

SGB 312: Reading the Qur'an

Fall 2018

Goldspohn 34

MWF, 9:20-10:30

Professor: Adam Kotsko, akotsko@noctrl.edu, Seybert 102

Office Hours: MWF 10:40-11:40 and 1:20-2:20, or by appointment

Course Description

This course is an intensive study of the Holy Book of Islam, the Qur'an. Revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in the early 600s, the Qur'an decisively shaped Islamic society, law, and literature as well as religious practices and beliefs. Among Muslims, the original Arabic text is considered a miracle in itself, a word of literary beauty on par with how English-speakers might think of a combination of Shakespeare and the King James Bible.

This term, we will read through the entire text of the Qur'an in English translation, generally following an approximation of the chronological order of their revelation, accompanied by biblical parallels, selected readings from the earliest biography of the Prophet, and a major work of contemporary scholarship.

Course Goals

After completing this course, students will be able to

- give an account of the content, themes, and literary style of the Qur'an
- connect passages of the Qur'an to their original historical context
- use and evaluate contemporary scholarly work on the Qur'an
- relate key stories in the Qur'an to previous versions that appear in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament
- relate and assess differing views on the historical and theological place of women in Islamic society in light of the Qur'an

Required Texts

Barlas, Asma, *"Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Texas UP, 2002). [ISBN: 0292709041]

The Qur'an, trans. M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (New York: Oxford UP, 2004). [ISBN: 0199535958]

Sells, Michael, ed. and trans., *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations*, 2nd ed. (White Cloud Press, 2007). [ISBN: 1883991692]

Additional readings will be made available on Blackboard and marked on the syllabus with (**).

Course Requirements

Each student's grade will be based equally on class participation (50%) and written work (50%).

Class participation presupposes careful and thorough preparation and serious intellectual involvement in class discussion. Students should come to class not only having read the text through, but having underlined, taken notes, and scanned over the marked text at least one additional time after the initial reading. On the basis of such preparation, students should be prepared for an intensive, text-focused discussion.

My expectation for class participation is that every member of class will be able to contribute with remarks and citations that are on-topic and reflect solid preparation for class. A student who meets that baseline will receive a grade in the **B range** for their participation portion. Students whose contribution is notably lacking—for instance, those who speak very little, who give no evidence of having done the reading carefully, who consistently change the topic in a disruptive way, or whose primary contributions are jokes or personal anecdotes—will receive a participation grade in the **C or D range**. Students who distinguish themselves through some particular service—such as consistently contributing new topics that shape the discussion, serving as a resource for navigating the text, or making a special effort to draw in quieter classmates—will qualify themselves for a participation grade in the **A range**.

The baseline condition for class participation is of course physical presence in class. Absences not only affect the individual student, but the entire group, and the same is true of habitual lateness. Punctual attendance should be regarded as mandatory. Lateness will count against a student's participation for that session, and in extreme cases will be treated as the equivalent of an absence. Particularly in a ten-week term, a small number of absences can quickly add up to a significant percentage of class time missed (10% for 3 absences, 20% for 6). An increasing number of absences carries with it increasing consequences, which are as follows:

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| 1-2 absences | No grade penalty, in recognition of our shared human frailties. (If students miss fewer than two classes, however, then in cases where a student is at the threshold between two grades, the professor will go with the higher one.) |
| 3-4 absences | A half letter grade is deducted from the student's final grade for each absence; this penalty may be lifted by doing an absence make-up for each missed class. |
| 5-6 absences | For each absence, the student <i>must</i> complete an absence make-up (described below) to avoid failing the course, and a half letter grade penalty is imposed on the student's final grade which <i>cannot</i> be made up. |
| 7 absences | Automatic failure of the course. |

In order to make up for an absence, students must visit a museum or attend a cultural or academic event relevant to the content of the course. They must write a reflection on this experience (at least one *full* page, double spaced), relating it in some way to material that they have studied as part of the Shimer core curriculum. Absence make-ups must be completed **within three weeks** of the absence being made up. Students have ample opportunities to attend events on the North Central campus, in Naperville, or in Chicago. Hence there should be no difficulty in finding an appropriate event or time for a museum visit.

Students have two options for their **written work**.

1. Six focus papers of 2-3 pages, to be orally presented and discussed in class. All six papers will count equally toward the portion of your grade representing written work.
2. Three such focus papers, together with a final paper of 6-8 pages. The three focus papers will together count for half the portion of your grade representing written work (i.e., 25% of the final grade), as will the final paper.

All students must sign up for at least three focus papers within the first week of class, on a Google Doc to be provided by the professor. Failure to sign up by the beginning of class on Monday, September 17, will result in a half letter-grade penalty. At least two out of the three initial focus papers must fall prior to Monday, October 15. That same date is the deadline for deciding whether to write a final paper or three additional focus papers. Students opting to do more focus papers should express that preference by signing up for three additional focus papers by the deadline. Students may change their preference after that point, subject to a half letter-grade penalty. In the event that a student opts to write a final paper after having done four or more focus papers, their three highest focus paper grades will count toward their final grades. Students may make up the two half letter-grade penalties by doing extra focus papers.

