

# The "*Umma*": Quranic Meaning(s), Prophetic Practice and Modern Relevance

Boston Islamic Seminary  
Continuing Education

**Weekend Session I: December 9-10, 2017**  
**Weekend Session II: December 16-17, 2017**

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## Course Description:

This course explores a comprehensive analysis of the word "*Umma*" in the Quran and Prophetic Sunna in order to activate the concept in the modern period. Half the course is dedicated to a detailed analysis of the word *umma* in the Quran. First, Meccan verses of the Quran mentioning the word *umma* will be analyzed through the lens of four Quranic *tafāsīr* to determine the conceptual meaning of the word. Then, Medinan Quranic verses will be analyzed to understand the more particular meaning of the word. After the Quranic study, the concept will be analyzed in the prophetic Sunna through the socio-political document "the Medina Constitution" which organized the first *umma* in Islamic history uniting Muslims and Jews. The aim of the latter ideological and historical study is to have enough material to consequently explore how the Quran sees the function of the *umma* in the political sphere. This will be done comparatively through studies in philosophy (Aristotle) and political science. How to activate the meanings of *khalīfa*, practice of *shūra* and *sharī'a* to achieve an *umma wasat*. Is the Quranic *umma* composed only of Muslims? What is the meaning of justice in such an *umma*? What is the difference between *umma* and the modern nation state? Can the *umma* provide an alternative model to the nation state, both at a local and global level? What is the relationship between the *umma* and political power? The course will explore and discuss the latter questions and more ideas pertinent to the meaning and practice of citizenship, not only for Muslims but globally.

## Book:

Dissertation: *A Conceptual Analysis of "Umma" in the Quran & Sunna and the Aristotelian Polis*. Indiana University, 2012.

## **Grading**

Active Participation- KWLS chart	50 points
In-Class presentation	20 points
Final Exam	30 points
<b>Total 100 points</b>	

### Requirements:

- 1. KWLS charts:** This should be the most “fun” and “personal” part of this course as well as a great aiding tool for your study and organization of course material. The vast majority of students come to class with preconceptions about Islamic concepts based on culture or media. This class exercise will help you decipher what you previously know from what you will learn in the course. This will not only help your learning process but will tremendously open up your world view and enhance your personal growth. KWLS stands for (what you **K**now, what you **W**ant to know, what you **L**earned, what **S**urprises you). Each time we discuss a new reading, you will fill out this chart: A- Before reading the class reading, you will write down what you know about that topic and what you would like to know about it; B- After reading your assigned reading and attending the class, you will fill out what you have learned from L1: reading, L2: the class session, and what surprised you! These charts will be filled out, partly at home and partly in class and count as your class participation. They will be graded and returned to you so that you monitor your learning experience & progress as well as how your perspectives are changing. In order to fill out these charts, you are required to read the material (BEFORE class), fill out the first three portions of the chart at home (what you know, what you want to know, what you learned from the reading), then after attending the class session, in the last 10 minutes of class you will fill out the second portion (what you learned from class session and what surprises you)- alternatively you can fill out these sections during the class session (basically your notes). Then you hand in the chart to your instructor to be graded. These charts have to be handed in class, **late charts will not be accepted.**
- 2. In-class presentation:**

Students will make a 10 min in-class presentation about the assigned reading of that section in a specific day. A presentation schedule will be assigned on the first day of class. A presentation discusses the main arguments articulated by the author (at least 5 main arguments). The presentation ends with few questions directed to the class which open up the floor for discussion. You should discuss ideas that triggered your thought or changed your perspective about a specific issue. In addition to your own reflection about these arguments, students must be prepared to field questions about their presentations from the professor and their peers. The presentation should be in PowerPoint format. You can be as creative as you want; you can use pictures or specific provoking questions. Students usually present ONCE during the course duration.

