

REL 165: Discovering Islam

Instructor: Rebecca Moody

Office Hours: by appointment online (via email or Google Hangouts)
and / or in person (on campus)

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Course description

More than 1,400 years ago, in a cave in what is today known as Saudi Arabia, the Prophet Mohammed began receiving the revelations that collectively yielded the Qur'an. Today, 1.5 billion people across the world practice the religion that followed. It has since birthed political and military empires that spanned continents, philosophical discourse and scientific discoveries that shaped the world. It's also functioned as a placeholder for stereotypes that defy the tenets on which it is based.



Given the incredible depth and breadth of the languages and geographies; histories and practices; tenets, texts and beliefs that comprise Islam, we will not attempt to arrive at one concise definition in a mere 15 weeks. Rather than working to gain mastery, we will survey some of those histories in their diversity and complexity. In so doing, we will hone the critical thinking, reading and writing skills necessary to engage Islam's multiple iterations, including its legal, political and mystical dimensions, using them as a sounding board to question with what we think we know about Islam.

Course Goals and Objectives

Over the semester, you will likely encounter material that is new, different and perhaps unexpected, a thrilling and daunting venture. At the same time, you will practice the skills necessary to engage these multiple and varied conversations about Islam with intelligence and empathy.

As a community we will:

- engage some of the central texts and contexts that serve as the foundations of Islam;
- develop the ability to think and write critically about Islam and Muslims;
- demonstrate an awareness of the diversity of the histories and traditions that represent Islam;
- practice engaging in informed conversation and debate about contemporary religious issues.

Departmental Learning Objectives

The Religion Department has articulated four goals that shape its teaching and its expectations of what students in its courses may expect to gain:

- to think critically and imaginatively about the role of religion in human expression, thought and social institutions both historically and in the present day;
- to establish an understanding of the degree of religious diversity in the world, along with an appreciation for the crucial role that religion has played in the course of human history;
- to recognize the difficulties inherent in undertaking a coherent, disciplined study of religion and to be aware of the diversity of perspectives within that study;
- to practice critical thinking skills and to produce that thought in verbal and written form.

Required texts

- Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Time* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007)
- Fatima Mernissi, *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 1994)
- Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999)

These are available in the Shine Student Bookstore. New and used copies are also available online through, for example, amazon.com and powells.com. If you decide to go this route, be sure to order your text so that you receive it well before the week that we read it.

All other readings are available online (follow the links) or via Blackboard (marked with ❖).

Thoughts about the online course format

This course, while offered online, covers the same breadth and depth of material as any classroom-based course with desks and a chalkboard. It thus carries the same expectations from students in terms of time commitment and quality of work. Please do not think it will be easier because you don't have to come to class. In fact, given its format, you will need to take even more responsibility for the content: here, the onus is on you to reach out to others when you have questions or need clarity. By extension, remember that, while you may not meet with each other multiple times each week, you are not alone in this process. Push yourself to learn with and from each other, engaging your peers as you would in a more traditional classroom format.

In addition, whereas, in a classroom-based course, you might focus on articulating your ideas verbally with the professor and your peers, here your focus will be on expressing yourself in writing. This skill will prove invaluable as you move forward with your career at SU and beyond. That said, writing is not a skill that we're born with but one we must hone. I encourage you to push yourself to practice expressing your ideas about new and complex material in written words and, in turn, responding to others' ideas thoughtfully and with respect.

Be courteous, concise, factual and formal in all work, including what you post on Blackboard. If you would not say it in person, do not say it online. Do not use slang, abbreviated or capitalized words, emoticons, etc. Express differences of opinion clearly but fairly and with reasoned arguments and evidence. To do so otherwise will lower your grade.

This online format also requires that you know how to effectively use and navigate Blackboard. Please take the time to familiarize yourself with it by perusing the iSchool's [excellent tutorials](#).

Assignments

Abstracts	55%
Media Contextualizations	10%
Participation	10%
Final Paper	25%

I will not accept late work without prior approval. This means you must email me and receive a response from me before the assignment is due. Be clear about assignments well in advance. While I am happy to answer questions about assignments, I will not in the hours before one is due.

