

REL 270A: Explorations in Religion and Society:
Politics and Religion of the Middle East
Roanoke College, Spring 2016
Block 6, 2:20-3:20 p.m., MWF, West 319

Professor: Holly Jordan

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Office: West 319

Office Hours: 3:30-4:30 MWF,

Course Hashtag: #REL270A

10:10-11:40 Tuesdays and by appointment.

Course Description

This course explores the diversity of religions present in the greater Middle East and how those religions both shape and are shaped by the politics of the region. Throughout this term, we will deep-dive into particular places and regions but will also contextualize those places within the history of the region. The course begins with an overview of the foundations of Islam within the polytheistic religions of Arabia. The focus then shifts Saudi Arabia and Iran, Sunni and Shi'a hegemonies, respectively. Attention is paid to non-Muslims religions in the region as we move through Israel and Palestine. Finally, we move into two main challenges for the region, the Arab Spring and ISIS, before concluding with an overview of the disappearing religions and peoples of the region. By the end of this course, students will summarize their learning in a final project on a subregion of their choice from the greater Middle East.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Explain the historical origins and development of the Islamic tradition within a polytheistic world;
- Identify the key beliefs, practices, and institutions within regional religions, including Sunni Islam, Shi'a Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, etc.;
- Critically assess perspectives on special topics in Islam, including political systems, women, *jihad*, and the Arab Spring;
- Understand the role that politics and religion formed in shaping the modern Middle East;
- Critically analyze state and governmental structures and give recommendations on policy; and
- Demonstrate critical thinking, reading, and writing skills.

Required Texts

- *No god but God (Updated Edition): The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam* by Reza Aslan – ISBN-13 978-0812982442
- *On Saudi Arabia: Its People, Past, Religion, Fault Lines—and Future* by Karen Elliott House – ISBN-13 978-0307473288
- *The Ayatollah Begg to Differ* by Hooman Majd – ISBN-13 978-0767928014
- *The Israelis: Ordinary People in an Extraordinary Land* by Donna Rosenthal – ISBN-13 978-0743270359
- *The Fires of Spring: A Post-Arab Spring Journey Through the Turbulent New Middle East – Turkey, Iraq, Qatar, Jordan, Egypt, and Tunisia* by Shelly Culbertson - ISBN-13 978-1250067043

- *Black Flags: The Rise of Isis* by Joby Warrick –ISBN-13 978-0804168939
- *Heirs to Forgotten Kingdoms: Journeys Into the Disappearing Religions of the Middle East* by Gerard Russell – ISBN-13 978-0465049912
- Other readings posted to Inquire.
- Note: Students must bring that day’s reading to class in either print or digital format. Failure to do so will result in a half-absence (students get one “freebie” on this requirement).

Attendance

Come to class. Come to class prepared. If for some reason, you are not prepared that day, still come to class. You are paying for this degree. Come to class.

Obviously, only a select few of you will have perfect attendance in this course. If you are absent, you still must complete any work due that day. This includes any work to be submitted online. You will be allowed three unexcused absences this semester (I don’t feel like it/It’s too pretty outside/I just want to eat sleep/etc. days). Use them wisely. More than three will affect your participation grade.

Legitimate situations may arise during the semester that keep you from class (illness, family death, religious holiday, etc.). If you plan to be absent for a session, please notify me via email before that session. If you are unable to attend class unexpectedly, please notify me before the next class session with the reason for your absence. Absences ultimately will only be considered “excused” if proper documentation (doctor’s note, etc.) is provided within a week of the absence. Please note that every three times you are late to class will count as one absence. Absences are factored into the Participation grade.

Course Policies and Resources

Academic Integrity

The integrity of the classes offered by any academic institution solidifies the foundation of its mission and cannot be sacrificed to expediency, ignorance, or blatant fraud. Therefore, I will enforce rigorous standards of academic integrity in all aspects and assignments of this course. For the detailed policy of Roanoke College, regarding the definitions of acts considered to fall under academic dishonesty and possible ensuing sanctions, see *Academic Integrity at Roanoke College* (www.roanoke.edu/academicintegrity). Should you have any questions about possibly improper research citations or references, or any other activity that may be interpreted as an attempt at academic dishonest, please see me before the assignment is due to discuss the matter.

While collaboration is key in understanding some of the moral arguments we will discuss this semester, please note that all work must be completed *individually*. For group projects, students will be required to submit a document explaining their involvement in the project.

