

Introduction to Islam

REL 272 (Spring 2015)

TTH 9:40 – 10:55 (Chambers 2187)

Dr. Syed Rizwan Zamir

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Office Hours: Wed 9:45-12:45 (Schedule appointments via [this LINK](#)).

NOTE: If you are unable to meet during these times, schedule appointment through email.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Possibly, over 1.6 billion human beings identify with “Islam”, as their religion, their way of life, their path to God or/and sometimes as a revolutionary alternative to the western worldview and ways of life. An overview of its origins in history, doctrines, myths and core beliefs, rites and rituals, aesthetic and cultural expressions, lived Muslim experience, and various religious and intellectual, this course examines “Islam” as a “religion”. Our explorations will encompass various introductory texts on “Islam” written by both Western scholars and well-known Muslim intellectuals writing for the Western audience. This textual study will be complemented by a variety of weekly multimedia sources. While careful listening to these various “introductions to Islam” (and nuances that separate those from one another), our study will culminate in your working in groups and developing your own “introduction to Islam”. Your group “introduction to Islam” will then be contested and debated by other competing accounts presented by your classmates. Our study will conclude with theoretical considerations in defining Islam, and discussion about criteria for navigating and choosing or rejecting these varying and often competing interpretations of Islam.

Obviously and inherently polyvalent and subject to various interpretations, our study this semester, hopefully, will also show that the term “Islam” is a potent and highly complex analytical category with serious political and social ramifications, for example, in debates such as “*Islam* and the West”, “*Radical Islam*”, “*women and gender in Islam*”, and in questions posed such as “*is Islam compatible with democracy?*” or “*is Islam a peaceful religion?*” In the process it is hoped that the students would appreciate the complicatedness of any serious attempt to “introduce Islam”, and the stakes that underlie it.

CLASS FORMAT

This class has been imagined as a book club in which members have chosen to learn about “Islam” over the period of a college semester. Each week a group from among the book club members will set the agenda for the two meeting sessions on Tuesday and Thursday. The role of the instructor is to suggest texts (that’s the Course Outline below!) and be a facilitator in the learning process. How the instructor can facilitate the book club and its goals will depend on how the group in charge of setting the agenda for the week utilizes him. Further details about the format are described under section **Week Plan** (see below) and will also be discussed on the first day of the class.

OBJECTIVES OF THE COURSE

For the instructor, the success or failure of the course depends on how far the class as a group accomplishes the following goals:

1. Familiarizing students with the Islamic tradition and its various doctrinal, ritual, mythical and cultural and artistic expressions;
2. Introducing students to the academic study of Islam and appreciation of the stakes in it;
3. Making sense of Muslim thought, practice, and lived experience so that students could, if they so choose, effectively engage Muslims and Muslim communities and their religious texts and religious discourse;
4. Cultivating skills of reading, thinking (both analytical and imaginative), interpreting, discussing and writing, and learning to express those as closely interrelated activities.
5. Making learning *relevant, useful, enjoyable* and *meaningful* for all involved in the class.*

***NOTE:** Making the class more relevant to you personally is something that will require your engagement and deep interest. Feel free to talk to the instructor about ways in which you may contribute to achieving these goals, personally and as a group.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS*

Group Project (Interview 7%, Present/Debate/Paper 13%, Additional Research 10%)	30%
Group Assignments (7% each)	21%
3 Interpretive Reflections (8% each, 500 words)	24%
Participation (Week Plan 15%, Discussion 6% & Blog 4%)	25%

***NOTE:** course requirements maybe modified, but not without prior consultation with you.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

1. You will be responsible for keeping track of your attendance. The last class of the term, you will turn in a pledged sheet detailing your attendance to the instructor. You will also provide your own assessment of your overall participation grade.
2. Attendance is compulsory in this course. More than **1 absence** without valid excuse such as sickness or family emergency etc. will result in the lowering of grade. (B+ will become a B, B a B- and so on)
3. In case of absence it is your responsibility to obtain notes and 'catch-up'. *Absence will not be a good excuse for not knowing what happened in the class.*

CLASS PRESENCE, ETIQUETTE, DISCUSSION AND PARTICIPATION:

1. Perhaps the most significant aspect is class energy and the group dynamic. For a positive, healthy and enjoyable learning environment it is crucial that all book club members bring their best warm and engaged selves to the weekly meetings. Do whatever in your capacity (meditation, yoga, exercise, listening to your favorite music or coffee etc.) to freshen yourself up for the class.
2. It is an absolute must that electronic devices, if used at all, be used in the class for class-related activities only (e.g., for taking notes, pulling up readings etc.).
3. You must always bring the syllabus & assigned readings for the week to the class.
4. Please do not come in late or leave early—it is disruptive.
5. Your participation grade will reflect the overall *quality* (and not simply quantity) of your contributions to the class throughout the semester. It includes proper class etiquette, attentiveness, preparing for the class, asking thoughtful questions that emerge from a careful reading of the texts, and finally contributions to the blog.

DISABILITIES:

A student who requires accommodation for a documented disability of any type should see me *immediately* to discuss modifications to course requirements.

WRITING AND SPEAKING CENTER:

Basic writing and speaking skills are expected in this course and quality of both will be critical to your success in this course. You are therefore strongly encouraged to consult writing and speaking centers for your assignments and class presentations. Look up the links below for more information on the services they provide:

Writing Center: <http://www3.davidson.edu/cms/x11014.xml>

Speaking Center: <http://www3.davidson.edu/cms/x15986.xml>

REQUIRED TEXTS (available at the Bookstore and on reserve in the library)

1. Brown, Daniel. *A New Introduction to Islam* (2nd edition). New York: Blackwell, 2009.
2. Esposito, John L. *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam*. New York: Oxford, 2011.
3. Michon, Jean-Louis. *Introduction to Traditional Islam*. Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 2008.
4. Murata, Sachiko, and William C. Chittick. *The Vision of Islam*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2006.
5. Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity*. New York: HarperOne, 2002.
6. Rippin, Andrew (ed.). *Defining Islam: A Reader*. London: Equinox Publishers, 2007.
7. Schuon, Frithjof. *Understanding Islam*. Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 2011.
8. Williams, John. *The Word of Islam*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994.

ASSIGNMENTS FOR THE SEMESTER:

General Guidelines:

1. *The audience for all your written assignments is your REL 272 class.*
2. Use Standard font (Times New Roman) and margins (one inch on all sides).
3. Save paper: print on both sides and DO NOT create a separate cover page.
4. Only cite fully if it is a text other than those assigned. Use Chicago or MLA.
5. Do mention the WORD COUNT in the end.
6. Unless stated otherwise, all assignments will be posted on to the Blog.
7. Each 24-hour delay will result in corresponding 10-point deduction.

Week Plan* (15% of the Participation grade)

Every week a group will plan the TTH class sessions. Since *the goal of each class meeting is better understanding of the assigned text(s) & video(s)*, the week plan must reflect and emerge from their close reading and comprehension, and in turn, should seek the same for the whole class; therefore, a well thought-out plan to best utilize the class session for that purpose:

1. Each TTH class session the group responsible will lead class discussion for an hour; please **leave the last 15 minutes for the instructor.**
2. By noon on Monday you will post the following on the blog:
 - a. 3-page outline of the assigned material (videos included) for the week that will consist of:
 - i. Salient points and why they need to be noted and comprehended
 - ii. Important passages/quotes (you can simply point to those)
 - iii. Identify aspects/passages that are unclear
 - iv. A list of important terms
 - b. If applicable, ½ page relevant background information:
 - i. About the text,
 - ii. The author, and
 - iii. How that information may or should shape our reading and comprehension of the text.
 - c. A brief *separate* plan for the TTH classes and how you'd like to run those. You may post the plan for Tuesday by noon on Monday and one for Thursday on Wednesday.
 - d. Guidelines/Instructions along with underlying goals and rationale for your classmates on what and how should they prepare for TTH class sessions
 - e. Questions and issues you'd like the instructor to address
3. Each group will evaluate every weekly plan – including their own:
 - a. It will include written comments and feedback and assigning a grade;
 - b. Each group will turn evaluation sheet for all groups on the last day of the class.

***IMPORTANT:** In preparing the week plan it must be “the big picture” that should guide your choices.

Interpretive Reflection (IR)

1. PURPOSE: Your IR is **Your Two-Minute Class Insight**. Its purpose is to “think deeply” on an aspect of a text/theme/issue.
2. ENGAGE READINGS: A good IR will critically engage the readings. Good grasp of assigned material and relevant issues is therefore assumed.
3. WITHIN/WITHOUT: In line with general methodology of the class, you should seek to speak from both *within* and *without* the text.
4. AUDIENCE: *Since you are writing for your fellow classmates* restating or summarizing the readings will be absolutely redundant. (Reading it aloud may prove useful)
5. TONE: Be direct and get straight to your point. An IR is not an op-ed or an expression of how you felt about the readings. Like most writing and communication, it is geared toward speaking to an audience and persuading it of your insight. You do not need to exclude yourself. So yes, you can use first person pronoun I! The question is what kind of “I” is speaking in the IR. An “I” that is unreflective, opinionated or/and does not engage readings or the audience is clearly problematic.
6. INTEREST: Choose to reflect on the aspects of readings that you find fascinating, intriguing, contentious, or simply unclear/confusing.
7. The key questions you should be asking yourself are the following:
 - i. DO YOU CARE? Is this idea worth your time and effort? Do you care about the topic/theme/text?
 - ii. FEASIBILITY: Is the idea manageable within the word-limit prescribed for the assignment? With limited words, write only after having fully developed your thoughts so you could state those as clearly and succinctly as possible.
 - iii. ILLUMINE: Does the IR offer something different/new or merely summarize? Will it be illuminating to your audience? Why should your classmates care about what you have to say?
 - iv. SHOW/PERSUADE: Does it *show* (not just state) what it was meant to convey to the class? Does it successfully convince or persuade your classmates?
8. IR needs to be posted onto the blog. You are encouraged to engage and provide feedback on IRs written by others. You may also be asked to peer-grade these IRs.

