

# MIDDLE EASTERN LANGUAGE & CULTURE (MELC)

## **MELC 13184 History University Seminar (3 Credit Hours)**

An introduction to the seminar method of instruction that explores the major methodologies of the historical discipline and which accents the organization and expression of arguments suggested by readings in historical topics.

Satisfies the following University Core Requirements: USEM - University Seminar, WKHI - Core History

Students in the Holy Cross College or St. Mary's College colleges may **not** enroll.

## **MELC 20033 The 1001 Nights (3 Credit Hours)**

The Thousand and One Nights, also known as the Arabian Nights, is a collection of tales originated in the Arab lands that has become a masterpiece of world literature. These enchanting stories, framed by the tale of Scheherazade (or Shahrazad), have enjoyed a widespread and varied reputation over the centuries and across cultures. It is said that the Thousand and One Nights is the most read (or heard about) book in human history, second only to Bible. In this class, we will examine these stories from a variety of academic and cultural perspectives, taking advantage of the wealth of material available (both textual and audio-visual). We will examine issues of provenance: where did these stories originate and when? We will study the stories as literary texts as well as historical documents, asking what, if anything, they tell us about the cultures they reflect and the societies in which they are set. We will examine how these tales have been interpreted by later societies, both Arab and Western, and what those interpretations tell us about the interpreters. We will use this class and its content to introduce ourselves to the study of the Middle East, its languages, history, literature, and peoples. We will gain a better understanding of the analytical tools and techniques for the study and appreciation of literature in general.

Satisfies the following University Core Requirements: WKAL - Core Art & Literature

## **MELC 20052 Intro to the Middle East (3 Credit Hours)**

The gateway course will provide students with initial preparation and acquaint them with the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). More specifically, the course will introduce students to the historical milieu of MENA cultures and societies as well as the various dynamics that continue to shape them. It will survey the history of the region from the end of late antiquity to the present. Themes will include the rise of Islam; Muslim-Christian interactions; the caliphate; the age of gunpowder empires; engagements with modernity; encounters with European expansion; Islamic and secular reform movements; nationalism and revolution.

## **MELC 20055 Formation of the Modern Middle East (3 Credit Hours)**

This course examines the history of the Middle East from the late eighteenth century to the Arab uprisings of 2011. We will approach cultural, social, political and intellectual transformations in the Middle East. We will pursue a number of themes including engagements with modernity; reactions to Western colonial expansion; religious and secular reform movements; nationalism and revolution; changes in gender and family experiences; the Arab-Israeli conflict; the impact of oil and the Cold War; postcolonial state-building; the rise of political Islam and piety movements; globalization and economic disparities; and movements for democracy and social justice.

Satisfies the following University Core Requirements: WKHI - Core History

## **MELC 20070 Introduction to Islamic Civilization (3 Credit Hours)**

This course is designed to introduce students to Islamic civilization and Muslim culture and societies. The course will cover the foundations of Islamic belief, worship, and institutions, along with the evolution of sacred law (al-shari'a) and theology, as well as various aspects of intellectual activities. The Koran and the life of the Prophet Muhammad will be examined in detail. Both Sunni and Shi'i perspectives will be considered. Major Sufi personalities will be discussed to illuminate the mystical, and popular, tradition in Islam. Topics on arts, architecture, literary culture, and sciences will be covered. Although the course is concerned more with the history of ideas than with modern Islam as such, it has great relevance for understanding contemporary Muslim attitudes and political, social, and cultural trends in the Muslim world today. MMME minors will need to secure an override from the Department office to register.

Satisfies the following University Core Requirements: WKHI - Core History

## **MELC 20101 Arab Society and Culture: Past and Present (3 Credit Hours)**

This course aims at introducing students to the history of the Arab world. Through a panoramic view encompassing twelve centuries of Arab history and culture, we look at all sides of this rich and venerable civilization: the beauty of the Alhambra and the great mosques, the importance attached to education, the achievements of Arab science—but also internal conflicts, widespread poverty, the role of women, and the contemporary Palestinian question. We explore how the religion of Islam created a far-flung Arab Muslim world that embraced lands reaching from the shores of the Atlantic to Iraq and the Indian Ocean. Each has its own geographical features and historical traditions, yet certain themes and experiences are common to all: the rise and spread of Islam, the growth of the Ottoman Empire, the expansion of European trade and empire, and in the last decades, the challenge of Islamic resurgence and integration into a new kind of world. We attempt at a clear and comprehensive interpretation of the paths of the Muslim religion, its divisions, its authorities and traditions, its current contradictory powers to unite and to divide. Throughout, social institutions and culture are intertwined with politics and economics. The texts we read in this class are studded with famous names from the past—Ibn Khaldun, al-Ghazali, and Ibn Sina (Avicenna); Saladin and 'Abd al-Nasir (Nasser)—as well as with those of the recent memory—Hafiz al-Asad and Saddam Husayn; the Nobel Prize winner Najib Mahfuz, the cultural critic Edward Said and popular singer Umm Kulthum.