Communication with Professor:

Students should contact me at hjordan@roanoke.edu with any questions or concerns they have. It is the instructor’s goal to have all written work graded within 10 days of submission. If you are concerned that I have not graded something of yours after this 10-day period, please feel free to email me. My goal is to respond to your emails within 48 hours of them being sent.

Disability Support Services

- **The Office of Disability Support Services, located in the Goode-Pasfield Center for Learning and Teaching in Fintel Library**, provides reasonable accommodations to students with identified disabilities. Reasonable accommodations are provided based on the diagnosed disability and the recommendations of the professional evaluator. In order to be considered for disability services, students must identify themselves to the Office of Disability Support Services. Students requesting accommodations are required to provide specific current documentation of their disabilities. Please contact JoAnn Stephens-Forrest, M.S.W., Coordinator of Disability Support Services, at 540-375-2247 or e-mail stephens@roanoke.edu.
- If you are on record with the College's Office of Disability Support Services as having academic or physical needs requiring accommodations, please schedule an appointment with Ms. Stephens-Forrest as soon as possible. You need to discuss your accommodations with her before they can be implemented. Also, please note that arrangements for extended time on exams, testing, and quizzes in a distraction-reduced environment must be made at least two full business days *before every test*.
- For more information, visit http://www.roanoke.edu/inside/a-z_index/center_for_learning_and_teaching.

The Writing Center

The Writing Center @ Roanoke College, located on the lower level of Fintel Library, offers tutorials focused on written and oral communication for students working on assignments and projects in any field. Writers at all levels of competence may visit the Writing Center at any point in their process, from brainstorming to drafting to editing, to talk with trained peer tutors in informal, one-on-one sessions. The Writing Center is open Sunday through Thursday from 4 to 9 pm. Simply stop in, or schedule an appointment by going to libguides.roanoke.edu/writingcenter, where our schedule of writing workshops and creative writing playshops is also posted. Questions? Email writingcenter@roanoke.edu or call 375-4949. Like our Facebook page for updates!. For more information, visit <http://libguides.roanoke.edu/c.php?g=517941&p=3541407/>

Course Structure and Rules of Conduct

The structure of our classes will change from session to session. Some days will rely more on lecture; others will be student-led. As this is a class happening in real time, a day's scheduled events may change if there is an item in the news worth bringing to the table.

As unstructured as this sounds, I do have a few rules. First, just be the adults you are. I expect everyone to treat both the material and each other with respect. Religious tolerance is expected from each student. At no time will you be required to discuss your personal religious beliefs in class, but if you do, assume that you will be treated with courtesy.

Second, use whatever technology you need to do well in this class (computers, tablets, etc.), even if that means quickly looking up a word in your phone's dictionary. That being said, use your technology wisely. If something your doing with your tech is distracting to me or someone else, we may need to have a talk. **At minimum, I reserve the right to tell you to close it/turn it off immediately.**

Third, bring whatever else you need to do well in this class. Yes, that includes coffee and snacks. Just don't bring anything terribly disruptive to other students (food requiring silverware, loud wrappers, anything that smells like a chicken biscuit). Feel free to bring enough to share with everyone.

Finally, check your email *often*. Set Inquire up to forward messages to your email if you are not good at checking Inquire often. Check your email before class daily to make sure there have not been last-minute handouts or articles sent out (or cancellations due to weather—I live in Blacksburg).

Assignment Requirements:

Students must complete the readings for the course in the order they appear and on time. Due dates for readings assignments will be posted at the end of this document and in the calendar tool of the website. Students shall at all times turn in *their own work*.

All assignments must be turned in Microsoft Word or .rtf (Rich Text) format. No other file formats will be accepted. *All assignments* must be written following proper spelling and grammar and must be free of Internet-speak. Students who do not own an office suite are encouraged to download LibreOffice, a free open-source alternative to MS Office or iWork: <http://www.libreoffice.org/download/libreoffice-fresh/>.

Students should strive to complete all work on time. Work that is not handed in on time will lose 10% of the grade on the assignment for every day it is late. Exceptions can be made to this policy if requests are made before the scheduled date and time of an assignment or test.

At all times, I will endeavor to have assignments graded within ten days of submission. If this changes, I will inform students of delays as soon as is possible.

