Traditions of Islam

Department of Religious Studies
Grinnell College
REL 220-01 — Fall 2007
Tues 10-11:50am; Thurs. 10-10:50am
Steiner Hall, Room 106

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Office hrs: MW 12-2pm
or by appt.
Traditions of Islam

In the name of God, the Merciful and Compassionate: praise belongs to God, the Lord of the Worlds, the Merciful, the Compassionate; Master of the Day of Judgment, You do we worship and You do we call on for help; guide us on the Straight Path, the path of those whom You have blessed, not of those who earn your anger nor those who go astray. (Qur’an 1:1-7)

Description and Objectives
With the above passage begins the Qur’an, or “Recitation,” the holy book of an estimated one billion people worldwide. What does God reveal in the Qur’an? Who was Muhammad, God’s messenger? What accounts for the rapid spread of Islam from the deserts of seventh-century Arabia to locations as far-flung as Spain and Indonesia? What is the nature of belief and practice within this world tradition? What differences exist among contemporary Muslims? How does Islam impact conversations about American religious diversity?

This course introduces the religious traditions of Islam. By the end of the course, students should have a working knowledge of the historical contours of Islam; key Muslim terms and concepts; varieties of Islamic belief and practice; and the changing place of Islam within both global and American contexts.

Required Texts
John L. Esposito, Islam: The Straight Path (rev. 3d edition)
Michael Sells, Approaching the Qur’an: The Early Revelations
Genieve Abdo, Mecca and Main Street: Muslim Life in America after 9/11
Vali Nasr, The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future
Mohsin Hamid, The Reluctant Fundamentalist
E-Reserve/Blackboard materials (denoted with an asterisk* on your schedule)

Evaluation

20% Participation
15% Discussion leadership
20% Two short papers (4-5 pages)
25% Midterm exam
20% Final exam
NOTE: If you have specific physical, psychiatric, or learning disabilities and require accommodations, please let me know during the first week of class so that your needs can be appropriately addressed. You will need to provide documentation of your disability to Joyce Stern, the Associate Dean and Director of Academic Advising (x3702).
PARTICIPATION (20%)

Students are expected to attend each class session, and register their attendance on a sign-in sheet which will be passed around at the beginning of class. Late arrivals or early departures will count as ½ an absence; more than one unexcused absence will negatively affect this portion of your grade.

Mere attendance is not enough, however. You should carefully read the assigned materials ahead of time, come to class with those materials (including e-reserves), and be prepared with questions and comments. Actively, consistently engaging your professor and your peers will be reflected in this part of your grade.

The percentage of your final grade assigned to “participation” places a substantial responsibility upon your shoulders, but this also true for me. Assessing a student’s participation can be an inexact science, but I will try to dispel whatever aura of mystery customarily attaches to such judgments. At least twice during the semester, I will not only tell you what your participation grade is to that point, I will also provide you with concrete feedback on what you might do to improve it (should this be necessary).

Generally speaking, here is how I will evaluate your participation:

A — Students demonstrate that they have read and reflected upon the assigned materials. Students consistently offer insightful comments, questions, and evaluations of the readings, and also respond thoughtfully to their peers in class discussions.

B — Students demonstrate they have read and reflected upon the materials. Students occasionally provide comments, raise questions, and engage peers in class discussions.

C — Students demonstrate at least a nodding acquaintance with the assigned materials, and infrequently offer questions or join in class discussions.

D — Students are unfamiliar with assigned materials, do not respond adequately to questions, and customarily ignore class discussions.

F — Students seem to have stumbled into the wrong class, demonstrating a willful ignorance of assigned materials and an unjust desire to merely borrow the precious oxygen of their peers during class discussions.

Keep in mind that there is a reward for consistent and thoughtful participation. In addition to ensuring that our seminars do not degenerate into monologues, your steady labors throughout the semester can diminish the panic which usually comes as midterm and final exams approach.
DISCUSSION LEADERSHIP (15%)
In pairs, students will be asked to lead one class session in discussion. A schedule will be passed around early in the semester. Before your assigned day, you will be expected to develop a concrete, coherent agenda tied to course assignments and themes. Your grade will be determined by the quality of that agenda, and your ability to engage your colleagues in worthwhile conversation. Consulting with me ahead of time is not required, but it might prove helpful in ensuring your success.

