

Attention!

This is a representative syllabus. The syllabus for the course you are enrolled in will likely be different.

Please refer to your instructor's syllabus for more information on specific requirements for a given semester.

Introduction to Shi'i Beliefs and History

Instructor:

Office Hours:

Office:

Email:

No laptops, phones, or other mobile devices may be used in class.

What is Shi'ism? Is it an ideology, a sect, a cult, or something else? How is Shi'i Islam different from other Islamic sects, and how did it come to be? Who are the Shi'is? What do we know about Shi'i societies in the past or present or about their beliefs and practices? Where are/were these societies located and how did they develop?

From its inception to various steps of transformation and in its many manifestations in history and in the modern world, the many misrepresentations and misinformation have created a sense of mystery about this topic. This course does not aim at providing a final and definitive answer to the above questions or similar ones. Instead, we will together approach this topic methodically and critically and discuss various issues in light of the available information and in connection with the current discourse.

COURSE MATERIAL:

Since the subject of this course is a vast topic and we will be concerned with many different aspects of it, we will be reading from a big variety of literature. There are many good books and articles that cover much of the topics we will discuss, and some are listed in the bibliography. Every week the assigned readings will be posted on Carmen, consisting of articles, book chapters, encyclopedia entries etc. The students are responsible for doing the readings and should come to class prepared, ready to engage in a discussion. You will be graded according to your informed class participation: doing the readings and taking part in the conversation. If you find it difficult to engage in class discussions talk to me outside the class and we will find ways to include everybody in class conversations.

CLASS PARTICIPATION and PRESENTATION:

- Be sure to do the required readings before the meeting. Students are expected to engage in class discussions actively. Reading from the suggested readings will help you get a fuller grasp of the discussion, and enrich the experience of class participation for everybody. All participants in the class are expected to engage in class discussions actively. If you don't feel comfortable making a comment at first, you can always ask a question. You are expected to come to class ready to enter a conversation on the topic, and will be graded accordingly. If you find it difficult to engage in class discussions talk to me outside the class and we will find ways to include everybody in class conversations.
- There will be short writing assignments, as well as one short presentation by each student. While the writing questions will be assigned by the instructor and posted on Carmen, the topics for the presentation is chosen by student after consultation with the instructor.
- Each student must write a final paper on a topic of choice after consultation with the instructor. The topic of the final paper may be related to your in-class presentation. In fact you should treat the in-class presentation as a chance to engage with a topic for your final paper so that you can write a better paper. It is important to present the material logically and coherently, show all work, and give all credit due with proper citation. This is your chance to really learn a lot about a specific topic of your choice within the purview of this class – make the most of it.

GRADING:

- Attending class, and actively participating in class discussions accounts for 15% of your overall grade
- Quizzes on assigned readings may be given, and they account for 10% of your grade.
- Writing assignments (25%)
- The in-class presentation (10%)
- Final paper (40%)

Bibliography:

- Berkey, Jonathan P., *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600-1800*, Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Daftary, Farhad, *A History of Shi'i Islam*, London: I.B.Tauris, 2014.
- Donner, Fred M., *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*, Harvard University Press, 2010.

- Haider, Najam I., *Shi'i Islam: an Introduction*, Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Halm, Heinz, *Shi'a Islam: from Religion to Revolution*, Markus Wiener Publishers, 1997.
- Kurzman, Charles, *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran*, Harvard University Press, 2005.
- Momen, M. *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: the History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism*, Yale University Press, 1985.
- Mottahedeh, Roy P., *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran*, Simon and Shuster Publishing House, 1985.
- Norton, Augustus, R., *Hezbollah: a Short History*, Princeton University Press, 2007.

Various articles from:

- *Encyclopedia of Islam*
- *Encyclopaedia Iranica*
- *The New Cambridge History of Islam*

Week 1. January 14th

Review, early history of Islam and the life of Muhammad

Week 2. January 21st

succession to Muhammad: the origin of the Shi'a as the party of Ali

Week 3. January 28th

1st written assignment due. Momen, *Shi'i Islam*, pp. 1-34

From the murder of Ali to the murder of Husayn: Formation of Shi'i identity in Iraq

Week 4. February 4th

2nd written assignment due. Momen, *Shi'i Islam*, pp. 35-85

The twelve Imams of Imami Shi'ism,

Week 5. February 11th

Momen, *Shi'i Islam*, pp. 147-171

The twelfth Imam, the occultation, The doctrine of Imamate

Week 6. February 18th

Daftary, pp. 105-145.

The Ismailis: schism to Fatimids

Week 7. February 25th

3rd written assignment due.

Daftary, *History of Shi'i Islam*, pp. 145-185. Momen, *Shi'i Islam*, pp. 220-232, pp. 86-104.

Zaydis, Batini Ismailis, Nusayri Alawis

Week 8. March 4th

Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, chapter 4. Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs*, Chapter two.

From heterodoxy to orthodoxy: Sufi circles and pre-Safavid Shi'ism

Week 9. March 11th

4th written assignment due. Deadline to pick a topic for final paper in consultation with the instructor.

Momen *Shi'i Islam*, 105-146.

Shi'ism in Safavid and post-Safavid Iran

March 18th Happy Spring Break!

Week 10. March 25th

5th assignment due. Momen, *Shi'i Islam*, pp. 172-207, Halm, *Shi'a Islam*, pp. 41-87.

Doctrines, Rituals, Practices

Week 11. April 1st

Momen, *Shi'i Islam*, pp. 246-299

Contemporary Shi'ism

Week 12. April 8th

Norton, Hezbollah, pp. 1-59, Halm, *Shi'a Islam*, pp. 88-162.

Iranian Revolution, Hezbollah

Week 13. April 15th Review, In-class presentations.

Week 14. April 22nd, In-class presentations