

Sunni & Shi'ite Islam

(A Comparative Introduction)

REL 276 (Fall 2014)

MWF 8:30 – 9:20 (Chambers 3187)

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Office Hours: Mon & Wed 9:45-11:30 (Schedule appointments via [this LINK](#)).

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is primarily an overview of the doctrines, thought, spirituality, history and diversity of Shi'ite Islam. Our study will complement RELI 272 (“Introduction to Islam”) that focuses primarily on the Sunni Islamic tradition. Though an introduction to Shi'ite Islam primarily, we will considerably touch upon the convergences and divergences between Sunni and Shi'ite interpretations of Islam. Part I will cover the origins of the Sunni-Shi'ite split in the early history of Islam. This background in history is crucial to the appreciation of the Sunni and Shi'ite points of view and major points of contention. In Part II we will turn to the Shi'ite belief-system and sectarian divisions within Shiite Islam. Part III then examines the religious life, piety, material culture and esoteric currents within Shiism. Part IV reviews the history of Shiism with special emphases on a) *political and intellectual developments* within Iran since the rise of the Safavid Empire at the turn of the 16th century till the Iranian Revolution, and b) *development of the clerical authority* of religious figures called “Ayatullah”. Based on the information learned in the first four parts, Part V will be the synthesis of our study where we will examine the major themes within the Sunni-Shi'ite polemical literature, ecumenical possibilities and initiatives in recent times, the role of Sufism in mediating the Sunni-Shi'ite divide, the relevance of our study for the present-day sectarian conflicts in the Muslim world and other relevant issues. These topics will be covered through collaborative group projects that will be shared with the class through teaching presentations.

OBJECTIVES OF THE COURSE

Since it is impossible for this course to be more than an *overview* of Sunni and Shi'ite Islam, it is expected that by the end of the class, the students will have the necessary language, background and familiarity with the Shi'ite tradition (and how it compares to Sunni Islam) to engage further, if they so choose, the texts and communities of Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims, and make sense of their religious life and thoughts and views of one another. Beyond learning the content of this course, our study also seeks to enhance skills of thoughtful reading, writing, speaking and group discussion, and analytical and imaginative thinking. For the instructor, the success or failure of the course depends on how far the class as a group accomplishes these goals.

The most significant goal of this class is to make learning *relevant, useful, enjoyable* and *meaningful* for all involved. Making the class more relevant to you personally is something that will require your engagement and deep interest. Feel free to talk to the instructor about ways in which you (or/and the instructor) could contribute in achieving these goals, personally and as a class.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

(NOTE: In view of the needs of the class the instructor may alter the syllabus as appropriate)

REVIEW	35%
Group Project (Teaching 11%, Paper 10%, Annotated Bibliography 5%)	26%
Group Presentations and Assignments	10%
Interpretive Reflections (2)	14%
Participation (Includes Debate, Blog Activities & Field Trips*)	15%

ATTENDANCE POLICY, CLASS DISCUSSION, AND PARTICIPATION

1. You will be responsible for keeping track of your attendance. The last class of the term, you will turn in a pledged sheet detailing your attendance. You will also provide your own assessment of your overall participation grade.
2. Attendance is compulsory in this course. More than **2 absences** without valid excuse such as sickness or family emergency etc. will result in the lowering of grade. (B+ will become a B, B a B- and so on)
3. It is an absolute must that electronic devices, if used at all, be used in the class for class-related activities only (e.g., taking notes, pulling up readings etc.).¹
4. Always bring the syllabus & assigned readings for the week to the class.
5. In case of absence it is your responsibility to obtain notes and 'catch-up'. Absence will not be a good excuse for not knowing what happened in the class.
6. Occasionally, you may be asked to 1) summarize or present formally selective portion of the readings, 2) make critical comments, 3) work in groups, 4) turn in questions from the readings, and 5) bring examples from the media (audio/video, blogs, magazines, and social media) for further discussion and clarification.
7. Please do not come in late or leave early—it is disruptive.
8. Your participation grade will reflect the overall *quality* (and not simply quantity) of your contributions to the class throughout the semester. This includes proper class etiquette, attentiveness, preparing for the class, asking engaging questions and active and thoughtful engagement with the texts and **Blog-related activities**.

