



In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful
(Arabic Calligraphy in Kufic Style)

University of Toronto
Department of Historical Studies

Last Updated: January 4, 2010

Spring 2010
RLG 204 H5S: Introduction to Islam
Tuesdays, 16:00-18:00 – NE 292

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I. Course Description and Goals

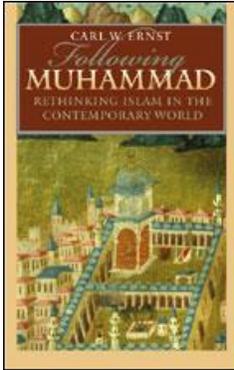
As the world grows ever smaller and people of diverse religions, cultures, races and social classes are brought closer together, the need to understand and appreciate the diversity and pluralism of humankind has never been more acute. Rudyard Kipling's famous dictum, "East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet," sounds quite naïve nowadays. Today, about one in five human beings, numbering over one billion people, practice the religion of Islam. However, information about Islam in the West is sadly lacking. Though headline news is dominated by stories from parts of the Islamic world, such "crisis reporting" often obfuscates, rather than clarifies, our understanding of this important world faith.

This course introduces students to the world of Islamic spiritual, religious, cultural and civilizational traditions. It ranges widely, touching on everything from history, theology, art, architecture and scripture to music, mysticism, philosophy, law, literature and politics. No prior knowledge of Islam is assumed. This course is for anyone who has an open mind and an eagerness to learn.

A distinctive feature of this class is its emphasis on direct learning. In an introductory chemistry class, if you're told that combining NaHCO_3 (baking soda) with CH_3COOH (vinegar) will cause CO_2 gas (carbon dioxide) to be released, you may yawn and jot this down in your notebook. However, if you're told to mix these two ingredients together in a covered container, shake and then release – trust me, you'll never forget the result! Similarly, in our class, we will try as often as possible to engage directly with the subject matter. In other words, we will not, for example, simply learn *about* Islamic law and philosophy, but will try to engage with some of the very questions that Muslim jurists and philosophers have grappled with over the ages.

At the end of this course, you will have a significant insight into Islamic history, thought and practice, but even more importantly, you will have acquired the tools and critical thinking skills necessary to continue your explorations of this subject, to evaluate various sources of information and to arrive at informed conclusions.

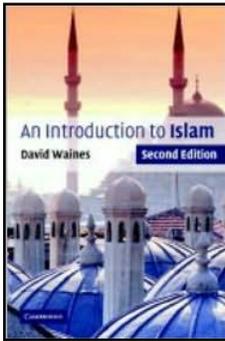
II. Learning Resources (required)



Carl W. Ernst, *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World*, published by the University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

Dr. Carl W. Ernst is W.R. Kenan Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Director of the Carolina Center for the Study of the Middle East and Muslim Civilizations. He studied comparative religion at Stanford (AB 1973) and Harvard (PhD 1981), has done research tours in India, Pakistan, and Turkey, and has also visited Iran, Egypt, and Uzbekistan. He is the author of numerous academic books on Islam. The volume we are using as the textbook for our course received the Choice Outstanding Academic Book award for 2004 and the Bashrahil Prize for Outstanding Cultural Achievement in the Humanities. Unlike many “Islam 101” books published since September 11, 2001, *Following Muhammad* avoids the traps of sensational political exposé and specialized scholarly Orientalism. Carl Ernst introduces readers to the profound spiritual resources of Islam while

clarifying diversity and debate within the tradition. He moves away from a Middle Eastern bias, addressing the pluralistic nature of Muslim societies and thought. With translations of selections from Islamic texts, Ernst offers access to Muslim voices and key themes. He concludes with an overview of critical debates on important contemporary issues such as gender and veiling, state politics, and science and religion. A concise selected reading list provides a helpful guide for future study. This engaging introduction to Islam is an excellent resource for learning about a religion that is a major presence in the world.