**SCHEDULE**  
(Subject to Adjustment)

**Lunch/Dhuhr Prayer 12:30pm-1:30pm**

**Asr Prayer --- 3:30pm-4:00pm**

**Saturday, December 9**

10am- 12:30 pm	<p><b>Introduction p. 1-13</b></p> <p><b>Chapter 1: Umma in the Meccan verses of the Quran</b></p> <p><i>Umma</i>, appointed term (<i>'ajal</i>) and associated responsibility.....27</p> <p><i>Umma</i>, Religion and Forefathers.....34</p> <p><i>Umma</i> and <i>al-Kitāb</i>.....38</p> <p><i>Umma</i> and the <i>Imām</i>.....43</p>
1:30- 3:30 pm	<p><i>Umma</i> and the Covenant (<i>al-Mīthāq</i>).....49</p> <p><i>Umma</i>, <i>Ummī</i> Prophet and the Global <i>Umma</i>.....57</p> <p><i>Umma</i> and Sovereignty .....64</p> <p>Leadership, the Book and Justice.....64</p> <p>Land .....68</p>
4- 5:30 pm	<p><b>B- <i>Al-Umma al-Wāḥida</i> (One <i>Umma</i>) and its differentiation across human history</b></p> <p><i>Umma</i> of the Prophets.....69</p> <p>----Dealing with religious diversity.....72</p> <p>    i- Confederates of evil (<i>al-'Aḥzab</i>).....74</p> <p>    ii- <i>Umma</i> of the Believers ( <i>al-Mu`minūn</i>) and the Process of Continuous Reform.....75</p>

**Sunday, December 10**

10am- 12:30 pm	<p><b>Chapter 2: <i>Umma</i> in the Medinan verses of the Qur'ān</b></p> <p>1-The Notion of a Shared <i>Umma</i>; Rights and Obligations.....84</p> <p>2- Prophet Abraham (<i>Ibrāhīm</i>) was an <i>Umma</i>.....87</p> <p>    a-Defining the Muslim <i>Umma</i> through Prophet Abraham.....90</p> <p>    b- The Best Religion (<i>Dīn</i>) is <i>Millat Ibrāhīm: al-Hanīf</i>.....102</p> <p>    c- <i>Al-Manāsik</i> (the Rituals).....111</p> <p>3-The Middle <i>Umma</i> (<i>al-Umma al-Wasaṭ</i>) and the Witness (<i>Shahāda</i>).....113</p>
1:30- 3:30 pm	<p>4-<i>Ummat Ahl Al-Kitāb</i> (Jews and Christians).....121</p>

	5-The Best <i>Umma</i> ( <i>Khayr Umma</i> ) every raised up for mankind.....127 6- <i>Umma</i> of the Book and Governance.....134
4- 5:30 pm	<b>Chapter 3: <i>Umma</i> in the Medina Constitution.....143- 153</b>

### Saturday, December 16

10am- 12:30 pm	<b>Chapter 3 continued:</b> A- Decrees addressing the believers.....153 B- Decrees addressing the Jews.....171 C- Decrees addressing <i>Ahl al-Ṣaḥīfa</i> (the people of the constitution).....180 <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sacred Land (<i>Haram</i>).....180</li></ul>
1:30- 3:30 pm	<b>Chapter 4: The <i>Umma</i> and Political Governance – Comparative.....196</b> A- Khalīfa and Political Animal.....202 i- <i>Khilāfa</i> in Islamic Literature.....213
4- 5:30 pm	<b>B- <i>Umma</i> and the Polis.....220</b>  i-Aristotelian Polis and <i>Qur’anic Umma</i> .....220 ii-Community and State in Contemporary Political Theory...224 iii-Resolving Conflict by Invoking Competing in Virtues in Aristotle and the Qur’ān.....231

### Sunday, December 17

10am- 12:30 pm	<b>Umma and the Polis Continued:</b> iv-Polis is the Medium whereby Citizens Exercise Virtuous Activity.....239 <b>a-</b> Difference between Law and <i>Shari’a</i> .....241  <b>C-Polis and Constitution vs. Umma and al-Kitāb.....246</b> i- Introducing Constitutional Reforms.....251 ii-The Characters of Constitution and the Citizen Mirror Each Other.....255 iii- Constitutional Law transformed into Community Norm....259
1:30- 3:30 pm	<b>D-Polis and Justice vs. <i>Umma</i> and <i>Shūra</i>.....260</b> i-Justice as a Mean and the Concept of <i>Wasaṭ</i> .....260 ii-Justice as “Unity of Virtues” is Only Attained through Collective Judgment of Citizens in a Polis.....265 <b>a-</b> Understanding “Prophet Abraham was an <i>Umma</i> ” through Aristotle’s

	<p>“Unity of Virtues”.....268</p> <p><b>b-</b> <i>Umma</i> Attains Justice through <i>Shūra</i> (Collective Judgment of <i>Khulafā</i> ).....269</p> <p><b>c-</b> Justice is Manifestable in the “Common Good” Resulting from Collective Judgment .....275</p>
4- 5:30 pm	<p><b><i>E-Umma and Political Power</i></b>.....277</p> <p>    i- The Just Leadership vs. <i>Tāghūt</i>.....277</p> <p>    ii- <i>’Ulū ’l- Amr</i> (Those entrusted with authority).....281</p> <p>        • <i>’Ulū ’l-amr</i> in the Medina Constitution.....288</p> <p><b>Conclusion &amp; Reflections</b>.....292</p>