

RELG 250, Introduction to Islam

(generic syllabus)

Instructor: Noah Gardiner, gardinen@mailbox.sc.edu
Office hours: Rutledge College 325, Wednesdays 11-12, Thursdays 12:30-1:30, and by appt.

Course Overview:

In this course we examine major aspects of Islam as a religious and cultural tradition, from its historical beginnings to the modern day, in various sectarian varieties, and from the Middle East to the United States. Our overarching perspective is historical, and considerable attention is paid to premodern Islamic thought and culture, though always with an eye toward ways that modern Muslims regularly reconsider and contest the meanings of key events in the history of Islam. Modern topics such as “Islamic terrorism” and American Islam also are discussed. The class is appropriate for those with little or no previous exposure to Islam, though students who are already familiar with it will discover much that is new and unexpected. Experienced students of religion will find that Muslim thinkers address many issues and questions familiar from other religious traditions, but that Islam also presents unique challenges to our understandings of the very definition of religion, and of religion’s relationship to areas of life such as science and politics.



Learning Outcomes:

Students who successfully complete this course should be able to:

- Synthesize the basic tenets and practices of the major varieties of Islam within a historical framework.
- Critically evaluate statements about Islam in the media and in political debates.
- Critically evaluate the statements of groups and individuals claiming to speak for Islam as a whole.
- Communicate effectively in discussion and in writing about matters related to Islam.



Required texts:

- Alexander Knysh. *Islam in Historical Perspective*. Upper Saddle River: Pearson, 2011. ISBN 978-0-321-39877-2.
- Aaron Hughes. *Muslim Identities: An Introduction to Islam*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013. ISBN 978-0-231-16146-6.
- G. W. Wilson and Alphona Herring, *Ms. Marvel*, Vol. 1, 1-5 (2014). ISBN 978-097851-9021.

Other readings include numerous primary texts in translation and some secondary sources, all of which will be provided on Blackboard.



A note on web resources:

Beware of online resources regarding Islam other than the ones recommended in class. There are a lot of Islamophobic and otherwise mis-informative sites about Islam on the internet, as well as many sites that emphasize the correctness of one particular interpretation of Islam at the expense of others.

Neither type of site can be relied upon for the sort of materials appropriate for this class.

Assignments, requirements, and grading:

Grades will be based on the following:

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| Participation: | %10 |
| In-class writings | %20 |
| Leading discussions: | %10 |
| Midterm exam: | %35 |
| Final exam: | %35 |

Letter grades are assigned as follow:

A, 90-100; B+, 87-89; B, 80-86; C+ 77-79; C 70-76; D+ 67-69; D, 60-66; F, 59 or less.

Participation

The participation grade reflects **students' preparation for and active contributions to class.**

Participation in class means being present and attentive, and being willing and able to make meaningful contributions to discussions (which in turn requires having carefully completed the assigned readings for each class-meeting). Those for whom participation in classroom discussions is a source of serious anxiety are encouraged to regularly visit Prof. Gardiner's office hours in place of classroom participation.

Good participation does not require that you have understood everything you have read or heard. Indeed, one of the best ways to participate is to ask questions about the things you have not understood. The more everyone participates, the more productive, interesting, and fun the class will be.

Good participation does require coming to class. Frequent absenteeism will lead to a significantly lower participation score. **Students who will be missing classes due to religious holidays, sporting events, etc. must notify Prof. Gardiner by the end of the second week of class** (Friday, Sept.1).

In-class writings

In-class writing assignments are short (usually 4-5 sentences) writing tasks that are directly related to the readings. They will be given approximately once a week. They are intended to help everyone get their thoughts together about the readings prior to discussion, and to check that people are doing the readings. They will be collected and graded on an A, B, C scale (or a zero if the student is absent) based on the degree of engagement with the readings that they demonstrate.

Leading discussions

Each student in the class is required to lead a classroom discussion of one of the readings—either a primary text or a piece of secondary scholarship from outside the course textbooks. This will entail a few things:

- Writing a 2-3 sentence overview of the reading that captures its main subjects.
- Writing a one-page outline of the reading.
- Writing a set of five discussion questions to get the conversation going.
- Leading the discussion in class.

