THEO/ISA 273:01 -- Islam: Religion and Culture

Prof. John Renard (renardgj@slu.edu)  
Office: HU 337, 977-2869  
Spring 2009, TR 12:45, XH G22  
Office: TR11:30-12, OBA

**Description:** An overview of fundamental beliefs and values of the religious tradition called Islam, using primary textual and visual sources from a range of cultural contexts, with special attention to how the story of Islam offers insight into the interplay of religion and culture: wherever Islam has taken root, it has become inculturated even as it has Islamized its new host culture.

**Objectives/Assessment:** Students will develop the skills to:

1) *read and critique* the main sources and structural elements of the Islamic religious tradition/assessed via all written and oral work (See Reading, Assignments)

2) *articulate* Islamic tradition’s central beliefs, practices, personal and communal moral values/assessed via all written and oral work

3) *distinguish* between core elements of Islamic tradition and tendentious, intolerant interpretations of Islam and other traditions/assessed via all written and oral work

4) *evaluate* the relationships between Islam as a religious tradition and the various major cultures within which Islam has been a powerful presence/assessed via all written and oral work.

In addition, the cultural diversity component will be assessed by means of a “before and after” attitude inventory (available in PDF on BlackboardCE) geared to suggesting changes in students’ views of the cultural aspects of the study of Islam (the inventory will not be graded as such). Finally, each student will supply on the last day of class a one-page response to these questions: 1) How has your knowledge of Islam as a religious tradition changed? 2) How has your understanding of culture changed? 3) How has your understanding of the relationships between cultural diversity and Islam changed as a result of this course? 4) How many of your responses to the attitude inventory survey changed from “before” to “after”? This will not be graded, but you will not receive a final grade without turning this page in.

**Assessment and SLU Mission’s Five Dimensions:** Scholarship and Knowledge via objective test, discussion, and written work; Intellectual Inquiry/Communication via readings and class reports; Community Building via regular group discussion, group reports, and intense focus on cultural diversity; Leadership and Service via rotating discussion leadership and focus on ethical and justice questions; Spirituality and Values via study of operative ethical and spiritual principles of Islam as a major religious tradition with important links to Judaeo-Christian traditions. All will provide non-graded assessment data via a pre/post test to be explained in class.

**Method:** Each session will combine elements of lecture, audio-visual illustration, and discussion of readings and class material (breaking into groups with rotating leaders whose task will be to choose key questions for discussion, then come together with that day’s other leaders before the class to sum up and analyze major themes in the discussion). Discussion will be geared to interpreting documentation re: cultural elements it suggests.

**Required Reading:** (See Study Questions for all three books on BlackboardCE)
- Murata and Chittick, *The Vision of Islam*[V]
- Renard, *Windows on the House of Islam*[W]

[Recommended Reading]
- Renard: *Seven Doors to Islam: Spirituality and the Religious Life of Muslims*, companion volume to [W] above
Topics and Readings:
I. Introduction: Overview of Beliefs and Practices, Study of Islam Past and Present
1/13: Introduction, Overview
1/15: V ix-20
1/20: V 20-70
1/22: V 70-117
1/27: V 117-58
1/29: V 158-92
2/3: V 193-235
2/5: V 236-82
2/10: V 282-335
2/12: NO CLASS – all will take online exam on V during class time – for 50 minutes between 12:45 and 2:00 – test shuts down 50 minutes after student signs on – with 100 multiple choice questions randomly distributed from the same pool (giving different arrangement for each student.)

II. Encountering Islam Through Primary Sources
   Individual reports: during this segment of the semester, each student will give a 5-minute oral presentation in class on material assigned to each from W – the focus will be how 1) what is the nature of the document? 2) what specific Islamic beliefs/values are its main themes 3) how does the document interpret those themes (see below re Outline topics), and 4) what can one conclude about the relationships between religion and culture on the basis of this documentation, whether textual or visual?
2/17: W 1-6, 24-57 [Reports on 1-6; 24-28 & 43-47; 28-34; and 48-54]
2/19: W 59-107 [Reports on 59-64; 65-74; 78-84; 92-98; 98-107]
2/24: W 107-44 [Reports on 107-16; 119-24; 130-37; 137-44]
2/26: W 144-72, 180-94 [Reports on 144-49; 159-66; 180-89]
3/5: W 226-35, 244-67 [Reports on 226-31; 244-50; 250-61]
   3/10 and 3/12: SPRING BREAK/Easter
3/17: W 269-336 [Reports on 269-77; 278-83; 301-10; 311-17]
3/19: W 336-83 [Reports on 336-44; 355-59; 359-68]
Take-home Outline #1: DUE Mar 24
   Using the outline format described below, complete and argue the thesis
   Three of the most important ways in which Muslims have interpreted their sacred sources and tradition generally are…(e.g. literally, metaphorically, poetically, allegorically, mystically, legally, ritually, socio-economically, using gender as a principle…) BECAUSE? illustrating your three main points with primary source material chosen only from W. NOTE: supply evidence of your case from the sources in W only, w. page # of W in ()

