

*The Qur'an as Literature*  
*Spring 2019- ABT4131/1H58*

Prof. Sarra Tlili

Email address: satlili@ufl.edu

Office: 354 Pugh Hall

Office hours: Thursday 10 - 12

Class times and location

Days	Per	Time	Bldg	Room
T	7 – 8	1:55 PM - 3:50 PM	MAT	102
R	7	1:55 PM - 2:45 PM	MAT	102

### COURSE DESCRIPTION:

In this course we will study the Islamic scripture, the Qur'an, from a literary standpoint. Arabs, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, generally consider the Qur'an the epitome of literary perfection, whereas many non-Arabs find it almost impenetrable. The aim of this course is to help students navigate this text and develop a deeper appreciation for its themes and style. This will be achieved through a combination of close reading of the Qur'an itself and readings in secondary literature discussing this scripture's history, style, structure, and content.

This course is divided into three major units. In the first unit we will address a number of preliminary questions, including the history (or histories) of the Qur'an, and its translatability. The second unit focuses on the style and structure of the Qur'an. In it we will examine the various techniques through which this text creates literary effect, such as imagery and sound. The last unit is more subject-oriented. In it will explore aspects of the Qur'an's ethics pertaining to gender, the environment, war, and so forth. Thematic and stylistic features will be discussed throughout the semester, but in the second unit emphasis will be laid mainly on style and structure, whereas in the last unit emphasis will be laid mainly on the Qur'an's themes.

### COURSE TEXTS

- The Qur'an, any edition. Online editions are available at <http://tanzil.net>.
- Saeed, Abdullah. *The Qur'an: An Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2008.
- Barlas, Asma. *"Believing" Women in Islam: Unreading the Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*. Texas: University of Texas Press, 2002.
- Tlili, Sarra. *Animals in the Qur'an*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012. (available online through UF library)

*The Qur'an as Literature*  
*Spring 2019- ABT4131/1H58*

- Supplemental readings available on Canvas.

## READINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

- Our class activities will revolve mainly around discussions of reading materials. For every session you will be assigned one or more articles or book chapters. Please read all materials carefully and come prepared to **discuss**, rather than **regurgitate**, the content. To do this, besides reading for information you need also to identify a few points that you find controversial, inspiring, or otherwise attention-grabbing. Come prepared to either agree or disagree with the author, but also to defend your position. Class participation represents a substantial part of your final grade, so make sure that you demonstrate your preparedness by engaging with the material and participating in class discussions.
- Because we are dealing with a non-Western tradition you will encounter unfamiliar vocabulary and ideas. When this is the case do not hesitate to ask for clarifications. If you don't I will assume that you understand everything and it becomes your responsibility to engage with the material properly.
- I will often divide reading assignments among 2 groups. When this is the case, each group is responsible for giving a detailed summary of their assigned readings before raising points for discussion.
- If you are accessing the Qur'an online make sure that you print out the assigned verses and bring them to class with you (no use of electronic devices please!)

## CLASS DEBATES

Occasionally we will have debates about some Qur'an-related issues. Two groups of students will be assigned a controversial aspect of the Qur'an. Students will have to familiarize themselves with the scholarly debates about the issue at hand and defend a given position. These discussions must be grounded in **scholarly** readings. The grades for these debates will be incorporated in your participation and attendance grade.

## CLASS PRESENTATIONS

Students are required to give presentations on Qur'an-related topics of their choice. Topics need to be discussed with the instructor before the spring break.

## MIDTERM, QUIZZES, AND FINAL PAPER

*The Qur'an as Literature*  
*Spring 2019- ABT4131/1H58*

There will be a take-home midterm, several pop quizzes, and a final exam (format to be discussed in class).

### CLASS ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

You are allowed to miss **three** 50-minute sessions. Every additional absence must be documented, otherwise it will cause your final (course) grade to drop by one degree. For example, if your final grade is A and you have one unexcused absence your course grade will become A-. If your grade is B- it will become C+, and so forth. Please refer to the following website for more information on attendance

policies: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx#absences>

**Note also:** Every TWO LATE ARRIVALS equal one absence. You are considered late if you enter the classroom 5 or more minutes after the beginning of the session. The instructor's watch is the official time piece of our class.

### GRADING

- Class participation: 25%
- Midterm: 25%
- Final: 25%
- Presentation: 15%
- Quizzes: 10%

### GRADE DISTRIBUTION

93-100	A	73-76	C
90-92	A-	70-72	C-
87-89	B+	67-69	D+
83-86	B	63-66	D
80-82	B-	60-62	D-
77-79	C+	LESS THAN 60	E

### GENERAL ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

A C- grade will not be sufficient for Majors or Minors or count towards a GE or Gordon Rule Credit or College Basic Distribution Credit. See UF website on grading policy: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

*The Qur'an as Literature*  
*Spring 2019- ABT4131/1H58*

## CANVAS

All assignments, announcements, exercises, study guides, grades, etc. will be posted on the course website on Canvas. It is your responsibility to check the website regularly and keep up to date with the class.

## CELL PHONES AND OTHER ELECTRONIC DEVICES:

Students are expected to turn off - or put on silent + no vibration - and put away all cell phones during class sessions. No electronic devices are needed in this course.

Accordingly, all electronic devices must be put away as well.

