

**RLST 2150-01**  
**Introduction to Islam**  
*Fall 2009*  
*Tuesday and Thursday, 1:00-2:40 p.m.*  
*CC 04*

**Dr. Annie Blazer**

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Office Hours: MW 11:00-12:00 and

Th 9:00-11:00 in CC17

**Course Description:**

This course serves as a baseline introduction to Islam. Founded in the seventh century, Islam has since spread over much of the globe and is practiced in virtually every country. Given this long history and extended geography, we will certainly be unable to address every facet of Islam this semester. In the first half of the semester, we will focus on two important features of Islam: the history of the Islamic empire and the Qur'an. In the second half of the semester, we will address Islam in the contemporary world focusing on issues of nationalism, immigration, gender, and global politics. In assessing both the early history of Islam and lives of Muslims in the contemporary world, it is my hope that you will gain a broad understanding of Islam and critical tools for evaluating cultural presentations of Islam in the U.S.

**Objectives:**

*The primary objective of this course is:*

- To establish a baseline understanding of Islamic history and practice

*We will also:*

- Critically assess representations of Islam in the contemporary world
- Think about issues of gender and global politics in relation to these representations

**Assignments:**

You will be responsible for a variety of assignments over the course of the semester. You will be expected to post weekly informal responses to our readings in the class's online forum on Course Connect. Postings are due by midnight the night before we cover the assigned reading in class. (Further explanation of this assignment is included at the end of the syllabus.) To get full credit for this assignment, you must turn in 14 posts. There will be two short essays (4 pages each) assigned throughout the semester. There will also be a midterm and final exam. Paper prompts and exam study guides will be distributed closer to due dates.

**Grading:**

Assignments are given the following weight:

20% - Participation (including Course Connect posts)

10% - Geography Quiz

20% - Short essays (10% each)

50% - Exams (25% each)

## **You are expected to adhere to the Millsaps honor code.**

- [http://www.millsaps.edu/academics/honor\\_code.shtml](http://www.millsaps.edu/academics/honor_code.shtml)

*If you have any needs or require accommodations related to a disability, please contact Patrick Cooper to register for disability services. You can reach him via e-mail at [coopeap@millsaps.edu](mailto:coopeap@millsaps.edu) or by calling extension 1228. Accommodations will not be granted until a meeting with Patrick has taken place each semester, and letters have been received by your instructor.*

## **Assigned Readings:**

Students should purchase the following books:

- Carl Ernst, *Following Muhammad* (UNC Press, 2003)
- Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair, *Islam: A Thousand Years of Faith and Power* (Yale University Press, 2002)
- Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'an* (White Cloud Press, 1999)
- Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape* (Columbia University Press, 2006)
- Ahmed Rashid, *Descent Into Chaos* (Viking Press, 2008)
- Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis* (Pantheon Press, 2003)

All other readings will be available on Course Connect.

## **Course Schedule:**

*Tuesday, August 25: Introductions*

*UNC's Approaching the Qu'ran controversy:*

- *Time Magazine:* <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,335965,00.html>
- *O'Reilly's response:* <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,60620,00.html>
- *The Daily Show:*  
<http://www.thedailyshow.com/video/index.jhtml?videoId=106344&title=terror-unc>

*Thursday, August 27: Understanding Islam*

**Readings:** Ernst, *Following Muhammad*, preface and 1-36

### **Discussion Questions:**

- What anti-Islamic attitudes have prevailed over time? How has colonialism affected Western perspectives on Islam? How can we avoid these sentiments when we study Islam?

*Tuesday, September 1: Islam's Beginnings*

**Readings:** Bloom and Blair, *Islam*, 1-48

### **Discussion Questions:**

- How did Islam begin? What was the world like at the time of Islam's origin? What changed over time?

*Thursday, September 3: Islamic History*

**Readings:** Bloom and Blair, *Islam*, 49-102

### **Discussion Questions:**

- How did Islam spread? What do Bloom and Blair mean by "The Golden Age of Islam"?

## **Geography Quiz**

*Tuesday, September 8: Islamic History*

**Readings:** Bloom and Blair, *Islam*, 103-156

### **Discussion Questions:**

- How did the growth of cities affect the spread of Islam? What sorts of intellectual endeavors did Muslims pursue? How did this affect the religion?

*Thursday, September 10: Islamic History*

**Readings:** Bloom and Blair, *Islam*, 157-232

**Discussion Questions:**

- What do Bloom and Blair mean by “The Age of Empires”? How did regional powers, consolidation, and expansion affect Islam?

*Tuesday, September 15: The Qur’an*

**Readings:** Ernst, *Following Muhammad*, 93-105 and Sells, *Approaching the Qur’an*, preface

**Discussion Questions:**

- How do Sells and Ernst present the Qur’an? Why do you think there is so much resistance to reading the Qur’an by non-Muslims in the United States?

