

## **ISSUES AND DEBATES IN ISLAMIC STUDIES HISTORY 535/575**

Spring 2012  
Wed. 7:20-10pm  
Nguyen Eng. 1107

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Office hrs: W 4-5pm

Islamic Studies is a field that is both new and old. In Muslim majority societies, Islamic Studies generally referred to the interdisciplinary study of texts central to Islam as a religion, and the application of those texts to everyday life. Studies included not only those directly related to better understanding scripture and its commentaries, but also the ancillary disciplines of the Arabic language, the history and biographies of the Prophet Muhammad and the early Muslim community, and law and legal methodology. From the eighteenth century, western scholars began to exclusively identify Islam with a region of imperial interest, the Middle East and North Africa, understanding this region's history, politics and society through the lens of what they perceived was distinctly "Islamic". In other words, much of the diverse social, economic, cultural as well as political experience of the region was attributed to an essential and unchanging Islam. This course will introduce, explore and problematize these constructs, through a number of themes or topics that have emerged as central to debates within Islamic and western academic traditions, including: the interpretation of texts such as Qur'an and Hadith, the issue of authority, political and religious, the elaboration of law and legal methodology, the impact of modernization and globalization on religious authority and textual interpretation, and the evolving role of gender in Islam.

By the conclusion of the course, students should have a grasp of the major chronology in the development of Islam as a religion, and of the debates in scholarship about it. They will also have the ability to demonstrate understanding of the range of differences in methodological and disciplinary approaches in understanding Islam, and an awareness of and ability to assess and evaluate the sources, both primary and secondary, textual and other, used in providing explanation and interpretation of issues related to Islam. Lastly, this course aims to provide students with a solid foundation for the further study of Islam and the Middle East in the MA program in Middle East and Islamic Studies at GMU. Students will be expected to demonstrate these outcomes through weekly papers, an oral presentation, and a final research paper.

### COURSE ASSESSMENT AND GRADE DISTRIBUTION:

Students will be required to prepare for and participate in class discussion by completing weekly readings before each class. Students will also be expected to submit weekly response papers on the readings, and deliver an oral presentation at least once during the term. Students will also be required to research and write a final research paper that develops one of the course themes. Guidelines for all requirements will be provided in advance.

Participation -- 10%

Weekly papers -- 30%

Oral Presentation -- 15%

Research Paper -- 45%

#### ADDITIONAL ISSUES:

Please do not eat or text in class. Laptops should only be used for taking notes. Cell phones must be turned off. If you are unable to participate in seminar discussion it is better not to attend, as attendance of warm bodies alone does not qualify as participation.

#### ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS:

Disabilities and Academic Accommodations: If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

Academic Honesty and Plagiarism: This class and all of your work as an undergraduate are governed by GMU's Honor Code: "Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work."

Plagiarism is presenting another person's words, ideas, or sequence of arguments as your own without attribution. We will discuss what constitutes plagiarism and how to cite sources properly in this course. It is my duty to report all violations of the Honor Code. To read more about the Honor Code, the Honor Committee, and its procedures, see go to <http://honorcode.gmu.edu>.

Last Day to Add Classes: 1/31/2012

Last Day to Drop Classes: 1/31-2/24/2012

### Tentative Assignment Schedule:

- Week 1      *Islamic Studies as a Field: Origins and History*  
Ernst et al, *Rethinking Islamic Studies: From Orientalism to Cosmopolitanism*, Univ. of South Carolina Press 2010.
- Week 2      *Origins of Islam and Foundational Paradigms*  
Donner, F., *Muhammad and the Believers*, Harvard 2010
- Week 3      *Origins of Islam and Foundational Paradigms*  
Madelung, W., *Succession to Muhammad*, Cambridge 1998
- Week 4      *The Islamic State and its Discontents*  
Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religion and Authority in the First Centuries of Islam*, Cambridge 2003
- Week 5      *The Islamic State and its Discontents*  
Hibri, T., *Parable and Politics in Early Islamic History*, Columbia 2010
- Week 6      *Islamic Law: Authority and Practice*  
Hallaq, W., *Sharia: Theory, Practice and Transformations*, Cambridge 2009
- Week 7      *Islamic Law: Authority and Practice*  
Abou el-Fadl, K., *Speaking in God's Name*, Oneworld 2001

### **Spring Break**

- Week 8      *Alternative Perspectives: Shiism*  
Abisaab, R., *Converting Persia*, IB Tauris, 2004
- Week 9      *Alternative Perspectives: Sufism*  
Renard, J. *Friends of God: Islamic Images of Piety, Commitment and Servanthood*, California 2008
- Week 10     *Encountering Modernity*  
Zaman, M., *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change*, Princeton 2007.
- Week 11     *Encountering Modernity*  
Deeb, L., *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Lebanon*, Princeton 2006.
- Week 12     *Gender and Islam*  
Ahmad, L., *Women and Gender in Islam*, Yale 1993
- Week 13     *Gender and Islam*  
Tucker, J., *Women, Family and Gender in Islamic Law*, Cambridge 2008
- Week 14     **Research Paper Due**
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