The Qur’an
Themes and Structures in Islam’s Holy Book

Saturday 4 June 2016
10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

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Course Description and Learning Outcomes
The Qur’an is a crucial text not only in Islamic culture, but in our common global literary heritage. This course introduces students to the literary-historical study of the text of the Qur’an from a non-dogmatic perspective. Rather than eliding the complexities of the Qur’an, this course exposes students to the challenges of a chronological reading of the text to shed light on its various structural, stylistic, and thematic features. These features are implicated in debates ranging from the Qur’an’s literary and historical context(s) to the relationship between its oral and written modes, from its reception and influence in Arabic-Islamic literary culture to the facilities and limits of its translation from Arabic into other world languages. While the Qur’an’s complexities may seem daunting, direct engagement and familiarity with the text will equip students to meaningfully participate in today’s most urgent inter-faith conversations.

All course readings are in English. The class session will include guided studies of selected extracts from the Qur’an. Since the Qur’an is primarily an oral text normally performed in the original Arabic, the course will also feature audio recordings of Qur’anic recitations in Arabic; however, knowledge of Arabic is not required.

Required Textbook

ISBN-13 # 978-1-4696-0976-8
Useful Online Resources
http://al-quran.info/#home
[qcorpus.]quran.com
quranbrowser.com
iqsaweb.wordpress.com

Topics and Readings

Why read the Qur’an?
Diverse interests and objectives in approaching the Qur’an
Aims and methods of the present course
* Ernst, 1-19.

What exactly is the Qur’an as a text?
History of the text
* Ernst, 20-37.
Forms, styles, structures
* Ernst, 37-58.

How can we read the Qur’an?
Ritual reading
* Ernst, 58-61.
Interpretative reading
* Ernst, 62-72.
Chronological reading
* Ernst, 72-5.

Translation as Facility and as Challenge
* http://al-quran.info/#home
* http://quran.com/

Early Meccan Suras
Intro to major structures and themes
* Ernst, 76-9.
Example of Sura 80
* Ernst, 80-1.
Example of Sura 68
* Ernst, 81-3.
Other themes: Apocalypse, hymns of praise, consolation, denunciation
* Ernst, 83-92.

Later insertions
* Ernst, 92-8.

Sura 53 and the “Satanic Verses”
* Ernst, 98-104.

Break

Middle and Later Meccan Suras
Intro to structural and stylistic approaches
* Ernst, 105-10.
Internal Qur’anic references: Example of Sura 15
* Ernst, 111-20.
Recasting external narratives and parables: Example of Sura 18
* Ernst, 120-38.
Rhetoric of debate and implied audience
* Ernst, 138-54.

Medinan Suras
Intro: Ring composition and intertextuality; New themes and audiences
* Ernst, 155-7.
Ring composition of Sura 60
* Ernst, 164-66.
Intertextuality and identity in Sura 3
* Ernst, 171-90.
Rewriting covenant in Sura 5
* Ernst, 190-204.

Concluding Thoughts