

“Culture & Cultures of the Middle East”

Course Syllabus (revision 18-Sep-07)
The Ohio State University, AUTUMN 2007

Course Number: Near Eastern Languages & Cultures (NELC) 241 / Anthropology 241
[Master Schedule # 12591-3] [# 01393-6]

Meeting Time: Tuesday & Thursday 1:30pm – 3:18pm
Meeting Location: Central Classrooms (CC) Room 209

Instructor: Morgan Y. Liu, Ph.D.
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Office Hours: Thursdays 11:00am – 1:00pm, and by appointment.
Office Location: 331 Hagerty Hall
Mailbox: 300 Hagerty Hall, NELC Department office.

Course Description:

We will take an on-the-ground view of the Middle East today, looking at how ordinary people live, think, and act in the context of dynamic traditions with increasing global connections. Our focus is on everyday life, cultural commonalities and diversities throughout Middle Eastern societies, with an focus on their majority Muslim populations.

The course will also bring in relevant historical, political, economic, and religious contexts to help us understand the lived experience of the people we encounter. We will read ethnographic books and articles covering different parts of the Middle East (with some Central Asia), and watch films, which will be analyzed with the text materials and lectures.

If you fulfill the course requirements, by the end of the quarter you should:

- Acquire a grasp for *what societies in the Middle East are like*, how the people think, what they do, how daily life operates, what the governments are like to live under, etc.
- Learn some conceptual tools to *think analytically about culture*, both Middle Eastern and your own in comparison.
- Get a sense of *how the Middle East fits into the world at large today* & how economies, politics, religion, and cultures are globally connected. That is, understanding the world after 9/11.

Prerequisites & Audience:

None, only college-level ability to read critically, and express yourself in speech and writing.

This class is for anyone interested in getting behind news headlines, and taking a ground-level view of the cultures, histories, politics, and religions of this part of the globe. Especially appropriate for students studying social sciences or humanities, but useful and appropriate for students of all majors.

No background is presumed in the history or languages of the Middle East, or Islam. Those with some background in those would still benefit from the course’s analytic approach to culture. All readings in English.

Requirements and Grading:

Participation:	15%
Quizzes:	25%
Midterm Exam:	25%
Final Exam:	35%

❖ **Participation** is the key to doing well in the course. It means:

- *Do the assigned readings.* I cannot overstress the importance of this.
 - Pace yourself between our class meetings. Don't do last minute reading.
 - Refer to my handout: "How to Read an Academic Book or Article". (on course website)
 - Use my **Reading Questions (RQ)** to help guide you what to read for and how to think about it. I'll post them for each reading assignment on the course website.
- *Actively participate in class discussion.*
 - Be prepared to talk about the Reading Questions in class. You should jot down notes for the RQ as you read, and bring them to class.
 - Our goal is to interpret the material critically together and respond to others' arguments. Much of our learning in this course will come from class interactions. **You'll be graded for your conscientious engagement with the material and other students**, not how much you already know, or how smart you appear in discussion.
 - I realize some students naturally don't talk much in class. But try to speak up a few times during the quarter, ask questions, or talk to me outside of class – show me you are engaged with the material and with other students on the issues: that's participation.
- *Films shown in class are required content*, and will appear in quizzes and exams.

❖ **Quizzes:**

- *One Quiz every week* (almost), on Thursdays.
- *Covers the readings of that week* (the ones to be read for Tues & that day Thurs)
- *Quiz is in class*, very short, usually at start of class.
- Will check *if you've grasped the key points or ideas* of articles or book sections. May ask you to give an example or two from the reading. But will NOT ask for nitpicking detail, no trivial facts or figures.

❖ **Midterm & Final Exams**

- Midterm will be in class (see schedule). Final Exam is scheduled for **Wednesday, December 5, 2007, 1:30pm – 3:18pm**. *If you have a conflict with this, let me know now.*
- Format for both will be short essays (several paragraphs per question), and will ask you to reflect on the course material and discuss it, take a stance on an issue, and/or provide examples.
- If you *keep up with readings, do the Reading Questions, and participate in class*, you'll do fine.

Policies

Absences: *you are allowed 2 absences to class without penalty.* This is meant to cover illness, family situations, job interviews, etc.

- Beyond that, *absences will negatively affect your overall grade, up to 5% per unexcused.* This is a lot! *You can fail just by missing a few too many classes!*
- For absences after the 2nd one, email me (ahead of time if possible) with your reasons. Email me even if you tell me verbally in class, because I need a record. I will use my discretion to decide how much grade penalty (up to the 5% per incident) applies, but probably at least some penalty will apply.
- If an unusual, lasting situation arises, you are responsible to let me know as soon as possible (or have someone else contact me). Disappearing (even with good reason) without telling me does not look good for you in terms of getting a reduced penalty.
- Also, let me know now about expected absences from *religious holidays ahead of time.* These are excused without counting to the no-penalty limit of 2.
- I will take attendance (but that's also so we'll get to know each others' names). Make sure I know you're here if you're late. Perfect attendance may get a grade boost!

Missed Quizzes: if you are absent for a quiz, tell me in advance. If you have good reason, I will let you make up that quiz in my office. You are responsible for asking for a makeup – it won't happen automatically. Limit of 1 or 2 makeups. I will drop everyone's lowest quiz grade anyway, but you don't want more than 1 zero on your quiz record.

