

REL 3363: Islam
Michael Muhammad Knight

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Office Hours: Tu/Th 3:00-4:00 (PSY 247)

This course explores the development of Islam from its origins in the Arabian Peninsula to its flourishing across the known world. We will discuss the historical context in which the original Muslim community emerged, as well as the development of Muslim theological, mystical, legal, and political institutions. This course will give special attention to the ways in which Muslims have conceptualized and interpreted the Qur'anic revelation and the significance of the Prophet Muhammad. At the heart of the course readings and discussions lies an exploration of Muslim diversity concerning questions of religious authenticity and authority.

Course Objectives

- develop familiarity with key figures, texts, and themes in Islamic tradition
- explore critical concepts and issues in the academic study of religion

Course Expectations (How to Do Well Here)

First, a note on critical concepts. By enrolling in this course, you are taking part in the academic study of religion. This is different than the way that someone might study a religion within a community of believers, i.e. a seminary or Sunday school environment. In this course, we will examine Islam through a **descriptive** lens, rather than a **prescriptive** one. By “descriptive” I mean that we will approach Islam as it appears historically on the ground, rather than with an effort to locate the essence of “true” Islam. In other words, as we look at the diversity of Muslim traditions, it's not our job to say that one side of a particular debate represents the authentic legacy of Islam. We are not the referees in sectarian disputes. Another way of saying this: we take a **constructivist** approach, not an **essentialist** one. This distinction is helpful whether we're talking about a particular religion, religion in

general, race, gender, or other concepts. “Constructivist” means that we recognize these concepts as changing over time, and varying across different historical settings. In contrast, an “essentialist” approach would assume that we could discuss a topic such as “religion” as though our vocabulary carries the same meanings across all time and space.

Second, discussion is crucial for success here. We don’t have a physical classroom. The course site is where we exchange ideas and work on these readings together. This means that you need to be present and active in course discussions. It also means that your participation needs to contribute toward a healthy, productive online environment in which we can safely interact with one another and express disagreement in a respectful, collaborative manner. We are here to help each other, not to win debates. There will be no trolls here. Part of our success also depends on respecting the privacy of the space. This is not a public forum, and we should not assume that anyone’s comments within the course site are meant to be shared with the outside world. Please contact me if there are uncertainties on these points, or if you have any concerns regarding the online discussions.

Third: when I give advice for successful midterms and finals, please take it seriously.

Finally, let me express my commitment to being an accessible resource. If something is unclear or you want to discuss an assignment or other course expectations with me, please do reach out and ask.

Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this course.

Required Texts

- Brockopp (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad*
- Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past*
- Additional readings are provided online via the course site

Grading and Assignments

Midterm: 30%

Final: 30%

Discussion: 15%

Hadith Sciences paper: 15%

Quizzes: 5%

Professionalism: 5%

Midterm and Final

The midterm and final exams will each consist of a digitally submitted paper, 1450 words of content (double-spaced, with word count noted on first page), in response to a prompt that will be provided two weeks in advance. Late submissions without justification (illness or emergency) are penalized by 2.5 points per day.

Discussion

You are expected to contribute to our digital classroom environment by participating in course discussions of assigned readings and other media, both in providing original comments and responding to the posts of others. Discussion in a module doesn't have an expiration date, but your earliest post in a discussion is due on Wednesday by 11:59 p.m. in the week that it is assigned.

Quizzes

Several short quizzes are offered for engaging readings, new terms, and key concepts of the course. These quizzes constitute 5% of your course grade. Each quiz can be taken more than once to improve your score. Quizzes are due on Wednesday at 11:59 p.m. in the weeks that they are assigned.

Professionalism

Because this is an online course, we don't exactly have "attendance," but your professionalism grade reflects your presence in the course. Everyone starts with a perfect score. Points are deducted for failing to maintain the course as a professional space. This includes trolling or other inappropriate behavior in discussions, inattentiveness to assignments and course responsibilities, and other conduct that undermines our work.

