical development of Islam shall be historicized within local geographical contexts and through the impact of colonization and modernity.

Despite approximately 62% of Muslims living today in the Asia-Pacific region, many Islamic studies curricula in North America and Western Europe focus heavily on the 'central' Islamic lands while giving only cursory acknowledgement to the contributions and development of Islamic thought and civilization outwith the Near East. This course attempts to correct this imbalance through emphasizing the diverse political and philosophical constructs of Islamic thought by paying attention to the lived realities of Muslims on the 'periphery' of Islamic civilization through engagement with primary texts.

It is through incisive study that we, as a society, are able to break popular ideological notions of 'the other,' particularly those of Islam and Muslims, which have come to predominate in popular discourse over the last decade. The study of complex and diverse worldviews promotes equality and respect of other societies ordered with organizational preferences very different from our own. Through this course being part of the Global Learning initiative, it is hoped that students at FIU will begin to engage with the beautiful complexity of contemporary Muslim societies and hopefully inspire them to seriously engage with other societies and civilizations outside the Western hemisphere through the study of religion and politics.

This course is designed to be a comprehensive survey of Islamic civilization from the birth of tradition in seventh century Arabia to the contemporary period. Organization of this course is both topical and historical. Students shall be encouraged to engage with primary texts in consultation with the instructor and relevant secondary literature. The course will engage the intellectual tradition of Islam as well minority discourses within the tradition, particularly from Asia and Africa as well as focusing on issues of contemporary relevance.

## GLOBAL LEARNING COURSE OUTCOMES

GLOBAL AWARENESS- Students will be able to describe the complex interplay among key ideas, historical eras, and thinkers that have helped to shape and define the diversity of the Islamic world today.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE- Students will be able to analyze contemporary issues in the Islamic world through their historical background, Western colonial engagement with modernity, and postcolonial politics that continue to shape the dynamics of Muslim societies in the international system.

GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT- Students will demonstrate a willingness to engage with other societies and civilizations outside the Western hemisphere through the study of religion and politics.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

Droge, A. J., trans. *The Qur'ān: A New Annotated Translation*. Sheffield and Bristol: Equinox, 2013.  
Esposito, John L., ed. *The Oxford History of Islam*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.  
Leaman, Oliver. *Controversies in Contemporary Islam*. New York: Routledge, 2013.

## SUGGESTED FURTHER READINGS

[http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/img/assets/5495/Islamic\\_Studies\\_bibliog.pdf](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/img/assets/5495/Islamic_Studies_bibliog.pdf)

## GRADING

Class participation:	10%
Midterm:	25%
Student presentations and class assignments:	15%
Mosque visit	15%
Final paper	35%

### CLASS PARTICIPATION (10% OF FINAL GRADE)

Each student will endeavor to attend all class sessions on time and participate actively in class discussions. Students are expected to do all readings assigned in the syllabus. Handout readings will be available on Blackboard. Every student will also serve at least once as a *class discussant*, singly or in a pair depending on class size: class discussants will prepare notes on the assigned readings ahead of time and raise key points, discussion topics, important background issues, and questions *in order to facilitate class discussion*. Discussants are not expected or required to lecture but rather should prepare to complement the work of the professor through analysis and questions prepared on the topic of the day's lecture in advanced coordination with the professor.

MIDTERM (25% OF FINAL GRADE)

Online midterm examination will consist of all material presented hitherto.

GROUP PRESENTATIONS AND CLASS ASSIGNMENTS (15% OF FINAL GRADE)

Each group will prepare a 20 minute oral presentation on their research topic which will be delivered during the last class meetings of the term. A bi-weekly assignment will be assigned to allow you to reflect on the material presented over the previous two weeks.

MOSQUE VISIT (15% OF FINAL GRADE)

The class will attend Friday prayer services (*jum'mā'a namāj*) at the Baitul Naseer Mosque of the Aḥmadī community at 208 NW 7th Court, Hallandale Beach, FL 33009. The reading for the class will be an introduction to the Aḥmadī tradition from the *Encyclopedia of Islam*. Prayer services shall be held from 1315-1400. Please be aware that this will be held on a Friday in lieu of class.

FINAL PAPER (35% OF FINAL GRADE)

Due by midnight on the assigned day of the final examination via Blackboard.

- Consultation with the professor is recommended. Whenever possible, the term paper should fit into the student's wider academic trajectory. Select from topics provided or provide topic of interest for instructor approval. Sample topics could include: Sufi poetry in Islam, the American Muslim experience after 9/11, women's and minority rights after the Arab Spring, etc.
- Proposals (1-2 pages of narrative, plus preliminary bibliography using a standard bibliographic style) are due no later than the date of the midterm. Some students may be required to submit a revised proposal.
- Final Papers are due by midnight on the assigned day of the final examination- electronic copies to be uploaded to Blackboard. *Please note that, due to the late due date, no extensions will be permitted and no late papers accepted.*

## GRADING CRITERIA

All student work will be assigned numerical grades, corresponding to the following letter grades, according to the criteria below. Final grades will be calculated according to the percentages outlined above and converted to final letter grades for the course.

