

## Islamic Thought and Practice (ITP)

Spring 2019, Amman, Jordan

4 credits

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Office Hours & Class times: Flexible. I am normally working in the office – located in the Magnuson apartment on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor – on Monday and Thursday afternoons. You are welcome to “drop in,” or to ask for an appointment.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION** — This course offers a survey and summary of the major beliefs and practices of Islam, highlights from Islamic history, and a look at current issues such as gender issues and modern Islamic movements. A strong emphasis is placed on understanding Islam in context and learning to relate to Muslims, developing the skills and understanding to “enter their world.” We will take advantage of living in a Muslim-majority context, as well as during travel in the region, to learn through site visits, hearing local speakers, meeting with Muslims, etc. Throughout the course, we will focus on developing a Christ-centered response and approach to Islam and Muslims.

In addition to seeking to understand Muslims and Islam (vision, faith and practice), we will consider the broader topics of how to understand religion in general, and how to understand and relate to another major world religion and its adherents, in particular. Since the beginning of Islam, Christian-Muslim relations have been characterized by mutual misunderstanding (reaching levels of demonization of the other) and by conflict and competition for both political and religious dominance (including the Crusades and colonial history). In recent times, events such as the founding of Israel and the Palestinian/Arab-Israeli conflict, the Gulf War, 9/11 and the “War on Terror,” have exacerbated Christian-Muslim suspicions and tensions. In this context, students are asked to seek to explore an empathetic and Christ-centered approach to Muslims and Islam, through participation in the reading, assignments, engagement with speakers, cultural exchanges with local young people, and through involvement in the local community.

### COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES — GENERAL & SPECIFIC

*a. General Objectives* — *The goal of this course is to help students develop a primary grasp of Islamic belief and practice, including an awareness of some of the diversity which exists within Islam/among those who call themselves “Muslim.” This course uses Islam and interaction with Muslims as a mirror in which students might see themselves more clearly, and be challenged to think about their own religious/faith identity and practice, both within the Christian community and in relation to those in other communities.* Readings, lectures, speakers, site visits, and personal encounters with the peoples of Jordan and elsewhere in the region are all used to achieve this objective. The course also seeks to develop a humble respect for the basic moral integrity of cultural and religious others, in this case Muslims.

In addition, this course will provide students with numerous opportunities to practice and develop intercultural skills such as entering into the world of different others, adapting behavior within that other context, suspending judgment, shifting perspective to see the world from other perspectives, practicing empathy, etc. All of this learning will be in a faith context. Students will be challenged to ask questions like, “How should we as followers of Christ relate to Muslims and Islam?” and “What are the boundaries of becoming ‘all things to all people,’ in respect to how we relate to Muslims and Islam?” Students will also be challenged to grapple with some of the current challenging Christian-Muslim (interfaith) issues, and begin to formulate a personal Christ-centered response.

*b. Specific Objectives* — This course will help students to:

1. Become aware of some of the highlights of the historical development of Islam, from a Muslim perspective.
2. Develop a basic understanding of Islam, both as a religion and as a way of life. Become familiar with the pillars of Islam (practice) and the basic beliefs of Islam, from a Muslim perspective.
3. Develop a basic understanding of some issues of contemporary Islam, including modern *Islamism* (e.g., the *Salafi* movement, and ISIS), from a Muslim perspective.
4. Be able to discuss some of the issues around the topic of women in Islam, with a beginning understanding of how gender issues reflect and interact with (are relative to) cultural context, from a Muslim perspective.
5. Begin to develop a Christian / Christ-centered approach and response to Islam, including thinking through some of the barriers and bridges (points of divergence, and points of common ground), and how to relate to Muslims in a Christ-centered way (engaging this through interaction within the MESP cohort, and with local Muslims and Christians).
6. Explore and reflect on the intersection and relationship between *faith* and *culture*, and the boundaries and relationship between the *Divine* (that of God) and the *human*.
7. Live out *humility* in the face of the complexity of human life in terms of beliefs and behaviors.