Lateness: repeated lateness (every 3 or 4 instances) will be counted as absence. *Leaving class early* (without telling me ahead verbally) is treated as lateness. *Doing other activities during class* is treated the same (see below on class conduct).

Incompletes: I don't like to give incompletes. But if feel you need one, you must request this before the final exam, and give good reasons. I have discretion about whether to grant this, and it would mean some late penalty on the exam and/or makeup work even if I grant the incomplete.

Class Cancellation: In the unlikely event of class cancellation due to emergency, I will contact you via email and request that a note be placed on the classroom door. Afterwards, I'll email you about what I expect you to do for the following class. It is a good idea always to check your email the morning before each class.

Plagiarism: I take plagiarism or cheating on tests very seriously.

- All suspected cases will be reported to the Committee on Academic Misconduct, in accordance with university rules.
- *Substantiated cases would mean a failing grade in this course.*
- I may use new anti-plagiarism software to check for undocumented source material.
- Plagiarism is the representation of another's works or ideas as one's own. It includes the unacknowledged word for word use and/or paraphrasing of another person's work and/or the inappropriate unacknowledged use of another person's ideas.
- **Collaboration and sharing ideas** from others, however, is a **good thing**. We learn by building on each other's ideas. Just make sure you **acknowledge** your sources with footnotes in your writings, or orally in class. (Also *do something* with the ideas of others:

evaluate them, relate them to other ideas, argue for or against them, give your own examples illustrating them, etc. Don't just cite them.)

Students with disabilities, please make your needs known to me as soon as possible. The Office of Disability Services offers services for students with documented disabilities. Contact the ODS in 150 Pomerene Hall at 2-3307.

In-class conduct: I expect we will treat each other with respect in the classroom, both in behaviors and manner of discussions.

- Please do not read (newspapers, non-course books, email, websites, etc.) during class.
- Typing on devices is permitted only for notetaking.
- Keep any talk to each other to a quiet minimum.
- I reserve the right to ask students whom I judge is disrupting the classroom environment to leave, resulting in an instant absence deduction of 5% of total grade.

Suggestions

- **Check email & course website** on Carmen throughout the week for any course news or updates on assignments.
- It's best to contact me by email, (liu.737@osu.edu). I try to reply to email within 24 hours. For longer questions, see me before/after class or at my office hours. To get class assignments if you missed class, check your email or course website, or ask a friend in class before you ask me.
- Email me questions about what we did in class or read. "No question is stupid" – I mean it. I can answer them at the beginning of next class, because probably other students have the same question.
- Get the phone/email of 2 others in the class, for notes or updates in case you miss class.
- It's great to talk about the course material outside of class and share insights. **Do your Reading Questions with someone else!**
- Make sure I know you're in class if you come late and miss the roll call. You may check with me every so often that my record of your grades & attendance is accurate. I don't give your grade "so far in the quarter", but can tell you what grades you have for quizzes, etc.
- Clear, concise, **effective writing** in the quizzes and exams is key to doing well in this course. I highly encourage you to use the free services of the Writing Center, which works with you one-on-one, confidentially, to improve your writing. Check them out at: <http://cstw.osu.edu>, 614-688-4291.
- **Do come see me in my office hours** during the term. I'll be glad to chat with you about questions, or any topics of your interest. *You don't have to have a "problem" to see me!* You can just drop by during office hours, but it's best to email me to let me know you are coming, so I can make sure we have time to chat.

Disclaimer

I have intentionally chosen readings & films that offer a range of different interpretations and viewpoints, some of which argue against each other. *The points of view expressed in the course material do not necessarily reflect my views or those of the University.*

This course is *not* trying to advance any particular political or religious point of view, nor to evaluate questions of official policy (like the current U.S. war in Iraq). Rather, we are trying to understand the Middle East and its people, who have their own points of view, which we will listen to, but not necessarily agree with.

Our common task is to evaluate everything thoughtfully, because an opinion you disagree with is instructive to all of us. You are NOT required to agree with what you read or hear (including from me), but ARE required to give every idea careful consideration and respect for those expressing them.

You are welcome to argue for your own point of view in a constructive manner. You will be graded not for which side you come down on in a debate, but how well you argue for it (using well-documented facts, materials from our course, methodical argument, etc.). This applies for what you say in class and what you write in your exams.

Readings

All readings for this class are contained in 2 required books and articles available on the course website as PDFs.

The books can be bought at SBX Bookstore, 1806 N. High Street (across from Sullivant Library & Ohio Union), phone 614-291-9528, www.sbx-osu.com

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <i>Everyday Life in the Muslim Middle East</i>, edited by Donna Lee Bowen & Evelyn Early.2. <i>Writing Women's Worlds</i> by Lila Abu-Lughod. |
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If SBX runs out, *let me know immediately*, and search for these books at other campus bookstores, like UBX, Barnes & Noble at South Campus Gateway, online, etc.

The books are also on reserve at the **Sullivant Library**. Our course is **listed under "NELC 241"** there.

The **Class Schedule for reading assignments** is in a separate document on the course website. It shows what you need to read for which class, and the theme of the day. Please see that now.