Introduction to Islam

Catalogue Course Description: This course is meant to be a survey of the Islamic way of life: its beliefs, traditions and practices from Qur’anic origins and the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad. The historical development of Islamic law, religious sects, mysticism, and intellectual thought of the global Muslim community from medieval to contemporary times.

Further Details: As is the case with any religious tradition, Islam entails a complex web of history, culture, and practice. Islamic history spans more than 1400 years, has changed and adapted to various contexts, and now boasts over 1.6 billion followers; it is simultaneously a religion, a culture and a civilization. Needless to say an “Introduction to Islam” course can take multiple paths. This course approaches Islam by examining the variety of ways that Muslims view and practice their religion. We will examine Muslim history and practice not in a vacuum, but as it relates to the lives of contemporary Muslims. In this way, we can make historically and culturally distant subject matter relevant, so as to develop an understanding and undertake research, aware of the social aspects of religious belief and practice that transcend time and place.

We will learn to question the ways in which popular culture and the media present Islam, and develop and improve our ability to think critically and write clearly. By understanding the nuances involved in terms like jihad or Shari’a, the relationship between Sunni and Shiite Muslims, and the treatment of women in the Qur’an, we can advance a holistic view of Islam. As a consequence, larger themes like gender or sectarian difference are not treated in isolation, but dealt with throughout the course in various contexts. One of our primary goals is to examine what it means to be a Muslim in the modern world, contextualizing religious practice given the social and political environment of the period and community being studied. Throughout we will approach our subject matter as scholars of religion, who appreciate the divergent arguments and the disagreements that arise from informed and introspective analysis.
Class Structure:

Although this is primarily a lecture course, we will do our best to include discussion and group work. Lecture will focus on subject matter relevant to the reading, filling in gaps and adding sources as necessary. On occasion I will bring in audio or video to augment our discussion. If there are pressing questions, I encourage you to ask them, and I will do my best to address and clarify them during the course of class.

Goals of Class Discussions:

Class is an important opportunity to discuss the week’s themes and readings. It is a chance for us to think critically and question some of our own assumptions. We will aim at a thoughtful and thought-provoking discussion. As we go through the semester I want you to develop a sense of responsibility for class discussion, making sure it is robust, on-topic and well thought out. We will cover a lot of material each week and you should approach the readings with the goal of allowing certain sources to speak to you, challenge you, and inspire further reflection. Our discussions will be shaped, to a significant degree by the questions and ideas you bring to class. While we will generally stick to the course outline, I may change readings or subject matter to better address your concerns or interests.

Readings:

On average you will have 80 pages of reading per week. I have done my best to provide you with texts that tell a story, while at the same time building an understanding of Islam and the lives of Muslims. The relaying of stories is an important part of Islam, and I hope that we can replicate some of that experience through the texts I have chosen. Although a majority of our reading will be from secondary sources, we will read primary source material in translation; Qur’an, Hadith (traditions of the prophet), and stories of the prophet. Since translations are flawed recreations, especially in the case of the Qur’an, I will supply you with a variety of translation styles, so as to develop your understanding of the complexities involved.

While reading an assignment, keep asking: What does the author mean by that, Why should I believe that, so what?

These are the same questions that we will be asking in class, and that I will ask when reading your work. When you find something in the readings that seems vulnerable to criticism, try to formulate the criticism precisely, but then try to imagine how the author might want to respond to your question or objection.

** - Please be aware that the reading for any given week may change, and I will inform you of these changes in advance.
Class Requirements & Grading:

Participation: Although not assigned percentage, participation is an important part of your grade. In a class this size it is difficult to evaluate participation and so your grade will only be affected by extreme absence (dropping your grade as much as a + or -). Participation, can also positively affect your grade. In this sense participation, is actively and thoughtfully contributing to the conversation, as well as actively listening and respecting your classmates’ input. Articulating ideas through participation will also help you to formulate ideas, take exams, and write your essays; as well as reinforce the lectures and reading material.

Quizzes 6 for 5% each (Drop lowest); Total 25% of the Final Grade: You will be given 6 short quizzes as labeled in the syllabus (Quiz dates: Feb. 12, Feb. 26, Mar. 5, Apr. 9, Apr. 23, & May 7). These we be 5-10 minute quizzes consisting of 10 questions, testing your basic knowledge of terms and ideas. The lowest grade will be dropped.

Grading Scale for Quizzes:

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<th>&gt; 10</th>
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<td>B+</td>
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Book Review 15% (March 5): This is a 4-5 page review of the Ingrid Mattson book that we will read in weeks 3 & 4. The review is due in class (hard copy) on Thursday, March 5 & via email by the end of the day. Late Reviews: Essays turned in after the deadline will lose 1/3 grade (A to A-; A- to B+; B+ to B, etc.) for each 24-hour period late up until the end of the second day. Papers turned in any time after the end of the second day will lose 1 full letter grade (A to B; A- to B-, etc.)

