

Arabic is not a prerequisite, but an open mind and general knowledge about Islam or an “Introduction to Islam” course are very highly recommended.

Discussion sections will be held on Fridays from 10:30-11:30AM and 3-4 PM on Zoom. Please use the same link as for TA office hours.

No Prerequisites: Open to all undergraduates and graduates.

Course Requirements and Assignments:

- * **Reading Responses: 50%**
- * **Weekly Discussion of Primary Text *The Essence of Reality* (20%)**
- * **Quizzes (20%)**
- * **Class Attendance (10%)**
- * **Extra Credit (1% + 1%)**

Students who wish to write a final paper can write 2 reading responses (20%) in weeks 2-3, and a final paper (30% - see instructions below) over the course of weeks 4-9.

Course Readings:

Please purchase a hardcopy of the following book from the seminary Co-op:

Rustom, Mohammed, *The Essence of Reality: A Defense of Philosophical Sufism (zubdat al-ḥaqā'iq)*. New York: New York University Press, 2022.

Recommended General Readings:

Chittick, William, *Sufism, A Short Introduction*, Oxford: One World Publications, 2000.

Sells, Michael, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur'ān, Mi'rāj, Poetic, and Theological Writings*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1996)

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Deliverance from Error: Five Key Texts Including His Spiritual Autobiography, al-Munqidh min al-Dalal*, McCarthy trans., Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 1999.

Vincent Cornell, *The Way of Abū Madyan*, Cambridge UK: Islamic Texts Society, 1994.

Nazanin Sheikhi & Nicholas Stone, *Exhibitions on the Prophet of Islam at Sabeel Center*. Chicago, IL: KAZI Publications, 2022.

Media resources:

Abdallah Rothman, *Midnight Moments* (youtube series). An introduction to forms of self-reflection, presence, *dhikr*, practice of silence, breathing, with discussion of difference between Sufism and the mindfulness movement.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jndEekIV3J4>

Yunus Emre, an excellent Turkish series (with English subtitles) on the life, spiritual formation, and practice of Turkey's beloved 13th century Sufi poet.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifirKjdhEYw&list=PLFCxIHnP1BCXx-0XWjt8wbkksuPBoi9pL>

Yousef Casewit & Khalid Williams, *The Sufis of Morocco* (podcast). Discourses on Islamic spirituality, faith, and practice; dream interpretations; visionary experiences from a contemporary Moroccan Shadhili Sufi order.

<https://podcasts.apple.com/be/podcast/the-sufis-of-morocco/id1549027088>

Lecture Sequence:

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Week I: Why study Sufism?

Wed. Sept. 28

Required Reading for Lecture:

Ernst, Carl. “Sufism in the Contemporary World.” *Sufism: an introduction to the mystical tradition of Islam*, pp. 199-228.

Required Reading for Friday Zoom Discussion Section:

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt. *The Essence of Reality*, Introduction and Chapter 1 (the Reason for writing this book; Who will benefit from this book?) pp. xv-21.

Week II: How to “study” Sufism?

Oct. 3 & 5

Required Reading:

Chittick, William. “The Quran and Sufism.” *The Study Quran*, pp. 1737-1749.

Morris, James. "Situating Islamic Mysticism: Between Western Traditions and Popular Spirituality." *Mystics of the book* (Edited by Robert A. Herrera). pp. 293-316.

Ogunnaike, Oludamini. "Performing Realization: The Sufi Music Videos of the Taalibe baye of Dakar." *African Arts* (2018) vol. 41, no. 3. pp. 26-38.

Required Reading for Friday Zoom Discussion Section:

ʿAyn al-Quḍāt. *The Essence of Reality*, Chapters 13-24 (discourses on divine and human knowledge, prophecy, faith, and the spiritual world) pp. 42-61.

Week III: What is the soul?

Oct 10 & 12

Required Reading for Lecture:

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. "What it means to be human," in *The Garden of Truth*, pp. 4-25.

