

Islamic Civilization and Cultures

Courses and Requirements

The focus of this concentration is the study of Islamic civilization as a global and multicultural phenomenon. There are currently more than a billion Muslims in the world. They live in dozens of countries and speak hundreds of languages and dialects. They are the majority population in a region spanning from Morocco to Indonesia.

The impact of the civilization connected with Islam on world history has been complex and profound. The founding of the religion of Islam and the first Islamic polity by the Prophet Muhammad was a major turning point in human history. The subsequent Islamic empires that arose in the immediate wake of the rise of Islam — the Umayyad and the Abbasids — not only had a tremendous effect on the political and economic nature of the global system, they also became centers of intellectual and cultural fluorescence. Following the fall of Baghdad to the Mongols in the 13th century, the conversion of Turko-Mongol tribes to Islam led to a remarkable new series of Islamic polities that transformed the Eurasian world not only through military conquest but also by providing links for trade and diplomacy. Islam played similarly crucial roles in the histories of Africa and Southeast Asia.

From the Taj Mahal and the libraries of Timbuktu to the Blue Mosque in Istanbul and the Alhambra palace in Spain, Islamic societies generated remarkable works of art, architecture and literature. The rise of European power and the subsequent colonization of much of the Islamic world brought new challenges. In the contemporary world, the role of Islam in global and local affairs is deeply contested. The purpose of this concentration is to allow students to study systematically and coherently the global civilization of Islam — its religious traditions, histories and cultures — in all of its diversity.

BEGINNING STUDIES

First- and second-year students may begin with any introductory course that deals with Islamic civilization or its cultures. RLST 240 Classical Islam, HIST 166 History of the Islamic World, or HIST 264 History of Modern Middle East are especially designed as introductory courses and are open to first-year students. Students hoping to spend all or part of their junior year in the Arabic-speaking world should begin their study of Arabic in the first two years at Kenyon.

CONCENTRATION REQUIREMENTS AND CURRICULUM

Area and disciplinary coursework

Students are required to take at least 2 units (four semester courses) which focus on the Islamic world, outside of the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures. Courses should be chosen from at least two different departments. These courses may be chosen from a list of courses approved by the program committee of the Islamic Civilization and Cultures Concentration and may include up to two relevant courses taken in study abroad programs. These courses must have a substantial amount of work that deals specifically with an aspect or aspects of the Islamic world. One of the courses may be a comparative course that examines the Islamic world together with another cultural region. One of the courses must be an introductory course chosen from the following: RLST 240 Classical Islam, HIST 166 History of the Islamicate World, or HIST 264 History of Modern Middle East. At least one of the courses must be an advanced seminar.

Language study

At least one year of instruction in a relevant Islamicate language is required. Currently, this requirement can be met by taking the two-semester sequence of Arabic at Kenyon (MLL 101Y-102Y). The equivalent of one year of approved college-level language instruction in Arabic or another relevant language such as Farsi, Turkish, Urdu, Swahili, Uzbek or Bhasa Indonesian at another accredited academic institution will also meet the requirement, as will some intensive summer programs, or a semester of language study abroad when paired with language immersion. In the case of transfer students, credit will be accepted for a year of Islamicate language study with a grade of C+ or better pursued at another institution. If the program committee determines that a student possesses native proficiency in a relevant language, it will waive the requirement. Students are encouraged to continue language study beyond one year. It is strongly recommended that students continue their language study beyond the first year.

OFF-CAMPUS STUDY

Off-campus study in the Islamicate world is not required, but it is highly recommended. Students should consult with Islamic Civilization and Cultures Concentration faculty and the director of international education for opportunities available to Kenyon students to study in the Islamicate world for one semester or a year. Summer language-study programs are also available for students who need to prepare for off-campus study or desire to learn an Islamicate language not offered at Kenyon (e.g., Hindi-Urdu, Farsi, Turkish, Swahili, Bhasa Indonesian). Students who wish to study abroad in the Arabic speaking world need to complete one year of Arabic at Kenyon before going abroad.

COURSES THAT MEET THE CONCENTRATION REQUIREMENT

ASIA 490 Senior Seminar: Asia in Comparative Perspective (comparative, when the topic is appropriate)*

HIST 156 History of India (comparative)

HIST 166 History of the Islamicate World**
HIST 237 History of Spain: Pliny to the Guggenheim (comparative)
HIST 258 Ottoman Empire
HIST 261 The Mongol Empire in World History (comparative)
HIST 264 History of Modern Middle East**
HIST 345 History of the Indian Ocean (comparative)
HIST 365 Middle East through Film and Fiction*
HIST 370 Women and Gender in the Modern Middle East*
HIST 438 The Medieval Spains: Antiquity to the New World* (comparative)
MLL 101Y Beginning Arabic
MLL 102Y Beginning Arabic
MLL 201 Intermediate Arabic I
MUSC 103 Introduction to Ethnomusicology (comparative)
MUSC 485 Asian Music Ensemble (Gamelan)
RLST 240 Classical Islam**
RLST 440 Seminar on Sufism*
RLST 447 Islam in North America*
RLST 443 Voices of Contemporary Islam*

** Course fulfills the seminar requirement*

*** Course fulfills the introductory course requirement*