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. 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
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Office hours
Unless I have a prior meeting or engagement, I will be in the Office of the Dean at all times during the week. You can drop by at any time, except Monday morning when we have our staff meeting. However, I suggest you email me or call me ahead of time to check if a meeting would be convenient because I have a lot of other commitments.

Feel free to call me or email me at any time! You can also text me at 603.502.6522.

UNH’s Center for Academic Resources in Wolff House also 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.

Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. Please contact the Office for Disability Services for Students at 862-2607 in room 118 of the Memorial Union Building to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

Required materials

Grading
Your grade will be computed as follows:

50 percent: Tests
25 percent: Research papers
25 percent: Movie reaction papers

Tests
There will be three non-cumulative tests, tentatively scheduled as follows:
Research Papers

Goal
You must submit two short research papers. These provide an opportunity to delve into a topic that interests you—something that might not be covered in lecture or in your normal reading. A good paper will show evidence of substantial research spread over a period of time. You should plan to read about your topic in depth and you should expect to consult a wide variety of sources. Your paper should show some mastery with your chosen topic—familiarity with the literature, a command of basic facts, and awareness of contrasting interpretations.

Equally important, each of your papers must be accompanied by an appended research log. As you are doing your research, you must keep a detailed record of your activities, using the spreadsheet posted to Blackboard. Keep track of when, where, and how you search; describe what you find; jot down ideas or things to explore next time you do research; make notes; print articles/citations or email them to yourself. Doing these things will expedite your research process, help you formulate research plans, and let you easily retrace steps if necessary. I encourage you to follow these best research practices in all of your courses, not just this one!

Your log should note the amount of time spent, resources you have consulted or read (books, databases [specify which], search engines [specify which, along with key words used], etc.), time devoted to writing drafts. Please note that your log should include activities that proved to be unhelpful—for example, searching databases that yielded no relevant results., articles that in the end were not useful. The log will give me a good sense of the time and effort you have expended on your paper and provide me with an idea of the foundation on which your paper is based.

Evaluation
Your paper AND log will be graded according to a rubric, which is posted on Blackboard. You should consult this at least three times: before you begin your research, immediately before writing your paper, and before submitting your final draft. I strongly suggest you plan to have a rough draft of your paper ready a week before the deadline in order to have ample time for polishing and rewriting.

Please familiarize yourself with the UNH policy on plagiarism. This is defined on page 22 of University of New Hampshire Student Rights, Rules, and Responsibilities:

09.3 Plagiarism
The unattributed use of the ideas, evidence, or words of another person, or the conveying of the false impression that the arguments and writing in a paper are the student's own. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to the following:
1. The acquisition by purchase or otherwise of a part or the whole of a piece of work which is represented as the student's own;

2. The representation of the ideas, data, or writing of another person as the student's own work, even though some wording, methods of citation, or arrangement of evidence, ideas, or arguments have been altered;

3. Concealment of the true sources of information, ideas, or argument in any piece of work

The 2014-2015 Handbook of Student Rights, Rules, and Responsibilities can be downloaded at:
http://www.unh.edu/student/rights/srrr1011.pdf

Even if you think you understand what constitutes plagiarism, I recommend you consult this web page for excellent examples of what is and isn’t acceptable:
http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml

Please note that you must submit your paper both in hard copy and electronically through Blackboard SafeAssign, which will check for plagiarism. You have been warned: don’t plagiarize, both because it’s wrong and because you will be caught.

Requirements
You must sign up for your two paper topics by Thursday, September 18th.

Please make sure your papers conform with all of these requirements:

- The body of your paper should be no longer than 1,250 words (approximately 5 pages). Please indicate the word count after your conclusion. If you don’t know how to do that, find out—it varies by software. The 5 pages is exclusive of the title page, bibliography, appendices, maps, and figures.
- Double-spaced, with 1.25” left margin and all other margins 1”
- 12 pt font
- Pages must be numbered
- Your citations and bibliography MUST conform with the MLA style. Before you submit your bibliography, you MUST consult this website:
  http://www.library.unh.edu/reference/citation.shtml
  One fail-safe way of ensuring that your bibliography is properly formatted is to enter your sources online at:
  http://www.easybib.com/
  This will generate MLA citations.
- No late papers will be accepted. No exceptions.

The papers are due at the beginning of class on:

- Tuesday, October 14th
- Tuesday, December 9th
Movie reaction papers

Movies are an important form of cultural representation. When we represent ourselves, we do so with varying degree 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. But how do Middle Easterners represent themselves? Over the course of the semester, you will be watching 14 movies made by directors from the Middle East. I have tried to group them 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. We will leave time in class to discuss the movies on the day you have to submit your paper. All of the movies will be held on 4-hour reserve in the library, and 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!

The films, along with descriptions, call numbers, and paper deadlines, are in a separate document posted to Blackboard.

Themes

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