

Islam, Science, and Bioethics

History of Science 350 / Spring 2023 / University of Wisconsin-Madison

Mondays, 8:50-10:45am, Mosse Building r. 5257

Prof. Daniel Stolz

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Office Hours: Fridays 10am-11am on Zoom, in person by appointment.

This course explores modern Islamic debates about science, medicine, and society. We begin with an overview of science in the early centuries of Islam, examining foundational controversies over the role of science in ritual practice and the interpretation of the Qur'an, and whether the Prophet Muhammad's sayings on health and illness can serve as the basis for a system of medicine. We will then turn to modern debates on topics ranging from the use of assisted reproductive technologies to organ transplantation. We will also consider the long history of Islamic debates about quarantine. Throughout, the course adopts a historical approach that understands religion, science, and medicine as social institutions, inseparable from the culture, economy, politics, and power structures of their time and place. Our focus will be on the Middle East, but examples from other predominantly Muslim societies will be considered as well.

Course Objectives

Students who complete this course will be able to:

- Identify aspects of science and medicine in Islamic history
- Explain and contextualize opposing views in major Islamic legal and ethical debates regarding modern science and medicine
- Communicate with scholars regarding current research in this field
- Perform original research that situates science or medicine in a historical context

Course Materials

All readings will be on Canvas, except for a book that we will read in November: Sherine Hamdy, *Our Bodies Belong to God: Organ Transplants, Islam, and the Struggle for Human Dignity in Egypt*. ISBN 978-9812387028. You can access the e-book for free through the UW library catalog, or you can buy a copy.

Explanation of credit hours

The credit standard for this 3-credit course is met by an expectation of a total of 135 hours of student engagement with the course's learning activities (at least 45 hours per credit or 9 hours per week), which include regularly scheduled meeting times (group seminar meetings of 115 minutes per week), dedicated online time, reading, writing, individual consultations with the instructor, and other student work as described in the syllabus.

Components of Course Grade

Preparation For class meetings (15%): complete tasks assigned in preparation for class meetings, such as brief responses to questions about the reading or about short videos that provide context for the reading.

Participation in class meetings (20%): contribute to class learning through critical analysis of course materials and respectful, productive engagement with other students' views.

Class synopsis (5%): for each class meeting, one student will be responsible for producing a report that summarizes the main points of the discussion. These reports will help you clarify and synthesize your learning across the many weeks of the course. They will also help students who miss a class due to emergency.

Interview (20%): You will have the opportunity to interview a scholar who is conducting current research in the field of Islam, science, and medicine. You will produce a report on this interview, either in video or written format, depending on your preference and the preference of the interviewee. **Due April 26.**

Semester-long independent project (40% total): you will have a choice of options. Each option includes several stages, and culminates in a paper of 12-15 pages that makes an original historical argument based on primary and secondary sources. Stage I is an initial paper of 3 pages, due **March 24** (5%), Stage II is an additional paper of 4-5 pages, due **April 14** (10%). A first draft of the complete paper is due in class on **May 1** (5%). A second draft is due Friday, May 5 (20%). Papers will be returned to you on May 9. You may submit another revision by **May 12** if you wish.

Honors option: Students completing this course with the honors option should discuss an honors project with me no later than March 10, i.e., before spring break. Projects are due May 1.

Late Policy

Late work will lose one third of a letter grade for each day past the deadline.

This course is graded on an A, AB, B, BC, C, D, F scale:

A=93-100 AB=88-92 B=82-87 BC=77-81 C=72-76 D=67-71 F=66 or below.

Participation Rubric

Excellent (90-100)	Good (80-90)	Competent (70-80)	Inadequate (60-70)	Fail (0-60)
-Mastery over readings and previous discussion -Explores questions rigorously -Comes to class with interpretations and questions -Engages others	-Knows readings well -Consistent preparation and involvement -Offers analysis of texts in class	-Basic grasp of reading -Mostly offers facts or surface-level interpretations -Contributes when called upon but not actively engaged	-Insufficient command of reading -Attempts to contribute facts or interpretations when called but unable to offer substance	-Uninvolved -Unexcused -Disruptive

Learning Needs and Support

Accommodations

You are welcome to discuss your learning needs with me. If you plan to request disability accommodations in this course, please register with the McBurney Disability Resource Center as soon as possible.

If Covid-19 or another health issue disrupts your semester, I will work with you to design reasonable accommodations so that you may continue your progress in the course. This process works best when you communicate with me promptly.

Writing Support: The History Lab

The History Lab is a resource center where experts (PhD students) will assist you with your history papers. No matter your stage in the writing process — choosing a topic, conducting research, composing a thesis, outlining your argument, revising your drafts — the History Lab can help you sharpen your skills and become a more successful writer. The History Lab is offering virtual meetings this semester. Go to:

<https://history.wisc.edu/undergraduate-program/the-history-lab/>

Digital Assignment Support: Design Lab – Located in College Library, Design Lab provides one-on-one help for students working on digital assignments. By appointment. <https://designlab.wisc.edu/> In many situations, our history TAs in the History Lab will also be able to help students with their digital history assignments as well.