Ḥadīth Sciences Assignment

For this short paper (in the proximity of 700 words, with word count noted on first page), you will apply the methods of premodern ḥadīth scholars to explore a question related to Muslim theology. All necessary information is provided for you. The assignment consists of 1) analysis of a small selection of ḥadīths through the lens of classical ḥadīth evaluation, and 2) application of your findings to a short reflection on the question provided.

Grading Scale

A	94-100
A-	90-93
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D	60-69
F	< 60

Academic Integrity

It's your job to familiarize yourself with UCF policies concerning academic honesty and issues of plagiarism. Please refer to the [UCF Golden Rule](#) for further information.

Safe Zone and Title IX Statement

I have pledged to affirm the identities of and provide resources to people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions. To reward your careful attention to this section, I offer a bonus point to the course grade of anyone who can tell me why Avicenna had the power of invisibility (it's a joke that involves traditional Arabic nomenclature and modern sports-entertainment). I am committed to the safety and well-being of everyone in our campus community, and therefore willing to be a resource for your concerns beyond this course. If you come to me for non-course-related concerns, I will protect your confidentiality within the limits of the law. As a member of the faculty, I am legally required to report information concerning sexual discrimination and misconduct. Please become familiar with your rights and resources, including access to confidential counseling, at <http://osrr.sdes.ucf.edu/titleix>.

Disability Accommodation

Students with disabilities who may require academic accommodation should contact me as soon as possible. Please become familiar with UCF resources for student accessibility at <http://sas.sdes.ucf.edu/>.

Course schedule (subject to change):

1/8-1/12: Introduction to the course

- McCutcheon, "The History of 'Religion'"
- Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past*, introduction and ch.1
- Quiz: key terms/concepts
- Discussion: religion as category

1/15-1/19: Muḥammad in his world

- *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad*, ch.1
- Rubin, "Prophets and Prophethood"
- Quiz: historical context

1/22-1/26: Muḥammad in Mecca and Medina

- *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad*, ch.2-3
- Discussion: Qur'ān suras

1/29-2/2: Muslims after Muḥammad

- Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past*, ch.2
- Lucas, "Basic Concepts of the Hadith"
- quiz: key terms/concepts/people

2/5-2/9: 'Ā'isha bint Abī Bakr

- Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past*, ch.3-4
- Discussion: 'Ā'isha

2/12-2/16: Karbala

- quiz: key terms/concepts/people
- **Ḥadīth Sciences Assignment due by 11:59 p.m. Friday**

2/19-2/23: Fāṭima az-Zahra

- Klemm, "Image Formation of an Islamic Legend: Fāṭima, the Daughter of the Prophet Muḥammad"
- Discussion: *Noha* videos

2/26-3/2: Legal Traditions

- *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad*, ch.4
- Discussion: choose one reading and discuss:
 - Haider, "Contesting Intoxication: Early Juristic Debates over the Lawfulness of Alcoholic Beverages"
 - Lucas, "'Perhaps You Only Kissed Her?': A Contrapuntal Reading of the Penalties for Illicit Sex in the Sunni Hadith Literature"

3/5-3/9: Technologies of the Muslim Self

- *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad*, ch.5, 7
- **midterm due by 11:59 p.m. Friday**

3/12-3/17: spring break

3/19-3/23: Theological Traditions

- *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad*, ch.8
- Discussion: thinking about theology

3/26-3/30: Mystical Traditions

- *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad*, ch.6, 10
- Heck, "Sufism—What is it Exactly?"
- Discussion: Islam and mysticism
- Quiz: key concepts in Sufism

4/2-4/6: Artistic Traditions

- *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad*, ch.13
- Gruber, "Images of the Prophet Muhammad *In* and *Out* of Modernity: The Curious Case of a 2008 Mural in Tehran"
- Discussion: image of young Muhammad

4/9-4/13: Authority and Authenticity

- Homerin, "Ibn Taimiyya's *Al-Ṣūfiyyah wa-al-Fuqarā'*"
- Memon, *Ibn Taimiyya's Struggle against Popular Religion*, 46-87
- Discussion: the construction of tradition

4/16-4/20: Reform

- Mahmood, "Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation"
- Discussion: *The Noble Struggle of Amina Wadud*

Final Exams due: May 1, 11:59 p.m.