All assignments must be submitted via Blackboard. Submit your abstracts and final paper as a Word or Pages attachment in their respective folder under the Assignments tab. Do not copy and paste them into the dialogue box; do not attach a .txt or .pdf file; do not send them via email. If you choose, you may paste the text of your media contextualizations and open discussions into the dialogue box in their respective folder under the Discussion tab.

Abstracts require that you read critically for an author's key argument and write a maximum 350 word (or 1 typed, double-spaced page) synopsis of it. *Focus on **one** of the week's main readings (not the shorter articles or videos); incorporate examples from one or more of the other readings as supplementary evidence for your argument.* Most of us are accustomed to reading for trees (details: names and dates) rather than the forest (overarching themes and foundational ideas). I am asking you to tell me about the latter, not the former. At the same time, I am asking you to practice brevity. Editing yourself for content as well as spelling and grammatical mistakes will prove key. These are *not* opinion papers, nor are they synopses wherein you recount what the author says. *Post abstracts to Blackboard in the Abstracts folder under the Assignments tab. **Due Thursdays by noon. 11 abstracts; 5 points each. Abstracts are mandatory during weeks 1-4.***

Effective abstracts will:

- identify the author's main argument. This means identifying a clear, salient point around which to focus; it also means excluding certain aspects of the text so that you can focus on what you find critical. Don't litter your abstracts with data; hone in on bigger ideas. It also means having a strong thesis statement, such as: In this abstract, I will argue x about y by showing z.
- identify how the author arrives at this main argument by pointing to specific examples from the text. You must properly quote or paraphrase and properly cite any textual evidence.
- analyze and critique its effectiveness: Do you buy it? Why or why not?
- use a combination of the other readings as evidence to back up your own argument.
- refrain from including personal stories or anecdotes and limit your use of I statements. Rather than talking about yourself, your family or your feelings, talk about the text.
- present the above in a well-crafted, cohesive yet complete paragraph. 100 words will very seldom accomplish this.

Media contextualizations ask that you offer a lens through which to approach a week's readings (individually or collectively). This may be in the form of a news story, song, video, meme, Twitter post, .gif, etc. The format is up to you so long as you can offer it as an attachment or via a link on Blackboard. The item must be current (no earlier than August 2016) and related to that week's readings. Your options are almost limitless. Choose from mainstream media sources such as *Al Jazeera, BBC or NPR*; share a story from *Religion Dispatches, Huffington Post or BuzzFeed* or a segment from *The Daily Show, Full Frontal with Samantha Bee or Saturday Night Live*; offer a trending meme. See weeks 2 and 3 (Islamophobia and Muslim Women's Hyper Visibility) for examples. I will post a sign-up sheet during the second week of class; the assignment will begin during week four. *Post media contextualization to Blackboard by creating a new thread in the Media Contextualizations forum under the Discussions tab. **Due Tuesdays by noon. 2 media contextualizations; 5 points each.** If you find an appropriate or timely piece during another week, you may post one additional week for extra credit (a possible 3 points).*

Using your media item as an example, offer a set of guiding questions, comments or thoughts about the readings; illustrate how your media item relates to the readings and to the course. Anchor your observations in specific passages from the reading(s): point to places in the text(s) where you see overlap, properly citing each passage and making clear how you see your example and the text(s) working together. Consider these as guiding thoughts for your peers: your comments will set the tone for their own engagement with and response to the texts. Your post should include the media item and a roughly 200-250 word narrative in which you contextualize it.