Academic Integrity

You are responsible for knowing and following the university's policies on academic integrity, which can be found here:

<https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/academic-integrity/>

Artificial Intelligence

You may not represent AI-generated responses as your own work. We will spend some time in class assessing the ability of current technology to answer questions about history. Beyond that, I discourage you from using AI to do research for this class. In my experience, current technology will answer some questions wrongly with as much confidence as it answers some questions correctly. **Note: other instructors may have different policies. Consult your instructor.**

Recording and Intellectual Property

You may not record class meetings. All course materials that I provide you are only for the purposes of your own learning. Please do not distribute them more broadly. This includes the class notes that will be shared by other students.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

Note: the most up-to-date information on what you need to read, watch, or turn in is always available on Canvas.

Introductory Matters

Week 1 (Jan. 30): Introductions: Islamic History and a Historical Approach to Islam and Science

Read: Ahmad Dallal, *Islam, Science, and the Challenge of History*, pp. 1-53.

Medicine and Authority in Premodern Context

Week 2 (Feb. 6): How to Deal with a Plague: The Black Death in Islamic Thought

Listen: Nukhet Varlik on plague in the Ottoman Empire.

Justin Stearns, "Contagion in Theology and Law: Ethical Considerations in the Writings of Two 14th Century Scholars of Nasrid Granada."

Justin Stearns, "Contagion Contested: Greek Medical Thought, Prophetic Medicine, and the First Plague Treatises."

Week 3 (Feb. 13): Learned Medicine and Feminine Knowledge: The Case of Midwifery

Read: Avner Giladi, *Muslim Midwives: The Craft of Birthing in the Premodern Middle East*, excerpts.

In class: introduction to the 19th century

Islam, Science, and Medicine in the Colonial Age

Week 4 (Feb. 20): Quarantine, Dissection, and Militarization in Egypt

Read: Khaled Fahmy, "Islam, Medicine, and Enlightenment," in *In Quest of Justice: Islamic Law and Forensic Medicine in Modern Egypt*, pp. 39-80.

Week 5 (Feb. 27): Science and the Interpretation of the Qur'an

Read: Marwa Elshakry, "Theologies of Nature," in *Reading Darwin in Arabic*.

Additional reading TBA.

Week 6 (Mar. 6): Technology and Material Culture in the Early 20th Century

Read: Leor Halevi, "The Qur'an in the Gramophone," in *Modern Things on Trial*, pp. 131-58; Alireza Doostdar, "Empirical Spirits: Islam, Spirits, and the Virtues of Science in Iran," pp. 322-349.

SPRING BREAK

Islamic Critiques of Scientific Modernity

Week 7 (Mar. 20): Environmentalism

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Encounter of Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*, excerpts.

Anna Gade, "Muslim Environmentalism as Religious Practice," in *Muslim Environmentalisms: Religious and Social Foundations*, p. 199-242.

Part I of independent project due on Canvas by this Friday, March 24.

Week 8 (Mar. 27): The Islamization of Knowledge Movement and Its Critics

Readings TBA

Islamic Ethics and Modern Bodies

Week 9 (Apr. 3): Occult Knowledge and Religious Authority in Iran

Read: Alireza Doostdar, *The Iranian Metaphysicals*, excerpts.

Week 10 (Apr. 10): Reproductive Technology, Kinship, and the Nation: IVF in Turkey and Iran

Read: Zeynep Gurtin, "Patriarchal Pronatalism: The Conjugal Confines of Turkey's IVF Boom," *Reproductive Biomedicine and Society Online* 2 (2016) :39-46; Soraya Tremayne and Mohammad Mehdi Akhondi, "Conceiving IVF in Iran," *Reproductive Biomedicine and Society Online* 2 (2016): 62-70. Zeynep Gurtin, "Banning Reproductive Travel: Turkey's ART Legislation and Third-Party Assisted Reproduction," *Reproductive BioMedicine Online* 2011, Vol.23 (5), p.555-564.

Part II of independent project due on Canvas by this Friday, April 14.

Week 11 (Apr. 17): Transplant Medicine, Islam, and Neoliberalism in Egypt (I)

Sherine Hamdy, *Our Bodies Belong to God* (begin)

Week 12 (Apr. 24): Transplant Medicine, Islam, and Neoliberalism in Egypt (II)

Sherine Hamdy, *Our Bodies Belong to God* (finish).

Interview assignment due on Canvas by Wednesday, April 26.

Student Research

Week 13 (May 1): Students workshop first drafts of independent projects.

Independent project due May 5 at 11:59pm (Central Time).

Optional revision of independent project due May 12.