

The University of Calgary  
Faculty of Humanities  
Department of Religious Studies

Religious Studies 353 L01  
Islam in the Modern World

Winter 2010

Block Week: January 4-8 MTWRF 9:00 am – 5:00 pm

Instructor: Dr. Gordon Nickel  
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Office Hours: By appointment  
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### Required Texts

READ BEFORE THE FIRST DAY OF CLASS: Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

Andrew Rippin, *Muslims: Their Beliefs and Practices*, Third edition (Routledge, 2005).

(NOTE: Get these textbooks in paperback. Don't purchase earlier editions of *Muslims*.)

### Course Description

This course provides an introduction to modern Muslim religious thought and a selection of social, political and cultural issues connected with it. Important reform, revivalist and sectarian movements will be studied, as well as significant thinkers in modern Islam. The course will explore questions surrounding both the nature of Islam in the world today, and how Islam has dealt with the phenomenon of modernity. An area of special focus will be the depiction of Islam on the internet, including the diverse expressions of Muslim identity by Muslims themselves.

### Course Objectives

The objectives of the course are to familiarize students with the major modern trends in Islam, to take into account a variety of perspectives on those trends, and to encourage respect for the people who advance them. Students are challenged to consult primary sources and the very best secondary sources in order to gather criteria for evaluating popular media portrayals of Islam. The course aims to approach class material in a descriptive and scholarly fashion while providing freedom in class for both confessional and critical expressions.

## Core Competencies

The course aims to develop the skills of gathering and organizing information about Islam while providing an introduction to the analysis and evaluation of that information. The required assignments develop the ability to do research, to describe research material in one's own words, to acknowledge sources, to synthesize, and to read and think critically.

## Course Requirements (subject to change by the beginning of the term)

### 1. Pre-session assignments

*Because this is a Block Week course rather than a regular course stretching over a semester, be sure to invest a significant amount of time preparing for the course during December 2009.*

1. Read the textbook by Tariq Ramadan. There will be a quiz on the book on the **first day of class**. Questions to help you prepare for the quiz are given on page 5 of this outline. Be sure to keep these questions with you as you read the text.
2. Write a short paper (600 words) for **submission at the beginning of the first class**, which includes the following parts: a) Describe your knowledge of, and experience of, Islam as you enter this course. b) Read chapter 12, "Describing Modernity," in the textbook by Andrew Rippin. After reading the description of *modernity* proposed by Rippin and others, would you describe yourself as "modern" in these terms? At which points are you "modern"? At which points are you not? c) Which topic(s) in particular would you like to see treated during class sessions? This assignment will not be graded; however, if it is not completed and submitted on time your final course grade will be lowered by 5%.

### 2. Block Week assignments

*In order to receive maximum benefit from this course, plan to use this full week for course work alone rather than scheduling other work or studies.*

1. Quiz on the textbook by Tariq Ramadan (see above), **9:00 a.m. January 4**. 10%
2. Read the textbook by Andrew Rippin according to the following schedule. In order to assess your reading of this text, there will be a quiz on this textbook on **January 8**. 10%
  - For Tuesday January 5: *Muslims* chapters 2 and 14
  - For Wednesday January 6: *Muslims* chs. 3 and 13
  - For Thursday January 7: *Muslims* chs. 4 and 6
  - For Friday January 8: *Muslims* chs. 7 and 15
3. Islamic identity journal: at the end of each class day, reflect on how course material has helped you answer basic questions (information on page 6). Due **January 8**. 10%

## Homework:

- You will need to devote one or two hours each night to reading and writing assignments (see above). Students will be expected to have completed the readings before class and will be asked to describe and analyze the material each day during lectures. (No intention to embarrass any student!—only a desire to maximize opportunities for you to speak, and to give other students a chance to hear important content from your voice.)

### 3. Assignments for after Block Week

*N.B. All assignments must be submitted in paper form at the Department of Religious Studies, SS 1301 by noon of the due date as well as electronically by email attachment to Dr. Nickel.*

1. A written assignment concerning the portrayal of Islam on the internet to be handed out in class January 8 and due **January 18** (1000 words). 20%
2. Research paper on a topic of current interest which relates in a significant way to one of our main class topics. Finalize your topic during Block Week. Your analysis of the topic (2000 words maximum) should provide the necessary factual material so that the topic can be seen against a solid backdrop (a minimum of five good scholarly sources). It should describe the opposing viewpoints which people have about the subject. It should also discuss the importance of the topic within the context of this course (as reflected in the textbook and DVDs viewed, etc.) Your research and writing should focus on the *religious* issues at stake within the topic. Due **February 22**. 40%
3. Participation in online blogs or forums. Information to come during course. 10%

Late assignments will not be accepted unless a prior agreement with the instructor has been made or a valid medical certificate is submitted. No exceptions will be made. Any incomplete assignment will be awarded a mark of F for that component of the course.