***FIELD TRIP:**

During the semester, you are required to attend a service at both a Sunni and a Shi'ite center. Muslim Students Association has volunteered to find company for you for this trip. It is however your responsibility to do it. Toward the end of the semester you will submit a sheet confirming whether you undertook these visits or not.

¹ Research has shown that students who multitask on a laptop during class receive lower test scores than students who do not (Sana, Weston, & Cepeda, 2013). Also, students who are around students who are multitasking on technology perform lower.

ASSIGNMENTS FOR THE SEMESTER:

General Guidelines:

1. AUDIENCE: *The audience for all your written assignments is your REL 276 class.*
2. Use Standard font (Times New Roman) and margins (one inch on all sides).
3. Save paper: print on both sides and DO NOT create a separate cover page.
4. Only cite fully if it is a text other than those assigned. Use Chicago or MLA.
5. Do mention the WORD COUNT in the end.
6. Unless stated otherwise, all assignments will be posted both on Moodle & the Blog.
7. Each 24-hour delay will result in corresponding 10-point deduction.

Interpretive Reflection (IR)

1. Besides posting your IR, you are also expected to regularly read and comment on IRs posted by your classmates. You may also be asked to peer-grade these IRs.
2. PURPOSE: Your IR is **Your Two-Minute Class Insight**. Its purpose is to help critical engagement with the issues and associated readings, and raising the level of class discussion. Good grasp of the issues and assigned material is therefore assumed.
3. ENGAGE READINGS: A good IR will engage the readings and speak from both within and without these texts. Ask the instructor to explain this distinction.
4. AUDIENCE: In writing it, imagine you are reading it aloud to the class to hear and engage it. *Remember you are writing for your fellow classmates* who have also read the same material. Therefore, restating or summarizing the readings will be absolutely redundant. You may be asked to read it aloud in the class.
5. INTEREST: Choose to reflect on the aspects of readings that you find fascinating, intriguing, contentious, or simply unclear/confusing.
6. TONE: An IR is not an op-ed or an expression of how you felt about the readings. Like all writing, it is geared toward speaking to an audience and persuading it of your insight. You do not need to exclude yourself. So yes, you can use first person pronoun I! The question is what kind of “I” speaks.
7. The key questions you should be asking yourself are the following:
 - i. DO YOU CARE? Is this idea worth your time and effort? Do you care about the topic? Would you enjoy thinking about it?

- ii. FEASIBILITY: Is the idea manageable within the word-limit prescribed for the assignment? With limited words, write only after having fully developed your thoughts so you could state those as clearly and succinctly as possible.
- iii. ILLUMINE: Will it be found interesting and illuminating by the class as a whole? Why should your classmates care about what you have to say? Does the reflection offer something different/new or merely summarizes?
- iv. SHOW: Does it *show* (not just state) what it was meant to convey to the class?
- v. PERSUADE: Does it successfully convince or persuade your classmates?

Some Guidelines for the Blog:

1. Generally, *primary readings* will be discussed on Friday. Post your questions related to the secondary readings by **TUESDAY 9 p.m.**; those related to the primary readings by **THURSDAY 9 p.m.** Please remember to rate all questions, including yours.
2. The quality of your contribution to the Blog will be assessed in relation to how thoughtfully you engage the assigned texts in asking and responding to questions.
3. Your question should be substantial. It must:
 - a. Provide clarification as to how it is related to our study, the stake in the question for the one asking it (and for us as a class); in other words why is this question important to be discussed?
 - b. Emerge from and relate to the text/readings assigned for the day/week;
 - c. Be clearly and carefully articulated. It should display careful reading of the text and must not miss the obvious. Avoid typos and grammatical errors.
4. Your comment should:
 - a. Not be about how you feel (i.e., your open-ended opinion) but should bring the texts and our conversation to bear upon the question asked by your classmate;
 - b. Reveal again careful thought and clarity of expression. Take time to make your comment comprehensible to the reader.
 - c. Not avoid challenging and debating ideas, yet in a respectful way