**MELC 20223 From Hannibal to Augustine (3 Credit Hours)**

The course explores the history, culture, religion and society of Roman North Africa, one of the centers of early Latin Christianity. Important authors such as Cyprian, Tertullian, Lactantius, Perpetua, and above all Augustine of Hippo lived and wrote in the region dominated by the ancient Phoenician city of Carthage, and this is where some of the greatest writings of ancient Christianity were produced. In this course, we will situate the culturally and economically fertile environment of 3rd to 5th-century North Africa in its context in terms of geography (surrounded by the Mediterranean, the Sahara desert, the African provinces to the East, first and foremost Egypt, and lastly the Iberian Peninsula, from where the Vandal invaders would arrive), politics and history (from the Phoenician colonization to the arrival of the Arabs), economics, multiethnicity and religious diversity. We will discuss literary works, works of art, archaeological relics and historical sources to gain a multifaceted understanding of a complex and fascinating era whose legacy would contribute so much to shaping the Christian Middle Ages. Knowledge of Greek or Latin is not required. No prerequisites.

Satisfies the following University Core Requirements: WKHI - Core History

**MELC 30023 Gendered Bodies in the Islamic Tradition (3 Credit Hours)**

This interdisciplinary course offers a topical survey of the relationships between biological sex, culturally bound notions of "masculinity" and "femininity," and the gendered body in the Islamic tradition. The primary aim of the course is to explore the intersection of religion and social constructions of gender and the body in a variety of historical and cultural contexts in the Muslim World. Students read and interpret religious texts and commentaries, literary and legal texts, women's writings, and media in English translation. Coursework focuses on increasing students' understanding of the diversity of scholarly views on women's bodies as sites of piety and sites of political and social contestation (reproductive rights, public vs. private space, etc.).

**MELC 30025 The Arabic Literary Heritage (3 Credit Hours)**

This course introduces students to classical/medieval Arabic literature from its beginnings in the pre-Islamic period to the eve of the Ottoman Empire (600-1517). Its emphasis is on direct examination of Arabic literature through a close reading of the representative texts in English translation. Among the topics to be discussed: the impact of Islam on the Arabic literary tradition, the relationship between convention and invention, the emergence of lyric genres and the development of a concept of fiction. Readings include pre-Islamic Arabian poetry, the Qur'an (as literary text), lyric poetry and Sufi poetry, the Arabian Nights and medieval Arabic narrative romances. No knowledge of Arabic is required.

Satisfies the following University Core Requirements: WKAL - Core Art & Literature

Enrollment is limited to students with a program in Arabic or Mediterranean/Middle East Study.

**MELC 30071 Islamic Theology: From Classical Origins to Modern Challenges (3 Credit Hours)**

This course studies the major themes of Islamic theology. It starts from the early debates concerned with Muslim views of God, the nature of the Qur'an, the prophethood of Muhammad and ends with current debates about the status of Islamic law (shari'a). It also discusses divine vs. human will, the role of politics in Muslim view of salvation and the limits of rationality. It traces how these topics moved from simple formulae to complex concepts due to socio-political controversies and conditions, whether they were sectarian or interreligious conflicts, crises of legitimacy, colonialism or modernity. The arguments of various schools are presented, and translated excerpts from prominent theologians are studied. As we read these texts we ask ourselves a number of questions. For example, what alternatives were possible for theologians other than what later became standard Muslim doctrines? What is the importance of imagination in the creation of these theological systems? Did modern Muslim theologians have better options to handle ancient traditions that most of them ended up adopting? Do some modern Muslim theologians have an alternative view to offer? The course is meant to help students see the problems of theology from an Islamic viewpoint that may deepen their understanding of wider religious questions.

Satisfies the following University Core Requirements: WKHI - Core History

**MELC 30525 Islam and the Abrahamic Faiths (3 Credit Hours)**

In 1965, the Second Vatican Council issued a "Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions", which contains a statement that Muslims "submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God." While the Declaration can be understood as recognizing the possible validity of Islam's claim to Abrahamic status, some scholars have introduced the notion of "Abrahamic religions" as a way of associating Judaism, Christianity and Islam as related faiths. This course will explore the defining features of the Abrahamic religions that tie them closely together as well as their particularities and differences. As the youngest of the three Abrahamic religions, Islam has a lot of things to say about Abraham which largely correspond to the Biblical story although the Qur'an also contains some novel features, including the claim that Abraham, together with Ishmael, built the Ka'bah. This course will discuss how the scriptures of the three religions emerged within the same cultural milieu, and explore their intertwined histories and the ways in which Jews, Christians, and Muslims developed their own independent religious identities from their early encounters to the present. Students will also be introduced to some basic teachings of Islam. No prior knowledge of Islam is required.