Midterm 25% (March 12): This is an in-class exam that will consist of a combination of short and long essays. Green books required.
Final 35% (May 21): The final exam will be cumulative and include short and long essays, and a map quiz. The exam date is Thursday, May 21 from 10:15-12:15PM.

Explanation of Grading: Aside from quizzes, as indicated above, all assignments and exams will be given letter grades. The following, partially taken from the CSUS website (http://catalog.csus.edu/12-14/first%20100%20pages/academicpolicies.html), helps to define what each letter means:

A - *Excellent* achievement of the course objectives. In addition to being clearly and significantly above the requirements, work exhibited is of an independent, creative, and contributory nature.

B – *Very Good* achievement of the course objectives. The performance is clearly and significantly above the satisfactory fulfillment of course requirements.

C - *Satisfactory* achievement of the course objectives. A C shows evidence of effort, but only modest success in meeting the course expectations.

D - *Unsatisfactory* achievement of course objectives, yet achievement of a sufficient proportion of the objectives so that it is not necessary to repeat the course unless required to do so by the academic department. A D is minimally acceptable in the sense that it barely counts as a completion.

F - *Unsatisfactory* achievement of course objectives to an extent that the student must repeat the course to receive credit.

**Plus** - Shows effort and achievement that goes somewhat beyond the standards expressed above for each letter category.

**Minus** - Shows effort and achievement that is somewhat below the standards expressed for each letter category.

Statement on Academic Integrity

Plagiarism and academic dishonesty constitute serious offenses that undermine your education and violate Sacramento State’s policy on academic integrity and may result in penalties ranging from a lowered grade to course failure. All work submitted in this class must be your own, and must be completed specifically for this class. You may not turn in work previously written for another class. Any use of another’s work without proper attribution constitutes plagiarism. Plagiarism ranges from copying someone else’s work word for word, to rewriting someone else’s work with only minor word changes (mosaic plagiarism), to summarizing work without acknowledging the source. For more information see the library’s page on plagiarism: (http://library.csus.edu/content2.asp?pageID=353)
Expectations:

Attendance: I will not be taking attendance, but excessive lateness and/or absence will negatively affect your performance on exams as well as the participation component of your grade.

Preparation: Being prepared means you have read and taken notes on all of the week’s required reading assignments, have arrived to class with all of the relevant texts, and have brought questions and ideas to class that are important to you, prepared to discuss a range of issues. On occasion I will give you a list of “terms to define/identify” before a week’s readings. You should come to class aware of these definitions, having used your class texts and outside materials if necessary.

Laptops & Cell Phones: Laptops and cell phones are not allowed during class. We should be listening and commenting, keeping a good focus on the direction of the conversation. As we all know, laptops and cell phones can be a serious means of distraction for you and those around you.

Office Hours: Outside of our weekly class sessions, I will be available to address any questions, concerns or suggestions you have by e-mail and during office hours (it is best to make an appointment). I will do my best to respond to your e-mails within 24 hours on weekdays. I will typically respond to weekend emails on Mondays. I encourage you to meet with me to discuss questions you might have about the course material or your broader interests.

Accommodations for Recognized Disabilities: I will make every effort to accommodate your needs as they apply to the above policies. Please come see me in the event that you will need special accommodation so that we can figure out an acceptable solution.

I’m looking forward to a rich and exciting semester.
Books:


This text is an extremely useful and insightful look into the history of Islam and how Muslims and non-Muslims use this history to explain current events. One of the book's main arguments is that what we see happening is much more about an internal debate between Muslims than it is a conflict between Islam and the West. **Reza Aslan** is President and CEO of Aslan Media Inc., focused on entertainment about the Greater Middle East and its Diaspora communities. He is Associate Professor of Creative Writing at the University of California, Riverside. For insights into his thought and political perspectives see: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6-bLZbkYk-I](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6-bLZbkYk-I)


Through short chapters this text will provide explanation and elaboration on the themes we will deal with throughout the semester. About the editors: Roger Allen was Professor of Arabic and Comparative Literature in the Department of Near Eastern Languages & Civilizations at the University of Pennsylvania for 43 years. From 2009-2010 he served as president of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA). Shawkat M. Toorawa is Associate Professor of Arabic Literature and Islamic Studies at Cornell University.

