Course description

Few regions of the world seem to have been featured so prominently in the news in recent years as the Middle East, invariably in a negative context. With two-thirds of the world’s proven oil reserves and a strategic location at the junction of three continents, it has seen almost constant military intervention and political interference from outside, most recently in the form of US involvement in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. This has fueled powerful local responses, both culturally and politically. Today, bloody
internal wars rage in several countries, and their future looks especially bleak. The region is also the birthplace and focal point of Islam, the world’s second largest universal faith, ensuring that its global importance will endure. But Judaism and Christianity also have strong historical and spiritual connections with this region, connecting it to the larger world in numerous ways. Because the contemporary political map was largely an arbitrary product of European colonial rule, it remains deeply flawed, contributing to territorial and boundary conflicts that have contributed to extreme militarization. And yet arguably most Americans are still painfully uninformed about this vitally important region, viewing it through a lens that is distorted by ignorance, fear, demagoguery, and cultural prejudice. This course aims to sharpen that lens.

“Dogs bark at a person whom they do not know”

Heraclitus

“Political extremism involves two prime ingredients: an excessively simple diagnosis of the world’s ills and a conviction that there are identifiable villains in back of it all”

John W. Gardner

Online specifics

Unlike a traditional face-to-face course, this course will be taught exclusively online, with no scheduled classroom or face-to-face meetings. Thus, you have the flexibility of accessing course materials 24 hours a day. Although you can listen to recorded lectures at your convenience, you are expected to finish listening to all lectures for a particular week during that week. That is important for two reasons. First, the course will be far more meaningful, both individually and collectively, if we are all in the same metaphorical space at roughly the same time, even if we cannot be sitting side by side in the same classroom. It is challenging to replicate the collaborative, intimate, and
interactive experience of a physical classroom in an online environment. Making sure we are engaged with the material simultaneously can alleviate the sense of intellectual and personal isolation that online learning can promote. Second, I have learned that online classes can be absolutely disastrous if you are prone to procrastination. And guess what: that applies to virtually everyone, including myself. If you are not diligent about keeping up with coursework you will quickly be overwhelmed. I want to strike a balance between giving you the flexibility and convenience that are among the most compelling advantages of online learning and ensuring that you adhere to a schedule and remain consistently engaged throughout the semester. Please note: I will be monitoring online engagement with course analytics.

All lectures will be recorded and made available incrementally through the course home page. Whereas a traditional classroom lecture might last 50 minutes (MWF) or 1 hour and 20 minutes (TR), the material here is divided into many much smaller and more logical units because research shows that this enhances absorption. Some units may be as brief as 10 minutes, others are longer, depending on the topic. You can simply go through the units (in sequence) at your own pace, although I recommend taking frequent breaks. You can, of course, go back over a unit, or even a specific section of one, if you don’t understand something or need to review material.

Altogether, you will have to listen to approximately 35 hours of lecture material over the course of the semester—roughly equivalent to lecture time if the class met in a traditional in-person setting. A good rule of thumb would be to listen to 2-3 hours of lectures every week to keep on track.

**Office hours**

Because this is an online course, and I live in Santa Cruz, CA, I only hold virtual office hours. During those hours I will be available using Zoom web conferencing software (UNH has a site license). My office hours are:
If these times are not convenient, please feel free to make an appointment. I can also be accessed by email, preferably though my private email address (drysdale@icloud.com), although I do have a UNH email account (drysdale@unh.edu). If you have a question or would like to discuss something, don’t hesitate to contact me. If you email me, please remember to include GEOG 540 in the header so that your message isn’t treated as junk mail. I will generally answer emails between 9:00 am and 5:00 pm PDT, Monday-Friday, and will try to get back to you promptly, except at the weekend.

**Recommended but not required texts**


**Please introduce yourself!**

Please complete this [Biographical survey](#) by January 31st so that I know who you are. Please also feel free to schedule a brief video chat (FaceTime, Skype, or Zoom) with me if you'd like to introduce yourself that way too.

**Technical support**

Please understand that I am unable to provide technical support. If you have
problems, call 603.862.4242 Monday through Friday between 8:00 am and 4:30 pm or by getting help through this link:

http://www.unh.edu/it/service/get-help

UNH Policies and Procedures for Students

Please click here: Important Information about UNH Policies and Procedures for Students

Center for Academic Resources (CFAR)

UNH’s Center for Academic Resources (Smith Hall, Second Floor, 3 Garrison Avenue, (603) 862-3698, cfar.sss@unh.edu) provides numerous resources to help you meet your academic goals, including drop-in tutoring and help with time management, note taking, studying, and test taking. I particularly recommend you consult the Study Tips and Tools that CFAR provides online. You will find these resources extremely helpful.

Office of Disability Services

The University is committed to providing students with documented disabilities equal access to all university programs and facilities. If you think you have a disability requiring accommodations, you must register with Disability Services for Students (DSS). If you have questions about the process, please contact DSS at (603) 862-2607 or disability.office@unh.edu. If you are registered with DSS, and eligible for accommodations that you would like to utilize in this course, please forward that information to me in a timely manner so that we can meet privately in my office to review those accommodations.