Murata, Sachiko; Chittick, William. *The Vision of Islam*, Chapter 3: Angels. (Angels, God's unseen Messengers, Light, angelic luminosity, clay, spirits and bodies, fire, soul, imagination) pp. 87-102.

Required Reading for Friday Zoom Discussion Section:

ʿAyn al-Quḍāt. *The Essence of Reality*, Chapters 76-88 (discourses on the nature of the soul) pp. 152-171.

Recommended Reading:

ʿAydarūs. "On the Soul and Its Impulses." In *The Fragrant Scent*. (impulsive thoughts, knowledge of the soul, defects of the ego, the ego is the greatest enemy, how to slay the ego, the cause of love of the ego, obfuscations of the ego, the heart's quiet capitulation to the ego, directions from whence motivating thoughts arrive, the impact of remembrance on satan, summoning good motivating thoughts and warding off their opposites, what is meant by the heart, human versus animal spirits, the human spirit) pp. 5-53.

Week IV: What is the nature of the world?

Oct 17* & 19

*Mehdi Ali Lecture

Required Reading for Lecture:

Burrell, David. "Creation." In *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology* (the nature of the universe, creation *ex nihilo*, schools of kalam on the nature of the world, falasifa on origination, Ghazali, Razi, Suhrawardi, Ibn 'Arabi, Mulla Sadra). pp. 141-158

Chittick, William. *Ibn Arabi: Heir to the Prophets*, Chapters 3, 4, 5 (chapter 3: the divine roots of love - wujud, the entities, genesis of love, human love, poverty, perfection; chapter 4: the cosmology of remembrance – remembrance, prophecy, the book of the soul, the breath of the All-Merciful, knowledge of the names, all-comprehensiveness, achieving the status of Adam, the perfect servant, the house of God; chapter 5: knowledge and realization – knowledge, benefit, the form of God, reliable knowledge, following authority, realization, the ambiguity of creation, giving things their *haqq*, the rights of God and Man, the soul's *haqq*) pp. 35-86.

Required Reading for Friday Zoom Discussion Section:

'Ayn al-Quḍāt. *The Essence of Reality*, Chapter 3-12 (on God and His names) pp. 24-39; Chapters 55-59 (on the perpetual renewal of the world) pp. 116-127.

Week V: Can one renounce the world?

Oct 24 & 26

Required Reading for Lecture:

Zargar, Cyrus. "Distancing Oneself from the Worldly: Renunciation (*zuhd*) According to al-Muḥāsibī and al-Sarrāj." Chapter 7 of *Polished Mirror: Storytelling and the Pursuit of Virtue in Islamic Philosophy and Sufism*. (historical background, renunciation as observant disinterest: al-Muḥāsibī, a tripartite model of renunciation in al-Sarrāj,

renunciation, asceticism, and Islamic ethical history, to work or not to work: renunciation and trust, saintly stories of renunciation), pp. 177-202.

al-Karkari, Mohamed Faouzi. *Foundations of the Karkariya Order*, selections from Chapters 3 and 5: “The Patched Cloak (*al-muraqqa‘a*),” and “Spiritual Wandering (*al-siyāḥa*),” pp. 129-140; (the basis of the *muraqqa‘a*, the benefits of the *muraqqa‘a*, the *muraqqa‘a* of Sayyidunā ‘Umar; wandering with the body and with the spirit, the junction of the two seas), 206-215.

Required Reading for Friday Zoom Discussion Section:

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt. *The Essence of Reality*, Chapters 37-54 (discourses on the non-eternity of the world, divine causation, and human agency) pp. 82-116.

Week VI: What is the role of a spiritual guide?

Oct 31 & Nov 2

Required Reading for Lecture:

al-Karkari, Mohamed Faouzi. *The Foundations of the Karkariya Order*, selections from Chapter 1: The Pact. (spiritual companionship in the Sufi tradition, the companionship of love, the companionship for spiritual training, the need for a spiritual master), pp. 42-55.

Imam ‘Abdullāh bin ‘Alawī al-Ḥaddād. “The First Set of Counsels” from *Beneficial Counsels (al-Waṣāyā al-nāfi‘a)* (levels and fruits of *taqwā*, seeking knowledge, signs of a sound heart, means to illuminating the heart, recommended *adhkār*) pp. 3-27.