GROUP WORK:

Find your group of (?) by **September 5th**. During the semester there will be certain group assignments and a major **Collaborative Group Project (CGP)**. CGP involves a teaching presentation, a paper and annotated bibliography. By **October 3**, you must have chosen your topic for the project. Possible topics for CGP are listed below. If you want to explore a different topic, please discuss it with the instructor and obtain his approval.

TOPICS FOR THE GROUP PROJECT

(Detailed instructions for CGP will be provided)

1. A Comparison of the Sunni and Shiite Views on the Companions of the Prophets
2. Descendants of the Prophet (Sayyids/Sharifs) in Islamic History & Muslim Societies
3. Major Themes in Sunni-Shiite Polemics
4. Sunni-Shiite Relations in Islamic History
5. Intra-religious Dialogue and Ecumenical Initiatives
6. Sufism and the Sunni-Shi'ite Divide
7. Shiite Art, Theatre and Architecture **OR** Comparative Study of Art & Architecture
8. Shiite Political Thought **OR** Comparison of Sunni and Shi'ite Political Thought
9. Sunni and Shiite Perspectives on Gender and Sexuality
10. Iran
11. Iraq
12. Lebanon, Syria, Turkey
13. Shiism in South Asia (India and Pakistan)
14. Shiism in the West, especially the United States

Instructions for the Exam:

1. **GREEN BOOK:** You will absolutely need Green Books for your exam. Loose paper (with or without clips/staple is irrelevant!) will result in loss of points.
2. **HANDWRITING:** Clear and legible. If I cannot read your handwriting, it will mean I won't understand what you are saying. I will have no option but to assume that you don't know the material.
3. **READ AND ANSWER THE QUESTION CAREFULLY:** It is here usually that well-prepared students lose points. Either they end up answering the wrong

question (I.e., misreading the question) or not answering it FULLY. So answer the question asked, and answer all parts of it.

4. TIME MANAGEMENT: It is common sense and I have suggested a way to divide time for your answers. Do not write essays for short IDs. You will have to make choices. For IDs and short answers you will have to prioritize between more and less important, and more and less relevant things you choose to mention.
5. READ THE QUESTION AGAIN AND AGAIN WHILE ANSWERING IT:
Related to 3, this works well for keeping one on track.

Writing and Speaking Centers:

Basic writing and speaking skills are expected in this course and quality of both will be critical to your success in this course. You are therefore strongly encouraged to consult writing and speaking centers for your assignments and class presentations. Look up the links below for more information on the services they provide:

Writing Center: <http://www3.davidson.edu/cms/x11014.xml>

Speaking Center: <http://www3.davidson.edu/cms/x15986.xml>

Disabilities:

A student who requires accommodation for a documented disability of any type should see me *immediately* to discuss modifications to course requirements.

Academic Honesty:

Students are expected to fully abide by the Honor Code as set out by the College and should pledge all their assignments and exams.

REQUIRED READINGS (Available at the Bookstore and on Reserve in the Library):

1. Al-Tabatabai, Muhammad Husayn. *Shi'ite Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975). [Also available at <http://www.najaf.org/english/book/28/>]
2. Amir-Moezzi, Mohammad Ali. *Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism* (New York: SUNY, 1994).
3. Ayoub, Mahmoud. *The Crisis of Muslim History: Religion and Politics in Early Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003).
4. Daftary, Farhad. *A History of Shi'i Islam* (London: Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2013)
5. Haider, Najam. *Shi'i Islam: An Introduction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014)
6. Mattheisen, Toby. *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Spring that wasn't* (Stanford: Stanford Briefs, 2013)
7. Momen, Moojan. *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism*. (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1987)