As is obvious from the title this text focuses mainly on the Qur’an, its importance to Muslims, and its place in Islamic history. It is an introductory text on the Qur’an, but goes further by assessing and examining the ways that the Qur’an has been and is being interpreted. **Ingrid Mattson** was the first woman president of the Islamic Society of North America (2006-2010), which is arguably the largest Muslim organization in the United States and Canada. In 2008, she represented the American Muslim community at President Obama’s Inaugural prayer service. She is a native of Canada and converted to Islam in 1987. She has said that upon reading the Qur’an she found "an awareness of God, for the first time since I was very young" (see “A View from the Edge,” Commonweal at [https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/view-edge](https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/view-edge)). Currently, she is the London and Windsor Community Chair in Islamic Studies at Huron University College at the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario, Canada.

For supplementary reading outside of class: [http://www.usc.edu/schools/college/crcc/engagement/resources/texts/muslim/quran/](http://www.usc.edu/schools/college/crcc/engagement/resources/texts/muslim/quran/) contains three translations (Yusuf Ali, Pickthall, Shakir) for easy comparison. It is searchable by keyword, and can provide an alternate version of difficult passages. The site also contains searchable hadith collections.
Course Outline

Part I: Introduction to Islam: Many or One?

In this first section we begin our exploration of Islamic belief and practice, contextualizing it within the study of religion. The readings are meant to help us begin our intellectual journey.

Week 1

Jan. 27
Introductions

Jan. 29 Reading:
- Aslan, Reza, No God But God, xiii-xxvi
- Allen, Roger, and Shawkat M. Toorawa, ed. Islam: A Short Guide to the Faith, 3-17

See Blackboard for:

Part II: Muhammad

In weeks 2 and 3 we will be introduced to the Prophet Muhammad considered the final prophet or “seal of the prophets” by most Muslims. In week 2 we will be introduced to the religion and culture of pre-Islamic Arabian society in order to contextualize the society into which Muhammad delivered the message of Islam. Week 3 further develops our understanding of Muhammad’s life, and the beginning of his experience with revelation. Here we will also begin to explore Islamic notions of representation and the sanctity of the prophets.

Week 2: Muhammad’s Environs – Pre-Islamic Arabia

Feb. 3 Readings
Aslan, Reza, No God But God, 3-34 (top)

Feb. 5 Readings

See Blackboard for:
- Jamal J. Elias ed., Key Themes for the Study of Islam, Prophecy Ch. 15, 281-294
**Week 3: Muhammad and Revelation**

**Feb. 10 Readings**  
Aslan, Reza, *No God But God*, 34-74

**Feb. 12 Readings**  

See Blackboard for:  
*Jamal J. Elias ed., Key Themes for the Study of Islam*, Prophecy Ch. 15, 295-303  
Sayyid Qutb on Muslim Society in *Defining Islam*, ed. Andrew Rippin, 24-29

**Quiz 1 on Feb. 12**

**Part III: The Qur’an**

Although we were introduced to revelation and its relationship to the Prophet Muhammad in week 3, week 4 and 5 will look more specifically at the Qur’an’s structure and the import that it has for Muslims, then and now. The Qur’an is fundamental to Islamic belief and practice, and as such will be part of our discussion throughout the course.

**Week 4**

**Feb. 17 Reading**  
Mattson, Ingrid, *The Story of the Qur’an*, 1-75

**Feb. 19 Reading**  
Mattson, Ingrid, *The Story of the Qur’an*, 76-136

**Week 5**

**Feb. 24 Reading**  
Mattson, Ingrid, *The Story of the Qur’an*, 137-175

**Feb. 26 Reading**  
Mattson, Ingrid, *The Story of the Qur’an*, 176-233

See Blackboard for:  
- Excerpt from the Quran – Surah Al-Kahf (The Cave)

**Quiz 2 on February 26**
Part IV: Women in Islam

Although gender in Islam will be a recurring theme throughout the semester, in week five we will look specifically at some of the issues that relate specifically to women and the Qur’an and women in Islam more generally.

Week 6:

Mar. 3 Reading

See Blackboard for:

Mar. 5 Reading

See Blackboard for:
Jamillah Karim, *American Muslim Women*, 1-21

**Quiz 3 on March 5**
&
**Book Review Due (both in class and via email)**

Part V: The Story of Departure and Return

In week 7 we will follow Muhammad as he establishes Islam in Medina and then returns to Mecca as a political and religious leader. Here again we will discuss issues relating to gender and Islam by examining Muhammad’s relationship with his wives, especially his favorite wife, Aisha, and the relevance she has had for Muslim women, then and now.

Week 7

Mar. 10 Reading
Aslan, Reza, *No God But God*, 76-108

March 12: **In-class Midterm Exam (Green Books Required)**
Part VI: What Now?

