

AMES 1806: Modern Arab Cultures and Societies

What we commonly and monolithically refer to as “The Arab World” in fact consists of 22 individual nation-states, each with their own particular historical trajectory and a combined population of nearly 400 million people encompassing a plethora of religious faiths, political orientations, social formations, and individual identities. This course provides a starting point for understanding this frequently misunderstood part of the world, the diverse peoples that inhabit it, and the myriad cultures they practice. We will address the various problems we encounter when approaching such an unwieldy concept as “The Arab World”, key moments that have shaped modern Arab cultures and societies, and examples of how cultural production functions in the context of modern Arab history and politics.

Liberal Education Requirements:

Gaining critical literacy in diverse cultural traditions is one of the foundational principles of liberal education. Moreover, reflexivity on the part of scholars to critically interrogate their own subject-position vis-à-vis the topics, places, and people they are investigating is essential to a rigorous liberal education. This course provides a broad overview of the peoples, cultures, and societies of what is commonly termed “the Arab world.” Throughout the course we problematize concepts and categories that are too often taken for granted, such as who is an “Arab,” what constitutes “culture,” what is “traditional” and is it necessarily the opposite of “modernity”? We look at not only how Arab identity has been constructed over the course of the 20th and 21st centuries, but also how, far from being a static and stable construct, it has dynamically shifted and responded to local, regional, and global conditions.

Student Learning Outcomes:

Can identify, define, and solve problems:

A fundamental concern of this course is problematizing concepts and categories that are too often taken for granted. Students will be exposed to various problematics in approaching “the Arab World” as a subject of inquiry, such how to define what is meant by “the Arab World,” how the concept has been constructed in the western academy, and how many of the underlying assumptions of such a monolithic category preclude our ability to appreciate complexities and nuances of the region, its peoples, and its cultures. Assigned readings combined with lectures will foreground these problematics.

Assessment: Regular response papers throughout the semester, as well as a midterm and final exam will assess students not just on basic comprehension of terms, concepts, and other assigned materials, but will moreover be graded based on students’ own ability to critically examine primary materials using the analytical tools and concepts introduced in the course.

Understand diverse philosophies and cultures within and across society

Another fundamental concern of this course is highlighting the diversity, heterogeneity, and complexity of Arab cultures and societies, as well as the philosophies and ideologies that have played significant roles in their shaping, such as nationalism, religion, leftism, and feminism. Through assigned readings and lectures, students will be exposed to the multiplicity of the philosophies, cultures, and societies across the Arab region.

Assessment: Regular response papers throughout the semester, as well as a midterm and final exam will assess students' understanding of the diversity of philosophies, cultures, and societies that constitute the "Arab world."

Week 1: What is an Arab? What is Culture? What is Society? – Defining Terms

Required Reading:

Halim Barakat, "Arab Society: Basic Characteristic Features" in *The Arab World: Society, Culture, and State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) pp. 12 – 31

Week 2: Problems and Approaches to Arab Cultures and Societies – Orientalism

Required Reading:

Edward Said, "Introduction" in *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) pp. 1-30

Week 3: Understanding "Tradition" and "Modernity"

Required Reading:

Armando Salvatore, "Tradition and Modernity within Islamic Civilisation and the West" in *Islam and Modernity: Key Issues and Debates* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009) pp. 3-35

Optional Reading:

Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions" in *The Invention of Tradition* Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) pp. 1-14

Timothy Mitchell, "The Stage of Modernity" in *Questions of Modernity* Timothy Mitchell ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) pp. 1-34

Week 4: The Arabs' Renaissance: The *Nahda*, its Impetus, and its Modern Implications

Required Reading:

Yoav Di-Capua, "*Nahda*: the Arab project of enlightenment" in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Arab Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) pp. 54-74

Week 5: Modern Arab Identity

Required Reading:

Stephen Sheehi, "Introduction" in *The Foundation of Modern Arab Identity* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004) pp. 1-14

Week 6: Colonialism, Independence, and Modern Arab State Formations

Required Reading

Nazih N. Ayyoubi, "State Formation in the Modern Era: The Colonial/Indigenous Mix" in *Over-stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008) pp. 86-123

Week 7: Social and Cultural Commonalities and Cleavages: Regionalism, Pan-Arabism, and Collective Identity Beyond the State

Required Reading:

Nazih N. Ayyoubi, "The Arab State: Territorial or Pan-Arabist?" in *Over-stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008) pp. 135-158

Week 8: Midterm Exam

Week 9: The Role and Limits of Religion

Required Reading:

Halim Barakat, "Religion in Society" in *The Arab World: Society, Culture, and State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) pp. 119 – 146

Jillian Schwedler, "Religion and Politics in the Middle East" in *Understanding the Contemporary Middle East* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2013) pp. 377-402

Week 10: Marxism, Leftism, and the Arab World

Required Reading:

Jaafar Aksikas, ""Toward a New Project of Modernity: Marxism and the Arab Left" in *Arab Modernities: Islamism, Nationalism, and Liberalism in the Post-Colonial Arab World* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009) pp. 129-150

Week 11: Arab Women and Feminism in the Arab World

Required Reading:

Lisa Pollard, "The Role of Women" in *Understanding the Contemporary Middle East* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2013) pp. 345-376

Week 12: Arabic Cinema and Television

Required Reading:

Andrew Hammond, "Cinema and Television" in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Arab Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) pp. 164-181

Week 13: Arab(ic) Literature and Culture

Required Reading:

miriam cooke "Middle Eastern Literature" in *Understanding the Contemporary Middle East* (Boulder: Lynne Reinner Publishers, 2013) pp. 403-438

Week 14: Case Study: Yemeni *Zamil* poetry

Guest Lecture – Emily Sumner

Week 15: Exam Preparation and Course Review

Assessment:

