

Introduction to Islam

INSTRUCTOR

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Goals:

1. For students to be able to describe the basic beliefs, practices, and expressions of Islam.
2. For students to appreciate the critical importance of studying Islam in this day and age
3. For students to grasp the overall narrative of the history of Islam and Muslim communities.
4. For students to be able to identify the main theological sources, traditions, and features of Islamic law.
5. For students to be able to recognize the diversity of Islam and the variety of Muslim experiences worldwide.
6. For students to be able to examine the intersection of Islam with social, political, and cultural issues.
7. For students to be able to differentiate between the multiple currents within contemporary Islam.
8. For students to be able to formulate their own understanding of contemporary events concerning Islam and Muslim communities in the world today

Course Description:

Introduction to Islam provides an overview of basic Islamic beliefs and practices through an examination of Islamic history, law, and an array of theological orientations as articulated in the traditions of teachings of various traditions. The course also examines Islamic practices in the contemporary period and thereby exposes students to reflect on the realities of religious everyday life and religious change. The course aims to give the students the ability to critically analyze the impacts of Islamic beliefs and values on social and cultural practices, and the formation of institutions, communities and identities. The course also aims to challenge students to grasp the complex relationship between the discursive traditions of a major world religion as well as the ambiguities of some key terms of Muslim religious thinking.

This course will lead students into an exploration of the basic history, contemporary expressions, concepts and phenomena, beliefs and rituals, communities and common experiences of Muslims across the globe. While such a course cannot amply cover the full extent of Muslim traditions across the ages and around the globe the expectation is that students engaged with this course will come away with a fuller appreciation for the richness and variety of Islam while also possessing a foundational understanding of its core concepts and practices.

As an academic study of the Islamic Tradition and the civilization(s) that it evolved this course is not one of Islamic theology (a religiously committed intellectual discipline) course. Rather this is an academic investigation of this great religion, which will use an intellectually rigorous and critical lens that draws on history, sociology, anthropology and critical hermeneutics in our study. For those looking for a theology course that sets out to show that one religious tradition is superior to the others or has "the truth," this is not the class that you want. Also for those wanting to demonize the tradition, you too are in the wrong class. This course aims to present a critical, but balanced, picture of Islam and Muslims across time and in the world today.

Readings:

Required Texts

- John L. Esposito, *Islam: the Straight Path*, Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Ron Geaves, *Aspects of Islam*, Georgetown University Press, 2005.
- **Tamara Sonn, *A Brief History of Islam* (2nd Edition), Wiley-Blackwell, 2010 ([available online](#))

Bibliography of Other Readings/Sources

- Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*, Princeton University Press, 2015.
- Sophia Rose Arjana, *Muslims in the Western Imagination*, Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Michael Birkel, *Qur'an in Conversation*, Baylor University Press, 2014.
- Norman Calder, Jawid Mojaddedi, and Andrew Rippin eds. & trans., *Classical Islam: A Sourcebook of Religious Literature* (2nd ed.), Routledge, 2013.
- Eric Geoffroy, *Introduction to Sufism: The Inner Path of Islam*, World Wisdom, 2010.
- Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Shari'ah Law: An Introduction*, Oneworld, 2011.
- Kim Knott, Elizabeth Poole, and Teemu Taira eds., *Media Portrayals of Religion and the Secular Sacred: Representation and Change*, Ashgate, 2013.

- Terje Østebø “African Salafism: Religious Purity and the Politicization of Purity” in *Islamic Africa*, 6, 2015: 1-2.
- David Robinson, *Muslim Societies in African History. New Approaches to African History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004: 25-73.

Assignments:

Lectures and Readings: Students are expected to complete the readings and watch the lectures for each respective module. The amount of readings and lecture material will vary slightly for each module or section, but will be in keeping with work-load expectations for an online course. Material for exams will be drawn from the readings and lecture materials. Thus, it behooves the student to be familiar with both and readily prepared to be tested on this material.

Discussion Boards: Each module will also have a discussion board assignment. Students will be expected to 1) post their own response to each module’s discussion prompt and/or question; 2) ask a question of, or post a critical comment to, two of their fellow students’ discussion board posts; and 3) respond to any questions or critical comments left on their own discussion board post. Discussion board groups will be based on online course sections and due dates for the discussion boards will be successive in the course of each module (e.g., discussion board post due day two, questions and comments due day three, responses due day four, etc.)

Exams: There will be two exams as part of the course. The first will be a mid-term, which will focus on Modules 1-5. The second will be a final exam. It will focus primarily on Modules 6-10, but include some questions from Modules 1-5. It is not a “cumulative exam” as such, but will require some review of the Mid-Term.

Analysis, Commentary, or Op-ed Project: Students will write a 1500-2000 word analysis, commentary, or opinion piece reflecting on, or reacting to, a critical topic of a student’s choice that was covered in class. This project will be cumulative insofar as students will be required to turn in portions of this assignment throughout the semester. This will help students not only complete the project, but also develop their ideas with sufficient time and input from their professor and fellow students. The TOPIC for this project will be due at the end of Module 3. The THESIS, or main IDEA or ARGUMENT, of the piece will be due at the end of Module 7. The OUTLINE for the project will be due at the end of Module 8. The DRAFT will be due at the end of Module 10. The FINAL PROJECT will be due at the end of the course.