Emotional or Mental Health Distress
Your academic success in this course is very important to me. If, during the semester, you find emotional or mental health issues are affecting that success, please contact the University’s Counseling Center (3rd fl, Smith Hall; 603 862-2090/TTY: 7-1-1) which provides counseling appointments and other mental health services.

**Academic misconduct**

Please note that the University has no tolerance for students who break the University Academic Honesty Policy. Please see the 2015-16 Students Rights, Rules, and Responsibilities Handbook for a full description:

http://unh.edu/vpsas/sites/unh.edu.vpsas/files/media/srrr1516.pdf

All students are expected to abide by these rules.

*Plagiarism*, misrepresentation, and cheating are academic crimes. Never:

- Turn in an assignment that you did not write or complete yourself
- Turn in an assignment for this class that you previously turned in for another class
- Cheat on an exam.

If you do so, any of these actions may result in a failing grade for the class, and further ramifications at the University level. Please ask me if you have any questions about what constitutes academic honesty and cheating.

**Grading**

**A. Three exams (combined 50% of your grade):**

There will be three, non-cumulative, timed online tests. The tests will consist of two distinct parts. Part A requires you to sign an honor statement that you will complete the test on your own and without any assistance of any kind.
Part B will have the actual questions. The test will be made available ONLY between 12:01 pm and 11:59 pm on the day of the test. You may do the test any time during that window, but once you start you must complete it within the allowed time. Please note: recorded lectures will ONLY be available until noon on the day of the test, so you must finish listening to or reviewing them before then. The test dates are TENTATIVELY scheduled as follows:

- Monday, February 26th
- Friday, April 6th
- Thursday, May 10th

Make-up tests can only be given for extraordinary reasons (for example, documented illness) and only if that has been agreed before the test.

**B. Six movie reaction papers (combined 30 percent of your grade).**

Movies are an important form of cultural representation. When we represent ourselves, we do so with varying degrees of accuracy, depicting our cultural, social, and economic heterogeneity, our multidimensional personalities, our complicated behavior, our varied motives, and our everyday concerns—in short, our humanity. When we represent the Middle Eastern “other”, however, we often do so through lazy and exotic stereotypes, which create, reflect, and powerfully reinforce our views, stripping away all those things that make people interesting human beings and reducing them to “billionaires, bombers, and belly-dancers”. But how do Middle Easterners represent themselves? Over the course of the semester, we will listen to unfiltered Middle East voices. You will watch a series of movies (made by directors from the Middle East) and documentaries (in which you will hear Middle Easterners speak for themselves). I have tried to group the 12 films into themes. Every two weeks, approximately, you will watch two movies, on your own, and submit a short paper, no more than two pages, summarizing the plot and discussing your reaction. You only need one paper for each movie assignment, not one paper for each movie. Papers must be
submitted before noon on the due date. You will also be required to participate in an moderated online discussion about each group of movies so that you can hear what your classmates think. The discussion will be available only between noon and midnight on the day the submitted paper is due. The films, along with descriptions, how/where you can view them, and paper deadlines, are in a separate document. Those movies that are in the library will be held on 4-hour reserve, so it is imperative that you plan your time efficiently and not wait until the last minute, when demand for access may be high. I think you are really going to enjoy these movies, and learn a great deal about Middle Eastern cultures and societies in the process!

C. Participation and engagement (20 percent of your grade)

Canvas and Tegrity each provide me with very comprehensive data on your participation and engagement. This information includes time spent listening to specific lectures by date and time period, page views, communication frequency, etc. This portion of the grade will mostly reflect your completion of all lecture recordings in a timely manner. Please note: speeding up the lecture obviously reduces the amount of time spent listening to it. Since time spent on a lecture is a major metric of participation and engagement, speeding things up works against you.

Atlas and map assignment

Materials needed:

- One atlas assignment, available separately on Canvas.
- Outline maps of the Middle East and North Africa, available separately on Canvas
- A decent atlas, such as Goode’s World Atlas, or online resources

Purpose:

You cannot expect to take a course about the Geography of the Middle East
and not know where places are :)

Maps and atlases are useful only if you have the skills necessary to use and understand them, and building your map literacy and ability to analyze spatial information is a key objective of all of this exercise.

The map exercise is not simply about rote learning of place locations (although knowing where places are is a foundation of geographic literacy). Locating a place is the first step toward understanding that place and a prerequisite to analyzing its relationships with other places. These exercises require you to process and analyze spatial data and encourage you to think about spatial relationships and the importance of location.

The assignment consists of a list of names of cities, countries, rivers etc that you have to locate on one of the outline maps and then learn. You do not have to submit completed maps but will be examined on this material in the tests to ensure that are geographically literate. There will be a map question on each of the three exams.

**Themes**

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