Each student is required to lead discussion once during the semester, and we will set up the schedule at the beginning of the semester. In a few instances when there is more material to cover, two

students will share the task. Discussion leaders will be graded on an A, B, C scale (or a zero if they fail to show up the day they are supposed to lead class). The overview, outline, and questions must be typed and handed in the day of the class. The outlines will be posted to Blackboard as a study aid for the exams.

N. B. that all students are required to do all of the readings, even when it's not their turn to lead discussion!

Midterm and final exams

These are timed, at-home essay exams administered via Blackboard. Study guides will be distributed prior to the exam.



One-on-one meetings

All students are required to schedule a one-on-one meeting with Prof. Gardiner during his office hours or at some other time, to be held during the first few weeks of class. This is an opportunity to see where the office is located, answer any questions you may have about the course, and have an informal chat.



Class guidelines:

Students must always bring their copies of the textbooks on days when readings from them are assigned. Students must also be able to access copies of readings assigned on Blackboard during the class for which they are assigned, whether printed or on a computer or tablet.

Students are permitted to use computers or tablets in class only when discussing readings stored electronically. Devices should otherwise be closed during class, unless the student can verify a medical need to use them at other times. Students should thus bring a notebook and pen or pencil to class for taking notes. The use of phones during class is not permitted. Those who do not follow these guidelines should expect to be called out in class, and Prof. Gardiner reserves the right to disallow the use of electronic devices in class if too many issues arise from their use.

You are welcome to bring food to class if you need to. Please try to avoid particularly loud, crunchy foods or anything that might otherwise distract the rest of the class.



Discussion etiquette:

Everyone in the classroom has the right to hold and express their ideas, opinions, and beliefs. Discussion and debate are at the heart of this kind of learning, and you are free—even encouraged—to disagree with the instructor and/or your classmates. However, when you do so, be sure to criticize the idea a person has expressed and not the person herself/himself. Follow basic rules of civil conversation: try not to interrupt or shout over each other, and be sure to give everyone a chance to talk. If anyone feels that he or she is being mistreated in classroom discussions then please come talk to the instructor outside of class as soon as possible. All such discussions will be kept confidential.



Accommodations:

Please notify the instructor by the end of the first week of classes if you require any special accommodations for the class and furnish any qualifying documentation.



Academic integrity:

As in all classes, students are bound by the University of South Carolina Honor Code with regard to cheating, plagiarism, lying, etc. For more information please refer to the Office of Academic Integrity's student resources page:

<https://www.sa.sc.edu/academicintegrity/honor-code-policy-information/>



**ASSIGNMENT
SCHEDULE**

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| Week 1 | Class Intro: Why Study Islam? |
| | Read the syllabus before class and bring it with you to class. |
| Week 2 | How to Study Islam, Islam and Late Antiquity |
| | Hughes, "Introduction: Religious Studies and the Academic Study of Islam," p. 1-16. |
| | Knysh, "Chapter 1. Arabia," p. 7-17. |
| | Hughes, "Monotheisms in Arabia," to "Islamic Origins: A Synthetic Approach," p. 28-40. |
| | Quran, Surat al-Fatihah ("The Opening"), tr. M. Sells. On Blackboard. |
| Week 3 | The Prophet Muhammad |
| | Labor Day, no class. |
| | Knysh "Chapter 2. Muhammad," p. 18-35. |
| | Hughes, "Chapter 2. The Making of the Last Prophet," p. 41-63. |
| | Ibn Hisham, "The night journey" and "The ascent to heaven," in <i>The Life of Muhammad</i> (Karachi: Pakistan Branch, Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 181-187. On Blackboard. |
| Week 4 | The Early Muslim Community |
| | Knysh, "Chapter 3. After Muhammad," p. 36-47. |
| | Knysh, "Chapter 4. The Murder of Uthman," p. 48-68. |
| | Hughes, "The Death of Muhammad," "The Events at the Portico," and the "The Four <i>Rashidun</i> ," p. 97-102. |
| Week 5 | Quran and Sunnah |
| | Knysh, "Chapter 5. The Quran" and "Chapter 6. The Prophetic Hadith and Sunna," p. 70-97. |
| | Quran selections. |
| | Tafsir selections. On Blackboard. |
| | Hadith selections |