Grading:

- Syllabus Quiz & Welcome Post — 1% (10 points)
- Module Quizzes — 20% (12 points/quiz — 120 points total)

- Discussion Boards — 17% (4 points for post, 4 for questions/comments, 2 for responses — 100 points total)
- Mid-term Exam — 20% (120 points)
- Final Exam — 20% (120 points)
- Analysis, Commentary, or Op-ed Project — 22% (140 points possible, see rubric)

Grading Scale:

- A 94-100% (573-610 pts.) // A - 90-93% (549-572 pts.)
- B+ 86-89% (524-548 pts.) // B 80-85% (488-523 pts.)
- C+ 76-79% (464-487 pts.) // C 70-75% (427-463 pts.)
- D+ 66-69% (402-426 pts.) // D 60-65% (366-401 pts.)
- E Below 60% (365 pts. or below)

**Grades are consistent with [UF policy](#)

Late or Make-Up Assignments:

You may turn in assignments early or receive an extension on an exam or essay assignment only in extraordinary circumstances, with written approval, and with prior consent from the instructor. If an extension is not granted, the assignment will be marked down 1/2 grade (e.g., from B+ to B) for each day late.

You are allowed one quiz reset for the entire semester. We recommend saving this until the end of the semester so that you can choose your lowest scoring quiz or a quiz that you missed.

Honor Code:

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The [Honor Code](#) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

Meetings:

Students are encouraged to meet with the instructor online during office hours or by appointment.

Accommodation for Disabilities:

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the [Disability Resource Center](#) (352-392-8565) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

Counseling Resources:

Resources available on-campus for students include the following:

- University Counseling Center, 301 Peabody Hall, 392-1575, personal and career counseling;
- Student Mental Health, Student Health Care Center, 392-1171, personal counseling;
- Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS), Student Health Care Center, 392-1161, sexual counseling;
- Career Resource Center, Reitz Union, 392-1601, career development assistance and counseling.

Software Use:

All faculty, staff, and students of the University are required and expected to obey the laws and legal agreements governing software use. Failure to do so can lead to monetary damages and/or criminal penalties for the individual violator. Because such violations are also against University policies and rules, disciplinary action will be taken as appropriate.

Online Course Evaluation:

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course based on 10 criteria. These evaluations are conducted online at <https://evaluations.u-fl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Students may view a summary of these assessments at [GatorRater](#).

Course Calendar:

Getting Started

Read: Course Syllabus

Assignments: Syllabus Quiz and Welcome Post

MODULE 1: *Why Study Islam?*

Read: Prothero Intro. and ch. 1

Assignments: Quiz & Discussion Board — Find and post articles

MODULE 2: *Imagining Islam — Perceptions and Perplexities*

Read: Geaves intro. & ch. 2; Esposito intro.; Knot, et. al., ch. 4; Arjana intro. & ch. 1; Ahmed pp. 3-10.

Assignments: Quiz & Discussion Board — Case Study; Idea and/or Topic for Analysis, Commentary, or Op-ed Project

MODULE 3: *Islam in History Pt. 1*

Read: Esposito ch. 1, pp. 1-19; Calder ch. 2; Geaves ch. 8; Esposito ch. 2, pp. 37-63.

Assignments: Quiz & Discussion Board

MODULE 4: *Islam in History Pt. 2*

Read: Esposito ch. 2, pp. 64-75; Calder et. al. selections from ch. 4

Assignments: Quiz & Discussion Board; Thesis statement/Big Idea for analysis, commentary, or op-ed project.

MODULE 5: *Scriptures and Sources*

Read: Esposito ch. 1, pp. 19-36; Kamali intro. and ch. 2, pp. 1-38; and Esposito ch. 3.

Assignments: Quiz & Discussion Board; Mid-Term Review; Mid-Term

MODULE 6: *Basic Beliefs and Practices*

Read: Geaves chs. 3-4; Calder et. al. selections from chs. 6-7.

Assignments: Quiz & Discussion Board

MODULE 7: *Topics: Sufism and Women in Islam*

Read: Geaves ch. 7; Geoffroy ch. 1; Calder et. al. selections from ch. 8; Geaves ch. 11; Birkel pp. 161-172.

Assignments: Quiz & Discussion Board; Outline for analysis, commentary, or op-ed project.

MODULE 8: *Topics: Religion & Politics, Contemporary Revival and Reform*

Read: Esposito ch. 4, Geaves ch. 10; Esposito ch. 5, Geaves ch. 9.

Assignments: Quiz & Discussion Board

MODULE 9: *Contemporary Issues and Islam in the West*

Read: Esposito ch. 2, pp. 75-91; ch. 6

Assignments: Quiz & Discussion Board; Draft for analysis, commentary, or op-ed project.

MODULE 10: *Special Topic: Islam in Africa*

Read: Østebø, pp. 1-2 and Robinson pp. 35-73.

Assignments: Quiz & Discussion Board

MODULE 11: *Conclusion and Review*

Assignments: Final Exam Review; Final Exam; Course Evaluation

***ANALYSIS, COMMENTARY, OR OP-ED PROJECT DUE ON LAST DAY OF CLASS**

***FINAL EXAM: DATE & TIME TBD**