David Waines, *An Introduction to Islam*, second edition, published by Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Dr. David Waines is an Emeritus Professor of Islamic Studies at Lancaster University in the UK. He received his PhD in Islamic Studies from McGill University in Montréal, Canada. He is a specialist of medieval Islamic history, medieval Islamic medicine (dietetics), contemporary Islamic religious and political thought, and modern Islamic movements. His publications include such interesting titles as *In a Caliph's Kitchen: Medieval Arabic Cooking for the Modern Gourmet*, *Patterns of Everyday Life* (on housing, textiles, clothing, food, and drink in the Muslim world), and *The Revolt of the Zanj* (a translation from Arabic of a portion of the famous history of al-Tabari). *An Introduction to Islam* is the story of Muslims' beliefs and practices as they developed from their origins to the present day. It emphasizes the rich and multi-faceted nature of this

world religion.

In addition to the two textbooks, other required “readings” (whether written, visual or audio) will be provided to students either in class or through the class Blackboard webpage. Some of the readings may be challenging. Do not give up! They often require thought, reflection and (gasp!) labour. In the words of the Talmud, “If someone tells you, ‘I have laboured but not found,’ do not believe him. If he says, ‘I have not laboured, but I have found,’ do not believe him. But, if he says, ‘I have laboured and have found,’ then believe him” (*Megillah 6b*). In other words, giving up on difficult material is not an option.



There is one other item you will need to purchase – a clicker. “Clickers,” or Classroom Response Systems, are a type of polling system seen on some game shows like “Who Wants to be a Millionaire.” In an academic context, they have been used very successfully to engage students in large classes. This teaching technique has been proven to increase student participation and improve student performance. Clickers must be correctly registered in order to earn credit. Instructions for doing this will be available on our class webpage. In addition, students must register their U of T email address on ROSI and check that account regularly. Gmail, Hotmail, Yahoo etc. have tended to cause problems with the U of T system and so are not as reliable.

The two textbooks and the clicker can be purchased at the UTM Bookstore at 1129 South Building.

III. Evaluation:

1. 20% (10% + 10%)

Online Assessments

Online assessments are short quizzes that are administered through Blackboard. Students in the past have found these very useful to help them critically think through important issues raised in the weekly readings, and to keep up with class. They are open book, but not open friend! Each correct response earns you a 100% for that question, and even an incorrect response earns you a 50% - wow! In other words, as long as you complete the assessment, it's impossible to fail it. These short evaluations (in combination with the Outline described below) will also give you a chance to judge your own performance before the last day to cancel (drop) courses without academic penalty (March 7). The total value of online assessments administered and graded before March 7 is 10%, and the total value of assessments after that date is also 10%, for a total of 20%.

2. 15% Ongoing

Participation and Attendance

Regular attendance in class, keeping up with readings, and active participation are absolutely fundamental for your success in this course. This will be assessed in a variety of ways, which may include in-class activities, short written responses on particular topics, participation in on-line discussion groups, and clicker questions. By simply clicking on your clickers when given the opportunity to do so in class, you will be earning marks towards your participation and attendance grades. Each correct clicker response earns you a 100% for that question, and even an incorrect response earns you a 70% - pretty generous!

3. 30% Monday, February 22
Friday, March 26

Outline/Proposal and Bibliography (5%) Essay or Creative Project (25%)

In our class, we will be covering a wide variety of subjects that introduce Islam. The essay/creative project is an opportunity for you to explore an area that interests you most. If you choose the essay, it must be between 1500-2000 words in length (approximately 6-8 pages excluding notes and bibliography) and engage critically to answer a question. If you choose the creative project, it will include a piece of artwork you've created that reflects particular themes we've studied, and a short description of between 500-750 words that explains your creation in terms of these themes. The grading rubrics, topics, and further details about the essay and creative project will be distributed to you well in advance of the due date. A one-page outline/proposal and bibliography is due on Monday, February 22, to be submitted electronically. This will help focus your ideas early and ensure that you don't procrastinate till the last minute. The final version is due on March 26. Submissions after the deadline will be penalized 10% per day late.

Essays/creative projects will be submitted through the 'turnitin.com' facility. Information on how to avoid plagiarism and inadequate referencing, as well the university's Rules and Regulations on this matter, may be found at <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/library/instruction/researchwriting.html>. If you wish to use an alternative to the turnitin.com facility, you must speak with your designated TA to discuss options by February 3, 2009. Participation in writing clinics can help students who find writing a challenge to increase their grade. UTM's Academic Skills Centre offers grammar and composition workshops and helps to improve your general writing and reference skills.

