



Fall 2026 Graduate Seminars



MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES



The University of Texas at Austin

ARA 384C | Readings in Islamic Sources: Qur'an and Interpretation

Dr. Hina Azam

From its initial proclamation by Muhammad until today, the Qur'an has served as a source of spiritual teachings, ethico-legal guidance, sacred narratives, and theological doctrines for Muslims of diverse times, places, and sects. Muslims have held their scripture to contain insights into history, the natural world, and human psychology. Believed to contain the direct words of God and therefore to be an infallible indicator of the divine mind, the Qur'an has remained the ultimate point of reference in Islamic thought and Muslim piety, and the scripture's interpreters have hung complex doctrines on its precise wording and turns of phrase over the course of centuries. The repository of this centuries-long interpretive effort is the Qur'an's interpretive tradition, known as *tafsīr* (exegesis). This Arabic-language course introduces students to the world of the Qur'an and *tafsīr*, both modern and premodern.

The course will progress along two parallel trajectories: (1) English-language secondary readings in the field of Qur'anic studies, which will orient students to the field as a whole and will provide background for the Arabic-language course materials; and (2) Arabic-language primary readings from a range of exegetical works on selected topics (theological, ethical, and narrative) of theological interest.

Course requirements include regular attendance, preparation of course texts, participation in class discussion (in Arabic as well as English), a research paper (to be written in English using Arabic sources), and an accompanying oral presentation.

This course requires a strong working knowledge of Arabic and/or completion of the 3-year Arabic sequence. Exceptions require instructor approval.

HEB 380C | Bible in Hebrew: Psalms-Nehemiah

Dr. Jonathan Kaplan

Taught in English with readings in Hebrew. Read and analyze the Books of Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah in Hebrew.

MEL 380C | Akkadian I

Dr. Øyvind Bjøru

This course trains students in the basic grammar and script of Akkadian, the language used in ancient Babylonia and Assyria, with a special focus on the Old Babylonian dialect. Students will learn to read documents such as contracts, letters, omens, and selections from the Code of Hammurabi.

MEL 380C | Ugaritic

Dr. Heath Dewrell

Study of the West Semitic languages from the city of Ugarit in what is now Syria, which was spoken from the fourteenth through twelfth century BC. Covers the essentials of grammar needed for reading Ugaritic texts.

MES 385 | Middle East Police/Criminals

Dr. Kamran Aghaie

This course will consist of two equal components, a research/writing workshop, and a reading seminar. Throughout the semester, approximately half of each course session will be spent on each of these two aspects of the course. By “workshopping” their research projects, students will learn how to carry out the different stages of a research project. 1) the evidentiary stage- collecting, processing and analyzing primary evidence, 2) conceptually formulating the project- culminating in a detailed prospectus, 3) presenting their research in a conference-style presentation, 4) writing the actual research paper, and 5) discussing, commenting on, and editing each other’s work in the stages listed above. The second component of the course will consist of reading and discussing scholarship on crime and criminals, as well as police and law enforcement across the Middle East. Students will learn how crime and law enforcement have evolved over the past two centuries in the Modern Middle East.

Requirements: Weekly reading assignments, substantial classroom discussions and presentations, academic-style book review, a graduate level research paper, a prospectus for this research paper, and comments on each other’s work.

Cross-listed courses**MES 384 | Arab Monarchies****Dr. Zoltan Barany**

Advanced studies of various aspects of social sciences in the Middle East.

MES 385 | European Imperial: British Empire**Dr. Kate Imy**

Advanced studies of various aspects of history in the Middle East. Study of the British empire in the Middle East, Asia and Africa.

MES 386 | Islamic Art Historical Tradition**Dr. Stephennie Mulder**

Advanced studies of various aspects of the arts and humanities in the Middle East.