This course explores the origins and growth of Islamic Civilization. Beginning with a look at the social, political, and religious conditions of pre-Islamic Arabia, as well as Arabia’s role as a center of trade linking the Byzantine and Sassanid Empires, we consider the impact of the life of Muhammad and the revelation of the Qur’an. We will then survey the development of the Caliphate, Islamic thought and culture, and religious institutions such as the legal schools and Sufi brotherhoods. Attention will be given to women’s role in Islamic history and the religious texts, as well as the emergence of sectarian conflict and the construction of sectarian religious narratives.

Along with the course texts, we will read primary sources in translation, such as religious texts, poetry, and literature. Through film and fiction, we will learn about the lives of significant historical figures such as Aisha bint Abu Bakr, Ibn Battuta, Ibn Khaldun, Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali and Omar Khayyam.