

# Women and Islam

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Instructor: Sandy Russell Jones

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Spring 2015

TTH 5 – 6:20pm

Tillett 252

Office Hours: Thurs 1 – 3pm

For centuries, the western world has had an intense fascination with the Muslim woman. Veiled, secluded, living in a harem and sharing her husband with other wives, she has been an object of Western curiosity, academic study, and most recently, the well-intentioned Western feminist's desire to save her from her oppressive world. While culture is thought to be partially to blame, most often it is the Islamic religion that is blamed for subjugating women. This is the image we are presented with in the Western media, but does this image match up to reality?

In this course, we examine what Islam really has to say about women. More importantly, we also hear *what Muslim women have to say* about what Islam has to say about women, rather than relying on Western descriptions or Muslim male interpretations. Through reading the sacred texts themselves, the Qur'an and the Hadith (the words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad), we examine what Muslims believe God has decreed for woman's role in human relationships as well as her spiritual role in her relationship with God. We look at how male interpreters have dealt with this material, and how Muslim women today are questioning these foundational interpretations.

We will also tackle the complex issue of modernity, and how to understand and analyze Islam in the modern world. As part of our class activity, each class session will begin with a look at the concerns of contemporary Muslim women through a Blog project. The internet has revolutionized the way Muslims communicate, think, write, and practice nearly every aspect of their lives, from online fatwas to online dating. Through the Blog project, each student will find and follow an internet blog written by a Muslim woman that deals with some aspect of being Muslim today. At the start of the prearranged class period, students will summarize their findings to the class, and show an example or two of their blogger's entries. Other class activities include the opportunity to engage in hermeneutics (the art of interpretation), explore online fatwas, and search hadith databases.

The course requirements include the Blog project presentation, two exams, class participation, and a research paper. For the paper, students choose a specific aspect of women's role in Islam to research and write on. The paper length should be approximately 10 pages, double-spaced. Students will present their research at the end of the semester during a mock conference held during class.

## Learning Goals:

Throughout the semester, students will:

- Gain a basic understanding of Islam's core religious beliefs and practices.
- Explore women's role in the religious texts, the ways in which this role has been interpreted by Islamic scholars, and the ways in which this interpretation has changed over time.
- Become familiar with key Muslim women as historical figures, and as archetypes that serve as models of and models for women's gender roles.
- Understand the ways in which Muslim women have been affected by historical developments such as colonialism and globalization.
- Be able to fluently discuss and analyze issues relevant to Islam in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

## Texts:

### **BOOKS: REQUIRED**

Judith Tucker, *Women, Family and Gender in Islamic Law*, ISBN-13: 9780521537476

Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, ISBN-13 978-0-19-512836-9

### **RECOMMENDED**

`Abdullah Yusuf `Ali, trans., *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 2006. ISBN-13: 978-1453756614

This English translation of the Qur'an is one of the most consistent with the Arabic text, and also includes extensive commentary offering background on events referred to in the text and discusses majority opinions on meanings and interpretations.

Nicholas Awde, *Women in Islam*, ISBN-13: 9780781810906

**READINGS:**  
-posted on the class website on SAKAI  
-links to online readings are also on SAKAI  
-handouts

## Course Requirements and Grading:

Blog project	10%
Midterm	20%
Research Paper	20%
Research Presentation	15%
Class Participation	15%
Final Exam	20%

## Absence Policy:

Absences for severe illness and religious observance are fully excusable, but you must notify me in writing.

The university requires that all absences are reported through the online system, which can be found at:

<https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/>

## Laptop Policy:

Laptop use in the classroom is permitted for **NOTE-TAKING ONLY**. If **you** choose not to pay attention to the material, that is your decision and will only affect your own grade. However, when you watch YouTube and do Facebook on your screen, it distracts the students around you, therefore, your actions are impacting others. This is not fair to your classmates. Non-course related activity will result in dismissal from class.

## Course Schedule

<u>DATE</u>	<u>TOPIC</u>	<u>PREPARE</u>
<b><u>Introductions</u></b>		
1/20	Syllabus & course introduction	
1/22	<i>"The Light in Her Eyes"</i>	Donner Ch 1 (SAKAI)
<b><u>Early Islam</u></b>		
1/27	A "Believer's Movement?"	Donner Ch 2 (SAKAI)
1/29	The Problem of Sources	Rippin (SAKAI)
2/3	Women of the Prophet's Era	Stowasser Chs 8 & 9 (SAKAI)
<b><u>Women in the sacred texts</u></b>		
2/5	Qur'an basics	explore Qur'an; bring to class
2/10	Women's Tafsir – Wadud RESEARCH TOPIC DUE	Wadud (entire)
2/12	GUEST SPEAKER – Research strategies	Research questions Denny (SAKAI)
2/17	What Muhammad did and said: The Hadith	Hallaq (SAKAI) Geissinger (SAKAI)
2/19	Should Muslim Women Rule?	Mernissi Intro & Ch 3 (SAKAI)
<b><u>Shi'i Islam</u></b>		
2/24	Shi'i Islam / Fatima and Zaynab	Rippin Ch 8 (SAKAI) continue reading for research papers
2/26	<i>"A life and a legacy are not always the same":</i> questioning the narratives	Spellberg Chs 1 & 3 (SAKAI)
3/3	Zaynab and Modernity	Deeb Intro & Ch 4 (SAKAI)
<b><u>Women and Law</u></b>		
3/5	The Shari'a: the basics	start Outline
3/10	<b>MIDTERM</b>	review
3/12	INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH OUTLINE DUE via e-mail	start writing

3/17	SPRING BREAK	
3/19	SPRING BREAK	
3/24	"He has set between you love and mercy:" Marriage and Divorce	Tucker Chs 1 - 3
3/26	The Woman's Divorce: <i>Khul`a</i>	Layish (SAKAI) Russell Jones (SAKAI)

### Modernity

3/31	Film: <i>Women of Islam</i>	Abu-Lughod Intro (SAKAI)
4/2	Do Muslim Women Need Saving?	Abu-Lughod Ch 1 (SAKAI)
4/7	The Politics of the Veil	Scott (SAKAI)
4/9	The Politics of Piety	Mahmood (SAKAI)
4/14	The Pious Subject	Hafez (SAKAI)
4/16	CLASS CONFERENCE	Prepare presentation
4/21	CLASS CONFERENCE	Work on papers
4/23	CLASS CONFERENCE	
4/28	CLASS CONFERENCE	
4/30	Wrap-up / Undergrad PAPERS DUE	
5/13	<b>FINAL EXAM</b> 4 – 7pm	

❧ ❧ ❧ HAVE A GREAT SUMMER! ❧ ❧ ❧