

Introduction to Islam

Spring 2023

INSTRUCTORS

Brahim Afrit and Michael Schuster
Office Hours: By appointment - Zoom

Goals For Students:

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

General Education Credits:

Primary General Education Designation: Humanities

Secondary General Education Designation (if seeking): International (N)

This course accomplishes the [General Education](#) objectives of the subject areas listed above. A minimum grade of C is required for Quest and General Education credit. Courses intended to satisfy Quest and General Education requirements cannot be taken S-U.

Readings:

Required Texts

- John L. Esposito, *Islam: the Straight Path*, Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2016. – 5th Edition
- Ron Geaves, *Aspects of Islam*, Washington: Georgetown University

Press, 2005

***Additional Supplementary and Optional Texts will be Provided by
Instructor on the Canvas Platform.***

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 (except for module 6). 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 at least **one** of their fellow students' discussion board posts.

For each initial post the student must cite **(5pts)** at least one of that week's readings (MLA citation style - mandatory) as well as refer to a lecture **(5pts)** from that week (except for Module 12) and put forward a substantial argument or critical thought **(5pts)**. While there is no minimum or maximum number of words required for the initial post, to efficiently meet the expectations for the initial post it is recommended to write at least 400 words. For the second post, each student must critically respond to a peer **(10pts)**, this should be more than a simple "I like" or "I agree" statement. Your response should be a critical engagement with what your peer has posted. Overall, each discussion post is worth a total of **25pts**.

The discussion board will open on the Sunday at the beginning of the week and close at 11:59pm on the Friday of that week.

Quizzes: Each module (except for module 6) will have a quiz. You will have 25 minutes to complete each quiz. These quizzes will open the same time as the discussion boards for the week—the Sunday at the beginning of the week—and close at 11:59pm on the Saturday of that week.

Exams: There will be **two exams** as part of the course. The first will be a mid-term (**120 pts**), which will focus on **Modules 1-6**. The second will be a final exam (**200 pts**). It will focus primarily on **Modules 7-12**, but include some questions from **Modules 1-6**. It is not a “cumulative exam” as such, but will require some review of the Mid-Term. You will have 120 minutes to complete each exam.

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 5. 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 9. The DRAFT will be due at the end of Module 11. The FINAL PROJECT will be due at the end of the course.**

Grading:

- Syllabus Quiz & Welcome Post — 10 points
- Module Quizzes — 20 points/quiz — 220 points total
- Discussion Boards — 25 points/post (15 points for initial post, 10 for reaction post) — 300 points total
- Mid-term Exam — 120 points
- Final Exam — 200 points
- Analysis, Commentary, or Op-ed Project — 150 points possible

Grading Scale:

- 93-100% = A
- 90-92% = A-
- 87-89% = B+
- 83-86% = B
- 80-82% = B-
- 77-79% = C+
- 73-76% = C
- 70-72% = C-
- 67-69% = D+
- 63-66% = D
- 60-62% = D-
- 0-59% = F

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.

If you run into technical issues you will need to contact UF IT and explain your problem to them. They will then provide you with a reference number which you can give to us.

General Education Credits

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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 evaluations.ufl.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:

WELCOME: *Getting Started* - **January 8**

Read: Course Syllabus

Assignments: Syllabus Quiz and Welcome Post

MODULE 1: *Why Study Islam?* - **January 15**

Read: Prothero Intro. and Ch. 1

Assignments: Quiz & Discussion Board — Find and post articles

MODULE 2: *Imagining Islam — Perceptions and Perplexities* - **January 22**

Read: Geaves Intro. & Ch. 2; Esposito Intro.; Knot, et. al Ch. 4; Ahmed pp. 3-10.

Assignments: Quiz & Discussion Board

MODULE 3: *Islam in History Pt. 1* - **January 29**

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* - February 5

Read: Esposito Ch. 2, pp. 63-75; Calder et. al. selections from Ch. 4

Assignments: Quiz & Discussion Board

MODULE 5: *Scriptures and Sources* - February 12

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

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

MODULE 6: *Basic Beliefs and Practices* - February 19

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

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

MODULE 7: *Sufism in Islam* - February 26

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

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

MODULE 8: *Contemporary Revival and Reform Part 1* - March 5

Read: Esposito Ch. 4, Geaves Ch. 10;

Assignments: Quiz & Discussion Board

Spring Break - March 12

MODULE 9: *Contemporary Revival and Reform Part 2* - March 19

Read: Esposito Ch. 5, Geaves Ch. 9

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

MODULE 10: *Contemporary Issues and Islam in the West* - March 26

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

Assignments: Quiz & Discussion Board

MODULE 11: *Special Topic 1: Islam and Culture in Africa* - April 2

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

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

MODULE 12: *Special Topic 2: Youth and Women in Contemporary Islam* - April 9

Read:

Women - Geaves Ch. 11; Birkel pp. 161-172

Youth - Janson pp. 1-34.

Supplementary Readings:

Shaikh pp. 147-162.

Assignments: Quiz & Discussion Board

MODULE 13: *Conclusion and Review* - **April 16**

Assignments: Final Exam; Course Evaluation; Final Draft analysis, commentary, or op-ed project