I would encourage you to do a stellar job on the paper, as I would like to forward the best ones to the *Journal of Historical Studies* of the University of Toronto and other venues for possible publication (see www.cssaame.com/jhs/). Wouldn't it be great to be a published author even before you graduate? A number of prestigious awards are available for top undergraduate student essays, and I will be keeping my eyes open for superior quality papers so that I can nominate you for such awards.

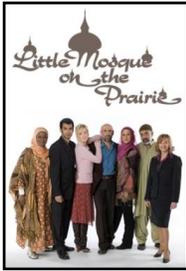
5. 35% Registrar scheduled

Final Exam

The final exam will test not only the content (i.e., facts) of what you have learned over the course of the semester, but will assess your skills in critically approaching material, evaluating it, and formulating coherent and informed responses.

As participation and attendance is essential, if you feel you will be missing classes or parts of classes, this may not be the course for you. Class lecture notes and PowerPoint presentations will not be made available online. ***In-class activities that count toward the participation grade cannot be made up and students who forget their clickers cannot be given credit for the questions missed.*** Late registrants may miss some participation marks. Exceptions to these policies are only possible in the case of extenuating circumstances, such as *documented* illness or death in the family. For detailed information on how to proceed with requesting an extension, appealing a mark, etc., please see the documents that are available on our website and contact the appropriate TA in charge. Please note that in all UTM classes, marks assigned are tentative until approved by the departmental chair and recorded in the office of the registrar.

IV. Special Event!



Every year, I try to have a special event for my class. This year, I'm delighted to inform you that Zarqa Nawaz and Zaib Shaikh, the creator and star of the hit CBC comedy *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, have accepted my invitation to speak to the UTM community as guests for the Snider Lecture on Wednesday, February 24, 2010. This exciting experience will be an integral part of our course. Those students who are unable to attend in person will be able to view the event on video. This is a wonderful opportunity for all of us to listen to some extremely creative and talented Canadians who have impacted the perception of Islam in this country. Students in our class will have the opportunity to meet with our two guests during the reception that will follow the talk.

V. Expectations:

- Participate actively, contribute your thoughts to class discussions and activities, ask pertinent questions and take notes of important points. Always be courteous. It is inappropriate to chat while the instructor or your classmates are speaking.
- You will be informed of the readings for all lectures beforehand. Don't fall behind.
- Computers may only be used to take notes in class, never for other activities and certainly not for gaming or e-mail. If you are using a computer, please ensure that the sound is turned off and that you are seated in one of the back rows so that you do not disturb your classmates.
- Mobile phones must never disrupt the class.
- Our TAs in this course, Ms. Shanifa Nasser, Mr. Halil Simsek, Mr. Babak Bakhtiarynia, Mr. Shaftolu Gulamadov, Mr. Adam Asgarali, and Mr. Adam Ali, are world-class scholars whom I've chosen because of their excellent knowledge of various aspects of the Islamic tradition. Take advantage of their skills and learning. We are very fortunate to have them. Also, be sure to respect them. The following is an example of a real email (modified to conceal the identity of the person who sent it) once sent to a TA. Don't laugh – such emails are far more common than you'd guess! "Netiquette" reveals a lot about people.

Date: Sat, 06 Jan 2007 09:36:20 -0500 [09:36:20 AM EST]
From: TheBoor@utoronto.ca 
To: Teaching Assistant@utoronto.ca
Subject: Hey!

Hey!

ne1 there? i emailed u 3 hours ago but u din reply!!!!!! like i sed, I waznt in class 2day – lol! did i miss nething :P?

cu later,

The Boor

Ahem, no comment on the above.

- Both I and the TAs look forward to working with you and meeting you individually. Feel free to drop by to discuss significant topics during office hours. If you have other questions, please e-mail the appropriate contact person. We will try to respond to all e-mail enquiries within 48 hours during school days. Remember, there are approximately 200 students in this class. It would be very helpful if you included your first and last names, your student number, and a clear statement of the subject of your message in the header in any correspondence. Check the course outline, other handouts and the class website for answers *before* e-mailing. Ensure that your UToronto account (which must be registered on ROSI) is functional and that you check it regularly. All course-related correspondence should be through this account, since, when communicating with the UToronto system, e-mails from Hotmail and other services have occasionally been known to simply disappear into cyberspace.

Marhaba! Welcome to RLG 204 H5S: Introduction to Islam