RECOMMENDED BACKGROUND READINGS (Bookstore and Library Reserve):

- Gibb, Hamilton. *Mohammedanism: A Historical Survey* (? : Kessinger Publishing, 2010)
- Schimmel, Annemarie. *Islam: An Introduction*. (New York: SUNY, 1992)
- Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Islam: Religion, History and Civilization* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003)

COURSE OUTLINE

Key: Lib. Reserve (LR), Lib. E-View (E); Primary Readings, Moodle (M), Online (O)

PART I: ORIGINS OF THE SUNNI-SHI'ITE DIFFERENCES

Week 1 (Aug 25- 29): Introduction to the Course/Muslim World

Readings: Haider 1-3; Momen 1-10; *Creation and Early Prophetic History* (M) *Life of Muhammad* 69, 73, 79-83, 104-107, 114-5, 117-21, 130-2, 155-159, 191-192, 221-226, 234-5, 545-56, 678-83 (LR & M);

MOVIE: *The Message* (1977) to be watched before the class on August 29th

- Common Misperceptions about the Sunni-Shi'ite Divide
- Scholarly Study of Shi'ism: History, Methods and Approaches
- Our Framework for the study of Sunni and Shi'ite Islam
- Demographic Distribution of Sunnis and Shiites
- Origins of Islam, The Prophet's Life & Early Muslim Community

Week 2 (Sep 1 -5): Introduction to Islam & Early Islamic History

Readings: Ayoub: Introduction - p.80

Life of Muhammad 683-690 (LR); *Mufid, Kitab al - irshad, 116-37* (M);

- The Crisis of Succession
- The Saqifah Debate
- Arguments made by the Contenders of the Succession

Week 3 (Sep 8-12): Early Islamic History II: The Rightly Guided Caliphs

Readings: Ayoub: 81- 144 & *Appendix I & II*

- Key Features of the Caliphate of the 'Umar
- The Second Crisis
- The Caliphate of 'Uthman & 'Ali
- The Term "Shi'a" & the Origins of the Shi'ites in Early Islamic History

Week 4 (Sep 15 –19): Sunni & Shi'ite Interpretations of Early Islamic History

Readings: Haider, 51-66; Ayoub, 145-155; Momen 11-22; **Tabatabai 39-55; "No one has been a better Companion to me than Abu Bakr" (O)**

- The Question of Succession & Sunni and Shi'ite view of Early Islamic History
- *Ahl al-bayt*
- *Sahabah*, *Rashidun*, the Promised Ten and the Scribes
- Political and Spiritual Authority in Islam: Caliphate vs. Imamate

GROUP ASSIGNMENT 1 & PRESENTATIONS (September 15 & 17)

CLASS PRESENTATIONS on ONLINE LECTURES & READINGS:

Group 1: [*The Khilafa of Abu Bakr*](#) (O)

Group 2: [*The Khilafa of 'Umar*](#) (O)

Group 3: [*The Khilafa of 'Uthman*](#) (O)

Group 4: [*The Khilafa of 'Ali*](#) (O)

GROUP 1-4: In groups you will listen to lectures on the four caliphs and present the summary and your comments in the class. **(7 minutes max)**

Group 5: Nakhshwani, “The Ten Granted Paradise” (M) & Kohlberg, “Some Imāmī Shī‘ī views on the Ṣaḥāba” (M)

Group 6: Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad*, pp. 1-27 (M) & Blankinship, “Imarah, Khilafah, Imamah” (M);

Presentation Outline of GROUPS 1-6 will be posted onto the blog by noon on Sep 14

Group 7: Overall Assessment of the Key Issues and Debates

Group 7 will outline the first draft of their comments by 5 p.m. on Sep 14 especially in light of the readings for the week. They will revise and post updated comments by 9 p.m. on Sep 18.