*Thursday, September 17: The Qur’an*

**Readings:** Sells, *Approaching the Qur’an*, 1-34

**Discussion Questions:**

- What is the role of the Qur’an in Islam? How is it used and how does this affect believers?

*Tuesday, September 22: The Qur’an*

**Readings:** Sells, *Approaching the Qur’an*, 35-40 and 145-157 (be sure to read footnote 5 on 151-152) (on Course Connect) Alexander Stille, “Scholars Are Quietly Offering New Theories of the Koran” *New York Times*, 2 March 2002 (<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/03/02/arts/scholars-are-quietly-offering-new-theories-of-the-koran.html?scp=3&sq=koran%27s%20origin%202002&st=cse>) and Stefan Theil, “Challenging the Qur’an” *Newsweek*, 28 July 2003 (<http://www.newsweek.com/id/57962>)

**Discussion Questions:**

- What is Sells’ interpretation of the The Sura of the Compassionate? What do you make of the “white raisins” affair in light of Sells’ interpretation? What cultural assumptions are present in the news coverage we read?

### **Short Paper Due—Analysis of two Suras**

*Thursday, September 24: The Qur’an*

**Readings:** Sells, *Approaching the Qur’an*, 161-223 and listen to the CD

**Discussion Questions:**

- How does hearing the Qur’an affect your understanding of the text? Why is recitation so central to Islamic practice? How does Sells present gender in relation to the Qur’an?

*Tuesday, September 29: The Hamtramck Controversy*

**Readings:** TBA

**Discussion Questions:**

- Now that you know about the importance of recitation for Islamic practice, what do you make of the situation in Hamtramck?

*Thursday, October 1: The Qur’an and the Contemporary World*

**Readings:** Hirschkind, 1-31

**Discussion Questions:**

- How is sermon listening different from other types of listening? Why does Hirschkind think it is important to study this kind of listening?

*Tuesday, October 6: The Qur’an and the Contemporary World*

**Readings:** Hirschkind, 32-66

**Discussion Questions:**

- What is the relationship between Islam, nationalism, and audition?

*Thursday, October 8: The Qur'an and the Contemporary World*

**Readings:** Hirschkind, 67-104

**Discussion Questions:**

- How does sermon listening affect ethical positions? How do cassettes affect this?

**In class movie:** *Tales from Arab Detroit*

*Tuesday, October 13: Midterm Review*

**Thursday, October 15: Midterm Exam**

**Fall break**

*Thursday, October 22: Approaches to Islam*

**Readings:** Ernst, 37-70

**Discussion Questions:**

- What approaches to the study of Islam does Ernst highlight? What is the role of the state in defining religion?

*Tuesday, October 27: Islam and Ethics*

**Readings:** Ernst, 107-162

**Discussion Questions:**

- What ethical issues do Muslims face?

**Museum Visit**

*Thursday, October 29: The Clash of Civilizations*

**Readings:** (on Course Connect) Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations" and Said, "Islam and the West"

**Discussion Questions:**

- Said and Huntington have very different ideas about the relationship between Islam and the West. What are the primary differences in their approaches? Who do you think Carl Ernst would agree with? Why?

*Tuesday, November 3: Immigrant Islam*

**Readings:** (on Course Connect) Lawrence, 69-104

**Discussion Questions:**

- How does immigration affect Islamic practices? How does Lawrence's presentation of immigrant Islam relate to *Tales from Arab Detroit* that we watched earlier this semester? To the Hamtramck controversy?

*Thursday, November 5: Twenty-first Century Islam*

**Readings:** Ernst, 199-214

**Discussion Questions:**

- How can we re-imagine Islam in the twenty-first century?

**Short Essay due: Immigration and Arab Detroit**

*Tuesday, November 10: No Class*

*Thursday, November 12: Islam and Feminism*

**Readings:** (on Course Connect) Mahmood, 153-188

**Discussion Questions:**

- How does Mahmood present feminism and agency?

*Tuesday, November 17: The Iranian Revolution*

**Readings:** Satrapi, *Persepolis* (whole book)

**Discussion Questions:**

- What was Satrapi's experience with the Iranian revolution? How does this relate Mahmood's analysis of Islamic female piety?

*Thursday, November 19: The Iranian Revolution*

**Readings:** Rashid, xxxvii-lviii

**In class movie:** *Persepolis*

*Tuesday, November 24: Contemporary Politics*

**Readings:** Rashid, 109-144

**Discussion Questions:**

- What is the relationship between religion and politics? How does this relationship affect nation-building attempts in Central Asia?

**Thanksgiving Break**

*Tuesday, December 1: Contemporary Politics*

**Readings:** Rashid, 349-404

**Discussion Questions:**

- According to Rashid, why did nation-building in Afghanistan fail?

*Thursday, December 3: Conclusions*

*Thursday, December 10, 2 p.m. – 5 p.m.*

**Final Exam**