*\*There will be no registrar-scheduled final examination for this course.*

## ASSIGNMENT REQUIREMENTS

The text of all the written assignments should be double-spaced except for quotations of more than four lines, which should be single-spaced and indented. Submit assignments in Times New Roman 12 pt. Notes should be single-spaced and placed either at the bottom of each page or at the end of the assignment. Notes should be provided in order to 1) provide documentation for the source of specialized information or a quotation; or 2) provide documentation for an important point which needs justification. A bibliography of works consulted is required in every assignment. For further format guidelines, see Kate L. Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations*.

## Grading

A numerical mark will be given for each course requirement. A letter grade will be assigned on the following number and letter grade scheme:

A+	100 - 96	A	95.9 - 90	A-	89.9 - 85
B+	84.9 - 80	B	79.9 - 75	B-	74.9 - 70
C+	69.9 - 65	C	64.9 - 60	C-	59.9 - 55
D+	54.9 - 53	D	52.9-50	F	Under 50

N.B. All written assignments will be graded with regard to both form and content.

## Academic Honesty

***Plagiarism is not tolerated at the University of Calgary and has serious consequences. Your essays/presentations must be your own work and inadequate referencing may be seen as plagiarism. Please see the relevant sections on Academic Misconduct in the current University Calendar. If you have questions about correct referencing, please consult your instructor.***

## Academic Accommodation

If you are a student with a disability who requires academic accommodation and you have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre, please contact their office at 403-220-8237. Students who have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre are not eligible for formal academic accommodation. Once registered, please discuss any upcoming tests/examinations with the instructor **two weeks** before the scheduled date.

## Gnosis

Gnosis is the Religious Studies Student Club. For membership or more information please email: [gnosis@ucalgary.ca](mailto:gnosis@ucalgary.ca) or visit <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~gnosis>.

**Study questions for your reading of *Western Muslims* (pre-session assignment #1)**

Read all of Tariq Ramadan's book, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

*Many consider Tariq Ramadan to be one of the best-known voices for Islam in Europe. He was recently celebrated in Montreal at the meetings of the American Academy of Religion. Spend an hour browsing the internet and reading articles and blogs, etc. about Tariq Ramadan. How would you describe the internet perception of this author? Where would you locate him on a spectrum of different types of Muslims in the world today?*

1. How does Ramadan categorize the major groups of “those for whom Islam is the reference point for their thinking, their discourse, and their engagement”? In which of these groups does he place himself?
2. Ramadan writes about “points of reference” (p. 9) by which, he says, all of the world’s Muslims define themselves. What does Ramadan include in these points of reference? How would you describe Ramadan’s particular approach to these sources? Which sources does Ramadan leave out of “points of reference” which many orthodox Muslim would include?
3. What is Ramadan’s approach to Islamic Law, which he calls “The Way (al-sharia)” in chapter 2? If you are not familiar with the basics of Islamic Law, first read chapter 6, “Legal developments,” in our second textbook, Andrew Rippin’s *Muslims: Their beliefs and practices*. This will help you greatly.
4. The categories *Dār al-Islām* and *Dār al-Harb* have been important to many Muslims in the past in their understanding of the geography of conquest. What do these terms signify? Does Ramadan accept the traditional Muslim understanding of these terms? What does Ramadan propose for the relationship of Muslims to the non-Muslim West?
5. In Ramadan’s presentation of Muslim spirituality in chapter 5, which elements would you expect to clash with the worldview of “modernity”? For a workable definition of modernity, check chapter 12 of the Rippin textbook.
6. A major question about Muslims who live in the West is whether—and if so how—they will participate in the political process. Part of Ramadan’s notoriety is his attempt to propose an answer to this question. Become thoroughly familiar with his proposal in chapter 7. Do you find yourself convinced by his argument?
7. Ramadan writes in chapter 9 that many efforts to foster Muslim-Christian “dialogue” end up involving only Muslims and Christians who do not authentically represent their own faith communities. How then will meaningful faith conversation come about between those

Muslims and Christians who, as Ramadan indicates, really need it? What would that conversation look like? What would be included in it?

### **Islamic Identity Journal** (Block Week assignment #3)

As an assignment to complete during the days of Block Week, *keep a journal of your observations and reflections on questions of Islamic identity*. In the modern world, many people are asking questions about what Islam is—and what it is not. This course provides you a great opportunity to gather materials which could help you to give sensible answers to the questions which people tend to ask.

Tariq Ramadan, for example, specifies three questions which he believes that Muslims living in the West must ask: Where are we? Who are we? In what way do we want to belong? (*Western Muslims*, p. 63). Other questions which one hears in public discourse today are the following:

Who speaks for Islam? (title of a 2007 Gallup Press book)

Who has the authority to represent Islam?

Who is a true Muslim?

What is the true Islam?

What makes a society—or a country—Islamic?

How would you characterize the largest blocks of Muslims in the world today?

What questions are you hearing, if they are not included above? At the end of each class day January 4-7, write a journal entry of approximately 300 words, double spaced. Reflect on how class sessions and course materials *during that day* have helped you to come closer to answering important questions about Islamic identity.

Your journal must show evidence that (1) you take such questions seriously; (2) you are approaching the questions in a descriptive and academic way (rather than confessional); and (3) you are putting some careful thought into a search for reasonable answers.

**On January 8 at the start of class**, submit the four daily entries of your journal to the instructor complete with a title page. (10% of final mark)