Required Reading for Friday Zoom Discussion Section:

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt. *The Essence of Reality*, Chapters 61-71 (types of knowledge, spiritual companionship and guidance) 128-144.

Week VII: What do Sufis do?

Nov 7 & 9

Required Reading for Lecture and Friday Zoom Discussion:

al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid. “The Book of Disciplining the Soul, Refining the Character, and Curing the Sicknesses of the Heart.” Book XXII of *The Revival of the Religious Sciences (Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-Dīn)* pp. 3-100.

No readings from *Essence of Reality* this week.

Week VIII: What is it like to be in love with God?

Nov. 14 & 16

Required Reading for Lecture:

Selections from Chittick, William. *Divine Love: Islamic Literature and the Path to God.*

Ibn al-‘Arīf and Ibn al-Mar’a on divine love (17 pages, trans. Yousef Casewit).

Required Reading for Zoom Discussion:

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt. *The Essence of Reality*, Chapters 25-30 (discourses on love and the intellect) pp. 62-73.

*** Nov. 21 – 25 Thanksgiving Break ***

Week IX: What is the Ultimate Religious Experience?

Nov 28 & 30

Required Reading for Lecture:

Zargar, Cyrus. “The Completion of Ethics: Self-Annihilation (*fanā’i*) Through the Lens of ‘Aṭṭār.” Chapter 9, *The Polished Mirror: Storytelling and the Pursuit of Virtue in Islamic Philosophy and Sufism*. (Plotinus on the end of ethics: a comparison, self-loss in a named God, annihilation in God and subsistence through God, ‘Aṭṭār and *The Language of the Birds* topos, the narrative of *The Language of the Birds*: finding the Sīmurgh within, love, self-annihilation, and the pains of separation, a return to the beginning of things: *tawḥīd* and self-annihilation). pp. 237-259.

Required Reading for Zoom Discussion:

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt. *The Essence of Reality*, Chapters 60, 89-Conclusion (discourses on the stage beyond the intellect and reaching God) 127-129; 172-195.

Dec. 3 – 5 College Reading Period

Dec. 10 Autumn Quarter ends

Assignments:

Reading Responses (50%): 10% each, due Monday 9pm on Canvas.

The reading responses are meant to help you think clearly and deeply about the required readings. Complete at least 5 out of 10 of the weekly RRs. Each RR counts as 10% of your final grade and is designed to help you engage closely and analytically with the secondary literature on Islamic theology. If you are unsatisfied with an assignment grade, you may complete an extra assignment(s) and I will count your highest 5 marks toward the final grade.

1. Choose two articles from the class readings for the week. After you read the two chapters carefully, outline and synthesize them in your notes, and then bring both articles 'in conversation' with each other over a 2-3 ideas, overlapping themes, or a set of intriguing questions. If you wish to compare, say, an *Oxford Handbook* chapter to one of the chapters in *Umm al-Barahin*, you may do so (but explain your reasoning).
2. Organize your thoughts around 2-3 key ideas/themes/questions and structure your reflection paper around them. You will be partly graded on the strength and cogency of your key ideas. Be specific. You may quote from the text (but no more than 3 lines). I am looking for clear, thoughtful, and concrete points that are tied to specific parts of the text. You may refer to an insight that I shared in the lectures, or an insight from your own area of interest; but my lectures and your interests cannot constitute the core of your reflection.
3. Write an informed and thoughtful response that demonstrates your grasp of the readings and the subject matter. Remember, being a critical and engaged reader doesn't mean you have to disagree with the author or the points raised. Ask and answer a set of intriguing questions, draw key comparisons and contrasts, and detect underlying thematic overlaps and differences. The idea is to take the time to read and understand arguments carefully, and perhaps pose a new set of questions. Example of questions you can pose and respond to: What would _____ say about _____? How would _____ respond to a certain point in the chapter? What alternative doctrine could theologian _____ have offered in response to problem _____?
4. Do not summarize the articles. If it is a summary, you will lose marks. Why? Because summaries only demonstrate your comprehension of the text. For the RRs, I assume that you know how to read an academic article, and that you are able to synthesize its key findings in your personal notes. If you have questions, speak to your TA or see me in office hours.
5. Write clearly, edit your work and make sure to carefully organize your paragraphs.

