

University of Nevada, Reno
Department of Geography

Fall 2009
Dr. Victoria Randlett

Geography 487/687

The Middle East

Th 11 - 1:45 pm

The region known in the West as the Middle East is one of daunting historical and geographical complexity. It has nonetheless become imperative for us to attempt a better understanding of this complexity. In this course, we will try to render the Middle East – in all its conflicts and contradictions— more comprehensible. We will aim for a more nuanced appreciation of this fascinating region, going on the assumption that the more we know, the less we fear, and the better decisions we make as citizens of the world.

The Middle East's complexity lies not only in its historical contradictions, but also in the extreme diversity and disparity of its physical and social geographies. While much of the region is arid and even barren, included in its boundaries are vast marshes, snow-capped mountains, and some of the most famously fertile river valleys on the planet. While some governments, like Turkey's and, to a lesser extent Egypt's, embrace programs of modernization and secularization (with however mixed results), others remain mired in conditions of almost incredible (by western standards) conditions of class and gender inequality.

The Middle East is a cradle or hearth of several of the world's great civilizations and three of its major religions; yet for centuries it has been wracked with conflict among those religions and among competing great powers. The glorious achievements of its bygone empires have now been nearly eclipsed by political chaos, corruption, and violence; persistent social and economic underdevelopment; and an apparent tendency to greet the modern, post-colonial world with more fear, anger and suspicion than verve or confident engagement.

Contact Dr R

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Required Texts:

Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 4th ed., Westview 2009*
Cole, *Engaging the Muslim World*, Palgrave Macmillan 2009**

Additional readings as listed

* *In the bookstore*

** *Available online*

Course requirements and Grading

Although I will be lecturing for part of each session, the course will be run primarily as a seminar, with everyone bearing part of the responsibility for discussion. In each class, one or two of you will lead a discussion on that week's readings (once alone, twice in pairs). Your contributions to all class discussions are a significant part of your grade.

There will be two exams, a midterm and a final. Both will follow the same format and be graded the same. The Mid-term (Oct 8) will cover the period up to the First World War. The Final (Dec 10) will cover the modern (post-WW I) period - it is not comprehensive. Active participation in the discussion constitutes 20% of each exam grade; 80% will be a short (5-7

page) paper. The paper will develop questions - and answer them - on what you consider the most important ideas in the previous weeks' readings. You do not have to address each reading in these papers; instead, your questions and answers should reflect your thoughts on what you have read and talked about up to that point (including any confusion or difficulties). Your 'answers' should include:

- a brief discussion of what you think are the most important points to raise
- clear references to the readings - what prompts your question, where the answers might lie, etc
- issues for discussion raised by your own questions, especially how your questions might relate to readings from previous topics

You must pose at least one of your questions to the class for the discussion.

The remainder of your course grade will be based on your attendance and your participation in all discussions led by others.

1. Solo assignment (1): Prepare questions & <i>short presentation</i> on readings; lead discussion		60 pts
2. Pairs assignments (2): Prepare questions on readings; lead discussion	2 @	30 pts ea
3. Discussion Exams (2): Short paper plus discussion		
	Papers	2 @ 100 pts ea
	Discussion Participation	2 @ 25 pts ea
4. Attendance & general participation		30 pts
	Total	400 pts

Syllabus *(subject to change)*

Week

1	Aug 27	Course Introduction (Where & what is the Middle East? Pre-Islamic Empires)
2	Sep 3	Emergence of Islam; early Islamic empires
3	10	The Middle East in the Age of Discovery
4	17	The Ottoman Empire in Decline: Waves of Reform and Reaction
5	24	European Dominance and its Discontents-Egypt, Iran, Islamic Identity
6	Oct 1	Turn of the Century Changes - Oil, the Young Turks, Zionism
7	8	MIDTERM DISCUSSION EXAM (11-1); The Great War (1:10-1:45)
8	15	The Emerging Modern Middle East: Independence, Identity, Oil
9	22	Nasser, Pan-Arabism, and the Arab-Israeli conflict
10	29	Cold War Geopolitics - Eisenhower through Carter
11	Nov 5	Israel and Palestine
12	12	Iran - revolution and war
13	19	Iraq
14	26	No Class - Happy Thanksgiving
15	Dec 3	The Middle East Now
16	10	FINAL DISCUSSION EXAM: The US and the Middle East Today