

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES
RELS 315 L01
ISLAMIC MYSTICISM
MW 1 – 2:15 p.m.

04/08/25

Dr. Aaron Hughes
Dept. of Religious Studies
SS 1308
Phone: 220-7063
e-address: hughesa@ucalgary.ca
Office Hours: TBA

Course Description

This course is designed to introduce students to “Sufism” or what has been interpreted by one scholar as the “mystical dimension of Islam.” Its aim will be to trace the development of major trends in Muslim mystical thought, piety, practice, and institutions from the second/eighth century to the present. Before we begin our study of this phenomenon we will begin by defining “big” and potentially difficult terms such as “religious studies,” “mysticism,” and ‘experience.’” Following this, some of the topics to be covered within an historical framework include: early Muslim asceticism; the beginnings of love mysticism; “sober” versus “intoxicated” experience; conceptions of the Sufi “path”; Sufi ethics and Sufi understandings of good and evil; Sufi brotherhoods, rituals and festivals; Sufi literature in the popular genres of mystical fable, allegory, and poetry. We will conclude the course by examining the place of Sufism in the modern world.

Core Competencies

By encouraging students to begin to appreciate the depths and nuances of Islamic civilization, this course will teach them to think critically and creatively about the many significant ways in which religion has shaped and continues to shape the human experience.

Course Requirements

1. Lectures

A review of the key concepts, issues, and themes of the course will be presented in the lectures. While there will be significant points of continuity and overlap between material presented in the readings and the lectures, be advised that **neither should be regarded as a substitute for the other**. In other words, there will be questions or parts of questions on the examinations which will focus exclusively on information and perspectives dealt with in the lectures and not in the readings – and vice versa.

2. Readings

It is essential that the student **carefully** complete the assigned readings **within the allotted time frame** indicated on the syllabus. “Carefully” means that the student should pay close attention to both the important details and the main points or themes of the various readings. (It’s your job to figure out what these are!) As stated above, the readings constitute a vital component of the course.

3. Examinations and Term Paper

There are two exams (a midterm and a final) in this course. In addition, there will also be a term paper due near the end of the semester.

NB: A) The grade for a missed examination, **unexcused beforehand**, will be F with no makeup [in the event of an emergency, please call me in my office 220-7063, or leave a message in the main office 220-6988); b) latecomers to examinations will only have the time remaining in which to complete their work; c) sorry, **no** makeup examinations will be scheduled to accommodate travel plans.

Evaluation Schedule

Midterm (Oct. 13)	30%
Term Paper (due Dec. 6)	30%
Final (take home)	40%

There will be no Registrar scheduled final examination in this course.

Required Texts

1. Annemarie Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam.
2. Michael Sells, Early Islamic Mysticism.
3. Farid ud-Din Attar, The Conference of the Birds.

Grading

A numerical mark will be given for each course requirement. A letter grade will be assigned on the following number and letter grade scheme:

A+	100 - 96	A	95 - 90	A-	89 - 85
B+	84 - 80	B	79 - 75	B-	74 - 70
C+	69 - 65	C	64 - 60	C-	59 - 55
D+	54 - 53	D	52-50	F	Under 50

N.B. All written assignments will be graded with regard to both form and content.

Recording of lectures:

Recording any part of any lectures in any form must first approved be by the instructor in writing and is for individual private study only. See current Calendar, Tape recording of Lectures.

Academic Honesty:

Students should be familiar with University regulations regarding academic integrity; see relevant pages in the current University Calendar.

Academic Accommodation:

If you are a student with a disability who requires academic accommodation and have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre, please contact their office at 220-8237. Students who have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre are not eligible for formal academic accommodation. Once registered, please discuss any upcoming tests/examinations with the instructor two weeks before the scheduled date.

Withdrawing from courses:

Please note the information regarding withdrawals and fee refunds in the Academic Schedule of the current University Calendar.

Gnosis:

Gnosis is the Religious Studies Student Club. For membership or more information please email: gnosis@ucalgary.ca or visit <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~gnosis>.

Schedule of Classes and Readings

Week 1 (Sept. 8)

Topic: Intro to class

Readings

Week 2 (Sept. 13, 15)

Topic: Defining or Messying up “mysticism” and “experience”

Readings TBA

Week 3 (Sept. 20, 22)

Topic: Introduction to the Study of Islamic Mysticism

Readings: Schimmel, pp. 1-22; Sells, 29-74

Week 4 (Sept. 27, 29)

Topic: Early Muslim Asceticism

Readings Schimmel, pp. 23-97; Sells, 75-96

Week 5 (Oct. 4, 6)

Topic: The Mystical Thought of Qushayri

Readings: Sells, 97-150

Week 6 (Oct. 13)

Topic: For the Love of God: Rabi`a al-`Adawiyya (d. 185/801)

Readings: Sells, 151-170

MIDTERM

Week 7 (Oct. 18, 20)

Topic: Intoxication and Sobriety: The Goals of al-Bistami (d. 262/874) and al-Junayd (d. 299/910)

Readings: Schimmel, 98-186; Sells, 212-265

Week 8 (Oct. 25, 27)

Topic: Al-Hallaj (d. 309/922) and the Crime of Ecstasy

Readings: Sells, 266-280

Week 9 (Nov. 1, 3)

Topic: Iblis (Satan) in Sufi Psychology

Readings: Handout

Week 10 (Nov. 8, 10)

Topic: The Way to Certainty and Peace: The Sufism of al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111)

Readings Handout

Week 11 (Nov. 15,17)

Topic: An Allegorical Poem of Mystical Quest

Readings: `Attar

Week 12 (Nov. 22, 24)

Topic: An Allegorical Poem of Mystical Quest (cntd.)

Readings: `Attar (cntd.)

Week 13 (Nov. 29, Dec. 1)

Topic Living Sufism

Readings TBA

Week 14 (Dec. 6, 8)

Topic Living Sufism (cntd.)

Final: TBA during Final Exam Week