

Introduction to Islam

Dr. Gisela Webb. RELS 2415

Islam is the fastest growing religion in America' and yet most Americans have little--or else distorted-- information on this last of the great monotheistic religions. In this course we will look at Islam from the point of view of Muslims' own self understanding as it has developed since the religion's origin in 7th century Arabia. We will begin the course with the study of the basic practices, beliefs, and values of Islam-including its concept of God, the universe, revelation, prophet-hood, ethics, and the afterlife. We will look at how religious devotion is expressed through art, poetry, and mysticism. The second part of the course will take us into contemporary issues of the day, from the developments of Islam in America--"immigrant," African American, and 'sufi' expressions--to Islamic women's issues and 'political Islam'. We will use a variety of media to study Islam: primary and secondary source literature, films, artwork, discussion interviews with guest speakers, and possibly a trip to a mosque for Friday services (maybe even a trip to a Middle Eastern restaurant!). This syllabus is tentative; we may find that it needs to be adjusted from time to time.

Required readings:

- Seyyed Hossien.Nasr, Ideals and Realities of Islam
 - A. Schimmel, Islam: An Introduction.
 - Fatima Mernissi, Dreams of Trespass
 - Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, Islam and World Peace (optional). Copy on reserve in library
 - Xeroxed selections of Quran, Hadith, Islamic poetry, and articles are included in a packet of readings to be purchased from **instructor for a nominal price.**
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Expectations/Grading

1. Dr. Webb is available for appointments in Fahy 305. Office hours will be announced on the first day of class. Office phone: 761-9461

2. Grading: 25% midterm, 25% final exam, 25%

attendance/participation grade and homework 25% short group research paper and book review. Your attendance/participation grade will be based on quantity of attendance and quality of class participation, the standards of which will be explained during the first class. If you miss the first class, it is mandatory that you make an appointment to see the instructor during the first week of class to discuss class requirements. In summary, "quality participation" means that the instructor expects/requires that students be punctual, mature, and courteous to students and teacher. Respectful, courteous questioning, dialoguing, critical thinking, non-derisive humor and empathetic listening will be required. Disrespect will not be tolerated and includes such behavior as private whispering/talking while the teacher or a student is addressing the class and body language or comments of derision and "accidental tactlessness." Similarly, book review and group research paper requirements will be explained in class; the student must see the instructor during the first week of class if he/she misses the discussion of paper and book review requirements.

3. Do not hesitate to make an appointment with Dr. Webb if you feel confused, frustrated, or have some personal, academic, or religious issue you want to discuss out of class.

4. On-line resources in Islam will be posted on Dr. Webb's homepage.

5. Last year's students formed a student organizations, SALAM: The Islamic Cultural Awareness Association of Seton Hall University to promote inter-religious and intercultural understanding among Muslims and between Muslims and non-Muslims. Dr. Webb and Athar Murtuza are faculty advisors of the organization. Let us know if you are interested in hearing about or participating in its activities.

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