INTL 290.2
Issues of Peace and Conflict in the Middle East

Spring 2015
Tu-Thr 9:25 am - 10:40 am
MAYBANK HALL 105

Instructor:  Ali Demirdas
Office:  Education Building Room 206-A
Office Hours:  Tuesday 11.00am-12.00am or by appointment.
Contact:  demirdasa@cofc.edu (E-Mail is the best way to contact with me. Specify the subject line appropriately in your e-mail.)

"The art and science of asking questions is the source of all knowledge."
Thomas Berger

Course Description, Learning Objectives and Outcomes.

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the “cradle of civilization,” is today home to around 330 million people, the world’s fastest growing religion, and great resource wealth. The Middle East is also home to some of the world’s most pressing challenges.
At the state level, Iraq, which until the U.S. occupation was held together by authoritarian rule, appears increasingly unstable and divided along ethnic and religious lines. 250 miles to the west, the Israel-Palestine conflict has left over 4,500 people dead in just the past four years. And Iran, a growing power and a country which the United States sees as the next threat in the region, has done little to hide its intention of developing nuclear weapons.

The course has several objectives. First, it aims to give students a more nuanced and complete understanding of the politics, societies and economies of the MENA. Second, it fosters students’ analytical skills, helping them to apply theoretical frameworks to problems in the Middle East. Finally, it seeks to supply students with the theoretical and empirical evidence necessary to evaluate and make critical, analytical arguments about the Middle East in comparative perspective. It is important to remind you that Martha Nussbaum in Cultivating Humanity (1997) defines critical thinking as "the capacity to reason logically, to test what one reads or says for consistency of reasoning, correctness of fact, and accuracy of judgment."

Critical comparison and judgment depends on more than factual knowledge, however. The other main objective is to encourage your imagination, "to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story." (Martha Nussbaum)

Textbook

Grading (PLEASE READ CAREFULLY)

➔ Participation (10%)
Regular attendance and participation in class is very important and required. You will be graded according to your participation in class discussions. Therefore, it is strongly advised that you come to class well prepared and contribute to the discussion. A sign-in sheet will be given to you at the beginning of every class to keep record of your attendance. Undocumented absences will result in deduction from your final grade. (1day=2 points) If need be, please bring a copy of doctor’s report to me for the record.

➔ Soliya Project (20%)
Soliya will collect and provide students with a broad selection of sound bites from first hand interviews and/or raw footage from partner news outlets, pertaining to a recent news event within the broader theme of the relationship between Western and predominantly Muslim societies.

Starting in the second week of March, Soliya will make this footage available to all students, and also contact you with detailed information on how you can access the footage. You will use this footage to assemble your own “news packages” using an online video-editing tool. Soliya has developed several video tutorials to walk you through how to use the software.

*Attendance is mandatory to the Soliya Connect program. If you should miss the Connect program discussions for any reason, please notify me or you can be removed from the Connect program resulting in *Failure for the class.*

**Research Project (10%)**
You will pick a country in the Middle East and write an analytical research paper about important aspects of foreign relations vis-à-vis its neighboring countries as well as the United States and other related major powers. Details will be given in class.

**Presentations (10%)**
In a 15 minute period, you will present your research paper.

**Midterm Exam (20%)**
There will be a cumulative mid-term exam.

**Final Exam (30%)**
It will cover all the course materials (lectures, discussions and readings). A review sheet will be made available before the final exam.

**Note on the Syllabus Readings**
The weekly readings listed below are subject to change based on what the instructor deems relevant new or alternative material. Since the course deals with current affairs issues in regard to which daily, if not hourly, developments are constantly unfolding, occasional topical readings from newspapers or online resources will be included in class sessions.

**Final grades will be calculated using the following table:**

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<th>Grade</th>
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<td>A</td>
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<td>A-</td>
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<td>B+</td>
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Assignment grades (insofar as they use a percentage scale) will also follow this grading scheme. Please, be a responsible student and take charge of your grade. If you want to know your current standing in class, check on the OAKS course site or inquire with me about this.

(Week 1)
Introduction and Course Content.

(Week 2)
Introduction to the Middle East: Its Geography.
Readings will be on OAKS.
Map Quiz.
Introduction to the Middle East: Its Early History
Textbook-related chapter.

(Week 3)
What is Islam?
Textbook- Pp. 13-47
Additional texts

(Week 4)
People of the Middle East: Arabs, Turks, Iranians, Kurds and Jews.
Textbook related pages.

(Week 5)
Colonization and its legacy in the MENA.

(Week 6)
Sunni-Shia conflict

(Week 7)
State & Society in MENA: Identity
Islam and the West.

The relationship between “Western societies” and “predominantly Muslim societies”

Religion and Governance

Population Growth, Urbanization, and Socio-economic Challenges in Middle East.

Arab Spring and its implications

Arab-Israeli Conflict

US foreign policy vis-a-vis Middle East

Military conflicts in MENA (US invasion of Iraq, US invasion of Iraq, Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the US invasion of Afghanistan.)

Research Papers Due!

PRESENTATIONS