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| Week 6 | The Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates |
| | Knysh, "Chapter 7. The First Divisions within the Community," p. 98- 108. |
| | Knysh, "Chapter 8. The Abbasid Revolution and Beyond," p. 109-121. |
| | Hughes, from "Abd al-Malik" through "The View from the Edge," p. 102-112. |
| Week 7 | Shi'ism |
| | Knysh, "Chapter 11. Twelver Shi'ism and Zaydism," p. 159-183. |
| | "Furat al-Kufi on Surat al-Bayyina" (Calder), p. 160-162. "Al-Nawbakhti on the Imamiyya" (Calder), p. 232-234. Quran: Surat al-Bayyinah (98:1-8). All on Blackboard. |
| | Watch: Ashura video |
| Week 8 | Shi'ism (cont.) |
| | Knysh, "Chapter 12. The Ismailis," p. 184-210. |
| | Midterm prep |
| | MIDTERM EXAM |
| Week 9 | Islamic Thought and Practice |
| | Knysh. "Chapter 9. Islamic Scholarship... The Rise and Development of the Schools of Law," p. 122-138. |
| | Hallaq, "Who's who in the Sharia?" in <i>An Introduction to Islamic Law</i> (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), p. 14-30. On Blackboard. |
| | Fall Break, no class. |
| Week 10 | Islamic Thought and Practice (cont.) |
| | Knysh, "Chapter 13. Ascetic and Mystical Movements," p. 211-234. |
| | Hughes, "Chapter 8. Constituting Identities," p. 183-201. |
| | Hughes, "Chapter 9. The Performance of Muslim Identities," p. 203- 221. |
| Week 11 | Gender and sexuality in Islam |
| | Quran, selections from Surat al-Nisa' |
| | Hughes, "Chapter 10. Constructing Muslim Women," p. 254-273. |
| | Ali, "Marriage, Money, and Sex," in <i>Sexual Ethics and Islam</i> (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), p.1-23. |

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| Week 12 | Early Modern Islam |
| | Knysh, "Chapter 14. Later Sufism," p. 235-258. |
| | Knysh, "Chapter 21. The Religious Policies of the Gunpowder Empires," p. 376-397. |
| | Melvin-Koushki, "Early Modern Islamicate Empire: New Forms of Sociopolitical Legitimacy," p. 1-21. |
| Week 13 | The Colonial Encounter and Islamic Reform |
| | Hughes, "Modern Variations," p. 225-253. |
| | Al-Jabarti (tr. Shmuel Moreh), <i>Napoleon in Egypt, al-Jabarti's Chronicle of the French Occupation, 1798</i> (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2004), p. 3-9 & 67-76. On Blackboard |
| | Knysh, "Chapter 22. Renewal and Reform in Islam," p. 398-423. |
| Week 14 | No class – Thanksgiving Break |
| | Read <i>Ms. Marvel</i> - by the end of Thanksgiving Break! |
| Week 15 | American Islam |
| | <i>Ms. Marvel</i> , entire comic. |
| | Sherman Jackson, "Islam and Black Religion," in <i>Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking Toward the Third Resurrection</i> (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), p. 23-57. On Blackboard. |
| | N. Abraham, "Arab Detroit's 'American' mosque," in N. Abraham & A. Shryock (eds.) <i>Arab Detroit</i> , ed. (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2000), p. 279-312. On Blackboard. |
| Week 16 | Islam and extremism |
| | Quran, The Sword Verse. On Blackboard. |
| | Knysh, "Chapter 25. The Ideology and Practice of Globalized Jihadism," p. 482-503. |
| | Bruce Lincoln, "Symmetric Dualisms, Bush and Bin Laden on October 7th," in <i>Holy Terrors</i> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 19-32. Osama bin Laden, "Jihad against Jews and Crusaders," in <i>The Middle East and Islamic World Reader</i> (New York: Grove, 2003), p. 324-327. On Blackboard. |
| | FINAL EXAM |