Grades:

Grades for this course are on a percentage system. At the end of the semester, the student's grade will be given as a percentage, based on the points earned out of all possible points. The types of graded work in this course include:

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|----------------------------------|------------|
| Attendance/Participation | 20% |
| "What Do You Know?" Paper | 5% |
| Journals | 20% |
| Class Briefings | 15% |
| Final Report | 25% |
| Midterm Exam | 15% |

Attendance/Participation – See Attendance Policy beginning on page 1. Students are expected to participate in class *daily*. This involves bringing that day's assigned reading to class (in print or digital format) as well as being *actively engaged* in learning (being engaged and thoughtful listeners, contributing to class conversation, etc.). Rear-in-chair is not sufficient to receive full credit on attendance and participation. Exceptional students will bring material to the conversation not necessarily assigned.

“What Do You Know?” Paper – This paper is exactly what it sounds like; students will write a paper (3-4-pages, double spaced, 12-point Calibri, 1’ margins) broken into three sections: what they *know* about the Middle East, what they’ve *heard* about Middle East, and what they’d *like to learn* about Middle East. As such, **this paper requires no outside research** (however, if students do use outside knowledge, it must be cited like any other assignment). The purpose of this paper is multifold. First, it will stand as your first *polished, formal* paper for me in this class. It will help to give me a sense of where you stand as a writer and what we need to work on one-on-one this semester. Second, it gives me a sense of how much knowledge of the region (both its politics and its religions) you have coming into this course. Finally, it will give *you* a perspective on what you know versus what you think you may know. This paper will be graded for structure, grammar, and spelling, but also for following proper mechanics: margins, line spacing, length, etc.

Journals – For each book that we read, students are responsible for writing a summary and analysis essay on our book. Students will prepare their journals daily to be shown to Dr. Jordan in class. Students will then take notes on what they wish to add for their responses. Once we have finished each book, students will redact their journals and notes into one document, which will be roughly two pages single spaced. At least 1.5 pages of the journal will be the students own summary and analysis (25% summary; 75% analysis) written over the course of the days we study the book. The remaining half page will be responses to class discussion on the book. **Please see Inquire for a sample journal.**

Class Briefings – Throughout the semester, students will prepare five regional briefings on regions assigned during the first week of class. Students will do research, at minimum from the *New York Times* (<https://www.nytimes.com>) and the *Christian Science Monitor* (<http://www.csmonitor.com>) on their region. Students should supplement their research with other news sources as well as library resources. Students are encouraged to set up Google Alerts (<https://www.google.com/alerts>) to help facilitate research. Each briefing will be roughly five minutes and will cover major issues in your region (including social and historical issues, religion, politics and national/regional stability, and transnational issues) as well as the topic of that day's briefings (see Course Outline). The research for these briefings will culminate in your final report.

Final Report – Throughout the semester, students will compile their research from their class briefings and additional research into a final term paper. This paper will read as a policy report, giving background, presenting issues, and stating recommendations for the region the student has been assigned. Please see Inquire for a sample journal and for assignment details and due-dates.

Midterm Exam – The midterm exam for this course will be facilitated online on Inquire and will be completed out of class. This exam will consist of short and long essay questions over the preceding information as well as key terms for short identification.

Students in this course will be graded on a plus/minus system (i.e. A, A-, B+): A: 100-93, A-: 92-90, B+: 89-87, B: 86-83, B-: 82-80, C+: 79-77, C: 76-73, C-: 72-70, D+: 69-67, D: 66-63, D-: 62-60, F: 59-0

Course Outline:

