



# **GEOGRAPHY OF THE MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA**

## **Geog 209 - Fall 2013**

**M, W 2:00-3:20 Plus Discussion Section and evening films  
Jacqua Center 101**

**Prof. Shaul Cohen**  
**Condon 107G Tel. 346-4500**  
Office Hours Thursday 2:00-3:00 OBA  
[scohen@uoregon.edu](mailto:scohen@uoregon.edu)

### **GTFs**

**Christine Carolan** [ccarolan@uoregon.edu](mailto:ccarolan@uoregon.edu)  
**Ashley Jennings** [ashjen1@gmail.com](mailto:ashjen1@gmail.com)  
**Zack Thill** [zackeryt@uoregon.edu](mailto:zackeryt@uoregon.edu)

## **Purpose:**

This course explores the geography of the Middle East with an emphasis on politics, culture, and regional cohesion. Through a variety of sources including modern literature, film, images of landscape, traditional academic texts and the daily news, we will pursue an understanding of those elements that characterize the region, as well as those features that are distinct and mark different peoples and places. We will examine local, sub-national, national, and international issues relating to identity and status, history, environment, economy and other topics, in an attempt to create a portrait of daily life in the many venues of the region, whether they be urban or rural, coastal or desert, North African or Asian, Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Arab, Israeli, Turkish, Iranian, and so on. Our goal will be to use the information available to us to discern patterns in the region that allow us to grasp its richness and complexity, to gain a sense of its past, contextualize current changes, and to anticipate future directions.

## **Resources:**

For this course we will work from a number of selected writings, and we will also read three Middle Eastern novels. The first, by the Sudanese author Tayib Salih, is ***Season of Migration to the North***, a complex narrative about the imprint of colonialism on the Arab psyche and the struggles between tradition and modernity in a small village on the Nile. The second, by Alaa al-Aswany, is ***The Yacoubian Building***, a recent best-seller in the Arab world, and a more modern tale of politics, character, misdeed and human folly. Our third novel is ***Cities of Salt*** by Abdelrahman Munif, which deals with the discovery of oil and the attendant disruption in an "unidentified" country (Saudi Arabia). You must also read the **New York Times** on a daily basis. In addition to these sources we will review a number of short films in class and feature films out of class that are a critical component of the course. You must also participate in our class Facebook page, UO Geog209 2013 which is at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/167249076801989/>

## **Requirements:**

Class and film attendance is essential for the course as we will often depart from the text material in lectures. You will be writing a short synopsis of the novels averaging 15% of the grade each, and a summary essay based on the novels and films, relating them to themes developed throughout the course worth 20% of the final grade. One in-class midterm will be worth 20% of the grade. 15% of your grade will be based on participation in all the elements of your discussion section and film sessions. There will also be a map quiz of the region to ensure your familiarity with some basic place names and physical features. **This will be given during the last class of the term, Wednesday, December 4th, and must be passed at a 90% or better rate in order to receive credit for the course** (re-testing during exam week is possible if necessary). Discussion section attendance is mandatory, sections meet weeks 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10. **You must also attend four out of the five supplemental movie showings which will take place during one evening of weeks 3, 4, 7, 8, and 9.**

A note about the New York Times - This is the "newspaper of record" for the country, meaning that it has the most authoritative voice in print media. There are three nationally prominent newspapers in the United States. The Wall Street Journal focuses on economic and finances matters, and has a conservative tenor. The Washington Post is a company paper, the company being the United States government, which doesn't own it but is its most important reader. It has a somewhat liberal bent, but is full of the gossip of government, so it talks about whoever is in power, or in scandal, or whatever. The New York Times talks about the world, the nation, and New York, in that order. The front page of the paper is a blend of things, but unlike other papers, its first substantive section is "International". That is uncommon, and it is to be celebrated. Monday through Friday you should read the New York Times, going cover-to-cover in section A, the news section. Look for anything related to our region, and, for that matter, to other regions, though the Middle East is your primary focus. Keep a log of the coverage of our region, as well as its mention in a U.S. context. Your log should note the title of the

article, what page it is on, what it is about, who wrote it, and so on. Also note whether it is a news story, a feature article, an editorial, or an op-ed piece. Pay attention to the trends - in what way(s) is the newspaper covering events, and in what way(s) is it conveying and shaping opinions? We will talk more about this assignment in class, and we will pay attention to the newspaper and discuss it on a regular basis.

### **Grade Summary**

Novel synopses 3 @ 10%, 15%, and 20% progressively

One in class test @ 20%

Final Essay 20%

Discussion Participation Grades 15% (this includes evening films and your NY Times log)

**I am supportive of students with special learning needs. My support depends on a partnership between us, and if you have issues that we should discuss please contact me immediately. There are a range of accommodations possible, and you may find useful information through the [Office of Disability Services](#).**

### **Course Policy**

Please respect others in class. This includes your own conduct and commentary, spoken, written, and unspoken. Please keep side conversations to a minimum, if you don't I will certainly notice, as will those seated near you. If you have concerns or complaints, please communicate clearly, and in a timely fashion. If you have needs, desires, concerns, apprehension, etc., don't keep them a secret! Effective measures on my part require some initiative on your part. In this vein, be aware that I am firm on the dates given to you concerning tests, papers, and other assignments. There is a 20% penalty for material turned in one day late, and 10% additional penalty for each day thereafter. Without advance warning and sufficient cause I will not grant incompletes. Leaving town early, an abundance of exams, general stress and other such reasons will not qualify for an incomplete. We are glad to discuss grades with you, but you must notify the GTF or me of your desire to do so within

one week of receiving the grade (final course grades excepted.) Be careful to follow appropriate rules concerning citation, do not work together on essays or tests. A tip for the wise: the quality of your writing counts. If you have concerns about your final essay, or think you could benefit from assistance, take advantage of the writing lab. Finally, I am available for conversation, feel free to stop by the office.