SEPTEMBER 19 (DEBATE): Sunni-Shi'ite Interpretations of Early Islamic History

In interpreting early Islamic history and the caliphate period, which side of the Sunni-Shi'ite divide do you find yourself taking and why? Why the other side is wrong?

Before SEP 22 Class: After the debate is concluded, the two sides will post their views (for their position and against the other position) on to the blog. You will also post your individual reflections on the debate. Both activities are part of the grade for the debate.

PART II: FROM HISTORY TO THEOLOGY

(Shi'ite Worldview and the Diversity within it)

(NOTE: The BLOG will be in full effect beginning this section of the course)

Week 5 (Sep 24-26): Shi'ite Beliefs I

Readings: Haider, 20-30; Tabatabai, 89-171; "Unity of God" (Sec. B) [here](#) (O)

- Sources of Shi'ite Theology and Practice
- Understanding of God
- Prophetology
- Eschatology

Week 6 (Sep 29-Oct 3): Shi'ite Beliefs II (Imamology, Lives and Teachings of the Imams)

Readings: Momen, Ch. 7; "Appendix: The Twelve Imams" [here](#); "Spiritual Status of Fatima az-Zahra" (M); "Ali on Knowledge and the Spiritual Life" (M); [Nahj al-Balaghah](#) (first 25 sayings);

- Virtues and Excellences of the Household of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*)
- *Walaya*
- Special Significance of 'Ali
- Imamology: The Imam, His Functions and Special Powers
- Lives of the Twelve Imams
- Fatima al-Zahra

Week 7 (Oct 6-10): Diversity within Shi'ism

Readings: Haider, 31-49 & Chapter 4; Daftary, 105-190; [Anthology of Isma'ili Literature](#) (M)

- Zaydism,
- Isma'ilis,
- Ghulat Sects
- Shi'ism in regions other than Iran?

INTERPRETIVE REFLECTION I (DUE Oct 10)

Pick any theme/topic that we have covered thus far in the semester (500 words)

FALL BREAK: Oct 10 (4:30 P.M.) - Oct 15 (8:30 A.M.)

PART III: ESOTERICISM & MESSIANISM

Week 8 (Oct 15-17): Esoteric Dimensions of Shi'ism

Readings: Momen Ch 11; Amir-Moezzi, 29-98; *A Theo-Imamosophical Sermon* (M)

- Exoteric/Esoteric religion (*Nubuwwa*/*Walaya*)
- Shi'ism as the Initiatic Path
- Shi'ite Esoteric Sacred History
- Imam: Divine OR Divine Guide?
- Shi'ite Mystical anthropology

Week 9 (Oct 20-24): Expectation of the Millennium: Shi'ite Messianism

Readings: Momen, Chapter 8; Amir-Moezzi, 99-139; "A Treatise on the Occultation of the Twelfth Shi'ite Imam" 10-17 (M); *The Promised One in the Qur'an* 1-23 (M);

- Occultation and Return of the Twelfth Imam
- Esoteric Eschatology & Messianism

Week 10 (Oct 27-31): Shi'ite Religious and Spiritual Life

Readings: Momen, Chapter 9 & 13; Colin Turner, "Aspects of Devotional Life in Twelver Shi'ism: The Practice of Du'a" (MWP); Tabatabai, 231-233 & 223-230; *Spirituality of Shi'i Islam*, 431-460 (M); *The Prophet's du'a al Jawshan al Kabir* part 1 [here](#); *Du'a Kumayl* [here](#)

- Shi'ite Law and Jurisprudence
- Devotion, Prayer Life & Pilgrimage
- Shi'ite Art and Architecture

OCT 31: REVIEW

(Topics covered until Oct 29 will be included)

Week 11 (Nov 3-7): Every Day is Ashura, Every Land Karbala: Commemorating Husayn

Readings: Haider, p.66-83; Bahrululum, *The Kerbala Epic* (M); I.K. Howard, "Story of Events after the Killing of al-Husayn" (M); Shariati, *Jihad and Shahadat* (O); "An Open Letter to IEC Board on the purpose of Muharram Processions" [here](#); and *Ziyarat al-Ashurah* [here](#)

DOCUMENTARY: [The Ten Days](#) to be watched before Friday Nov 5th.

