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Islam

Instructor

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Institution

Whittier College
 private liberal arts college

Course Level and Type

yr.2 and above / lecture-discussion

Hours of Instruction

39 hours, 3 hrs/week over a 13 week semester

Enrolment and Last Year Taught

22 students/fall 1997

Required Books

- Kahveci, The Basics of Islam
- Fernea, Guests of the Sheikh
- Robinson, ed., The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World
- Fernea and Bezirgan, eds., Middle Eastern Muslim Women Speak
- Dunn, The Adventures of Ibn Battuta
- photocopied materials (to be purchased in class)
- Aramco World issues on "The Hajj" and "Islam's Path East"

Purpose and Scope of the Course

Religious Studies 331 is an introductory course on Islam. Its major aims are:

1. to present the basic norms of Muslim belief and practice;
2. to introduce the history of Islam from its seventh-century origins in the Arabian peninsula through its expansion across the Eurasian-African landmass to its role in contemporary politics;
3. to acquaint you with the wide diversity of Muslim belief and practice "on the ground" as Islam exists in various cultural settings; and 4) to explore how the differing roles of men and women are interpreted in the normative tradition and in actual practice in various Islamic contexts.

Lesser aims will be to become acquainted with Islamic art and architecture, to understand something of Islamic mysticism (Sufism); and to attend to the differing interpretations of what it means to be Muslim according to Islam's two major divergent groups, Sunni and Shia.

Islam is a religion whose historical, geographical, cultural, and demographic sweep is vast. Obviously in a single semester's course we must be selective in what can and cannot be covered. With regard to actual Muslim practice and gender roles, we will follow a case study approach. Assigned reading focuses especially on Iraq and Turkey. The instructor has done field research in a Turkish village, and his observations from there will figure in class presentations and discussions. Slides and films will be shown. A field trip to a mosque is required. In view of the pairing of this course with Anthropology 327 Male and Female, our attention will often be directed to the implications for gender roles in Islamic norms as well as to the ways actual Muslim men and women construct their gender in view of their understandings of Islam.

In this course I ask that you keep a journal for recording each week at least one item about Islam from the mass media. In your journal I will also want you to write occasional responses to assigned reading as well as to other class activities such as films and the field trip. For those taking both courses in the pair, the final formal paper will be a joint paper with the anthropology course. The aim of both reading and writing assignments is to enable you to understand better what Muslims think and do.

Course Requirements

1. Attendance at class meetings; participation in the field trip; completion of assigned reading as scheduled and participation in class discussion on that reading. More than five absences will result in an automatic failing grade for the course.
2. Three formal papers.
3. A journal (kept in a separate notebook) for writing responses, as specified by the instructor, to certain reading assignments, audio-visual materials, Islam as reported in the news media, etc.
4. Occasional quizzes, some unannounced, on assigned reading.

Grading: Three grading options are available: 1) a letter grade (i.e., A+, A, A-, B+, etc.); 2) credit-no credit; or 3) a letter of evaluation. Each student should indicate by the second week of the semester which way he or she wants to be graded. Course grades will be determined as follows: 20% on the first formal paper; 20% on the second formal paper; 30% on the final joint paper; 15% on the journal; 15% on class participation, quizzes, field trip report, etc.

Course Schedule and Assigned Readings

Wk. 1 - Sept. 4 (Th) - Introduction

Wk. 2 - Sept. 9 (T) - Salat/Namaz--Prayer

Kahveci, pp. 39-91

Fernea, pp. ix-102 (intro.-chap.8)

Sept. 11 (Th) - Basic Beliefs and Islam on the Ground

Kahveci, pp. 3-35

Fernea, pp. 105-248 (chaps. 9-18)

Wk. 3 - Sept. 16 (T) - Islam and the West

Robinson, pp. ix-xxiii

Fernea, pp. 251-333 (chap. 19-postscript)

Sept. 18 (Th) - Muhammad

Robinson, pp. 2-11

Wk. 4 - Sept. 23 (T) - The Qur'an

xerox of selected suras from the Qur'an

Sept. 25 (Th) - The Qur'an
Fernea & Bezirgan, pp. 3-36

Wk. 5 - Sept. 30 (T) - field trip reports

Oct. 2 (Th) - Worship and Basic Duties
film: "The Guests of God"
Kahveci, pp. 3-109