COURSE OUTLINE

Key: Blog (B), Reserve (R), E-View (E), Online (O), Video/Multimedia (V)

PART I: “ISLAM” AS A WORLD RELIGION

Week 1 (Jan 13–15): Theoretical Framework

Readings:

Tue Introduction to the Course

Thurs “Islam” from *World Religions Reference Library* (B); Understanding Islam and Muslims (Pamphlet) (B);

Asma Afsaruddin, “How do we talk about Islam after Charlie Hebdo?” [here](#)

Videos:

Reza Aslan on CNN “Is Islam Religion of Peace?” (V) [Youtube Video](#)

Christopher Hitchens (V) [Youtube Video](#)

CIA Director John Brennan on Islam [YouTube Video](#)

Week 2 (Jan 20–22): Islam as a World Religion

Readings:

Tue Review Pew Forum Report “Mapping the Global Muslim Population” (O) [here](#); Huston Smith “Islam” from *The Illustrated World Religions* (R)

Thurs Sayyidul Ulama, Creation & Early Prophetic History (B);

Jan 22: “Edward Said on Orientalism” (V) [Youtube Video](#)

SIGNUP: *Groups for the rest of the semester need to be formed by Jan 22 and week(s) each group will in charge of Week Plan as well.*

PART II: THE TEXTBOOK ISLAM

(NOTE: Groups & the BLOG will be in effect beginning this section of the course)

Week 3 (Jan 27-29): Textbook Islam (I)

Readings: **Tue** Brown, *New Introduction*, pp.xiii-48 **Thurs** Brown, *New Introduction*, pp.49-102

Before Jan 27: Watch *The Message* (1977) (V) [YouTube Video](#)

Week 4 (Feb 3-5): Textbook Islam (I) continued

Readings: **Tue** Brown, *New Introduction*, Part III **Thurs** Brown, *New Introduction*, Part II

Week 5 (Feb 10-12): Textbook Islam (II)

Readings:

Tue Murata & Chittick: pp. xxv-84; Ibn Batutta on Hajj (B); Malcom X on Hajj (B)

Thurs Murata & Chittick: pp. 84-131;

Before Feb 10: *Inside Mecca* (V) [YouTube Video](#)

Week 6 (Feb 17-19): Textbook Islam (II) continued

Readings: **Tue** Murata & Chittick: pp.132-192; **Thurs** Murata & Chittick: pp.193-235;

Before Feb 17 (V): “Knowledge of the World” (Part 5) & “Man and Nature” (Part 3) from *The Traditional World of Islam* (R) – Call Number VC T76322

Week 7 (Feb 24-26): Textbook Islam (II) continued

Readings: **Tue** Murata & Chittick: pp.236-294; **Thurs** Murata & Chittick: pp.295-335

Before Feb 24 (V): “The Inner Life” (Part 6) & “Patterns of Beauty” (Part 4) from *The Traditional World of Islam* (R) – Call Number VC T76322

OR “I am a Sufi, I am a Muslim” (E)

SPRING BREAK

FRIDAY, February 27 (4:30 P.M.) – MONDAY, March 9 (8:30 A.M.)

Week 8 (Mar 10-12): Textbook Islam (III)

Readings: **Tue** Williams, *Word of Islam*, pp.1-65 **Thurs** Williams, *Word of Islam*, pp.66-139

Mar 10: *Koran by Heart* (V) [YouTube Video](#)

INTERPRETIVE REFLECTION I (Mar 12, to be posted onto the blog)
Pick any theme/text/topic that we have covered thus far in the semester (500 words)

Group Assignment I (2-3 pages, DUE on MAR 12, to be posted onto the blog):

Compare and contrast all Introductions from Part II. Your comparison must put these introductions in relation to and in conversation with one another, reveal careful study and analysis, and reflect on why these introductions differ from one another. You may use bullet points, visuals (charts or figures etc.), short descriptions or any other creative medium. Be prepared to discuss your comparison in the class.