Participation is a critical component of any course, be it based in a brick-and-mortar classroom or online. It's also more than simply talking (here: typing): you actively participate through listening thoughtfully and responding respectfully to your colleagues, therein fostering greater understanding. Use the *Open Discussion forum under the Discussions tab* to ask questions of each other, bounce ideas off of each other, test out theories about an author's thesis or overall argument, contemplate why I have assigned a particular text during a particular week, ponder what information it offers to a particular theme and to the semester as a whole, etc. I will monitor the discussions but will not actively engage unless necessary; this is intended as a space for you to collectively talk through your ideas. Always anchor your thoughts in the readings: cite specific passages; be clear about how they inform your thoughts. You will not be graded on each entry but on your overall participation throughout the semester. You must participate at multiple points during the semester; you cannot earn all of your participation points during the same week. **10 points.**

The **final paper** offers the opportunity to synthesize the work we've done throughout the semester. With my consultation, you will identify a research topic that builds on the writing and thinking you have done. Your paper must be grammatically sound and properly cited; you must use at least three credible academic sources (i.e.: not Wikipedia); these may but do not have to include our course readings. The final paper consists of 2 components:

- a proposal, including a working thesis statement and annotated bibliography ([see here](#) for examples) for each of your 3 proposed sources. These may change as you move forward with your research and writing, but I expect your proposal to nevertheless be well thought out and well articulated. *Post your proposal in the Final Paper folder under the Assignments tab. Due Thursday, November 16 by noon; 5 points.*
- a 5-7 page paper, double-spaced, in 12-point font, using the citation style of your choice (Chicago, MLA or APA). You must have a well-defined, debatable thesis statement, an effective argument structure, properly formatted internal citations and a works cited page. *There are two entries labeled Final Paper in the Final Paper folder under the Assignments tab; the second represents your Turnitin submission. You must post your paper in both places. Due Wednesday, December 13 at midnight; 20 points.*

If you're stuck identifying a topic or simply want to talk through one, you can reach out to me and / or consult a [reference librarian](#) at Bird Library in person or via email. I encourage you to do both.

Grading Scale

	B+	88-89	C+	78-79	D+	68-69		
A	93-100	B	83-87	C	73-77	D	60-67	F <60
A-	90-92	B-	80-82	C-	70-72			

Expectations

Throughout the semester we will work together to build a community in which each of us has the space to express our ideas, questions and concerns about the material we cover. In order to accomplish this, we need clear expectations of each other.

What I expect of you

- Respect the course and your peers. Read all assigned materials fully; ask questions as they arise.
- Respect the knowledge that your peers and professor bring. Do not blatantly reject a statement without ample evidence to support your own claim.
- Address everyone appropriately in all online communication: refer to us by name; do not begin your communication with “hey.”
- Engage others with respect and care, including those who might disagree with you and with whom you might disagree.
- Use gender inclusive language.
- Challenge yourself to think critically and creatively.
- Practice active and engaged participation as well as good listening skills; don’t simply wait to respond.
- Learn with and from this space. Disrupt the ideas you bring into the classroom by reading, thinking, listening and engaging with me, your peers and the texts.

What you can expect from me

- I will evaluate your work fairly and consistently and return it in a timely manner.
- I will practice active listening skills, allowing you ample opportunity to share your thoughts.
- I will challenge my own preconceptions about the material.
- If you allow me the opportunity, I will learn with and from each of you.

On proper academic citation

Given that this is an online course, all assignments will be written rather than verbal. Thus, you should approach all interactions with attention to detail: proofread everything before submitting it; give proper care and attention to spelling, grammar and in-text and bibliographic citations. I expect you to give this level of care to all assignments (abstracts, media contextualizations and your final paper). Choose a citation style at the beginning of the semester (Chicago, MLA or APA) and use it consistently throughout; properly format and cite all quotations and paraphrases using in-text and bibliographic citations. Remember that citation styles are akin to foreign languages: at first they seem staid, perhaps confusing and frustrating; with practice, they become much more familiar.