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

Academic honesty and integrity are fundamental values of the University community. An academic honesty offense is defined as the act of lying, cheating, or stealing academic information so that one gains academic advantage. Any individual who becomes aware of a violation of the Honor Code is bound by honor to take corrective action. Violations of the honor code include, but are not limited to: plagiarism, cheating, bribery, misrepresentation, fabrication, and conspiracy. Such violations may result in the following: lowering of grades, mandatory 0 on assignments, redoing assignments, a final failing grade in the course, expulsion from the course, referral to the student-run Honor Court. The Honor Code states: "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity." On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment. For more information, refer to: [http://www.dso.ufl.edu/Academic\\_Honesty.html](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/Academic_Honesty.html)

## STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS:

Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office (Disability Resources in Reid Hall). The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the Instructor when requesting accommodation.

## LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION:

If you wish me to write a letter of recommendation on your behalf, before you approach me with a request, please make sure that:

- You will earn / have earned at least B+ in all classes you took with me.
- You had regular attendance.

*The Qur'an as Literature*  
*Spring 2019- ABT4131/1H58*

- You did all required work, including ungraded work.
- You never behaved in a disrespectful way - tacitly or otherwise - with me or your classmates.

**FINAL POINTS:**

- When you email me allow 24 hours to receive a reply.
- Please note that the syllabus is tentative. I may change assignments to meet students' needs and to reflect the ongoing state of scholarship.
- I look forward to an exciting and fulfilling semester!

Course Plan

**Section I: Context**

**Week 1 (Jan. 8/10): Introductions**

Tuesday:

1. Course introduction
2. Outward description of the Qur'an
3. Watch documentary: *Islam: Empire of Faith*

Thursday:

1. Saeed, Chap. 1
2. Qur'an: Sūrat al-Naml (27)

**Week 2 (Jan. 15/17): Genesis and chronology**

Tuesday:

1. Saeed, chaps. 2, 3, & 6
2. Nöldeke, "The Koran"
3. Sadeghi and Goudarzi, "Şan'ā' 1 and the Origins of the Qur'an"

Thursday:

1. Stefanidis, "The Qur'an Made Linear"
2. Qur'an: Sūras 96 (al-'Alaq), 73 (al-Muzzammil) and 74 (al-Muddaththir)

**Week 3 (Jan. 22/24): translatability**

*The Qur'an as Literature*  
*Spring 2019- ABT4131/1H58*

Tuesday:

1. Saeed, Chap. 7
2. Bruce Lawrence, "Approximating *Saj*"
3. Shawkat Toorawa "How (not) to translate the Qur'an": <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EO0Lj70CCFU>

Thursday:

1. Al-Qadi, "The Term "Khalīfa" in Early Exegetical Literature"
2. Tlili, "From Breath to Soul"

Week 4 (Jan. 29/31): **Orality**

Tuesday:

1. Walter Ong, "The Orality of Language" and "The Modern discovery of Primary Oral Cultures"
2. Michel Cuypers, "The Semitic Rhetoric in the Koran and a Pharaonic Papyrus"

Thursday:

1. Qur'an: Sūrat Hūd (11), vv. 25-100
2. Qur'an: Sūrat al-Kahf
3. Sūrat Yūsuf

## Section II: Text

Week 5 (Feb. 5/7): **The Word**

Tuesday:

1. Saeed, Chaps. 4&5
2. William Graham and Navid Kermani, "Recitation and Aesthetic Reception"

Thursday: no class

Week 6 (Feb. 12/14): **Meccan Suras**

Tuesday: no class

Thursday:

*The Qur'an as Literature*  
*Spring 2019- ABT4131/1H58*

1. Neal Robinson, "The Interrelation of Structure, Sound and Meaning in Three Meccan Surahs"

**Week 7 (Feb. 19/21): Medinan Suras/Stylistic features**

Tuesday

1. Carl Ernst, "Medinan Suras"
2. Abdel Haleem, "Grammatical Shift For Rhetorical Purposes"

Thursday

1. James Bellamy, "The Mysterious Letters of the Koran: Old Abbreviations of the Basmalah"
2. Martin Nguyen, "Exegesis of the ḥurūf al-muqatta'a: Polyvalency in Sunnī Traditions of Qur'anic Interpretation"

**Week 8 (Feb. 26/28): Qur'an and Bible**

Tuesday:

1. Saeed, chap. 8
2. Qur'an: Sūrat Yūsuf (12)
3. The Bible: Gen. 37-50

Thursday:

1. Qur'an: Sūrat al-Ḥijr

**Week 9 (March. 5/7): Spring Break**

**Section III Themes**

**Week 10 (March 12/14): Prophethood**

Tuesday:

1. Saeed, Chap. 4
2. Qur'an: Sūrat Yūnus (10)
3. A. H. Johns "Jonah in the Qur'an"

Thursday:

1. Isra Yazicioglu, "Redefining the Miraculous: al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd and Saïd Nursī on Qur'anic Miracle Stories"

**Week 11 (March 19/21): Social status**

*The Qur'an as Literature*  
*Spring 2019- ABT4131/1H58*

Tuesday:

1. Michael Bonner, "Poverty and Economics in the Qur'an"
2. Qur'an: al-Zukhruf

Thursday:

1. Barlas, chap. 1

Week 12 (March 26/28): **Gender**

Tuesday: Barlas, chaps. 2 & 3

Thursday: Barlas, chap. 4 & 5

Week 13 (April 2/4): **Gender**

Tuesday: Barlas, chaps. 6, 7, and Postscript

Thursday: Tlili, 1

Week 14 (April 9/11): **Animals and the environment**

Tuesday: Tlili, chaps. 3 & 4

Thursday: Tlili, Chap. 5 & conclusion

Week 15 (April 16/18): **War and violence**

Tuesday:

1. Reuven Firestone, "The Qur'an on War: A New Reading"
2. Asma Afsaruddin, "War and Violence"

Thursday:

1. Presentations

Week 16 (April 23)

Tuesday:

1. Presentations and wrap up