

ANTHROPOLOGY 2219G-650

Cultures of the Middle East

COURSE OUTLINE

Winter 2020



Sculpture of ninth-century Persian scholar Al-Khwarizmi in Khiva, Uzbekistan. Latin discovery of Al-Khwarizmi's work introduced the numerals 0-9, one of many ways in which Islamic cultures have contributed to Western Civilization.

[Source](#)

Instructor: Dr. Randa Farah (she/her)
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Office Hours: (Zoom) Wednesdays 11:00 am – 1:00 pm EST
Credit value: 0.5 credit

Mode of delivery

For 2020/2021 this course will be conducted online. It is *asynchronous*, meaning that students will be provided with a variety of lesson materials and activities that can be done throughout the week, although there may be tasks that must be completed by specific times.

Calendar Course Description

An examination of the broad historical shifts and the consequences of imperial domination in variously shaping peoples' lives and societies in the "Middle East". Topics covered include: the rise of Islam including the Andalusian period, colonialism, Orientalism, media misrepresentations in western societies, class and gender, the Arab uprisings and popular culture.

Antirequisites: None.

Prerequisites: Any Arts and Humanities or Social Science 0.5 or 1.0 Essay course.

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. The decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Course Syllabus

Did you know that the word "algorithm" comes from the name of a Persian-Muslim polymath by the name of *al-Khawarizmi*? This brilliant scholar lived much of his life in Baghdad, wrote in Arabic, and the word "algebra" appeared in his 9th century manuscript, which is from Arabic meaning *al-jabr* and *jabara* (reintegration, or reunite). This is but an example of numerous English words that come from or through the Arabic language attesting to their contribution and relationships to the rest of the world, including Europe. Historically, the Middle East, also known as the "Cradle of Civilization" and Europe traded and had social, economic, and cultural entanglements, despite contemporary negative media stereotypes and misrepresentations that depict the relationship between "East" and "West" as oppositional, hostile and mutually exclusive entities. In this course, we challenge some of the racist representations of Arabs and Muslims in western societies and examine how these are related to the constant attempts by imperial powers to dominate the region, which vie for control of this important strategic region rich with resources, especially oil and gas. We learn in this course that the "Middle East" - a colonial nomenclature - is a vast and heterogeneous region with changing histories, as well as political, social, and cultural formations. Thus, we are only able to focus on a few specific themes and topics that enrich students' knowledge and are of interest and relevance to contemporary debates.

But we must begin with a general overview of its geography and demography asking where and what is the Middle East. Secondly, we examine the critical historical transformations that shaped societies and cultures over time, mainly: the rise of the Arab-Islamic empire in the 7th century, including the Andalusian period (Spain today), and European colonialism, especially its legacy in

places like Algeria and Palestine. Third, we look at the central arguments that Edward Said made in his groundbreaking book *Orientalism*. Orientalism is a perspective or paradigm through which much of the knowledge in the 'West' about the 'East' is produced. Hollywood produces films which are underpinned by an orientalist worldview in that they reinforce images of Arabs and Muslims as violent (terrorists) and backward; in western societies generally speaking, such characterizations are wrongly associated with the religion of Islam. Fourth, we will read and discuss issues pertaining to class and gender and ask for example why is it that in western societies there is an obsession with women's bodies and veiling? Fifth and final section we will select readings about the mass popular uprisings beginning in 2010/11 in Tunisia, popular culture, youth, or art production in the Middle East.

Through lectures divided into short segments, readings, forum or group discussions, films and documentaries, and online activities, the course will help students engage critically in academic and current public debates about the Middle East.

A full course schedule including a week-by-week breakdown of topics and assigned readings will be available on the course's OWL site before the first day of class.

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Examine, situate, and connect social and cultural phenomena pertaining to Arab and Islamic societies within larger historical and political (power) contexts.
- List some contributions and discoveries in science, philosophy, medicine, mathematics, and other kinds of knowledge made by Arabs and Muslims.
- Identify popular clichés, propaganda, and racist stereotypes and discourses about Arabs and Muslims, and distinguish these from scholarly knowledge and analytical approaches to Middle Eastern societies.
- Analyze racism against Arabs and Muslims situating it within a broader racist ideology that enables discrimination and racism against other groups.
- Define and grasp some basic knowledge of 'Orientalism' and the relationship between knowledge production and imperial projects of domination.
- Analyze contemporary and publicly debated issues, such as the question of women's veiling, or the Arab uprisings within regional and global social and historical processes.
- Identify some of the contemporary popular cultural trends.

Course Materials

Registered students will be able to access course readings through the course site in OWL before the first day of class.

Evaluation

- Quizzes - 45% (3x15% each)
 - Quiz 1 Feb 1 (covers readings and doc/video clip from Jan 4-Jan 25)
 - Quiz 2 March 15 (covers readings and doc/video clip from Feb 1-March 8)
 - Quiz 3 During final exam period April 8-30 (covers readings and doc/video March 15-April 5)
- Final essay - Due April 5 30%
- Assignments/activities - 25% Short interactive activities and commentaries. Specific dates will be provided before the beginning of class and posted in OWL.

Course Specific Conditions Required to Pass this Course

In order to pass this essay course, students must submit and receive a passing grade on their final essay.

Course Specific Statements and Policies

Make sure you watch all documentaries or films as these are included in quizzes and the final exam.

Academic Integrity - Statement on Plagiarism:

Students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing. It is also a scholastic offence to submit the same work for credit in more than one course. Plagiarism is a major scholastic offence.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and [Turnitin.com](https://www.turnitin.com).

Statement on Seeking Special Accommodations:

No accommodations will be granted retroactively more than 10 days after an assignment's due date or a missed quiz or test. Please see your academic counsellor immediately if you will be seeking accommodations based on medical or compassionate grounds.

Accommodation Policies

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#).

Academic Consideration for Student Absence

Students will have up to two (2) opportunities during the regular academic year to use an on-line portal to self-report an absence during the term, provided the following conditions are met: the absence is no more than 48 hours in duration, and the assessment for which consideration is being sought is worth 30% or less of the student's final grade. Students are expected to contact their instructors within 24 hours of the end of the period of the self-reported absence, unless noted on the syllabus. Students are not able to use the self-reporting option in the following circumstances:

- for exams scheduled by the Office of the Registrar (e.g., December and April exams)
- absence of a duration greater than 48 hours,
- assessments worth more than 30% of the student's final grade,
- if a student has already used the self-reporting portal twice during the academic year

If the conditions for a Self-Reported Absence are *not* met, students will need to provide a Student Medical Certificate if the absence is medical, or provide appropriate documentation if there are compassionate grounds for the absence in question. Students are encouraged to

contact their Faculty academic counselling office to obtain more information about the relevant documentation.

Students should also note that individual instructors are not permitted to receive documentation directly from a student, whether in support of an application for consideration on medical grounds, or for other reasons. **All documentation required for absences that are not covered by the Self-Reported Absence Policy must be submitted to the Academic Counselling office of a student's Home Faculty.**

For Western University policy on Consideration for Student Absence, see: [Policy on Academic Consideration for Student Absences - Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs](#)

[Student Medical Certificate \(SMC\)](#)

Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the [Western Multicultural Calendar](#).

Institutional Statements and Policies

All students should familiarize themselves with Western's current academic policies regarding accessibility, plagiarism and scholastic offences, and medical accommodation. These policies are outlined in Western's academic policies by clicking on this link: [Western's academic policies](#).

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