## APPROACH

As part of the overall MESP experience, this course presents a great opportunity for Christ-centered *intercultural* growth and development. Here we face the challenge (or cluster of challenges) in the area of attempting to understand and relate to another, different major world religion and its adherents (the religion which presents arguably the greatest challenge to the Christian faith and people of any religion or belief system of any kind, in the world). Here are some thoughts about how to approach this unit, the religion, the peoples:

- Learn from real people – as much as possible, meet and talk with local people along the way. Try to learn about their faith and practice, their lives, what it means for them to be Muslim. This is an opportunity to get beyond “book learning” – take advantage of it!
- Seek to understand, to get inside. Don’t settle for superficial understanding, generalizations, characterizations, which make it easy for you to minimize the significance of Islam / Islamic perspectives (e.g., “Islam is a religion of works,” whereas we have a religion of grace). When you think negatively of some aspect of Islamic faith or practice, try to find a similar negative in our own experience. When you think positively of some aspect of your Christian faith or practice, try to find similarities in Islam / with Muslims, and vice versa.
- As you read and listen to speakers and meet people, seek to empathize.
- Be thinking about the question, what is a Christian (Jesus-centered, Bible-centered) response and approach to Islam and to Muslims? What, for you, are some key elements of this? What does God, what does Jesus, call you to, as a believer, as a follower?
- Look for “barriers,” areas of difference, challenges, etc.; but also look for “bridges,” areas of similarity or connection, common ground. It’s a challenge, but try to find as many areas as possible, where you feel that we have things in common with Muslims / Islamic teaching.
- Begin to formulate a personal response and understanding (I’ve been working on this for over 35 years!).
- Think about the “hot topics” of our day, in Christian-Muslim relations, e.g.,
  - Are Muslims and Christians talking about the same god? What do you think? What do you think the Bible has to say about this? If you think not, what about Jews and Christians, or even Christians who have different understandings?
  - What do you think of the (Jordanian, Muslim) “Common Word” initiative, and various Christian responses (like the one from the Yale Center for Faith and Culture)?
  - What can you say positively about Islam, the Qur’an, Muhammad, and an Islamic vision?

We will also be considering some principles for understanding religion, and using our consideration of Islam as an opportunity to reflect on our own religious faith and practice (and how we understand ourselves).

Given that Islam is an essential element of Jordanian and Middle Eastern cultural context, there will be significant interconnection between this course and the *Peoples and Cultures of the Middle East* course.

## COURSE TEXTS, FILMS & DOCUMENTARIES

### Texts:

- i. **Kateregga and Shenk’s *A Muslim and a Christian in Dialogue***. We will begin our exploration of Islam by reading the Kateregga (Muslim) chapters, and Kateregga’s response to the Shenk chapters, in this book. This will give students an overview of the basics of Islamic belief and practice, presented by a Muslim, and will provide a foundation for going deeper in *Vision of Islam*. Later in the semester students will read the Shenk (Christian) chapters, and his response to the Kateregga chapters, in considering a Christian response to Islam.
- ii. **Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick’s, *The Vision of Islam*** will be the main text for this course. Students are encouraged to enter into the reading and seek to appreciate, understand, empathize with a Muslim vision of life, the world, faith, practice, etc. Students should contemplate areas that seem to present barriers to Christian faith / understanding and embracing Jesus, as well as seeking to find areas of common ground (between Islam and Christian faith).
- iii. ***The Qur’an, With References to the Bible; translation by Safi Kaskas***. You cannot understand Islam without engaging the Qur’an. We will reading a few pages per week in this excellent new English translation, undertaken by a friend who is active in Muslim-Christian relations, and who occasionally visits and presents during the MESP semester.
- iv. **Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace***. The sections of Volf that you are reading (Introduction, Chs 1-3, and pp. 207-15, 220-225, 243-273) are relevant to developing a Christ-centered, Biblically informed perspective on how we might approach Muslims. Students are encouraged to consider how the dynamics Volf describes regarding identity and otherness, and the tensions and enmity which may develop between different peoples, are relevant to Christian-Muslim relations; as well as considering how Volf’s metaphor of “embrace” might impact our relationships with Muslims, as we follow Jesus.

- v. **Readers:** You will be reading several articles relevant to this course (including the Travel Reader).

**Documentaries & Films:**

- *The Message*. An account of the beginning of Islam, endorsed by both Sunni and Shi'ite communities.
- *Inside Islam*. An overview of Muslim history, beliefs and practices, by the History Channel (with interviews of many Muslim scholars and leaders).
- *The Road to 9/11*. A post-9/11 documentary seeking to understand the background to that world-changing event.
- (optional, recommended) *Inside Mecca*. A detailed account of an actual pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca, following the experiences of 3 pilgrims (an American woman convert to Islam, a South African, and a Malaysian).