| Date | Day | Topic | Readings/Assignments |
|---|-----|----------------------|---|
| 01/16 | M | Introduction | Syllabus Overview and Course Outline |
| 01/18 | W | Tech | Introduction to Tech for the Course (Bring Laptop/Tablet) In-Class: Sign Up For Areas of Interest for Briefings |
| 01/20 | F | Inauguration | Class Cancelled –Inauguration Use class time to do research on Area of Interest Final Report: Post Preliminary Sources on Inquire by Midnight |
| Origins of Islam | | | |
| 01/23 | M | Early Islam | Aslan, Preface—Chapter 3 Assignment: What Do You Know? Essay Due prior to class on Inquire |
| 01/25 | W | Codification | Aslan, Chapters 4-6 |
| 01/27 | F | Diversification | Aslan, Chapters 7-8 |
| 01/30 | M | Modernity | Aslan, Chapters 9-End |
| Saudi Arabia and Wahhabism | | | |
| 02/01 | W | Briefings | In-Class: Regional Briefings 1 – Saudi Arabia Assignment: Final Journals on Aslan due |
| 02/03 | F | Foundations | House, Preface-Chapter 3 |
| 02/06 | M | Social Issues | House, Chapters 4-6 |
| 02/08 | W | The Future | House, Chapter 7-9 |
| 02/10 | F | Problems | House, Chapter 10-11 |
| 02/13 | M | The Future | House, Chapter 12-End |
| Iran and Shi'ism | | | |
| 02/15 | W | Briefings | In-Class: Regional Briefings 2 – Iran Assignment: Final Journals on House due |
| 02/17 | F | Foundations | Majd, Introduction—pg. 66 |
| 02/20 | M | Religion/Government | Majd, pg. 67-128 |
| 02/22 | W | Religion/Government | Majd, pg. 129-191 |
| 02/24 | F | Conclusions | Majd, pg. 192-End |
| Israel and Palestine | | | |
| 02/27 | M | Introduction Lecture | Readings TBA Assignment: Final Journals on Majd due |
| 03/01 | W | Briefings | In-Class: Regional Briefings 3 – Israel and Palestine |
| 03/03 | F | Becoming Israeli | Rosenthal, Introduction-Part I Midterm Examination due on Inquire by Midnight |
| March 6-10 – No Class (Spring Break) | | | |
| 03/13 | M | Jewishness I | Rosenthal, Part II |
| 03/15 | W | Jewishness II | Rosenthal, Part III |
| 03/17 | F | Non-Jews | Rosenthal, Part IV Final Report: Annotated Bibliography on Inquire by |

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|---|---|------------------------|---|
| | | | Midnight |
| 03/20 | M | Sexuality in Israel | Rosenthal, Part V-Epilogue |
| The Arab Spring | | | |
| 03/22 | W | Briefings | In-Class: Regional Briefings 4 – The Arab Spring Assignment: Final Journals on Rosenthal due |
| 03/24 | F | Tunisia and Turkey | Culbertson, Intro-Turkey |
| 03/27 | M | Iraq and Jordan | Culbertson, Iraq-Jordan |
| 03/29 | W | Qatar and Egypt | Culbertson, Qatar-Conclusion |
| ISIS | | | |
| 03/31 | F | Introduction Lecture | Readings: TBA Assignment: Final Journals on Culbertson due |
| 04/03 | M | Briefings | In-Class: Regional Briefings 5 – The Arab Spring |
| 04/05 | W | Zarqawi | Warrick, pg. xii-Book I |
| 04/07 | F | Iraq | Warrick, Book II |
| 04/10 | M | ISIS | Warrick, Book III-End Final Report: Rough Draft on Inquire by Midnight |
| Disappearing Religions and Peoples | | | |
| 04/12 | W | Mandaeans and Yazidis | Russell, Introduction-Chapter 2 Assignment: Final Journals on Warrick due |
| April 14 – No Class (Good Friday) | | | |
| 04/17 | M | Zoroastrians and Druze | Russell, Chapters 3-4 |
| 04/19 | W | Samaritans and Copts | Russell, Chapters 5-6 |
| 04/21 | F | Kalasha | Russell, Chapter 7-End |
| Conclusions | | | |
| 04/24 | M | Conclusions | Assignment: Final Journals on Russell due |
| Final Report | | | |
| 05/02 | T | Final Report | Final Report: Final Draft on Inquire by 5 p.m. |

NOTICE: There may be minor changes to the syllabus at the discretion of the professor, and notification of these changes will be made to students in a timely manner.

Extra Credit Opportunities (Maximum of Two Submissions – go extra points on Journal grades):

- Attendance for Peace Week – For events relating to our coursework during March, students may attend an event and write a response paper (3-4-pages, double spaced, 12-point Calibri, 1' margins) within a week of the event (emailed to the professor). Students should both describe their experience and relate it to course texts and topics. More information to follow.
- Attendance for Reformation 500 Events – Students may attend one of the following two panels and write the aforementioned response paper.
 - Interdisciplinary Panel: African Christianity with Dr. Sarah Wilson - http://www.roanoke.edu/events/interdisciplinary_panel_african_christianity
 - Interdisciplinary Panel: Is Democratic Capitalism Sustainable? - http://www.roanoke.edu/events/is_democratic_capitalism_sustainable
- Students are welcome to suggest other lectures/events for possible extra credit opportunities.