SHORT PAPERS (20%)
Students will write two short papers during the semester. Due dates are indicated in the course schedule. Each paper is worth 10% of the final grade (2 papers = 20%). Assignments for each paper will vary; instructions will be provided at least one week in advance of the due date. I will expect papers to be around five pages, with the usual requirements of a clear thesis, careful development of that thesis, conscientious citation of relevant course materials, good grammar and spelling, etc.

MIDTERM EXAM (25%)
This in-class examination will be designed to test your knowledge of key terms, concepts, and events. One suggestion: as we proceed during the first part of the semester, compile a list of key terms and concepts (especially those in Arabic). This will greatly ease the pain of studying for the midterm.

FINAL EXAM (20%)
This examination will ask you to synthesize key themes and reflect upon contemporary issues in light of our semester-long endeavors.
SCHEDULE

Aug. 30 (Th)  Introduction

Sept. 4 (Tu)  Soft Focus: The Media and Muhammad
              WATCH “Muhammad” (PBS documentary)

Sept. 6 (Th)  East and West
              Read: Said, “Orientalism” *

Sept. 11 (Tu) Muhammad the Messenger
              Read: Esposito, Intro and chapter 1
                     Ibn Ishaq (excerpt)*

Sept. 13 (Th) Muhammad the Exemplar
              Read: Peters, “The Quest of the Historical
                     Muhammad *
                     Lester, “What Is the Koran?” *

Sept. 18 (Tu) Recitation: The Qur’an
              Read: Sells, Approaching the Qur’an
                     [Paper topic assigned]

Sept. 20 (Th) Recitation: The Qur’an
              Read: Sells, Approaching the Qur’an

Sept. 25 (Tu) Tradition and Authority
              Read: Introduction to Hadith *
                     Excerpt, Hadith of Sahih Bukhari *
Sept. 27 (Th)  Expansion

       Read: Esposito, ch. 2

Oct. 2 (Tu)  Muslim Piety and Practice

       Read: Esposito, ch. 3

       PapEr I due

Oct. 4 (Th)  Muslim Piety and Practice

       Read: Hassam, “The Daily Prayer (Du’a) of Shi’a Isma’ili Muslims” *

Oct. 9 (Tu)  Muslim Piety and Practice

       Watch: “The Hajj” *

Oct. 11 (Th)  Muslim Piety and Practice

       Read: Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr*

Oct. 16 (Tu)  Muslim Piety and Practice

       Read: Esposito, ch. 3

       “Wearing the Hijab: Religion & Culture” *

Oct. 18 (Th)  MIDTERM EXAM

Fall Break  Week of Oct. 22-26

Oct. 30 (Tu)  Islamic Mysticism: Sufism

       Read: Ernst, “Saints and Sainthood” *

       Excerpts: Rumi; Conference of the Birds *
Nov. 1 (Th)  Islamic Mysticism: Sufis  
            Watch: “I Am Sufi, I Am Muslim”

Nov. 6 (Tu)  Islam and Modernity  
            Read: Esposito, ch. 4

            PAPER 2 DUE

Nov. 8 (Th)  Contemporary Islam  
            Read: Esposito, ch. 4

Nov. 13 (Tu) Shia and Sunni  
            Read: Nasr, *The Shia Revival*

Nov. 15 (Th) Contemporary Shia Islam  
            Read: Nasr, *The Shia Revival*

Nov. 20 (Tu) NO CLASS

THANKSGIVING

Nov. 27 (Tu) Contextualizing Fundamentalism  
            Read: Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*  
            Esposito, ch. 5

Nov. 29 (Th) Contextualizing Fundamentalism  
            Read: Excerpt from Wright, *The Looming Tower*  
            Sayid Qutb*
Dec. 4 (Tu)  **Contextualizing Fundamentalism**

Read: Esposito, ch. 6

Excerpt from Stern, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* *

Dec. 6 (Th)  **Muslims in America: African-Americans and Islam**

Read: Malcolm X*

Dec. 11 (Tu)  **Muslims in America: Immigration and Assimilation**

Read: Abdo, *Mecca and Main Street*

**American Muslims? Integration and Identity**

Read: Abdo, *Mecca and Main Street*

Media coverage of Keith Ellison campaign*

Dec. 13 (Th)  **Conclusion**

Read: Esposito, “Epilogue” (ch. 7)

**FINAL EXAMS DEC. 17-21**