**COURSE SPEAKERS, EVENTS AND SITE VISITS**

We will have a variety of Muslims address us about various particulars of Muslim vision, faith, and practice. There may be overlap with parts of the Conflict & Change course, including some of the speakers (who will be giving us Muslim perspectives on the conflict). In addition, there will be some overlap with the Peoples & Cultures course, as the majority people and culture of the Middle East are Muslim. The overall experiential emphasis of the semester will factor strongly into this unit, including possible homestays with Muslim families; interaction with local Muslims in Amman and elsewhere; and the travel component, during which we will visit other Muslim contexts.

**a. Speakers (subject to availability) and field trips (including but not limited to the following):**

- Dr. 'Alaa' al-deen M. A. 'Adawi, Head of the Department for the Study of Islam, Faculty of Shari'ah, The University of Jordan. Introduction to Islam.
- Dr. Raed al Tabini, Director, Hashemite Fund for the Development of Jordanian Badia. Former academic director with SIT Study Abroad in Jordan, receiving 30 students per semester. Jordanian culture.
- Dr. Samira Khawalda, Professor at the University of Jordan, on Women in Islam.
- Visiting the *King Abdalluh I Mosque* in Abdali (and/or another mosque), and observing prayer.
- Meeting Ahmad El-Zubi and Amir Shihadeh at a mosque for a discussion of their experience as Muslims.
- Dr. Safi & Eman Kaskas, translator of a new Qur'an translation, on a Muslim vision of the Qur'an, Jesus, and Muslim-Christian relations.
- Dave M. or Shannon B. and Sheikh E., Muslim-Christian Common Ground.
- Israel/Palestine
  - Sheikh Anwar Zboun, Muslim perspective on the conflict
  - Muslim participants with Roots and with the Parent Circle Family Forum (two interfaith peace movements).
  - Sheikh Ghassan Manasra (head of a Sufi order), Sufism
- Morocco
  - Dave M., Khalid & Clare, Faith Journey in the Moroccan Context
  - Dr. Fatima Rhorchi, Women in Morocco
  - Dr. Sadik Rdad, Moroccan Culture

**b. Events**

- *Language and Culture Exchange* — We will seek opportunity with different networks of Jordanian young people, to organize one or more meetings which will give opportunity for inter-cultural and inter-faith relationship and dialogue. After the initial meeting, students are encouraged to seek out opportunity for further relational time and interaction (e.g., getting together for coffee, etc.). These times are invaluable for helping you to better understand Jordanian experience(s) and perspective(s), including religious experience.
- *Other life activity*. This (these) is not an event so much as an ongoing opportunity to mingle with people, develop relationships, and learn about the culture. Every day presents opportunities, whether you are sitting in a coffee shop, observing the people around you; riding in a taxi, conversing with the driver; interacting with a shopkeeper; etc. Be a *participant observer*, learning all day, every day!

**ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING:**

*Grading for this course will be based on the following:*

Participation – presence for all required activities, plus active engagement including taking notes on speakers	10%
Reading – completing the reading, as reported on a weekly basis	20%
Kateregga & Shenk 4%	
Vision of Islam 8%	
Required Reader articles 3%	
Qur'an 5%	

Journal	20%
Final / Integrative Essay(s)	50%
	100%

**Assignment 1:** Participation including Speaker Notes (10%).

Students are required to attend all lectures and site visits, etc. and to be both attentive and participatory, with good “speaker etiquette” (no sleeping, no use of electronic devices, etc.). For a satisfactory score in each of the units, you need to ask at least 3 questions of speakers, over the course of the semester. (More is better, though if you’re a particularly active participant, please leave room for your quieter MESP cohort members to ask questions!)

Students are expected to take notes on all the speakers during the semester, including Travel Component. Notes can be according to your style and approach, and have no requirement in terms of length. They are for your benefit, so you have details to draw upon for your paper. Note do not have to be turned in, but the Program Administrator or Director may ask to see your notes at any time. Note: students are not allowed to use electronic devices or laptops to take notes (or at all, during speakers).