- The Battle of Karbala & Shi'ite Commemorations of Karbala
- Impact of the incident of Karbala and Shi'ite Sectarian Identity

- Karbala and Husayn in the Sunni Tradition
- Martyrdom in Shi'ism
- A Martyr of Humanity? Husayn and Karbala beyond the Islamic Tradition

**THIS WEEK IS MUHARRAM AND THEREFORE A GOOD OPPORTUNITY FOR
OBSERVING KARBALA COMMEMORATIONS AT THE SHI'ITE CENTER IN
CHARLOTTE**

GROUP ASSIGNMENT (1-2 pages, DUE NOV 7): *Bring three examples of verses from the Qur'an that in your view will be read differently by the Sunnis and the Shi'ites. What's the potential variance in interpretation and why?*

PART IV: INSTITUTIONS, POLITICS & HISTORY

Week 12 (Nov 10-14): Rise and Development of Shi'ite Clerical Authority

Readings: Momen, Ch. 10 & p. 220-232; Fuad Khouri, "The Ulama: A Comparative Study..." (M); Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, p. 16-75 (M); Haider, 213-216;

- Development of Shiite Jurisprudence and Legal Methodology (*usul al-fiqh*)
- *Ijtihad*, Prerogatives of the Imam, Emergence of Juristic Hierarchy (*marja'iyah*) and the Office of *Mujtahid* as the Supreme Jurisprudent (*'alamiyya*)
- *Usuli-Akhbari* Divide
- Khomeini and the Iranian Revolution: Contestations of *Wilayat al-Faqih*

Week 13 (Nov 17-Nov 21): Intersections of Religion & Politics, Contemporary Developments

Readings: Vali Nasr, "When the Shiites Rise" *Foreign Affairs* 85.4 (Jul/Aug 2006): 58-74 (E); *Sectarian Gulf*, vii-132;

DOCUMENTARY: [The Last Shah](#) (O) to be watched before the class on Friday

- Sunni-Shi'ite Relations in Islamic History: A Brief Overview
- Sectarianism and Contemporary Politics
- Rise of the Shi'ite Crescent?

Week 14 (Nov 24): Intersections of Religion & Politics II

Readings: Enayat, 18-51;

DOCUMENTARY: *Pilgrimage to Karbala* ([library e-view](#)) to be watched before the class

NOTE: The class on November 25 may be cancelled because of a conference.

THANKSGIVING BREAK: NOV 25 (4:30 P.M.) - DEC 1 (8:30 A.M.)

INTERPRETIVE REFLECTION II (DUE Nov 24)

Pick any theme/topic that we have covered thus far in the semester (500 words)

PART V: SYNTHESIS & CONCLUSION

Week 15 (Dec 1- 5): Group Project Presentations

Optional Days may be used for group presentations or/and for Concluding Our Study.

CGP PAPER (10-PAGE) DUE ON DECEMBER 5

CGP TEACHING-PRESENTATIONS THIS WEEK

GROUP ASSIGNMENT II (750 words) DUE ON DEC 5: *Critically evaluate the popular depictions of the Sunni-Shi'ite divide (pick one OR find yourself one that you think deserves examination), and suggest revisions that are necessary? Why these errors need to be corrected? How would they lead to misunderstanding? What is at stake in this revision?*

“The Economist explains: What is the difference between Sunni and Shia Muslims?”
<http://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2013/05/economist-explains-19>

Understanding the Sunni-Shi'ite Divide
<http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1924116,00.html>

A history of the Shia and Sunni Muslim conflict
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-25471361>

FC46A: The Origins of the Sunni-Shi'ite Split
<http://www.flowofhistory.com/%5Bmenupathalias%5D/fc46a>

Quick guide: Sunnis and Shias
From <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-16047709>>