98-100	A+	“As” are awarded for excellent to exceptional work, free of technical and stylistic errors, showing sustained thought and engagement with the material on an appropriate but impressive academic level.
93-97	A	
90-92	A-	
88-89	B+	“Bs” are awarded for good to very good work, with some occasional errors, but nonetheless clearly indicating a good grasp of the material and assigned task.
83-87	B	
80-82	B-	
78-79	C+	“Cs” are awarded for average to above average work, meeting minimal standards but marked with errors, and exposing gaps in student performance and/or fulfillment of the assignment.
73-77	C	
70-72	C-	
68-69	D+	“Ds” are awarded for barely passing to below average work, usually riddled with errors and seriously deficient in fulfilling the assignment.
63-67	D	
60-62	D-	
Below 60	F	“Fs” are awarded for unacceptable work.

## COURSE REGULATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

Readings must be completed by the date for which they are assigned. Careful preparation of readings is essential for success in this course! As this is a seminar-style class, students will be expected to actively participate in class discussions of the readings. In the interest of fairness, deadlines are firm and will not be extended except in case of emergencies. Late assignments without authorized extensions may be penalized **five percentage points** for each *day* late, or part thereof, up to a maximum of 30 points. *Keep disk and paper* copies of all written work

Standards for citation and referencing must be adhered to. I recommend MLA style (see <http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/Documentation.html> and follow the link to MLA style), but any standard format is acceptable as long as you are consistent. Students may use abbreviated parenthetical references for assigned course texts, *i.e.*, (Girard, p. 90) but must provide full bibliographic information for all other sources used for written work. Internet sources are generally *unacceptable* as references, but if you do use them, citations must include full url details and date accessed. All written assignments must be typed, formatted in 10-12 point standard fonts, double-spaced, with one-inch margins.

Spelling, grammar, neatness, clarity, style, organization, etc. all *DO* count! Poor writing will affect your grade. Strive for clarity and use your computer's spell-check program wisely. Rewrite and revise your essays *before* turning them in; do not ask to do so afterwards. Ask yourself, Is this clear? Am I communicating my thoughts well? Would a friend in another class understand what I am saying?

Plagiarism and any and all forms of academic dishonesty will *not* be tolerated. Plagiarism is stealing someone else's words or original ideas. Plagiarism occurs in three forms:

- Written work that is entirely stolen from another source;
- Using quotations from another source without properly citing them; and
- Paraphrasing from another source without proper citations

In all cases, to avoid plagiarism, students must properly cite the source material. Only commonly known facts and concepts, general material learned in the course of research and study, and students' original ideas do not require citation.

Students are expected to understand the definition of plagiarism. See the University Code of Academic Integrity at <http://www.fiu.edu/~oabp/misconductweb/2codeofacainteg.htm> if you need further clarification. Offenders will receive a grade of F for the plagiarized assignment, and possibly the course, and may be reported directly to the Office of Academic Affairs.

For useful guidelines, go to the **Plagiarism Prevention** section on the FIU Library's website: <http://libguides.fiu.edu/plagiarism>.

Attendance and punctuality in class are required. Each unexcused absence after **ONE** will adversely affect your final grade, deducting up to 15 points from your class participation grade for each occurrence. Students with more than **four** absences will receive a **zero** for class participation.

DO NOT COPY

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION AND THE LIFE OF MUHAMMAD

Thematic questions: *Who was Muhammad and in what socio-political environment did he emerge in 7<sup>th</sup> century Arabia? What technological and material changes to Arabian society make his message resonate among the Medinan tribes?*

Topics for class discussion: *Arabian geography, Byzantium, Persia, and Yemen*

August 27: Course Introduction

August 29: The Islamic World Today

(Esposito, Chapter 1)

### WEEK 2: LEGACY OF THE PROPHET

Thematic questions: *How was the life of the Prophet reinterpreted by subsequent generations of Muslims? How did the early Arab conquests change the powers of the eastern Mediterranean? Can we search for a historical Muhammad?*

Topics for class discussion: *Jerusalem, the Wars of Apostasy, the Caliphate, and empire*

September 3: NO CLASS

September 5: Muhammad as Prophet and Statesman

(Handout, Watt)

### WEEK 3: THE QURAN

Thematic questions: *What is the Quran to Muslims? How was it collected and canonized? What does it mean to have Arabic as a sacred language to the authority of non-Arab Muslims? Who speaks for the Quran?*

Topics for class discussion: *The Arabic language, revelation, inspiration, and historicity*

September 10: Introduction to the Quran

(Handout, McAuliffe)

September 12: Selected Chapters

(Droge, Chapters 1, 12, 19, and 21)

### WEEK 4: THE SUNNA

Thematic questions: *How were the sayings of Muhammad (ḥadīth) recorded and canonized? How do the canon collections differ between the Sunni and Shia sects of Islam? What is the role of the Prophetic Traditions (sunna) in Islamic jurisprudence?*

Topics for class discussion: *ḥadīth, sunna, and the foundations of Islamic jurisprudence*