**Assignment 2:** Reading (20%).

You will be given a schedule for the weekly reading, and asked to **report to the Program Assistant (according to their instructions) every Saturday by 10 pm** on the percentage you have completed of the reading for the week (on travel weeks, the reporting on the reading will come earlier). This is a busy semester, so it’s important to keep up with the reading and it is important that you refer to the readings in your papers. Note that there is reading assigned every week for each of the courses (other than the full week in Israel/Palestine). The reading (other than Travel Readers) will be done before our second trip (to Morocco & Cairo).

**Assignment 3:** Journal (20%)

Students are expected to write three journal entries per week (as specified below), on topics related to P&C, ITP, and/or C&C (if you want a word guideline, 300-350 is a good rough guideline – the point, though, is solid reflection, not number of words). Journals need to be clearly labeled, and **turned in to the Program Administrator every Friday by 10 pm, beginning January 12** (on Travel, it may be another day). **See the separate Journal Assignment document for specific dates and topics.**

Note: for any entry that is late, you will lose 1% of your journal grade, per day, per entry. For any entry that you do not do, you will lose 8% of your journal grade.

Possible topics for the “free” entries include:

- Reflect on the reading, site visits, local experience (meeting people in Amman), travel, etc.
- Respond to any one of the Muslim speakers. What did you learn? What challenged you? Did you gain insight into barriers or common ground?, etc...
- Respond to any aspect of Kateregga’s presentation of Islam.
- Related to the Volf text, consider writing on (but not limited to) the following topics: How do you find Volf’s discussion and vision to be relevant to Christian-Muslim relations? How does he help you understand the current tensions in Christian-Muslim relations? What do you find insightful, regarding how Christ-followers might approach Muslims? Do you think this is “do-able”? What challenges do you see?, etc.
- What barriers and bridges/common ground do you find, between Islamic concepts and practices (from Qureshi, Kateregga, Eaton, speakers, films, etc.), and your understanding of Christian (or Biblical) faith and practice?
- Reflect on something from the film “Inside Islam” or “The Road to 9/11.”
- How would you approach Christian-Muslim “interfaith” relations?
- Select a passage from the Qur’an, or verses about a particular subject (e.g., Jesus, People of the Book, Scripture), and discuss key differences and similarities in relation to your understanding of the Biblical account (or a Biblical perspective).
- On what basis should an Islamic group be designated a “terrorist” group? What does that label mean? How should it be applied? Do you think Hamas, Hezbollah, the Muslim Brotherhood, should be so designated?
- Reflect on gender issues in the Muslim context, or compare gender issues in the Muslim context and in the / a Christian context. What are the issues? How does the socio-cultural-religious context impact what the issues are and how they are articulated? Etc.

- Do you believe that Muslims and Christians are talking about, responding to, worshiping, the same god? How would you frame the question (i.e., what do you think the question is, that we should be asking), and what is your response? Draw on both Islamic sources and Biblical sources.
- What is your evaluation of the Common Word initiative (<http://www.acommonword.com/>) and of Christian (e.g., the Yale) responses to that initiative (e.g., <http://www.yale.edu/faith/acw/acw.htm>)?
- Can Islam and Christianity both be true? To what degree? Why and why not? Be sure to use both Islamic and Christian sources (at least, verses from the Qur'an and the Bible).
- How would you present Jesus to a Muslim, to help the Muslim understand Him from a Christian/Biblical perspective? What would you emphasize? Where would you start? How would you take into account what a Muslim already understands, or (from your perspective) misunderstands? Be sure to use both Qur'anic and Biblical references.

**Assignment 4:** Final/Integrative Paper (50%).

**A Personal Christian Response/Approach to Muslims.** 2500-3000 words as a guideline (this is a guideline – it can be shorter if it's good; you can write more if you want/need to). Email paper to [mesp.director@gmail.com](mailto:mesp.director@gmail.com). **Due Thursday November 8 (3 pm).**

**Formatting instructions:** 1 inch margins, 12 point font, include footnotes and bibliography (or sources / resources), you can have a separate title page or put your name and title at the beginning of your first page; title page and bibliography are not included in word count. *Be sure to include your last name and ITP in the document name (what you save it as).* Other than these specifics, you can use whatever paper / style system you are used to following.

