Course title: Authority in Shi‘i Islam
Instructor: Seyfeddin Kara

Course description:
In general, the concept of authority is one of the most central components of lawmaking and implementation. Authority is more crucial in the case of Shi‘i legal theory as according to Shi‘i theology, only the Imams have absolute authority over Shi‘is, and during the absence of the Twelfth Imam, there is no clear religious guideline as to what extent Shi‘i scholars may practice the authority of Imam. Therefore, in Shi‘i legal theory, the scope of the legal authority of jurists has direct consequence over their legal edicts, and the legal authority of jurists plays a central role in the process of responding to the exigencies of the time. This course aims to examine the source and scope of the religious authority of Shi‘i Imams and will explore the views of some of the most influential classical and contemporary Shi‘i scholars against the backdrop of key historical events. The course will study the following question: What is the influence of socio-political context on the scope of legal authority of jurists? Why did Shi‘i jurists take different views on the legal authority of jurists? What are the practical implications of the relation between the law and the exigencies of the society for the current Shi‘i states and communities? The readings will be provided by the instructor so no need to purchase any texts.

Course Structure:
The class will run for an intensive period of six weeks. All the work for the course will be due during the six weeks of study; no assignments will be due after the course concludes. Some of the course readings will be possible to complete before the start of the course, but other than that, all work will be assigned and completed during the six weeks of the course.

None of the assignments and study materials for the course will require participants to log into the system at a specific time of day. However, students will have specific days of the week when assignments of a particular kind are due. The schedule for the
class will provide a repeating, weekly pattern. Students who may need to interrupt the pattern for travel or other commitments will need to make specific arrangements with the instructors.

**Assignments and Assessments:**
There will be two main kinds of assignments, both of which will bring students into interactions with each other and with the instructor:

The first assignment, the “Weekly Reaction Paper” will require students to write a short essay of 700 words in reaction to the material for the week. The assignment will also require students to engage substantively two fellow students. Interaction with other students is compulsory.

The second assignment, the final paper will require students to write a 2000-word essay and submit it on the last day of the course.

**Grading:**
Weekly Reaction Paper: 50%
Final Paper: 50%

**Readings:**


Joseph Eliash, ‘The Ithnā‘asharī Shī‘a Juristic Theory of Political and Legal Authority,’ *Studia Islamica*, no. 29 (1 January 1969), 17–30,


