ISLA 501: The Qur’an: Text and History

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Course description

The Qur’an: Text and History examines the teachings, form, history, and modes of interpretation of the Qur’ānic text in both the modern and pre-modern periods. We will discuss what the Qur’an means to Muslims as a religious text, as well as its influence and centrality in other disciplines such as law, literature, and theology. Students will be exposed to traditional hermeneutical approaches, as well as reformist approaches such as feminist and modernist interpretations of the Qur’ān.

This is a student-centered seminar in which student participation is essential.

Course Requirements and Evaluation

30% Participation: All students are expected to finish their readings and participate effectively in class discussions.

10% Reflection Papers: Undergraduates are required to write one 1000-word essay reflecting on one of the main sections of the course (due October 25). Graduate students will be required to write two essays on two different sections of the course (due October 25). Reflection papers should address the debates and themes the authors are engaging, and the strengths and weaknesses of their arguments, as well as posing questions for the class to discuss.

30% Final Paper: Students are required to write a typed 15-page paper (double-spaced, 12-point font, one-inch margins) on a topic related to the Qur’ān (the history of the text, its interpretation, its reception, etc.). Graduate students are required to write 20 double-spaced pages. A full outline of at least two pages is due on October 30. The final paper will be due on November 20. Students are required to present their findings to their classmates in the last two weeks of classes.

15% Presentations: Undergraduates will be required to present the readings and lead class discussions for one week’s readings (graduate students twice). This week must not be in the same section that the student’s reflection paper covers. Students will also be required to present their final paper to the rest of the class.

15% Quizzes: There will be unannounced quizzes of a general nature in which students will be required to write about what they have learned from readings and class discussions.

Class Policies

• You are allowed only one unexcused absence; the second unexcused absence will reduce your class participation grade by one level (e.g. A to A-).
• Late assignments will be penalized at the rate of one grade per day (e.g. an A will be A- if late for one day and B+ if late for two days). Extensions will be granted only in cases of genuine emergency.
• No incompletes will be given except in cases of genuine emergency.

University Honor System and Students’ Rights

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information). L’université McGill attache une haute importance à l’honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l’on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l’étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/).

In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Required Books (available at the bookstore and on reserve)

• Asma Barlas, Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretation of the Qur’an (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2002).
• Amina Wadud, Qur’an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
• Barbara Freyer Stowasser, Women in the Qur’an, Traditions, and Interpretation (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

Reference Works and Guides

The Encyclopaedia of the Qur’an
The Encyclopaedia of Islam

Other Books on Reserve

Introduction (week 1, Sep. 6)
What do you want to learn about the Qur’an and why? What are the approaches you would use to study it?

Part I: The Formation and Form of the Qur’an

Formation and Chronology (week 2, Sept. 11-13)
Tuesday
- Fred McGraw Donner, “Mecca’s Food Supplies and Muhammad’s Boycott,” Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient 20, no. 3 (October 1, 1977): 249–266.

Thursday


**The Form of the Qurʾān: Meccan Suras (week 3, Sept. 18-20)**

**Tuesday**


**Thursday**


**The Form of the Qurʾān: Meccan and Medinan Suras (Week 4, Sept. 25-27)**

**Tuesday**


**Thursday**


**The Qurʾān: A Comparative Perspective (week 5, Oct. 2-4)**

**Tuesday**


**Thursday**


• Qurʾān: 12 (Surat Yusuf)

**Part II: The Qurʾān’s Areas of Influence**

**Literary Approaches to the Qurʾān (week 6, Oct. 9-11)**

**Tuesday**


**Areas of influence: Law, theology, literature, ethics**

**Thursday**


**Part III: Qur’anic Interpretation**

**Qur’anic Interpretation (Week 7, Oct. 16-18)**

**Tuesday**


**Thursday**


**Women in Qur’anic Interpretation (Week 8, Oct. 23-25)**

**Tuesday**


**Thursday**

• *Reflection paper due today. Graduate students must submit two reflection papers.*


**Part IV: Modern Approaches**

**Modern, Modernist, feminist approaches to Qur’an (Week 9, Oct. 30–Nov. 1)**

**Tuesday**

• *Final paper two-page outline due today.*


Thursday


Modern, Modernist, feminist approaches (Week 10, Nov. 6-8)

Tuesday

• Amina Wadud, Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1-70.

Thursday

• Amina Wadud, Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), remainder of the book.

Modern, Modernist, feminist approaches (Week 11, Nov. 13-15)

Tuesday


Thursday

• Asma Barlas, Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretation of the Qur’ān (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2002), the remainder of the book.

Modern, Modernist, Feminist approaches (Week 12, Nov. 20-22)

Tuesday

• Final paper due today

• Barbara Freyer Stowasser, Women in the Qur’an, Traditions, and Interpretation (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 119-134.


Thursday

Student presentations of final papers start today


Presentations of final papers (Week 13, Nov. 27-29)

Presentations of final papers (Dec. 4).