Please **include a self-evaluation** with this paper, 1-2 paragraphs evaluating what grade you feel you deserve for the paper, and why. Be specific. List what you see as strengths and/or weaknesses. Grade it as if you were grading someone else's paper. Give yourself a letter grade or percentage. Include the self-evaluation in the paper itself, at the end. Label it clearly. (Note: if you turn in the paper without a self-evaluation, you will be penalized 1 grade level, e.g., from A- to B+, etc.)

Note that the paper is titled "Final/Integrative Paper." I am not calling this a "research" paper, by which I would mean, you need to go out and find and read and refer to other sources (other than what you've been exposed to in this class). But to be "integrative" **you should – in any/all of the prompts below** – refer specifically to the materials (readings, speakers, site visits, films, etc.) of the course in your paper. And if you're talking about a Biblical perspective, you should actually open, read, and refer to the Bible, not just go off your feelings about what the Bible says. Be sure to clearly reference all materials and sources (specifically, in footnotes with all necessary information, so that I can trace your reference easily).

You can't talk about everything; but what you talk about, do it well, clearly, developing your points and showing why you think what you think. Do not write "off the top of your head." Go deeper than that.

**And please note – for every prompt, your reflection and writing is meant to be *personal*, not a research or “academic” paper. I want to see *you* in this reflection, grappling with issues that you have been grappling with this semester. (And write in the first person.)**

**Prompt A:**

Based on the reading, speakers, personal interactions, site visits, etc., and your own reflection, what is your current personal (Christ-centered, Biblically informed) response to Islam and Muslims?

It would be good to address the following:

- What does "Christ-centered" mean to you? - this is personal; I won't grade you on the content of your response (i.e., whether I personally agree with you or not), but on how you present your perspective (was it clear, strong; do you explain yourself).
- "Biblically informed" would mean, how and where you draw your thoughts about being "Christ-centered" from Scripture. Again, I'm not looking for whether I agree with you or not, but at how you present your thoughts.
- You may also include any of the topics / prompts above under the Journal assignment, or the topics in the other paper prompt).

- You should be engaging with what you've been learning about Islam, your interactions with Muslims, etc.

You can take this in different directions/approach it in different ways. What I look for is that you explain what you bring up (when you make a point, is it clearly established? If it's debatable, do you show why you hold your view? Do you say "someone said," or specifically reference who said it?, etc.), and that you show evidence of knowing and working with what we're learning.

**Prompt B:**

Truth Claims. The Bible (as understood by Christians) and the Qur'an (as understood by Muslims) make truth claims. Discuss your view of how to see those truth claims in relation to each other. (E.g., are one book and set of truth claims totally true and the other false? Are both true? Are either or both partially true?) You should discuss what you consider to be mutually exclusive claims, and where you find common ground (if any).

Again, be sure to make this personal, based on your reading, learning, interactions with Muslims, etc.

**Prompt C (shorter essays):**

Choose 2 of the following topics to write on (1300-1500 words each):

(note: any of these might be written your full paper, if you are so inclined)

- What barriers and bridges/common ground do you find, between Islamic / Qur'anic concepts and practice, and your understanding of Christian / Biblical faith and practice?
- Do you believe that Muslims and Christians are talking about (seeking / responding to / worshipping) the same god? How would you frame the question (i.e., what do you think the question is, that we should be asking), and what is your response? Draw on both Islamic sources and Biblical sources.
- What is your evaluation of the Common Word initiative (<http://www.acommonword.com/>) and of Christian (e.g., the Yale) responses to that initiative (e.g., <http://www.yale.edu/faith/acw/acw.htm>) (see the Reader)?
- Truth claims. Can Islam and Christianity both be true? To what degree? Why and why not? Be sure to use both Islamic and Christian sources (at least, verses from the Qur'an and the Bible).
- What are some of the key elements of a Christ-centered response to Islam and Muslims, for you personally?
- How would you present Jesus to a Muslim, to help the Muslim understand Him from a Biblical perspective? What would you emphasize? Where would you start? How would you take into account what a Muslim already understands, or (from your perspective) misunderstands? Be sure to use both Qur'anic and Biblical references.
- What have you learned about yourself / your faith, through learning about Islam and engaging Muslims? (self-awareness, insight, etc.) (how has your engagement with Islam and Muslims impacted you?)

And again, be sure to make this personal, based on your reading, learning, interactions with Muslims, etc.