

George Mason University

Department of Geography & Geoinformation Science

GG5 518-001: Geography of North Africa & Middle East - Fall 2024 – [Hybrid]

Name	:	Maction Komwa, PhD	Meeting Times	Online & R 3:00 pm – 4:15 pm
Office	:	Exploratory Hall, Room 2414	Location	Thompson Hall – 31017
Email	:	mkomwa@gmu.edu	Office hours	Wednesday [10:30 am - 11:30 AM Thursday- 1:30 PM - 2:30 PM or by Appointment
Phone	:	703-993-5646	Credits	3.00

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

- **Regular Check-Ins:** Students are required to regularly check their George Mason email and Canvas accounts for course announcements and updates.
- **Official Communication:** All course communication should be conducted through your George Mason email account. Emails sent from other platforms will not be acknowledged.
- **Ask Questions:** 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.
- **Proactive Communication:** 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 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.

5. Exams [% will vary see below]

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

6. Project Research Paper (25%)

- Topic Description: No grade | Annotated Bibliography: 2%
- Draft: 2% | Peer-Review 1% | Final Paper: 20%

In addition to the final individual presentation (10%), **graduate students** will demonstrate their writing skills through a research paper. The paper should address a domestic political issue in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) or any other topic discussed in class that the student wishes to explore in greater depth. Detailed information will be posted on Blackboard.

The research paper will be 15 pages long (excluding the title page and reference section) and must include at least 10 peer-reviewed articles. The paper should be double-spaced and formatted according to APA style.

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

Due Dates: All assignment due dates are clearly marked in the syllabus and on Blackboard.

Flex Days [“Life Happens Pass”

- You have 2 "flex days" to use throughout the semester. These allow you to submit an assignment up to 48 hours late (without penalty) for any reason (except online discussions).

Late Penalties:

- After using your flex days, late assignments will be penalized:
 - **1st day late:** 90% credit
 - **Each additional day late:** 5% credit deducted (until no points remain)

Extenuating Circumstances: If you have a serious reason for missing a deadline (medical emergency, etc.), contact the instructor as soon as possible.

Course Communication & Privacy

- Students are required to regularly check their Mason email account /Canvas for announcements or updates related to the course.
- Students must use their Mason email account to receive important University information, including communications related to this class. I will not respond to messages sent from or send messages to a non-Mason email address.
- You should feel free to send me email if you have any questions regarding something that you do not understand. Although I will not instantly answer your e-mail, I will reply to your e-mail within 48 hours and if you don't get my response please feel free to remind me or ask to confirm if I have received your email.

Student Expectations:

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

Student Support Services

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

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

Academic integrity:

The following statement is adapted from the Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning. No grade is important enough to justify academic misconduct. The integrity of the University community is affected by the individual choices made by each of us. Mason has an Honor Code, which you can read fully at the Office for Academic Integrity (<https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/>).

It is expected that you understand these definitions. If you have any doubts about what constitutes cheating, plagiarism, stealing, or lying in the academic context, please see your professor. *Acts of academic dishonesty in this course may be penalized with failure of either the work in question or the entire course.*

Disability Accommodations

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 for this class, please first visit <http://ds.gmu.edu/> for detailed information about the Disability Services registration process. Then please discuss your approved accommodations with me. Disability Services is located in Student Union Building I (SUB I), Suite 2500. Email: ods@gmu.edu

Diversity and Inclusion

George Mason University is committed to providing equal opportunity and an educational and work environment free from any discrimination on the basis of gender expression and identity, race, economic status, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, national origin, first language, religion, age and ability, marital status, pregnancy status, or genetic information. George Mason University shall adhere to all applicable state and federal equal opportunity/affirmative action statutes and regulations.

If you wish, please share your preferred name, gender pronouns, and how you would like to be addressed in class via email or through the self-intro assignment posted through the Canvas. For reference, I use he/him pronouns. If you are in transition of changing your name and gender pronouns, please keep me posted during the semester so that I can address you accordingly.

Sexual Harassment, Sexual Misconduct, and Interpersonal Violence

As a faculty member, I am designated as a “Responsible Employee,” and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking to Mason’s Title IX Coordinator per University Policy 1412. If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact one of Mason’s confidential resources, such as Student Support and Advocacy Center (703-380-1434) or Counseling and Psychological Services (703- 993-2380). You may also seek assistance from Mason’s Title IX Coordinator by calling 703-993-8730 or emailing cde@gmu.edu.

Student Privacy

George Mason University strives to fully comply with FERPA by protecting the privacy of student records and judiciously evaluating requests for release of information from those records. Please see George Mason University’s student privacy policy <https://registrar.gmu.edu/students/privacy>.

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.

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	8/29	Course Overview	Self-Introduction – 9/1
2	9/5	Physical and Cultural Geography	
		Chapter 1: Tricontinental Junction: An Introduction - Preview	Discussion # 1 Initial Posting by Thursday; Response to 2-3 classmates by Sunday]
		Chapter 1: Setting the Boundaries. Early Empires	
		Chapter 1: The Ottoman Empire, European Colonialism & Emergency of Modern States	
Chapter 2: The Face of the Earth			
3	9/12	Topography & Landforms -An overview	Map Quiz 1 [All Assignments below due Sunday by 11:59 pm]
		Regional Landforms	
4	9/19	Middle East Water Issues	Reading Reflection #1
		Patterns of Climate and other Environmental Aspects	
5	9/26	Start Chapter 3: Patterns of Time Historical-Geographical Foundations	
		Exam 1	
Chapter 3: Patterns of Time Historical-Geographical Foundations			
6	10/3	Patterns of Time Historical-Geographical Foundations	Reading Reflection #2 -- Topic Description
		Patterns of Time Historical-Geographical Foundations	
7	10/10	Chapter 4: Patterns of Peoples, Cultures, and Settlements: A Demographic Overview	
		Population and People Culture and Society	Reading Reflection #3
		Patterns of Religions	
8	10/17	Continue... Chapter 4: Patterns of Peoples, Cultures, and Settlements: A Demographic Overview	
		Geographies of Language and Ethnic Groups	Map Quiz 2 Annotated Bibliography
		Human Development, Cities & Settlements	
9	10/24	Chapter 6: Riches Beneath the Earth	
		Petroleum Production and Patterns of Reserves	Reading Reflection #4 Draft
		Global Economic Relationships OPEC	
10	10/31	Core Regions and Geography of Tourism	
		Exam II	
11	11/7	Chapter 8: The Earth and State: Geopolitics	
		The State in the Middle East	Map Quiz 3 Peer - Review
		Peace Treaties	
12	11/14	Chapter 9: The Earth and State: Conflicts on the Ground	
		The Arab-Israel Problem	Dry Run: Preparing for Your Final Presentation
		The Iran-Iraq War The Gulf Crisis and Terrorism	
13	11/21	Prepare your Presentation	
		Final Presentation	
14	11/28	To ensure you stay on track, online lecture notes and recorded videos will be posted on Canvas for your review during the Thanksgiving break. No class Meeting on 11/28	
		Economic Development and Social Inequality Regional Linkages and Arab Spring	
15	12/5	Final Presentation Week	
16	12/12	Final Research Paper 12/8	

Discussion assignments will be assigned periodically based on the selected topic. These assignments will involve online forum discussions to explore the topic in depth. Discussion prompts will be announced as needed, and discussion leaders will be assigned accordingly. Roster will be posted through Canvas.