III. Assessing Contemporary Islamic Themes
   Group reports: during this segment of the course, groups of students will choose some aspect of the ethical and social concerns analyzed in A and organize a discussion of the key issues. NOTE: each student will comment on his/her feature of the topic for NO MORE THAN 5 MINUTES, responding to the points on the “rubric” (See Blackboard), including relating the material to one website dealing with contemporary issues, and evaluating the quality of the site’s approach.
3/24: NO Class – Papers turned in
3/26: A 1-44
3/31: A 45-94
4/2: A 95-125 – Group 1 report
4/7: Museum Visit
4/9 – No class
4/14: A 126-61 – Group 2
4/16: Mosque Visit
4/21: [NO CLASS]
4/28: A 203-51 – Group 4

TAKE HOME OUTLINE #2: DUE 5/5 at door of Dr. Renard’s office HU 337, by 12 noon
Construct a thesis based on the question Evaluated against what you have learned from V and W, how effectively does A make its case? Illustrate your main points by specific references to A, V, and W (pg # in parens). NOTE: include specific evidence from these sources only.

Assignments and Grading:
Objective Test on General Background in V: 25%
Reading. Discussion/Reports on W and A: All are expected to complete the assigned readings and be prepared to participate in discussion on them. As you read, note down key problem areas; if difficulty understanding an item, ASK QUESTIONS in class. 25%
An essential ingredient in the course will be regular discussion. To facilitate that, one individual for each group will be assigned to serve as discussion leaders responsible for asking several focus-questions to stimulate reflection on the assigned material. After that, the discussion leaders will gather at the front of the class and report on major themes and concerns expressed in their respective groups. Discussion grade=group leading, individual and group reports, participation. Two 3-page typed take-home OUTLINES (on W and A): Each 25%

NOTE: you will hand me an IDEA-OUTLINE ONLY, to be constructed as follows:
I. Thesis Statement in which you indicate briefly the position you will argue, suggesting the main points of your argument. [NOTE: A thesis statement is not merely an assertion of readily observable factual data -- the who, what, where, and when; it attempts a further analysis, suggesting the “why” and “how” behind the factual data.]
   THESIS: FIRST, formulates a problem — e.g., Many people assume that Muslims employ only “fundamentalist/literalist” ways of interpreting their sources, but a wide range of evidence suggests otherwise ...
   because...; an issue — e.g., Far from monolithic, Islamic tradition shows many ways Muslims have developed for interpreting their sources ...; or a theme — images of God in relation to ethics, social and gender roles and women’s contributions, the religious foundations of justice. This is your Topic Sentence. THEN mention specific examples, e.g., of why what you claim is true, how said problem manifests itself, and how one might solve it; — each of those specific examples supported by several specific illustrations/types of evidence for your claim that there is a problem. NOTE: the thesis must include some indication of what your main points will be.
II. Body of the argument constructed of the three main points in thesis that are examples of aspects of the problem, each supported by references to primary source material, textual and/or visual, providing illustrations for the example. The purpose is to integrate as much of the material as possible using only the sources assigned to all. (This is to “level the playing field” in my evaluation.)
   III. Conclude with a statement as to the implications of your argument -- a “so what?” statement, more than a simple summary or repetition of what you have already said.
   An IDEA Outline is a step beyond a SKELETON outline, which merely lists terms. In an IDEA outline, you fill in the concepts, explaining your terms, but need not use complete sentences to do so. No title page or blank filler pages at back; just three jam-packed sheets with your name at top. Use standard outline format, i.e. I, A, 1, a, i...
   Either two or more subheads or none at all (e.g. 1, a, b; 2, a, b...).