That said, none of us were born knowing how to do this. Writing is a skill that takes significant attention and practice. To that end, I encourage you to:

- consult the [SU Writing Center](#) (a free service for all students)
- check out Bird Library’s [citation guides](#) and [research tutorials](#)
- explore the wealth of [information](#) available on the [Purdue Online Writing Center](#)’s website. Here you will find information about how to cite sources using [Chicago](#), [MLA](#) and [APA](#) styles, including in-text and bibliographic citations, as well as how to format block quotes and craft effective [thesis statements](#) and [outlines](#).
- when you’ve done the above and still have questions, *ask me!*

On Plagiarism

I take academic integrity very seriously and challenge you to do the same. Under no circumstances is it acceptable to copy work from another student, a book or the internet without properly citing your sources. *There is zero tolerance for cheating in any form or fashion*, including but not limited to plagiarism, falsification of an assignment (read: using any part of someone else's essay, whether garnered from the internet or your friend) or any act of deception. There should never be a reason for this to become an issue; you are certainly capable of doing creative, quality work without resorting to dishonest means. Please consult the [SU academic integrity policy](#) for further details.

On Wikipedia and internet sources

Wikipedia is a great a way to approach a concept with which you are completely unfamiliar; good Wikipedia pages often include bibliographies that can offer more (and often more credible) information. That said, *it is not ok to use Wikipedia as an academic source*. Just because something is on Wikipedia - or the internet writ large - doesn't mean it's true.

In an era of alternative facts, it is your responsibility to determine if your sources are sound and credible. Be very careful about what internet sources you use and how you use them. When in doubt, ask!

On using inclusive language

I expect all of us to use inclusive language in all conversations and written assignments, especially with respect to sex, sexual identities and gender, nationality, ethnicity, race and religion, social class, age and ability. Some of our authors do not follow this advice (Karen Armstrong is a glaring example); that should not give us license to fall into the same trap.

One goal of this course: to think critically about the words and images we use and the ways other people might hear them. If you are unsure what gender inclusive language is, please talk with me; we can have an open conversation about what I mean. *Most overtly, this means not using man, men or mankind to refer to people, humans or humanity or using He to refer to God or Allah.*

Negotiating Your Grades

I make every effort to be transparent about your grades. If you have a question about a grade or believe you were graded unfairly, talk with me. However, I will *not* negotiate grades at the end of the semester. Don't wait until then to talk with me.

Religious Observances

Students who cannot submit assignments or meet deadlines due to religious holidays must notify me within two weeks of the beginning of the semester.

Learning Accommodations

If you believe that you need learning accommodations, please contact the [Office of Disability Services \(ODS\)](#), located in Room 303 of 804 University Avenue, or call (315) 443-4498 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented Disabilities Accommodation Authorization Letters as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

Week	Theme	Assigned Text: Read, listen and / or watch
August 28 - September 2	<i>Wadjda</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Read the syllabus in its entirety - ❖ al Mansour, <i>Wadjda</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You can rent <i>Wadjda</i> on amazon.com or iTunes. It is also on reserve in Bird Library. - NPR, '<i>Wadjda</i>' Director: 'It Is Time To Open Up - Bloom, "<u>Where a Bicycle Is Sweetly Subversive: 'Wadjda,' by Haifaa al-Mansour, Made in Saudi Arabia</u>" <p>This first week, <i>your abstract is due on Saturday, September 2 by noon</i>. This is the only week in which you can offer opinions in your abstract. What did you learn from the film? How does it challenge your expectations about Islam and / or Muslim women? Why do you think we are beginning the course with it? Is it effective; why or why not?</p>
September 3 - 9	Islamophobia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ❖ Green, "What Is Islamophobia?" (9-33), "The Historical Foundations of Islamophobia" (35-65), "Colonialism, Orientalism, and the Clash of Civilizations" (67-99) <p>The following are short articles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - McClennen, "<u>We mourn Manchester, not but Kabul: How biased coverage of terrorist attacks drives us apart</u>" - Taylor, "<u>An anti-immigrant group mistook empty bus seats for women wearing burqas</u>" - Younus, "<u>I Am Not a Moderate Muslim</u>"
September 10 - 16	Muslim Women's Hyper Visibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ❖ Hammer, "(Muslim) Women's Bodies, Islamophobia, and American Politics" - ❖ Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others" <p>The following are short articles or videos:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Katebi, "<u>Please Keep Your American Flags Off My Hijab</u>" - El-Naggar, "<u>Practicing Islam in Short Shorts</u>" - Vernon, "<u>Are You Even Muslim?</u>" - Haydar, "<u>(W)Rap My Hijab</u>" - Haydar, "<u>Dog</u>" (featuring Jackie Cruz) - Kiah, "<u>I'm Never Going to like Mona Haydar's 'Rapping' Videos and You Can't Make Me</u>" - Hammad, "<u>Not Your Erotic</u>"