What happens after Muhammad’s death? Who will lead the Muslim community and how? These are the questions we will be asking in week 8. We begin with the Prophet Muhammad’s death, move onto the four “Rightly Guided” Caliphs and the first dynasties that came after. In week 9 we will examine the eventual split between the partisan’s of Ali (Shi’a) and the Sunni Muslim community. Here we will also discuss the relevance that this history has for contemporary relations between Shiite and Sunni Muslims.

Week 8: The Death of a Prophet and What Followed

Mar. 17 Reading
Aslan, Reza, No God But God, 109–141

See Blackboard for:
Tariq Ramadan, In the Footsteps of the Prophet, 211-216

Mar. 19 Reading
- Aslan, Reza, No God But God, 174-198

Spring Break (No Class March 24 & 26)
César Chávez Day (No Class March 31)

Part VI (Continued):

Week 9: Sunnis and Shiites, Is there a difference?

Apr. 2 Reading

See Blackboard for:
- Readings from Nahjul Balagha (Peak of Eloquence)
- Rippin, Andrew and Jan Knappert, ed. Textual Sources for the Study of Islam, 20-25, 134-147, 190-192
Part VII: Sufism: A Path to God

Sufism: In week 10 we will begin our exploration of Islamic mysticism, a theme to which we will return throughout the semester. Sufism has had a deep and lasting impact on Islam throughout its history from the time of Muhammad until today.

Week 10

Apr. 7 Reading
- Aslan, Reza, No God But God, 199-224

Apr. 9 Reading
See Blackboard for:
- Excerpts of Sufi Poetry
- Esposito, John L. Islam the Straight Path, 124-134

Quiz 4 on April 9

Part VIII: The Five Pillars, Shari’a, and Islamic Practice

Weeks 11, 12, 13 will provide an overall structure in which to better understand Islamic Law, ethics and practice. These are themes encountered throughout the semester, but which are given more specific treatment here. These weeks explore the way that traditions are used to understand beliefs and practices not fully elaborated on in the Qur’an. A significant part of this discussion pertains to the five pillars of Islam, as they are a fundamental part the Muslim belief system.

Week 11: The Five Pillars

Apr. 14 Reading
See Blackboard for:
- Vincent Cornell in The Oxford History of Islam, 72-90
- Esposito, John L. Islam the Straight Path, 92 (middle) – 106, 116-124 (top)

Apr. 16 Reading on Hajj and Tawhid:
See Blackboard for:
Autobiography of Malcolm X, 366-393
Readings on Tawhid (oneness) in Defining Islam, ed. Andrew Rippin, 19-23
Part VIII (continued): Muslim Spaces and Prayer

Week 12 is a continuation of our discussion in week 11, but with an emphasis on prayer and the mosque. One part of this is an examination of the ways in which Muslims pray and another is a discussion of the places in which they pray.

Week 12: Mosque and Prayer

Apr. 21 Reading on Mosques

See Blackboard for:
Gulzar Haider in Making Muslim Space, 31-45

Apr. 23 Reading on Prayer
See Blackboard for:
Jamal J. Elias ed., Key Themes for the Study of Islam, 263-280

Quiz 5 on April 23

Part VIII (Continued): Islamic Law

In week 13 we will seek to understand the mechanisms of Islamic law and discover the ways that the Qur’an and Hadith are used as a basis for legal decision making.

Week 13: Shari’a

Apr. 28 Reading

See Blackboard for:
- Vincent Cornell in The Oxford History of Islam, 90-95
- Sample Fatwas

April 30

See Blackboard for:
- Companion to the Article: Fatwa on Military Service
Part IX: Reformers, Fundamentalists and Tradition

Here we enter into the world of Islam in the 19th and 20th centuries and engage with the issues surrounding colonialism, reform, & fundamentalism. In these weeks we will grapple with the ways that Islam has been interpreted and lived in modern times.

Week 14:

May 5 Reading
Aslan, Reza, No God But God, 225-254

May 7 Reading
Aslan, Reza, No God But God, 255-277

Quiz 6 on May 7

Part X: The End & the Beginning: Week 15 is the end of the course’s narrative, but only the beginning of the story of Islam and the lives of Muslims in the 20th and 21st centuries. This week explores some of the new ways that Islam is being experienced in both Muslim and non-Muslim countries, asks whether such a bifurcation is relevant in contemporary globalized society, and reflects upon the desire for a continuum between these lived experiences and the beginnings of Islam in 6th century Arabia.

Week 15: Islam in the Contemporary World: Moving Beyond Borders

May 12 Reading
Aslan, Reza, No God But God, 278-292

See Blackboard for:
Jose Casanova in Secularism Religion and Multicultural Citizenship, 139-163

May 14
Review and wrap-up

Final Exam Thursday, May 21 10:15-12:15PM
(Green Books Required)