PART III: MUSLIM INTRODUCTIONS FOR WESTERN AUDIENCES

Week 9 (Mar 17-19): Muslim Introduction (I)

Readings: **Tue** Nasr, *Heart of Islam*, pp.xi-112 **Thurs** Nasr, *Heart of Islam*, pp.113-156

March 17: *In the Footsteps of Ibn Batutta* (V) [YouTube Video](#)

Week 10 (Mar 24-26): Muslim Introduction (I) continued

Readings: **Tue** Nasr, *Heart of Islam*, pp.157-236 **Thurs** Nasr, *Heart of Islam*, pp.237-316

March 24: *The Alchemist of Happiness* (V) [YouTube Video](#)

Week 11 (Mar 31-Apr 2): Muslim Introduction (II, III & IV)*

Readings:

Tue Schuon, *Understanding Islam*, pp.xvii-32 & 105-163

Thurs Maududi, *Towards Understanding Islam* (B)

***Note:** The instructor will lead discussion this week.

Group Assignment II (2-3 pages, DUE on MAR 12, to be posted onto the blog): *Similar to assignment I compare and contrast all the Muslim introductions.*

INTERPRETIVE REFLECTION II (Apr 2)

Pick any theme/text/topic that we have covered in part II (500 words)

EASTER BREAK

FRIDAY, APRIL 3 (4:30 P.M.) – WEDNESDAY, APRIL 8 (8:30 A.M.)

Week 12 (Apr 9): “Traditional Islam”: Culture, Art & Spirituality

Readings: **Thurs** *Introduction to Traditional Islam*, pp.51-90 (review other sections of interest)

April 9: *Coffee with Davidson Muslim* (details will be announced)

Week 13 (Apr 14-16): Introduction to Islam

Readings: **Tue** Class Presentations **Thurs** Class Debate

APRIL 16 (In-Class Debate): *Whose Islam is Right?*

- **APRIL 14:** YOUR COLLABORATIVE “INTRDUCTION TO ISLAM” IS DUE
- **THIS WEEK:** GROUP INTERVIEW WITH THE INSTRUCTOR (1-HOUR LONG, TO BE SCHEDULED THE WEEK BEFORE)

PART IV: SYNTHESIS & CONCLUSION

(NOTE: *The plan for this Part may be revised in light of the progress of the class thus far*)

Week 14 (Apr 21-23): Theoretical Considerations in Defining Islam I

Readings: **Tue** *Defining Islam*, 1-5, 17-34, 37-70; **Thurs** *Defining Islam* pp.175-222 & 288-307

April 21: *African American Islam* (V) [YouTube Video](#)

Week 15 (Apr 28): Defining Islam II

Readings: **Tue** B. Wilson, “The Concept of “Orthodoxy” in the Study of Islam” (B); I. Kalin, “Religion, Unity and Diversity” (B); Langer & Simon, “Dynamics of Orthodoxy and Heresy” (B); Guenon “Haqiqa and Sharia in Islam”

Before April 28: Watch *Fordson: Faith, Fast & Football* (R)

INTERPRETIVE REFLECTION III (April 28)

Pick any theme/text/topic that we have covered in part IV (500 words)

Week 16 (May 5): Concluding Remarks: The Stakes in Defining Islam

Readings: *Defining Islam* pp.335-357; “Are Muslims Nuts?” [here](#); “Bin Laden’s Declaration of Jihad against the Americans” (B)

Review: “Muslim Statements against 9/11” (B)

Review: RAND Report “US Strategy in the Muslim World after 9/11” (B)

May 5: “Underestimating the Threat of Radical Islam” (V) [YouTube Video](#)

Bill Maher, Affleck, Sam Harris [Youtube Video](#)

Noam Chomsky: Looking Back on 9/11 Part 1 & 2 (V) [YouTube Video](#)

Unmanned: America’s Drone Wars (V) [here](#)

Kurbaan – Classroom Debate Scene (V) [YouTube Video](#)

Group Assignment III (5-7 pages, DUE on MAY 5, to be posted onto the blog):

In updating *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam* to a revised third edition, Prof. John L. Esposito has asked for your feedback regarding changes you would like to see in the text. Your feedback will include:

- One-page assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of this text.
- A revised Table of Contents that will incorporate changes you’d like to see in the text
- Comment (to be inserted within the text of the table of contents) that provides rationale for each suggested change and why it is important.

- A concluding paragraph that may include other points you'd like him to consider in revising the text.

MAY 5: Groups will turn in the evaluation sheet for all “Week Plans”