Response Papers: 5 @ 10% each = 50%

Midterm Exam: 25%

Final Exam: 25%

Student Conduct Code: The University seeks an environment that promotes academic achievement and integrity, that is protective of free inquiry, and that serves the educational mission of the University. Similarly, the University seeks a community that is free from violence, threats, and intimidation; that is respectful of the rights, opportunities, and welfare of students, faculty, staff, and guests of the University; and that does not threaten the physical or mental health or safety of members of the University community. As a student at the University you are expected adhere to Board of Regents Policy: Student Conduct Code. To review the Student Conduct Code, please see:http://regents.umn.edu/sites/default/files/policies/Student_Conduct_Code.pdf. Note that the conduct code specifically addresses disruptive classroom conduct, which means "engaging in behavior that substantially or repeatedly interrupts either the instructor's ability to teach or student learning. The classroom extends to any setting where a student is engaged in work toward academic credit or satisfaction of program-based requirements or related activities.

Use of Personal Electronic Devices in the Classroom: Using personal electronic devices in the classroom setting can hinder instruction and learning, not only for the student using the device but also for other students in the class. To this end, the University establishes the right of each faculty member to determine if and how personal electronic devices are allowed to be used in the classroom. For complete information, please reference: <http://policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/STUDENTRESP.html>.

Scholastic Dishonesty: You are expected to do your own academic work and cite sources as necessary. Failing to do so is scholastic dishonesty. Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering, forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis. (Student Conduct Code: http://regents.umn.edu/sites/default/files/policies/Student_Conduct_Code.pdf) If it is determined that a student has cheated, he or she may be given an "F" or an "N" for the course, and may face additional sanctions from the University. For additional information, please see: <http://policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/INSTRUCTORRESP.html>. The Office for Student Conduct and Academic Integrity has compiled a useful list of Frequently Asked Questions pertaining to scholastic dishonesty: <http://www1.umn.edu/oscai/integrity/student/index.html>. If you have additional questions, please clarify with your instructor for the course. Your instructor can respond to your specific questions regarding what would constitute scholastic dishonesty in the context of a particular class-e.g., whether collaboration on assignments is permitted, requirements and methods for citing sources, if electronic aids are permitted or prohibited during an exam.

Makeup Work for Legitimate Absences: Students will not be penalized for absence during the semester due to unavoidable or legitimate circumstances. Such circumstances include verified illness, participation in intercollegiate athletic events, subpoenas, jury duty, military service, bereavement, and religious observances. Such circumstances do not include voting in local, state, or national elections. For complete information, please see: <http://policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/MAKEUPWORK.html>.

Appropriate Student Use of Class Notes and Course Materials: Taking notes is a means of recording information but more importantly of personally absorbing and integrating the educational experience. However, broadly disseminating class notes beyond the classroom community or accepting compensation for taking and distributing classroom notes undermines instructor interests in their intellectual work product while not substantially furthering instructor and student interests in effective learning. Such actions violate shared norms and standards of the academic community. For additional information, please see: <http://policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/STUDENTRESP.html>.

Grading and Transcripts: The University utilizes plus and minus grading on a 4.000 cumulative grade point scale in accordance with the following: A 4.000 - Represents achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements A- 3.667 B+ 3.333 B 3.000 - Represents achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements B- 2.667 C+ 2.333 C 2.000 - Represents achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect C- 1.667 D+ 1.333 D 1.000 - Represents achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements S Represents achievement that is satisfactory, which is equivalent to a C- or better. For additional information, please refer to:<http://policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/GRADINGTRANSCRIPTS.html>.

Sexual Harassment "Sexual harassment" means unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and/or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work or academic performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working or academic environment in any University activity or program. Such behavior is not acceptable in the University setting. For additional information, please consult Board of Regents Policy:<http://regents.umn.edu/sites/default/files/policies/SexHarassment.pdf>

Equity, Diversity, Equal Opportunity, and Affirmative Action: The University provides equal access to and opportunity in its programs and facilities, without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, gender, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. For more information, please consult Board of Regents Policy: http://regents.umn.edu/sites/default/files/policies/Equity_Diversity_EO_AA.pdf

Disability Accommodations: The University of Minnesota is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. The Disability Resource Center is the campus office that collaborates with students who have disabilities to provide and/or arrange reasonable accommodations. If you have, or think you may have, a disability (e.g., mental health, attentional, learning, chronic health, sensory, or physical), please contact DS at 612-626-1333 to arrange a confidential discussion regarding equitable access and reasonable accommodations. If you are registered with DS and have a current letter requesting reasonable accommodations, please contact your instructor as early in the semester as possible to discuss how the accommodations will be applied in the course. For more information, please see the DS website, <https://diversity.umn.edu/disability/>.

Mental Health and Stress Management: As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance and may reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. University of Minnesota services are available to assist you. You can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via the Student Mental Health Website: <http://www.mentalhealth.umn.edu>.

Academic Freedom and Responsibility: Academic freedom is a cornerstone of the University. Within the scope and content of the course as defined by the instructor, it includes the freedom to discuss relevant matters in the classroom. Along with this freedom comes responsibility. Students are encouraged to develop the capacity for critical judgment and to engage in a sustained and independent search for truth. Students are free to take reasoned exception to the views offered in any course of study and to reserve judgment about matters of opinion, but they are responsible for learning the content of any course of study for which they are enrolled.* Reports of concerns about academic freedom are taken seriously, and there are individuals and offices available for help. Contact the instructor, the Department Chair, your adviser, the associate dean of the college, or the Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs in the Office of the Provost. * Language adapted from the American Association of University Professors "Joint Statement on Rights and Freedoms of Students".