Week	Theme	Assigned Text: Read, listen and / or watch
September 17 - 23	The Prophet Mohammed and the Qur'an	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Armstrong, <i>Muhammad</i>, 1-76 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I encourage you to follow Armstrong's footnotes. She often cites passages from the Qur'an that are not assigned reading but that you may find helpful. You can find the full Qur'an here. - ❖ Sells, <i>Approaching the Qur'an</i>, 42-43, 48-55, 84-141, 166-71 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The full text is available online via the SU Library. - Ernst, "How to Read the Qur'an" (18 minutes) - Listen to the Call to Prayer
September 24 - 30	The Prophet Mohammed and the Qur'an	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Armstrong, <i>Muhammad</i>, 77-202 - Vice News, "World's Largest Pilgrimage" (14 minutes)
October 1 - 7	Shi'ism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ❖ Safi, "Life After the Prophet, Death After Hussein" (217-61) - ❖ Betteridge, "Muslim Women and Shrines in Shiraz"
October 8 - 14	Textual Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ❖ Aslan, "This Religion Is a Science: The Development of Islamic Theology and Law" (142-173) - ❖ Barlas, "Texts and Textualities: The Qur'an, Tafsir, and Ahadith" (31-62) and "Intertextualities, Extratextual Contexts: The Sunnah, Shari'ah, and the State" (63-89) - Gjelten, "March Against Sharia' Planned Across the U.S." (3 minutes) - Mann and Martin, "March Against Sharia' Meets Opposition in Syracuse, New York" (3 minutes)
October 15 - 21	(Re)Interpreting the Texts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ❖ Hidayatullah, "The Frames of Feminism" (37-45), "Relationships to Feminist Theologies and the State" (46-62) - ❖ Sells, "Sound, Spirit, and Gender in the Qur'an" (199-223) - Nawaz, Me and the Mosque (50 minutes)
October 22 - 28	(Re)Interpreting the Texts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wadud, <i>Quran and Women</i>
October 29 - November 4	What is Jihad?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ❖ Heck, "Jihad Revisited" - Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants" - Sarsour, "Islamophobes are attacking me because I'm their worst nightmare"

Week	Theme	Assigned Text: Read, listen and / or watch
November 5 - 11	Sufism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ❖ Aslan, “Stain Your Prayer Rug with Wine: The Sufi Way” (199-224) - ❖ Sells, “Rabi’a: Her Words and life in ‘Attar’s Memorial of the Friends of God” (151-70) - listen while you're reading: <u>“Morocco Gnawa Music Part 1”</u> - El Amraoui, <u>“Gnawa music: From slavery to prominence”</u> - Jusdanis, <u>“Asmâa Hamzaoui and the Bnat Timbouktu Make Gnawa Festival Debut”</u>
November 12 - 18	Sufism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ❖ Benlyazid, <i>Bab Sama Maftuh (Door to the Sky)</i> - ❖ Schimmel, “Women in Sufism” (34-53) - <i>Final paper proposal due</i>
November 19 - 25	Thanksgiving: No class	
November 26 - December 2	Fatima Mernissi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mernissi, <i>Dreams of Trespass</i>, 1-100 - ❖ Mernissi, “Was Benazir Bhutto the First?” (1-5) and “How Does One Say ‘Queen’ In Islam?” (9-25) - NPR, <u>“Remembering Islamic Feminist Fatema Mernissi”</u>
December 3 - 8	<i>Dreams of Trespass</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mernissi, <i>Dreams of Trespass</i>, 101-242
December 13		<i>Final paper due</i>