

# **PL355: Conversion Narratives and Interreligious Polemics in Historical Perspective**

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 12-1 pm or by appointment

## **Course Description**

The objective of this course is to expose students to the complex historical, sociological, and literary components of the phenomenon of conversion narratives, interreligious polemics, and other aspects of Muslim-Christian intellectual exchange. The course will focus mostly on the late medieval and early modern periods in the Islamic World and Europe. The course will first pave the way to the historical understanding of Muslim-Christian interaction, followed by a comprehensive review of the mutual knowledge of Muslim and Christian scriptural traditions, followed by a comprehensive review of tropes of religious conversion narratives in the Middle Ages. The final units will focus on debates surrounding the *age of confessionalization* in Europe and the Middle East, with an eye on the Ottoman and early modern European contexts.

## **Requirements**

(including expectations regarding participation and course assignments)

### **Academic Integrity**

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Syllabi should note that, instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

### **Attendance**

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences, whether excused or unexcused.

The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR FALL 2020: Students must refrain from in-person attendance if they are feeling ill.

### Assignments

Students will be expected to present two essays during the semester on a topic relevant to the readings that correspond to each half of the semester. The first assignment will be due on October 25 and the second on December 14.

### Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Unjustified late submissions of essay (more than 24 hours late) will result in a penalty of a full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Should students have a credible reason to submit an essay late, it should not be later than four weeks after the deadline. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

## Grade Breakdown

Participation in class will constitute 30% (15% for weeks 1-7 and 15% for weeks 8-14). The remaining 70% will be divided in equal parts between the two essays required in the semester.

## Schedule

### September 1

Introduction to the Class

### September 8

Hugh Goddard, *A History of Muslim-Christian Relations*  
Introduction and Chapters 1-3

John Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination*  
Part One

### September 15

Sidney H. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*  
Chapters 1-2

Roberto Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'an and Muslim Literature*  
Part One

### September 22

Sidney Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*

Chapters 3, 4

Roberto Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'an and Muslim Literature*  
Part Two (only chapters 4-7)

**September 29**

Sidney Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*  
Chapters 6-7

Roberto Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'an and Muslim Literature*  
Part Two (only chapters 8-10)

**October 6**

Hugh Goddard, *A History of Muslim-Christian Relations*  
Chapters 4-5

John Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination*  
Parts Two and Three

**October 13**

Ryan Szpiech, *Conversion and Narrative: Reading and Religious Authority in Medieval Polemic*  
Introduction and Chapters 1-2

**October 20**

Fall Break **First Essay due on October 25**

**October 27**

Hugh Goddard, *A history of Muslim-Christian Relations*  
Chapter 6

Ryan Szpiech, *Conversion and Narrative: Reading and Religious Authority in Medieval Polemic*  
Introduction and Chapters 4-6

**November 3**

Tijana Krstic, *Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire*  
Introduction and Chapters 1-3

**November 10**

Tijana Krstic, *Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire*

Chapters 4-6

**November 17**

Alexander Bevilacqua, The Republic of Arabic Letters  
Introduction and Chapters 1-3

**November 24**

Alexander Bevilacqua, The Republic of Arabic Letters  
Introduction and Chapters 4-6

**December 1**

Hugh Goddard, A history of Muslim-Christian Relations  
Chapters 7-8

**December 8**

Conclusions, reviews, doubts

**December 14**

Deadline for the second essay

purchase all books, since we are reading all of them almost in their entirety.