Evaluative Criteria and Calculations:
Criteria for evaluating both written work and class discussion:
1) Solid grasp of basic concepts and terms.
2) Ability to state key issue succinctly.
3) Appreciation of the complexity of, and variety of approaches to, the issue.
4) Clarity and conciseness of oral/written expression.
5) Coherence and consistency of argument, oral/written.

Expectations for Specific Grade Levels: (Criteria used to judge non-quantitative measurements – oral presentation, discussion, papers not "scored" numerically)

A = Superior, exceptional. Evidence of independent, creative, imaginative thinking, informed and disciplined, that asks critical questions.

A- = Outstanding command of data and other “A” qualities, manifested to a slightly lesser degree.

B+= Excellent, ability to synthesize and discriminate among complex and subtle arguments.

B = Very good, ready command of full range of concepts.

B- = Evidence of slightly lesser facility with data, etc., than at “B” level

C+= Good, general easy familiarity with major concepts.

C = Acceptable, satisfactory ability to describe overall picture and essential concepts.

C- = Still acceptable, but lesser facility than “C” level performance

D = Weak, lack of familiarity with most major concepts and arguments.

F = Unsatisfactory, plagiarism, cheating.

AF = 5 or more absences without supporting documentation.

Numerical Equivalents to Letter Grades

- Individual assignments:  A=4.00, A-=3.7, B+=3.3, B=3.00, B-=2.7, C+=2.3, C=2.00, C-=1.7, D=1.00, D, F=0.00.
- Conversion of numerical score to Letter Grades:  A= 100-96, A-=95-93, B+=92-89, B=88-85, B-=84-81, C+=80-77, C=76-73, C-=72-70, D=69-65, F=64 or lower.

Final calculations: A = 4-3.67, A- 3.66-3.43, B+ 3.42-3.17, B 3.16-2.9, B- 2.89-2.6, C+ 2.59-2.2, C 2.19-1.9, C- 1.89-1.5, D 1.49-.9

NOTE 1: University Disabilities policy: Any student who feels that he/she may need academic accommodations related to disabilities in order to meet the requirements of this course – as outlined in the syllabus, due to presence of a disability, should contact the Office of Disabilities Services. Please telephone the office at 314-977-2930, or visit Room 131 in the Academic Resources Center, 3840 Lindell Blvd. Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries.

NOTE 2: Everything I have to say about grading policy is printed here – clear evidence of miscalculation on my part will, of course, be dealt with appropriately as needed. The answer to the question “What do I have to do to get a...?” you can calculate yourself.

NOTE 3: no “extra credit” option available.

NOTE 4: If you would like your final project returned with comments, submit two copies and a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Otherwise I retain papers for a year.

NOTE 5: Papers receiving a D or F (only) may be redone for a maximum grade of C+.

NOTE 6: Attendance policy: 2 unexcused absences allowed; 3-5 unexcused absences = reduction of one half letter grade (e.g. B+ to B) in participation grade for each; 6 unexcused absences = F in participation grade; 7 or more unexcused absences = automatic AF for the semester

NOTE 7: Academic Honesty:

University statement: Students are expected to be honest in their academic work. The University reserves the right to penalize any student whose academic conduct is, in its judgment, detrimental to the University. Such conduct shall include cases of plagiarism, collusion, cheating, giving or receiving or offering or soliciting information on examinations, or the use of previously prepared material in examinations or quizzes. Violations should be reported to your course instructor, who will investigate and adjudicate them according to the Policy on Academic Honesty of the College of Arts and Sciences. If the charges are found to be true, the student may be liable for academic or disciplinary probation, suspension or expulsion from the university.

Instructor’s policy: Plagiarism consists in using 4 or more words in sequence, taken directly from someone else’s work, without attributing them to their author, regardless of who that author may be or from what form or venue their words were taken. Any words not the student’s own must be indicated with “quotation marks” and a reference of some kind. Plagiarism will merit an automatic F for the assignment. More than one occurrence will result in an automatic F for the course and may jeopardize a student’s good standing in the University.

NOTE 8: Emails received by 4 pm on any weekday will be answered that day; no emails will be answered between Friday 4pm and Monday 7 am.

NOTE 9: No use of cell phones in class; as for laptops: I will “visit” you on occasion at your desk and ask to see the notes you’ve been taking on that day’s material. Otherwise, no use of laptops.

NOTE 10: Online course evaluation MUST be completed during the time-window to be indicated by ITS and passed along by professor. Failure to complete the evaluation will result in an “I” grade until it is completed.