September 17: Judgment Day and the Afterlife

(Droge, Chapters 36 and 96-114)

September 19: Introduction to Hadith

(Handout, Ibn Arabi)

## WEEK 5: THE SHARIA

Thematic questions: *What is Islamic Law (sharī‘a)? How did it develop and what are the major schools of thought? What is the relevance of the sharī‘a in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?*

Topics for class discussion: *the process of devising Islamic law, fatwa, and ḥukm.*

September 24: Introduction to Islamic Law (Handout, Hallaq)

September 26: Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence (Handout, Hallaq)

## WEEK 6: SUFISM

Thematic questions: *How did Islamic mysticism (taṣawwuf) develop as a reaction to Islamic legalism? What are the different forms of taṣawwuf in Africa, Asia, and the Near East? How have taṣawwuf and Salafism come to ideologically define modern Islamic societies?*

Topics for class discussion: *Salafism, Sufism, legalism, and mysticism*

October 1: Sufism (Handout, Jackson)

October 3: The ‘Friends of God’ (Handout, Mojaddedi)

## WEEK 7: ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY

Thematic questions: *How did Al-Ghāzalī attempt to reconcile the mystical and legal forms of Islam? What does his spiritual autobiography say about the personal journey in Islamic societies? What is the relationship between the individual and community in the journey towards spiritual gnosis?*

Topics for class discussion: *human nature and the Divine, gnosis, and communal religion*

October 8: Al-Ghāzalī (Handout, Al-Ghāzalī)

October 10: Ibn Ṭufayl (Handout, Ibn Ṭufayl)

## WEEK 8: JUDAISM AND ISLAM

Thematic questions: *What was the status of Jews in the Islamic World? How did Islamic Spain come to define Judeo-Islamic intellectual exchanges in the medieval world?*

Topics for class discussion: *Maimonides, Islamic Spain, and the Convivencia*

October 15: **NO CLASS- EID HOLIDAY**

### **Paper Proposals Due**

October 17: ‘Opening Lecture: How Islam Saved the Jews’

<http://www.soas.ac.uk/religions/events/jordan-lectures-in-comparative-religion/14may2012-opening-lecture-how-islam-saved-the-jews.html>

WEEK 9: ISLAM IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA AND SOUTH ASIA

Thematic questions: *How did Islam spread to South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa? How do the forms of Islam practiced in these regions differ from those in the Near East? What role does maritime trade play in the spread of culture and religion?*

Topics for class discussion: *Zanzibar, Swahili, and the Indian Ocean World*

October 22: Islam in South and Southeast Asia (Esposito, Chapter 9)  
October 24: Islam in Africa (Esposito, Chapter 11)

WEEK 10: ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Thematic questions: *Why is Islamic art generally non-representational? What does the layout of a mosque say about Islamic spirituality and the human connection to the Divine? Why do maths, such as geometry, play such an important role in Islamic aesthetics?*

Topics for class discussion: *Islamic geometry, astrolabe, and mosque aesthetics*

October 29: Art and Architecture (Esposito, Chapter 5)  
October 31: NO CLASS- **Online Mid-term Examination on Blackboard**

WEEK 11: ISLAM AND MODERNITY

Thematic questions: *How did colonization affect various Muslim societies and how did they interact with modern social issues? 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' How does the global distribution of power and resources between the Global North and Global South affect state relationships of Muslim societies and the West?*

Topics for class discussion: *subaltern studies, postcolonialism, and gender studies*

November 5: Progress (Leaman, Part VI)  
November 7: Islamic Masculinities (Leaman- Part IV)

WEEK 12: MINORITY DISCOURSES IN CONTEMPORARY ISLAM

Thematic questions: *How are Muslim minority sects dealt with in Muslim majority societies? How and why has modern militant-extremism emerged in many Islamic societies?*

Topics for class discussion: *Muslim minorities and transnational militant-extremism*



November 12: The Myth of Militant Islam (Handout, Dakake)  
November 15: Ahmadi Islam (Handout, EI)  
**Mosque Visit 1315-1400**  
**208 NW 7th Court**  
**Hallandale Beach, FL 33009**

WEEK 13: CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

Thematic questions: *What is Islamic feminism and how is it challenging patriarchal norms in Muslim communities? Is there freedom to critique and analyze the Quran and the foundations of Islam from a secular academic lens?*

Topics for class discussion: *Muslim feminism, pluralism, and secular critical theory*

November 19: Freedom of Thought (Kurzman, Part V)  
**Socratic circle on student experiences of the mosque visit**  
November 21: Islamic Feminism- Skype guest lecture (Kurzman, Part IV)  
**Mosque visit report due**

WEEK 14: STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

November 19: **Creative engagement student group presentations**  
November 21: **Creative engagement student group presentations**

WEEK 15: STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

November 26: **NO CLASS- THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY**  
November 28: **NO CLASS- THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY**

Week 16: STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

December 3: **Creative engagement student group presentations**  
December 5: **Creative engagement student group presentations**

FINAL EXAMINATION

December 12: **Final paper due online via Blackboard**