Focus papers, like focus statements, are meant to orient our class discussion and must be submitted and presented in advance of the day we discuss a given reading. (In other words, they are not Integrative Studies-style protocols that recapitulate and expand on a previous class discussion.) Possible topics include but are not limited to the relation of the day’s reading to past readings, its development of recurring themes or introduction of new themes, relations between the Qur’an reading and supporting materials (biblical parallels or biography of Muhammad), or a close reading and analysis of a particular passage. They must be at least two *full* double-spaced pages in length and should be no more than three. All focus papers will receive a letter grade.

Final papers must take the form of a formal academic paper, which may but need not draw on scholarly sources. All papers must have a clear argumentative thesis and organizational scheme and be supported by ample textual evidence. Papers must follow **a recognized documentation style** in the humanities—preferably University of Chicago or MLA—and be 6 to 8 pages in length, double-spaced, in a standard font. Even if using only class materials, all papers must include a full bibliography.

All papers must be submitted via e-mail. Focus papers are due at the beginning of class time. *Please do not waste time and paper by printing copies for the class.* All final papers are due by midnight on Wednesday, November 21. Students are encouraged to submit early drafts for comments; the exact timing can be worked out with the professor on a case-by-case basis. All written work for this course is subject to North Central College’s plagiarism policy, which can be found at <https://www.northcentralcollege.edu/english/plagiarism-policy>.

Tentative Course Schedule and Readings

Monday	September 10	Sells, <i>Approaching the Qur’an</i> , Preface, Introduction, “The Opening,” “Sura of the Compassionate” (xi-31, 41-43, 145-157); Bible: Psalm 136, Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 26:1-11, Numbers 6:22-27, Matthew 6:9-13, Luke 11:2-4
Wednesday	September 12	Sells, <i>Approaching the Qur’an</i> , pp. 44-91
Friday	September 14	Sells, <i>Approaching the Qur’an</i> , pp. 92-141
Monday	September 17	Sells, <i>Approaching the Qur’an</i> , “Hearing the Qur’an” (pp.161-196)—also download audio files and listen to at least one sura until you feel you can follow along
Wednesday	September 19	Qur’an 67-80; <i>Life of Muhammad</i> on early ministry (**)

Friday	September 21	Qur'an 50-54, 56; Bible: Matthew 25:31-46, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11
Monday	September 24	Qur'an 30-32, 34-36; Bible: 1 Kings 10:1-23
Wednesday	September 26	Qur'an 37-41; Bible: Genesis 22:1-19
Friday	September 28	Qur'an 42-46
Monday	October 1	Qur'an 10-11, 13-15; Bible: Jonah
Wednesday	October 3	Qur'an 12; Bible: Genesis 37, 39-47
Friday	October 5	Qur'an 16-17; <i>Life of Muhammad</i> on Night Journey (**)
Monday	October 8	Qur'an 18-21; <i>Life of Muhammad</i> on "The Cave" (**); Bible: Luke 1-2
Wednesday	October 10	Qur'an 23, 25-29
Friday	October 12	Qur'an 6-7
Monday	October 15	Barlas, " <i>Believing Women</i> " in <i>Islam</i> , pp. 1-50 Deadline to decide whether to write a research paper
Wednesday	October 17	Barlas, " <i>Believing Women</i> " in <i>Islam</i> , pp. 50-89
Friday	October 19	Barlas, " <i>Believing Women</i> " in <i>Islam</i> , pp. 93-128
Monday	October 22	Qur'an 2:1-176; <i>Life of Muhammad</i> on the Hijra (**)
Wednesday	October 24	Qur'an 2:177-286; <i>Life of Muhammad</i> on The Cow (**)
Friday	October 26	Qur'an 3, 5
Monday	October 29	Qur'an 4, 49, 58, 65-66
Wednesday	October 31	Barlas, " <i>Believing Women</i> " in <i>Islam</i> , pp. 129-166
Friday	November 2	Barlas, " <i>Believing Women</i> " in <i>Islam</i> , 167-210
Monday	November 5	Qur'an 8-9; <i>Life of Muhammad</i> on Battle of Badr (**)
Wednesday	November 7	Qur'an 22, 33; <i>Life of Muhammad</i> on Battle of the Ditch (**)
Friday	November 9	Qur'an 47-48, 60; <i>Life of Muhammad</i> on Armistice (**)
Monday	November 12	Qur'an 24, 57, 59, 61-64
Wednesday	November 14	<i>Life of Muhammad</i> on conquest of Mecca (**)
Friday	November 16	<i>Life of Muhammad</i> on end of Muhammad's life (**)
Wednesday	November 21	ALL WRITTEN WORK DUE BY MIDNIGHT—NO EXCEPTIONS