CMEN 02

Theoretical Perspectives and the Study of the Middle East

“… [Y]ou must learn to use your life experience in your intellectual work: continually to examine and interpret it.”
C. Wright Mills

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Phone #: +46.46.222.9447
Course Schedule: 13:00-16:00

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said (1978) argues that the ‘Middle East’ is a fabricated concept, created in the Western mind and within Western academia. This “imagined” place, however, has experienced a series of both socio-political and economic crises over centuries. Similarly, its people hold on to shared affinities and experiences that contribute to their experiences of daily social life. The aim of the course is to probe the extent to which Western concepts, social science theories and the narrative of Western modernity can be applicable to the study of the Middle East. Towards this goal, we will examine a wide range of theoretical traditions and their application to the study of the region. Examining a variety of theoretical perspectives within the social sciences, the course focuses on the scholarly analyses of the Middle East that are inspired by these perspectives.

*Please keep in mind that this is not a theory course in the sense of teaching you about the different theoretical perspectives that the social sciences have to offer. Instead, the course looks at how different theoretical perspectives have been applied to the study of the Middle East, and in the process aided in the construction of the region as a field of inquiry.*

Class meetings are organized around lectures and discussions, with student participation encouraged at every class meeting.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the course students will be able to:

- Define key analytical tools within the different theoretical perspectives;
- Apply key concepts and perspectives to social and cultural phenomena in the contemporary Middle East;
- Compare and contrast the different theoretical perspectives through their application to the contemporary Middle East;
- Examine the applicability of different theoretical perspectives for explaining various social relationships in the contemporary Middle East;
✓ Critically assess theoretical paradigms and their utility for understanding social change in the Middle East;
✓ Assess the potential for social theory in guiding the forms of social change in the contemporary Middle East; and
✓ Evaluate the applicability of theories and concepts developed within Western academic institutions to the study of the contemporary Middle East.

COURSE READINGS

Course readings are available electronically through LUVIT. Please familiarize yourself with the site and make sure that you can access the readings before the due date.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The course requires readings, class participation and several written assignments. In addition to these requirements, students are also expected to submit a final term paper. The grade distribution is as follows:

Three Reflection Essays 60 percent
Final Paper 40 percent

Reflections

Students are expected to submit a total of three reflection essays, and each will be worth 20 points. The essay should be around 1,000 — 1,500 words and focus on the set of reading to be discussed in class for that section of the course. The deadlines for reflection essays are noted on the daily schedule. These deadlines allow the student to receive feedback from the instructor in order to help them improve their writing and analytical skills. The final deadline for the reflection papers is XX November at noon. Inability to submit reflection papers by that date will result in the student receiving no grade for the semester and having to wait till next semester for re-examination.

In your reflection, you need to
1. Address each text and evaluate the extent to which it accomplishes its own objectives;
2. Highlight the ways texts relate to one another; and
3. Situate the readings within the larger context of what you are learning in the class.

The essay should include answers to such questions as:

a) What is the author's thesis?
b) What is the major point s/he is trying to make?
c) What are the major assumptions the author makes (and expects readers to accept) in arguing that thesis?
d) What are some useful concepts s/he presents?
e) How does the reading relate to previous readings?
f) What are the major strengths and weaknesses of the work?
g) What questions have come to mind in light of past readings? and
h) What are the implications for research practice if the author's thesis and underlying assumptions are valid or true?
I will evaluate your reflection statements based on the following rubric:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Exceeds Expectations (20 points)</th>
<th>Meets Expectations (15 points)</th>
<th>Fails to meet expectations (10 points)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identification</strong></td>
<td>You identified the main arguments and the important concepts used to make it.</td>
<td>You identified a concept and provided a comprehensive definition.</td>
<td>You did not identify or define a concept from the reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Significance</strong></td>
<td>You placed the argument within the general field of Middle East Studies, and your own views and empirical applications. You used comparisons with other authors to make your point. You creatively highlighted the ways the argument can be used in future research.</td>
<td>You expressed the practical and theoretical significance of the argument.</td>
<td>You failed to mention the significance of the argument.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Technical exposition</strong></td>
<td>Your statement is well organized and interesting.</td>
<td>Adequate organization and flow of statement.</td>
<td>Incomprehensible organization, stylistic problems and lacks coherence.</td>
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</table>