6. Follow the standard rules for formatting academic papers (choose and be consistent with either MLA/APA/Chicago).
7. Length of paper: **2 pages, single-spaced.**

Formatting: submit in Word docx format on CANVAS; no PDFs; full name; date; page numbers; provide a title for your piece; specify the chapters you are comparing (“RR on chapters x & x”)

No late submissions accepted without a documented medical excuse; all first RRs will receive full points, as well as the *actual* grade. Example: 10/10; 8/10 will give you a sense of my expectations. For questions, speak to your TA first. If you don’t receive full points for the assignment, you can submit up to ten RRs until you get full points.

Weekly Discussion of Primary Text (20%): students break out into groups of 5 for 30 minutes to discuss and draw out three key ideas from the assigned Section Readings. The remainder of the time will be a plenary where each group shares the key take-aways from the discussion. Informed participation with primary theological/creedal texts with TA.

Quizzes (20%): There will be three quizzes held in class. 10% each; 10 short ID questions. Your top 2 quizzes will count toward your final grade. Quizzes are based on *lectures* and *assigned primary materials from the discussion sections*. Your TA will provide a list of key terms that will appear on the quiz.

Class Attendance (10%): Any unexcused absence or tardiness (over 5 mins) for class or discussion section will result in -1% of final grade. If you have more than 3 unexcused absences, you will be withdrawn from the course.

Extra credit (1%): *The Alchemist of Happiness* and submit a 2-page response on canvas. Engage the documentary with one chapter in the *Oxford Handbook*. Submit by Week 6. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JAKVFjX-yCw&t=1s>

Extra Extra credit (1%): Watch *Inception*, the DiCaprio movie, then read Ogunnaike’s “Ibn Arabi and Inception” article, which is available in PDF online: (<https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1151&context=jrf>). Then write a 3 page response and submit on canvas. Submit by Week 9.

All assignments are submitted online on the University of Chicago’s CANVAS website (no hardcopy).

Instructions for Research Papers: 30%

Weeks 1-2 - Time in Stacks: Spend time in the stacks. Find your area, read around your topic, and pick your books.

Week 3 – Declare your topic, upload receipts to CANVAS & article citations: Send me photo-scans of your receipts for 5 academic books that you checked out from the library and are exploring. Find 5 journal articles pertaining to your topic and send me the full citations (for help, speak to your librarian; use proquest; use jstore; use *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 2 & 3; use interlibrary loan; use your resources; and your imagination!). Choose your topic and speak to me about it. **5% (0.5% for each relevant source)**.

Week 5 - Submit Outlines: I am looking for assessable signs of concentrated work, and informed understanding of the secondary literature in your field. Vague outlines are unacceptable. Be specific about your proposed topic, argument, sources. Where's the hook for your paper? How are you framing it? Break down the larger sections into smaller ones: explain what sources will you use? Why? Be specific. Forward your outline to the class.

Week 7 - Submit revised outlines: You have one week to revise your outlines and resubmit based on feedback from instructor and students.

If you are dissatisfied with your outline grade, you can make it up by sending me a receipt and report about the feedback you received from the Writing Program. Set up a Graduate Writing Consultation to have someone give you feedback on your draft:

<https://writing-program.uchicago.edu/grads/gwcs>

Week 10: Submit your paper on CANVAS; in word doc; fully formatted.

Research Paper Tips:

1) A novice writer tends to want to take on broad horizons and lacks focus. Example:

- I will write about the past, present, and future of women in the Islam. "Specifically," I will explore women in Islam from medieval times up to the modern period, with some reflections about their future.

- OR: I want to write a paper "specifically" on Ibn Arabi's epistemology (there are about 800 titles attributed to Ibn Arabi, and the 15-volume *al-Futuh al-Makkiyya* is one of them).