Laptops may be used only for note taking. Any other use of a laptop in class can result in an F grade for the course and the forfeit of course credit. Cell phones should be turned off. If your cell phone rings or if you're using it for texting during class you will go down one full grade for the course. Each year I have heard complaints from students about the distraction that comes from texting, web surfing, messaging, and game playing that goes on around them. Let's eliminate that this term!

**Week 1\*** Introduction to the Region (\* *indicates Discussion Sections this week*)

**Week 2\*** History/Religion

Film Wednesday in class ***The City Victorious***

**Week 3** Religions/Histories continues

Discussion on Wednesday of ***Season of Migration to the North***

**1** Monday October 14 6:00 Kilometre Zero (Iraq/Kurdistan)

**Week 4\*** People and Politics ***Season Essay due Monday in class!***

**2** Monday October 21 6:00 The Closed Doors (Egypt)

**Week 5**

**Midterm Exam Wednesday this week!**

**Week 6\*** Iraq

Second Film ***Crude Diplomacy***: Oil and the new geopolitics.

**Week 7** Israel/Palestine

Discussion Wednesday of ***The Yacoubian Building***,  
**essay due in class**

**3** Monday, November 11 6:00 Late Summer Blues (Israel)

**Week 8\*** Palestine/Israel continues

**4** Monday, November 18 6:00 Paradise Now (Palestine)

**Week 9** Internal Tensions - Rural Urban, Religion, Ethnicity,  
Resources

Third Class Film ***A Voice Like Egypt*** Monday

**5** Monday November 25 6:00 Children of Heaven (Iran)

**Week 10\*** Where to?

Discussion of ***Cities of Salt*** Monday - **Essay Due in class**  
**Monday**

Regional Overview and Review **Map Quiz Wednesday**

**No Final Exam, but Final Essay due Monday of exam week at  
2:00PM in my office!**

**Campus Resources**

**Various issues and challenges can come up in the context of  
University life. Some resources that are available to you and  
that you are entitled to as a member of our community  
include:**

**-[University Teaching and Learning Center](#). In the basement  
of PLC, there are many services including drop-in writing and  
math labs, tutoring, test prep, and other things. They also  
have mini-courses on time management, computer software,  
and other things.**

**-[University Health Center](#). If you don't feel well, you may  
not do well (and vice versa). There are many services for  
your physical and psychological needs. Don't be shy; issues**

that you have are almost certainly more common than you might think.

**-[Office of Student Life](#).** Support of all kinds can be found in the Office of Student Life, and they can help you navigate the resources available to you on campus (and elsewhere). Their job is help you, they have resources and knowledge about what's possible. Check there for information about such things as the Bias Response Team, Non-traditional Student support, Conflict Resolution Services, and many others, the list is long.

**-[ASUO](#).** It's yours, you pay for it, you vote for it. It has as its mission and goals: to represent and advocate for all students, through the protection and promotion of the physical, cultural and educational development of the University. The ASUO Executive works to protect, allocate, and manage the student incidental fees. Through this fee we provide services to students and student organizations, create a marketplace of ideas on campus, and act as liaison between students, administration, and the Eugene community.

**There are many ways in which we form a community and provide support for one another. If you aren't finding what you need, ask around. If someone is in need, try to help!**

## **Basic Guidelines for Essay Writing**

By following these guidelines you will produce an essay that directs the reader's attention to the style and content of your work, and avoids distraction that comes from improper form. These suggestions are a starting point, feel free to exceed them....

1) Proof-read your essay! Better yet, proof-read it and then have a friend proof-read it. Run a spell-check program if you have one, but don't assume that it will catch all the errors. Number each page after the title page. Feel free to print on both sides of the page if you can.

2) Save a copy of the essay before you turn it in. Never hand in the only copy of your work.

3) Your essay should have a thesis statement or statement of your goals in the first paragraph.

4) Contextualize your topic. How does it fit in the "big picture"? What is its significance?

5) Use proper citation if citation is called for. Maintain consistency throughout the paper. Remember, if you are quoting, paraphrasing or taking primary ideas from another source, you must indicate this through citation, though for quotes from our novels author and page number is sufficient.

6) Write clearly and concisely. Illustrate your arguments with detailed examples. Remember, you are **not** writing a report. You are making an argument, or testing a hypothesis or theory, or challenging a viewpoint or conclusion. Your topic needs to be appropriate for this purpose. Whatever you write about, your writing must reflect your own thought on the topic, without being chatty. Back up your position with material that gives it weight and authority!

7) Try to provide a powerful conclusion. In it you briefly recap those elements that have contributed to your argument, and restate the significance of the issues and your analysis.