**Final Paper**

A 4000-word paper is required for this course, which is due on XX November at noon. Late papers will receive no grade for this semester and the student has to wait for re-examination next semester. You should choose one of two options for the topic of your paper:

**Option One:** A research proposal that outlines the study of a topic utilizing one or more of the theoretical perspectives discussed in class. The proposal should consist of a clearly-stated research question, literature review, research justification, methodology and strategies for data collection.

**Option Two:** A theory paper following the guidelines for writing reflection essays above and focusing on one or two theoretical paradigm, concept or problem. The focus of this paper is the theory itself. For example, you can write a paper comparing Sharabi and Said in their understandings of the social problems facing the region.

Students should think of the term paper as an enjoyable exercise that allows them to explore a topic of their interest as well as demonstrate their analytical skills. Term papers will be evaluated based on your ability to demonstrate the following steps:
Think about the topic you choose.
  o The topic needs to move beyond descriptive analysis and focus on a question, puzzle or problematic.

Pick literature that is most relevant to that topic.
  o Use at least three readings from the class.

Find references in the library that supplement class readings.
  o Be extensive but also pay attention to finding relevant ones that relate directly to your topic.

Formulate an argument that the paper addresses based on your sources.
  o Your paper should be based on a clear thesis statement that reflects the organization of your thoughts in a logical way that develops throughout the paper.
  o If you’re working on a research proposal, make sure that your research question is succinct and that everything you include in your proposal is relevant to it.

Summarize the arguments in the various readings and use these summaries to formulate the outline for the paper.
  o Your thesis statement and outline will probably change over time, but they keep you focused when it is time to write.

Follow the outline to elaborate the arguments of the different authors in a clear manner. Build your literature review in an interesting way.
  o And make sure that you are connecting it to your thesis statement.

Make sure that the paper provides a single focused line of argument, and includes an introduction and a conclusion.
  o Your thesis should indicate a clear purpose for the paper and should be established in the introduction, developed logically and fully throughout the paper, and summarized and clearly articulated in the conclusion.

Reference all sources used in the paper both within the body of the paper and in a Works Cited page.
  o Use any of the conventional styles such as APA, MLA, or the Chicago Manual. Be consistent!

Submit your paper on time. Early drafts will be provided with comments in order to help you improve your paper. Last day to submit a draft is Class 10.

Students should keep in mind some basics of writing good papers:

  • Support your claims. Make an argument instead of unsupported assertions.
  • Focus on analytical insights instead of opinions.
  • Connect ideas, sentences and paragraphs.
  • Make sure that your writing flows and that sentences are well constructed to show how ideas relate. Write simply.
- DO NOT use Google or Wikipedia (Google Scholar is OK).
- Use course material, academic journals (obtained through databases) and scholarly books.

I will evaluate the term paper based on the following rubric:

<table>
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<th>Meets expectations (30 points)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>General Structure</strong></td>
<td>• Thesis statement well stated.</td>
<td>• Clear thesis.</td>
<td>• No clear thesis statement.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Literature well chosen for topic.</td>
<td>• Literature well chosen for topic.</td>
<td>• Discussed concepts are not applicable to topic.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• All relevant concepts are discussed.</td>
<td>• Some concepts are discussed.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Content</strong></td>
<td>• Uses topic to apply knowledge of the Middle East.</td>
<td>• Clear connections between paper topic and the field.</td>
<td>• Fails to apply knowledge of the field to paper topic.</td>
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<td>• Identifies similarities and differences between different approaches.</td>
<td>• Identifies some of the main agreements and disagreements in the literature.</td>
<td>• Fails to identify similarities and differences.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Draws thoughtful conclusions from the literature review.</td>
<td>• Attempts to make conclusions but with some difficulty explaining the significance of these conclusions.</td>
<td>• Fails to draw conclusions or integrate personal opinion to argument.</td>
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<td>• Integrates personal opinion with material thoughtfully.</td>
<td>• Integration of personal opinion is incomplete.</td>
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<td>• Summarizes implications of the topic to Middle Eastern Studies.</td>
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<td><strong>Organization and Development</strong></td>
<td>• Thesis is established in the introduction, is fully developed throughout the paper, and a reasonable conclusion is articulated.</td>
<td>• Thesis reflects the purpose of the paper.</td>
<td>• No main idea.</td>
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<td>• Strong connections of ideas and transitions through the paper that facilitate understanding.</td>
<td>• Introduction and conclusion are present but may be incompletely developed.</td>
<td>• Ineffective introduction and/or conclusion.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Makes coherent connections between sentences. Uses transitions between paragraphs and within them.</td>
<td>• Connections between ideas are confusing or not present.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conventions and editing</strong></td>
<td>• Accurate and consistent citations.</td>
<td>• Accurate and consistent citations.</td>
<td>• Improper citations, phrasing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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<tr>
<th>Writing flows and contains well-constructed sentences that show relations between ideas.</th>
<th>Thoughtful writing, but not always effective.</th>
<th>Interferes with reader understanding, no editing apparent.</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Precise sentence-level editing.</td>
<td>Occasional use of awkward sentences.</td>
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**GENERAL GUIDELINES**

**Dishonesty**
I am quite confident that no one in this class would violate academic conventions regarding dishonesty. However, it is my duty to inform you that any student who breaks the rules by cheating, plagiarizing, or falsifying records will receive a failing grade for the course and have the case reported to the University administration.

**GRADES**

Grades will be granted based on the following scale:

A = 90+
A: Outstanding work that goes above and beyond the requirements of the assignment and demonstrates exceptional critical skills and creativity. Outstanding effort, significant achievement, and mastery of the material of the course are clearly evident.

B = 80-89
B: Above Average work that demonstrates a thorough understanding of the course material, fulfills all aspects of the assignment and goes a bit beyond minimum competence to extra effort, extra achievement or extra improvement.

C = 70-79
C: Average work that fulfills ALL aspects of the assignment with satisfactory understanding of course material. If you do the assignment exactly as it is assigned, you will receive an average grade (75%).

D = 60-69
D: Below Average work that shows a marginal understanding of the material but also failure to follow instructions, implement specific recommendations or demonstrate personal effort.

E = 59>
E: Failure to follow instructions for an assignment and lack of demonstration of basic course material.

**COURSE OUTLINE**
Class 1  Why theory? Why the Middle East?


Recommended:
• Timothy Mitchell (2002). The Middle East in the Past and Future of Social Science. In *Politics of Knowledge: Area Studies and the Disciplines*

Class 2  Theories and Disciplines


Recommended:

Class 3  Modernity and Postmodernity


Recommended:
• Steven Seidman (2012). *Contested Knowledge*. Chapters 11 and 13

Reflection 1 due

Class 4  Forms of Capital
• Dalia Abdelhady and Akram Al Ariss, Syrians Refugees in the Swedish Labour Market: Understanding the Role of Different Forms of Capital.

Recommended:

Class 5  Critical Cultural Analysis

Recommended:

Class 6  Critical Cultural Analysis

Recommended:

Reflection 2 due

Class 7  Post-Structuralism

Recommended:

Class 8  
Post-Structuralism cont.


Recommended:

Class 9  
Feminism


Recommended:
• Steven Seidman (2012). *Contested Knowledge*. Chapters 14-15

Class 10  
Decolonizing Theory


• Dipesh Chakrabarty, A Small History of Subaltern Studies, Chapter 24 in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies* edited by Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray.

*Reflection 3 due*