A mature researcher has something specific to say which opens up to broader questions. Example:

- I will examine medieval legal text X on inheritance laws pertaining to widows in 16th century Damascus. This text seems to suggest how social-political or cultural realities affected legal thought of X. It also reveals an important aspect of how legal discourse over inheritance shifted from earlier periods, and builds upon / contradicts / stands in contrast to the academic article X on the subject.

- I will examine Ibn al-‘Arabī’s notion of the heart as it appears in chapter X of the *Futūḥāt*. This builds upon Ghazali’s understanding of the heart in the *Ihya’*, but features certain Avicennan undercurrents as well. Thus, Ibn Barrajān’s understanding of the heart demonstrates how he both built upon and challenged dominant epistemologies of the day.

2) A novice writer tends to wonder: “do I have enough to say to cover 20 pages?” A mature writer never worries about whether they can write a long enough paper. Their concern is structure, precision, finding the hook, and analysis. Please don’t exceed 25 pages.

Writing Rubric:

Your written assignment is graded on a 30-point scale, 10 points are allocated for your selection and use of academic sources; 10 points for form (grammar and style); and 10 for content (your synthesis of articles, substance of your analysis). These points are converted to percentage, and assigned a total letter grade. Please note that while you are required to use and cite academic sources in the paper, I do not deduct points for failing to follow Chicago or APA style. You may cite your sources however you chose, as long as you are consistent and uniform. I penalize for incorrect Arabic-to-English transliteration, and it must be consistent.¹ Your paper does not have to be argumentative. However, you must synthesize, analyze, and frame your findings in a well thought out and cohesive manner. You must engage relevant secondary literature in the field.

(S) Academic Sources (*sanad*):

0-4 Points — The student failed to find and cite academic sources.

¹ Learn to transliterate according to the Library of Congress system. Devote two weeks to the task and it will get done. Install hotkeys on your computer: <https://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsol/romanization/arabic.pdf>

4-6 Points — The student made use of adequate academic sources and used them to support the substance of the paper.

10 Points — The student cites and uses excellent academic sources throughout the paper.

(F) Form (*sharīah*):

0-4 Points – The paper has numerous spelling and grammatical errors or terms and names are used incorrectly throughout. The composition is poorly structured. No or poor citations. Inconsistent style. No signs of revision are apparent in the flow of the text.

4-6 Points – Occasional spelling or grammatical errors appear or terms and names are inconsistently given. Poor citations. Inconsistent style. The composition is soundly written, but could be restructured to more clearly convey the writer’s points. Limited signs of revision.

8 Points – The paper is nearly free of spelling or grammatical errors and it is evident that time was taken to double-check the terms and names used in the paper. Proper citations given and consistent style used. The composition is sound in structure. The paper appears to have received multiple revisions before submission.

10 Points - The paper is free of any spelling or grammatical errors and it is evident that time was taken to double-check the terms and names used in the paper. The composition is not only sound in structure, but is written in a clear and eloquent style. Good citations are used. The language is compelling. The paper appears to have received multiple revisions before submission.

(C) Content (*ḥaqīqah*)

0-2 Points – A poor paper: The paper is poorly written. References are poorly used, sparse, or absent.

4 Points – A fair paper: The paper summarizes the research but lacks a clear train of thought. The paper does not have a clear thesis, argument, or set of findings. A minimal number of references appear to support the ideas of the paper.

6-10 Points – A good paper: The synthesizes research in the paper, and there is a clear train of thought. The thesis, argument, or findings of the paper are well developed. The author is able to support each key idea or point with sufficient and compelling citations.

10 Points – An excellent paper: The author critically analyzes the research marshaled for the paper. The train of thought is clear and conveyed in a scholarly and compelling manner. The points argued by the author are insightful and intellectually challenging. The author is able to support each key idea or point with an abundance of relevant citations.

Please note:

1. Late submissions will receive a 2% penalty per day (excluding weekends)
2. Plagiarism is the representation of the work of someone else as one's own work and is a serious academic offence.