Satisfies the following University Core Requirements: WRIT - Writing Intensive

**MELC 40700 Islam, Nonviolence, and Peacebuilding (3 Credit Hours)**

'Islam and Violence', 'Islam and Conflict', 'Islam and Peace', and 'Islam and Justice' are familiar topics that have become increasingly popular in the media in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. These topics were spawned by events such as the intractable Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the attacks on the United States of America in September 2001, the Bush administration's subsequent 'war on terror' in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Arab Spring which began in North Africa in 2011, followed in 2014 by the grotesque violence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). In contradistinction, to the plethora of courses focusing on Islam and Terrorist Violence, this course seeks to critically examine the Islamic theologies of nonviolence and peacebuilding articulated and embodied by a number of Muslim scholars. In order to develop a complex set of insights into these and other current conflicts in which Muslims are implicated, it is important to have a greater understanding of the Islamic view of peace and justice. This course aims to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of the Islamic view of justice and peacebuilding by examining the major theories and principles of Islamic ethics of Peacebuilding and applying it to analyze contemporary Muslim perspectives on justice and peacebuilding. Furthermore, this course is grounded in the nascent academic sub-discipline of religion, violence, and the practices of peace (RVP). The intention is to introduce students into this sub-discipline and help them expand their theoretical and analytical lenses. Finally, students are not expected to emerge from this course as experts on the Islamic Ethics of Peacebuilding, but will be exposed to major authors and arguments and be provided with a number of conceptual lenses that can be applied to their analysis of the diverse ways in which Islam is implicated in conflict, violence and peacebuilding on both a global and local level.

Enrollment is limited to students with a program in Arabic or Mediterranean/Middle East Study.

**MELC 40702 Moral Vocabularies of Contemporary Islam: Islamic Law and Ethics in Perspective (3 Credit Hours)**

How does one make sense of the moral vocabularies of contemporary Islam? Prominent in the media are debates about Sharia, known as Islamic law. On other occasions people talk about Islamic ethics and values in Muslim societies and communities. These categories are often non self-evident to even the most casual observer. How do we get a better grasp of moral debates in Muslim societies on questions as diverse as suicide terrorism, organ transplantation to democratic politics and fetal life? These ethical debates impact policy questions ranging from gender, democratic citizenship, technology and sexual violence to matters related to issues of Islamic family law and constitutional debates. But of equal importance is the need to give attention to the various contexts in which Muslim ethical discourses and moral vocabularies are deployed. Some of the contexts range from nation-states in-the-making, liberal democracies in the West, societies disintegrating as a result of failed states to countries being occupied by global powers. Hegemonic capitalist globalization, triumphant political liberalism and misrule all contribute to the social context. This course will explore a select sample of questions from an ethical and moral perspective. One of the presumptions that this course makes is that Muslim ethics is not only the site for the renewal of an ethical tradition; in many instances it is also the site of resistance against cultural and political imperialism, as well as that of accommodation. These complicated maneuvers account for the diversity and multiplicity of contemporary Muslim ethical discourses and moral vocabularies. Studying Muslim moral vocabularies do not provide a CT-scan of the Muslim mind? as some have egregiously averred, but provide maps of the histories of interpretative communities in the past and present. This approach will enable us to identify the various typologies as well as trajectories of the Muslim subject over time. In a mediatized world of real-time communication, moral terms are poorly communicated, distorted and often come across as a cacophony of voices, confusing to insiders and outsiders alike. Needless to say, ethics is not neutral to political debates: it is often at the center of fractious and divisive debates. Often the representation of ethical debates are caricatured and manipulated in the media to serve political ends. Students will get an introduction to Muslim moral philosophy, a history of the jurisprudence and a set of case studies dealing with concrete questions. Muslim religious discourses are, of course, essentially regimes of interpretation. Students will get an opportunity to become familiar with the interpretation of the primary religious sources of Islam that result in diverse iterations and accounts of Muslim ethics in various contexts. Satisfies the following University Core Requirements: WKHI - Core History

Enrollment is limited to students with a program in Arabic or Mediterranean/Middle East Study.

**MELC 40703 Modern Arab Thought (3 Credit Hours)**

This course studies a group of texts that cover developments in Arab thought starting with Napoleon's Egyptian campaign of 1798 and ending with the late twentieth century. It centers on analyzing the positions of Arab intellectuals on the interaction between Arab and Western culture (looking into their positions within their respective contexts, concerns and challenges). The aim of the course is to equip students with a good understanding of the main trends in Arab culture in the last two centuries and encourage a critical examination of the problems that defined public discussion during this period. Because these questions are still very influential in contemporary debates, our knowledge of their origins and developments is essential for understanding current events and studying present Arab societies.

Satisfies the following University Core Requirements: WKHI - Core History

**MELC 40704 Themes in Islamic Ethics: History and Contemporary Debates (3 Credit Hours)**

This is a survey course in Islamic law and ethics aimed at upper level undergraduates and law school students. The course will provide an outline of Islamic legal theory and jurisprudence and then cover topics such as Muslim family law, fatwas on a range of topics such as gender, sexuality and cultural and political conflict.

**MELC 46801 Directed Readings (3 Credit Hours)**

Individual or small group study under the direction of a faculty member. Permission of the Department required. Course may be repeated.

**MELC 48005 Area Studies Essay: Med MidEast (3 Credit Hours)**

A research course for the capstone essay for the minor in Mediterranean/ Middle East Studies. May not be double-counted for thesis credit in a major.