

World Regional Islam

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Aims and Objectives

In recent years there has been a lot of discussion about the nature of Islam. Jerry Falwell, the American Evangelical pastor, called Mohammad (the primary prophet of Islam) a terrorist. President George Bush calls Islam a religion of peace. As a world religion, Islam can encompass many labels: radical, conservative, modern, orthodox, dogmatic, adaptable, authoritarian, democratic, etc. The aim of this module is to do three things: first, it introduces students to the diverse and varied forms of Islam. As a religion predicated on a sacred text, Islam has a long tradition of interpretation, explanation and commentary which has allowed it to be flexible and relevant to various communities at different times and places. The second aim is to illustrate the geographical nature of this diversity. From as early as 750 AD we begin to see the emergence of different schools of Islamic jurisprudence developing in specific realms of the Islamic empire. This is to say that interpretation has always had a very local and geographic character. Thus, we will explore Islamic mysticism in Egypt, revolutionary Islam in Iran, Islamic interpretations of gender relations in Africa and the unique forms of Islamic governance in Indonesia. Finally, the course aims to illustrate how this diversity of practice and belief does not mean that Islam is only the sum of its parts. The aim here is to explore theoretical ideas that can explain how cultural and religious forms of attachment can inculcate a sense of unity in the imagination even as they allow for diversity in practice.

Course Content

Students will encounter information in this module that pertains to: (1) the history of Islam, (2) principles of Islamic belief and practice, (3) the geographic diversity of Islamic belief and practice and (4) case studies that relate specific social/political movements with specific forms of Islamic practice.

Learning Outcomes

The desired learning outcomes for this module are the following: (1) an ability to recognise and describe different theological positions; (2) an ability to assess those theological distinctions in relation to specific social and political circumstances; (3) an ability to collect and organise evidence from the field; and (4) an ability to synthesize your ideas into coherent well organised essays.

Learning Format

The learning format is divided into three areas: readings, lecture and clinics. In order of importance the emphasis is on the reading. Reading is your primary source of ideas into this topic and the carefully selected reading list is without question the heart of the course. Students should spend the majority of their time familiarizing themselves with the texts listed.

The second source of information is lectures. The aim of the lectures is to tie together a number of readings and authors that pertain to the theme in question. The lectures situate and explain the readings by putting the issues they raise within a broader context. All lectures will be posted in 'prose' form on Blackboard throughout the term. There is often more content in the prose lectures on Blackboard than what I actually deliver in class so I invite and encourage you to use these lectures and the extra content they provide.

The final source of learning is the clinics. The clinics provide an opportunity for students to have individual time with me to discuss their individual projects. This time is primarily designed to help work through the field-work project. Students who want to discuss course material for the exam should use office hours or make individual appointments. There are two clinics during the term. The

first is for students to discuss their proposal and the second is to discuss their final project. The clinics are provided for your benefit and should be seen as an opportunity to work through questions and problems regarding the fieldwork component of your research.

Method of Assessment:

The assessment for the module is 2x2500 words essays. The first essay is a 'take-home exam' that is based on class-content. The second is a field-work essay based upon the Cairo field-trip. Both of these are explained below.

Take-home exam: (due xxx)

At the end of lecture in week 5 you will be handed a sheet with three exam questions of which you are required to answer **one** in a 2500 word essay. The question will require you to synthesize ideas presented in lecture and the reading in a critical fashion. Remember you are asked to answer the question with your own independently derived argument. This means using class material rather than rehearsing it. Look at *Mitch's Rules of Writing* for guidance on how to approach, organise and write-up this assignment.

Field-work project: (due xxx)

The field-work project is a 2500 word analysis of an Islamic monument or site in Cairo. This site can be a mosque (e.g. Ibn Tulun, Rafai, Mohammad Ali.), a madrassa (e.g. Sultan Hassan, al-Azhar) or any other Islamic monument (e.g. a tomb, relic, fountain, statue, etc.) in the city. You will be asked to submit a proposal for your project in week 7 for which you will receive feedback in week 9. The field-trip will provide ample opportunities and resources for you to do independent research on your site. Some questions you should ask when preparing your proposal are: Why was the monument built? What religious purpose did it serve? What political or social purpose did it serve? Was building the site an effective means of achieving the social or political purpose desired? How is the monument being used today? Has its meaning and purpose changed? Remember to use the clinics to talk to me about your project on an individual basis.

Required texts:

Lapidus, I. (1988) *A history of Islamic societies*, Cambridge University Press.

Gilsenan, M. (1983) *Recognizing Islam*, Tauris.

Bates and Rassam (2001) *Peoples and cultures of the Middle East*, Prentice Hall.

Armstrong, K. (1995) *Muhammad: a biography of the prophet*, Harper Collins.

Schedule of Lectures

Week 2:	Lecture 1: Introduction Lecture 2: A brief history of the Islamic world I
Week 3:	Lecture 3: A brief history of the Islamic world II Lecture 4: Islamic Governance
Week 4:	Lecture 5: Ritual Islam Lecture 6: Cultural Islam
Week 5:	Lecture 7: Islamic Mysticism Lecture 8: Revolutionary Islam
Week 6:	Clinic
Week 7:	Reading Week Proposals Due Monday after Reading Week
Week 8:	No Class
Week 9:	Feedback
Week 10:	Cairo Fieldtrip
Week 11:	No-Class
Week 12:	Final Clinic