Wk. 6 - Oct. 7 (T) - The Fast and the Pilgrimage
Yocum xerox on "Notes on an Easter Ramadan"
"The Hajj" (Aramco World issue)

Oct. 9 (Th) - film: "There Is No God But God"
Robinson, pp. 250-290

Wk. 7 - Oct. 14 (T) - Islamic Architecture and Art
FIRST PAPER DUE

Oct. 16 (Th) - The Expansion of Islam/Sunni and Shia
Robinson, pp. 11-31

Wk. 8 - Oct. 21 (T) - The Expansion of Islam
Robinson, pp. 32-61
"Islam's Path East" (Aramco World issue)

Oct. 23 (Th) - The Islamic World System
Dunn, pp. ix-80
Robinson, pp. 124-163

Wk. 9 - Oct. 28 (T) - The Islamic World System
Dunn, pp. 81-158
Robinson, pp. 164-207

Oct. 30 (Th) - The Islamic World System
film: "Being a Muslim in India"
Dunn, pp. 159-320

Wk. 10 - Nov. 4 (T) - Sufism
Robinson, pp. 208-249
Fernea & Bezirgan, pp. 37-66

Nov. 6 (Th) - Sufism
guest speaker: Emelie Olson on "Women's Activities at Turkish Saints' Shrines"
Fernea & Bezirgan, pp. 77-83

Wk. 11 - Nov. 11 (T) - Contemporary Islam
film: "Remaking the World" Robinson, pp. 62-121

Nov. 13 (Th) - Contemporary Islam
film: "Islam in America"
Robinson, pp. 291-306

Wk. 12 - Nov. 18 (T) - Women and Gender in Islam
Delaney xerox on "Seeds of Honor, Fields of Shame"
Fernea & Bezirgan, pp. xvii-xxxvi, 88-123, 135-165

Nov. 20 (Th) - Women and Gender in Islam
film: "Conversations across the Bosphorus"
Acar xerox on "Women in the Ideology of Islamic Revivalism in Turkey"
Fernea & Bezirgan, pp. 167-192
SECOND PAPER DUE

Wk. 13 - Nov. 25 (T) - no class
THANKSGIVING BREAK


Wk. 14 - Dec. 2 (T) - Women and Gender in Islam
film: "Women and Islam"
Fernea & Bezirgan, pp. 193-230, 251-262

Dec. 4 (Th) - Women and Gender in Islam
film: "Saints and Spirits"
Fernea & Bezirgan, pp. 263-358

Dec. 10 (W) - THIRD PAPER DUE by 1:00 pm in Redwood 203

Pedagogical Reflections

This course is an introduction to Islam that pays particular attention to 1) the diversity of Muslim belief and practice, and 2) to the construction of gender in Islamic environments. Successful pedagogical strategies in this course: 1) having students visit different mosques in groups of 4 and then report to the entire class on their experiences in terms of an assignment sheet that asked them to attend to particular issues; 2) satisfaction with most of the films used in the course, though a couple are getting rather old, and tying two of the papers directly to the films; 3) having students identify and summarize weekly at least one item from the mass media that mentions Islam (this typically allows them to see, on their own, how the mass media select and "spin" things without the instructor having to claim it is so). Problems: 1) The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World has some great pictures, but the text is too often dry and unengaging for most undergraduates. 2) The book by Elizabeth Warnock Fernea is getting rather old; likewise the anthology edited by Fernea and Bezirgan, though in both cases students have positive reactions to them. The next time I teach this class, I'll likely drop the Cambridge Illustrated History and use one of the Islam textbooks currently on the market. In any case, I will probably keep the traditional Islamic "catechism" (The Basics of Islam) which gives an insider's perspective structured according to the "five pillars."

Select a location 

<http://www.wlu.ca/~wwwaar/syllabi/islam-yocum.html>

Latest update: August 02, 2002
Number of accesses since March 1, 1998: