

Contact Details for Your Instructor

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Course Details

Class Meeting Times : R | 3:00 pm – 4:15 pm
Location : Exploratory Hall 2312
Credit hours : 3.00
Office Hours : W: 10:30 am -11:30 am |
R 1:30 pm – 2:30 pm
or by Appointment

Course Description

The course covers, environmental, economic, and social factors of differentiation of regional structure and distribution of resources in North African and Middle Eastern countries.

Specialized Designation: Non-Western Culture

Course Overview

This course offers a comprehensive exploration of North Africa and the Middle East, two interconnected regions that have long captured global attention due to their historical significance, cultural diversity, and contemporary challenges.

Within a global context, we will examine these regions as integral parts of the interconnected world, analyzing their relationships with other regions, global trends, and international events. We will begin by defining North Africa and the Middle East as distinct geographical entities, examining their unique physical landscapes, cultural heritage, and historical connections. From the Sahara Desert to the Fertile Crescent, we will explore the region's diverse environments and how they have influenced human settlement, development, and cultural practices.

Next, we will delve into the interconnected processes of economic development, political governance, social change, and environmental challenges that have shaped the region's contemporary landscape. We will analyze the region's historical and modern experiences with colonialism, globalization, and conflict, as well as its efforts to achieve sustainable development, social justice, and political stability.

Throughout the course, we will consider the global implications of these regional developments, examining how events in North Africa and the Middle East impact global politics, economics, and culture. We will also discuss the region's role in addressing global challenges such as climate change, migration, and security.

While this course aims to provide a broad overview of North African and Middle Eastern geography, it's important to note that due to the region's vastness and complexity, we cannot exhaustively cover every country or issue. To address this, we will adopt a thematic approach, integrating various places into discussions of specific spatial processes.

Through a combination of readings, films, short response papers, and a final research project, you will gain a deeper understanding of the geography, history, and contemporary challenges of North Africa and the Middle East, as well as their place within the interconnected global landscape.

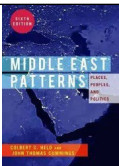
Course Objectives

Upon completing this course, students will be able to:

1. Identify and describe the region's physical landscapes, climate patterns, natural resources, including its diverse languages, religions, and traditions.
2. Identify and explain how patterns of global connections across nation, and/or cultures have shaped societies to create interdependence and inequality.

3. Examine the ways in which human activities have shaped and been influenced by the region's environment.
4. Critically analyze the region's economic development, political systems, and the impact of colonialism, imperialism, and globalization.
5. Apply an understanding of one's own positionality within a globally interdependent and unequal world to analyze solutions to global.

Required Textbook and Instructional Materials

	<p>Middle East Patterns: Places, People, and Politics by Colbert C. Held (Author) Publisher: Routledge; 6th edition ISBN-13: 978- 0367319977</p>
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Learning Management Systems [LMS]

- Canvas is our course learning management system (LMS). It provides access to course materials, assignments, and class discussions. You will log in to Canvas using your George Mason username and password through this link: <https://canvas.gmu.edu/>
- To get started with Canvas, check Canvas LMS Transition website: <https://lms.gmu.edu/getting-started-students/>
- If you have computer problems, please contact ITS Support Center <http://itservices.gmu.edu>; Email: support@gmu.edu; | Phone: 703-993-8870.
- This course is a hybrid, combining in-person and online instruction. To supplement your in- class instruction, weekly online lecture notes and recorded videos will be posted on Canvas. Please expect to spend approximately 8-10 hours per week on this course, including both in- class and online activities.

Communication Policy

- Students are required to regularly check their George Mason email and Canvas accounts for course announcements and updates.
- All course communication should be conducted through your George Mason email account. Emails sent from other platforms will not be acknowledged.
- Feel free to email the instructor with any questions you may have. While immediate responses may not always be possible, you can expect a reply within 24-48 hours. If you don't receive a response, please follow up to confirm that your email was received.
- Avoid waiting until the last minute to ask questions.

Course Assignments and Grading Breakdown

Students are expected to submit high-quality assignments on time through Canvas, according to the due dates specified in the syllabus. **Please submit all assignments through Canvas, unless otherwise instructed.** To successfully complete this course, you must fulfill the following assignment requirements:

1. Reading Reflections and Current Events Analysis [10%]

These papers will require you to reflect on topics discussed in class, as well as assigned films and documentaries. In your reaction papers, you will submit a short paper (no more than two pages) summarizing the real and ethical issues presented from the unfiltered voices of the people featured in the media.

Some of the issues related to the documentaries or films will be posted on [Platform] for an online discussion, in which you are expected to participate. This will allow you to hear the perspectives of your classmates before analyzing and submitting your reaction paper. Through these short reaction papers, you will explore the social and historical contexts of the region, challenging exotic stereotypes and gaining a deeper understanding of the truth.

Another component of this assignment will involve analyzing current news events related to the topics we are discussing in class. Students are expected to stay informed about current events in the region by regularly following reputable news sources such as The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Christian Science Monitor, The Wall Street Journal, The Guardian, al Arabiya, and al Jazeera.

When evaluating news sources, students are encouraged to ask critical questions such as:

- What news stories tend to dominate the headlines?
- Who is the intended audience of the news source?
- Are the sources biased in their reporting? Provide evidence.
- Are there any other sources that could be consulted to gain a balanced perspective on issues in the region?
- What implications can you foresee for this type of writing or reporting?

2. Map Exercises/Quizzes (10%)

These quizzes will help you develop your map literacy and ability to analyze spatial information. By understanding geographical locations, places, regions, and the movement of objects from one place to another, you will be better equipped to explore the geographical themes covered in this course. You will also be able to map social, economic factors, and climate vulnerability.

Through these activities, you will gain a deeper understanding of the spatial nature of geography and how each place or region can be examined, analyzed, and compared to others.

3. Discussion Forum Posts (Both initial and Responses) (5%)

- There will be 5 online discussions, starting in week 3 and continuing through week 13. I will initiate each discussion by posting a topic related to the week's readings or assigned media.
- To participate effectively, you should demonstrate your engagement with the course material by contributing your own thoughts and insights to the discussion forum.
- To satisfy the discussion requirements, you must first post your own initial response to the topic, and then respond to the viewpoints of other classmates.
- Your contributions will be evaluated based on their content, critical thinking, and application of course concepts, as outlined in the grading rubric. All discussion postings (initial and responses) will be graded on a 5-point scale, with 5 being excellent (total of 10 points). To earn full points, you must follow the instructions, adhere to the grading rubric, and submit your posts on time.
- These online discussions provide an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of different perspectives on the subject matter being discussed each week.

4. Discussion Leaders (5%)

From time to time, the instructor will assign students to lead discussions based on the assigned weekly readings. As a discussion leader, you will be responsible for summarizing the key points from these readings and formulating questions in advance to guide the class discussion. These questions should be posted on Canvas as part of your talking points. Your grade will include your level of engagement with the class during the discussion.

Exams [60]

- There will be three non-cumulative Exams
 - Each exam will contain objective (multiple-choice) and short-answer questions, Fill-in the blank questions
 - Exam [15%]; | Exam [20%]; | Final Exam 25%

5. ArcGIS Story Maps Presentation (10%) -

The "ArcGIS Story Map Presentation" is a collaborative assignment (groups of 2-3). Students will choose a country in the MENA region and conduct in-depth research on a critical, contemporary issue or set of interconnected issues affecting that country (e.g., resource scarcity, post-uprising dynamics, geopolitics, identity shifts, urbanization, or climate vulnerability). The goal is to apply course concepts analytically, moving beyond simple factual reporting, and to present this research using an ArcGIS Story Map. The project is worth 10% of the grade, and there is no accompanying written paper. Further details on presentation length and evaluation will be provided in class and on Canvas.

Grades will be assigned based on the distribution scheme below

Range (%)	Letter Grade	Grade description	Range (%)	Letter Grade	Grade description
>=93	A	Excellent	77 - 79.9	C+	Above satisfactory
90 – 92.9	A-	Very Good	70 - 76.9	C	Unsatisfactory
87 - 89.9	B+	Good with merit	60 - 69.9	D	Unsatisfactory
83 - 86.9	B	Good	<60	F	Failure
80 - 82.9	B-	Above satisfactory			

Late/Make-up Assignments Policy**Policy Due Dates & Flex Days**

All assignment due dates are listed in the syllabus and on Canvas. You get two flex days to use throughout the semester. You can use these to submit an assignment up to 48 hours late without a penalty, for any reason. These flex days do not apply to online class discussions.

Late Penalties:

- After using your flex days, late assignments will be penalized:
 - Assignments submitted up to one week late will receive a 10% grade reduction.
 - Assignments submitted one to two weeks late will receive a 25% grade reduction.
 - Assignments submitted more than two weeks late will receive 0 points.
- A time extension for exceptional circumstances must be approved in advance.

Student Expectations:

- Stay actively engaged with course materials, discussions, and deadlines.
- Respect the contributions and perspectives of your classmates, and express our opinions courteously.
- Value and learn from diverse perspectives, fostering a respectful and inclusive learning environment.
- Communicate clearly and professionally in both written and oral assignments.

Tentative Course Schedule *Faculty reserves the right to alter the schedule as necessary, with notification to students.*

Week	Date	Textbook Chapters & Supplemental Readings	Homework Activity Due date
1	8/28	Course Overview	Self-Introduction – 8/31
2	9/4	Chapter 1: Physical and Cultural Geography	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tricontinental Junction: An Introduction - Preview 	Discussion # 1 Initial Posting by Friday; Response to 2-3 classmates by Sunday]
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Setting the Boundaries. Early Empires The Ottoman Empire, European Colonialism & Emergency of Modern States 	
		Chapter 2: The Face of the Earth	
3	9/11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Topography & Landforms -An overview 	Map Quiz 1
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional Landforms 	
4	9/18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Middle East Water Issues 	Reading Reflection #1 Group Formation - In class
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Patterns of Climate and other Environmental Aspects 	
5	9/25	Chapter 3: Patterns of Time Historical-Geographical Foundations	
		Exam 1 – In-class	
		Chapter 3: Patterns of Time Historical-Geographical Foundations	
6	10/2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Patterns of Time Historical-Geographical Foundations 	Reading Reflection #2 -- Topic Description
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Patterns of Time Historical-Geographical Foundations 	
7	10/9	Chapter 4: Patterns of Peoples, Cultures, and Settlements: A Demographic Overview	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Population and People Culture and Society 	Reading Reflection #3 Topic description/proposal – 10/12
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Patterns of Religions 	
8	10/16	Continue... Chapter 4: Patterns of Peoples, Cultures, and Settlements: A Demographic Overview	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Geographies of Language and Ethnic Groups 	Map Quiz 2
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Human Development, Cities & Settlements 	
9	10/23	Chapter 6: Riches Beneath the Earth	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Petroleum Production and Patterns of Reserves 	Reading Reflection #4 Report Progress – 10/26
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Global Economic Relationships OPEC 	
10	10/30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Core Regions and Geography of Tourism 	
		Take Home Exam	
11	11/6	Chapter 8: The Earth and State: Geopolitics	<i>Final Presentation Outline</i>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The State in the Middle East 	Map Quiz 3 Report Progress – 11/9
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> International Peace Treaties 	
12	11/13	Chapter 9: The Earth and State: Conflicts on the Ground	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Conflict of Water Resources 	Dry Run: Preparing for Your Final Presentation
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Gulf Crisis and Terrorism 	
13	11/20	Final Presentation #1	
14	11/27	Thanksgiving break. No class Meeting on 11/27	
15	12/4	Final Presentation Week	
16	12/11	Final Exam [1:30 pm – 4:15 pm]	

Discussion assignments and class activities will be assigned throughout the course. Please be prepared to participate in these.

Updated August 2025

These four policies affect students in all courses at George Mason University. This Course Policy Addendum must be made available to students in all courses (see Catalog Policy AP.2.5) or click the link: [GMU Common Course Policies - Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning](#)

Academic Standards:

Academic Standards exist to promote authentic scholarship, support the institution's goal of maintaining high standards of academic excellence, and encourage continued ethical behavior of faculty and students to cultivate an educational community which values integrity and produces graduates who carry this commitment forward into professional practice.

As members of the George Mason University community, we are committed to fostering an environment of trust, respect, and scholarly excellence. Our academic standards are the foundation of this commitment, guiding our behavior and interactions within this academic community. The practices for implementing these standards adapt to modern practices, disciplinary contexts, and technological advancements. Our standards are embodied in our courses, policies, and scholarship, and are upheld in the following principles:

- **Honesty:** Providing accurate information in all academic endeavors, including communications, assignments, and examinations.
- **Acknowledgement:** Giving proper credit for all contributions to one's work. This involves the use of accurate citations and references for any ideas, words, or materials created by others in the style appropriate to the discipline. It also includes acknowledging shared authorship in group projects, co-authored pieces, and project reports.
- **Uniqueness of Work:** Ensuring that all submitted work is the result of one's own effort and is original, including free from self-plagiarism. This principle extends to written assignments, code, presentations, exams, and all other forms of academic work.

Violations of these standards—including but not limited to plagiarism, fabrication, and cheating—are taken seriously and will be addressed in accordance with university policies. The process for reporting, investigating, and adjudicating violations is [outlined in the university's procedures](#). Consequences of violations may include academic sanctions, disciplinary actions, and other measures necessary to uphold the integrity of our academic community.

The principles outlined in these academic standards reflect our collective commitment to upholding the highest standards of honesty, acknowledgement, and uniqueness of work. By adhering to these principles, we ensure the continued excellence and integrity of George Mason University's academic community.

Student responsibility: Students are responsible for understanding how these general expectations regarding academic standards apply to each course, assignment, or exam they participate in; students should ask their instructor for clarification on any aspect that is not clear to them.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Disability Services at George Mason University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students by upholding the laws that ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities. If you are seeking accommodations, please visit <https://ds.gmu.edu/> for detailed information about the Disability Services registration process. Disability Services is located in Student Union Building I (SUB I), Suite 2500. Email: ods@gmu.edu. Phone: (703) 993-2474.

Student responsibility: Students are responsible for registering with Disability Services and communicating about their approved accommodations with their instructor *in advance* of any relevant class meeting, assignment, or exam.

FERPA and Use of GMU Email Addresses for Course Communication

The [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)](#) governs the disclosure of [education records for eligible students](#) and is an essential aspect of any course. **Students must use their GMU email account** to receive important University information, including communications related to this class. Instructors will not respond to messages sent from or send messages regarding course content to a non-GMU email address.

Student responsibility: Students are responsible for checking their GMU email regularly for course-related information, and/or ensuring that GMU email messages are forwarded to an account they do check.

Title IX Resources and Required Reporting

As a part of George Mason University's commitment to providing a safe and non-discriminatory learning, living, and working environment for all members of the University community, the University does not discriminate on the basis of sex or gender in any of its education or employment programs and activities. Accordingly, **all non-confidential employees, including your faculty member, have a legal requirement to report to the Title IX Coordinator, all relevant details obtained directly or indirectly about any incident of Prohibited Conduct** (such as sexual harassment, sexual assault, gender-based stalking, dating/domestic violence). Upon notifying the Title IX Coordinator of possible Prohibited Conduct, the Title IX Coordinator will assess the report and determine if outreach is required. If outreach is required, the individual the report is

about (the “Complainant”) will receive a communication, likely in the form of an email, offering that person the option to meet with a representative of the Title IX office.

For more information about non-confidential employees, resources, and Prohibited Conduct, please see [University Policy 1202: Sexual and Gender-Based Misconduct and Other Forms of Interpersonal Violence](#). Questions regarding Title IX can be directed to the Title IX Coordinator via email to TitleIX@gmu.edu, by phone at 703-993-8730, or in person on the Fairfax campus in Aquia 373.

Student opportunity: If you prefer to speak to someone *confidentially*, please contact one of Mason’s confidential employees in Student Support and Advocacy ([SSAC](#)), Counseling and Psychological Services ([CAPS](#)), Student Health Services ([SHS](#)), and/or the [Office of the University](#)

Additional Policies

Digital Interventions – AI

Generative AI tools, such as large language models, are powerful tools that can support your learning by helping with tasks like brainstorming and generating ideas. However, they can also interfere with the learning process. This means you must explicitly disclose when and how you’ve used AI in your work, including the specific platform and date of use. Treat AI-generated material like any other source—it must be properly cited, and you are not permitted to submit it as your own original work. Failure to follow this policy is a serious academic integrity violation and will be punished accordingly. Additionally, George Mason University’s Academic Standards Policy prohibits students from cheating, plagiarism, stealing, and lying in academic work.

Diversity

Diversity is an important in an academic environment, and is a priority for George Mason University. See: <http://ctfe.gmu.edu/professional-development/mason-diversity-statement/>

“George Mason University promotes a living and learning environment for outstanding growth and productivity among its students, faculty and staff. Through its curriculum, programs, policies, procedures, services and resources, Mason strives to maintain a quality environment for work, study and personal growth. An emphasis upon diversity and inclusion throughout the campus community is essential to achieve these goals. Diversity is broadly defined to include such characteristics as, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, disability, and sexual orientation. Diversity also entails different viewpoints, philosophies, and perspectives. Attention to these aspects of diversity will help promote a culture of inclusion and belonging, and an environment where diverse opinions, backgrounds and practices have the opportunity to be voiced, heard and respected.”

Absences & Accommodations

- **Religious Holidays:** Please refer to George Mason University’s calendar of religious holidays and observations (<http://ulife.gmu.edu/calendar/religious-holiday-calendar/>). It is the student's responsibility to speak to the instructor in advance should their religious observances impact their participation in class activities and assignments.
- **Absence for documented illness:** Students who miss multiple virtual classes due to prolonged illness should seek medical care and provide documentation of such to the Dean’s Office, which will communicate with the student's professor(s). A prolonged absence may necessitate the student’s withdrawal from the course or from the University for the semester.
- **At the discretion of the professor:** There may be cases where an absence is undocumented but is, nevertheless, excused by the professor (e.g., absence due to a death in the family). Students should initiate a conversation with their professors about the nature and duration of the absence, in advance of the absence whenever possible.

When absences are excused, students remain responsible for all assigned work, and shall be provided with the opportunity to make up, without penalty, any work that they have missed.

University Resources

George Mason University has several academic support and other resources to facilitate your success. Some of these resources are presented below:

- i. University Libraries: see <http://library.gmu.edu/for/online>.
- ii. Counseling and Psychological Services: <http://caps.gmu.edu/>
- iii. The Writing Center <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/>
- iv. University Policies: <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu>
- v. University Catalog: <http://catalog.gmu.edu/>
- vi. Learning Services, University Career Services: <http://careers.gmu.edu/>