

Washington Semester
The Middle East and World Affairs: Seminar Course (SIS-319, 8 Credits)
I: Peoples, Cultures and Political Structures
II: Critical Issues



Instructor: Dr. Mohamed Nimer
Office: Dunblane House 202
Office Hours: Fridays, 2:30 pm – 4:30 pm; additional hours will be announced every week & by appointment

Email: nimer@american.edu
Tel: 202.895.4921
Cell: 410.790.2664

“The Arab Spring is the most fundamental change in world order since the fall of the Berlin wall”

Former Prime Minister of Spain
Remarks at the “Arab Awakening” Panel, Center for Transatlantic Relations
Washington, DC
December 7, 2011

Travel and non-Travel Options

Please read this syllabus carefully, and pencil important deadlines into your calendar. You are responsible for meeting all expectations and adhering to all the rules delineated in the contents below.

Course Description

The Washington Semester Middle East and World Affairs (MEWA) Program is a unique course of study that combines academic and professional experience in Washington, D.C. with a field practicum in the Middle East. The seminar will be augmented with lectures by invited speakers and visits to organizations in Washington and the Middle East. Class discussions will focus on the configuration of forces in the contemporary Middle East and their interface with the world, especially their relations with the West, particularly the United States. Therefore, emphasis will be placed on current events and their policy implications. Drawing on knowledge of contemporary history, social movement theory and international relations concepts, this course takes an inter-disciplinary approach to the study of the region and its place in the world.

Course Objectives

This course will:

- Examine the ways in which assumptions about the Middle East’s domestic politics and regional and global contexts impact international interaction with the region.
- Investigate current Middle East political transformations, key conflicts and policy debates.
- Improve student understanding of the Middle East and its place(s) in world affairs through experiential education and active learning.
- Allow students to develop confidence and a positive self-image through study, travel and interaction with experts, practitioners and ordinary people.

Learning Outcomes

On completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Assess their own assumptions about the Middle East and its place in world affairs.
2. Discuss sources of conflict and conflict resolution at the society, state and inter-state levels in the Middle East.
3. Discuss the prospects of democratization in the Middle East in light of the Arab Spring.
4. Evaluate the prospects of an Arab-Israeli peace.

Seminar Overview

The seminar course comprises two academic units. Unit I will consist of an in-depth survey of the Middle Eastern peoples, cultures and political structures, acknowledging their origins and developments in the contemporary period. Unit II will examine critical issues of the region, how they have shaped up in the last decade and what their future prospects are. Particular attention will be given to Islamic movements and parties, petrodollar politics and their local and global contexts, the Arab-Israeli conflict and conflict resolution, and the prospects of democratic change in light of the Arab Spring. The travel to the region will serve as a field study of important cases. You will experience local cultures and learn about the views of leaders in the region on the critical issues of the seminar.

I recognize that people employ different narratives in making sense of current events. The first page quote by former Spanish prime minister at a conservative study center is a perfect example of how leaders and thinkers place world events in a political context that allow them to advance ideas and national, international or global policy frameworks—even at the risk of judging developments prematurely. I will facilitate your examination of seminar topics and encourage you to develop your own insights and to articulate your own ideas.

Workload and Scheduling

The MEWA Seminar is an eight-credit seminar of two units, which means that you will be in class about eight hours per week. While every student's pace of study is different, a general estimate is that for every hour of in-classroom instruction, the student will be expected to work two hours outside the classroom.

You are expected to keep your schedule flexible on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays in order to accommodate the schedules of guest speakers. Their contribution form a core part of the experiential learning approach of the Washington Semester Program. Preparation through completing required readings is essential for maximizing the opportunities associated with course activities. Students should take notes and ask substantive questions integrating guest speaker insights with the readings and class discussions. Students will be assessed on their ability to make sense of how all these sources relate to the main learning outcomes of the course.

You will work in at you internship office on Mondays and Tuesdays every week. To make up for missed work days during travel, you will have a chance to work extra days to be determined later.

Readings

The main reading will be Louise Fawcett, *The International Relations of the Middle East*, Oxford University Press, 2009. Also, we will read parts of William Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, Westview, 2004; however, I recommend reading the entire book. Because of the MEWA program emphasizes current events, I will select a variety of readings that include book chapters, journal articles and primary sources analyzing and/or offering perspectives on current issues of Middle East and world affairs. Students are also encouraged to keep up with the news, especially considering the fact that the region is undergoing a period of rapid change. The reading material will be posted on Blackboard by

Friday every week. Students are expected to prepare a summary or discussion questions for every session. They might be called on any time to present it orally in class, although we may not have time for every student to present every time. There will be times when students will be asked to submit a written summary.

Class Attendance

Attendance and punctuality are essential requirements of the seminar. Every student must attend all required seminar sessions and arrive promptly. A poor record in either attendance or punctuality will have a detrimental impact on the student's final grade for the seminar. Please make sure to observe the following key procedures concerning attendance and punctuality:

1. You must allow plenty of extra time to arrive at all seminar sessions promptly. This includes times when class participants gather to go as a group to off-campus meetings.
2. You should bring with you the weekly schedules indicating the location of (and, if necessary, directions to) every seminar session.
3. You should always carry identification cards and Metro Fare/Smart card. (Please budget for this cost; the program does not cover it.)
4. If you arrive late for a seminar session that is already underway, you must not enter the classroom or briefing room. Late arrivals are discourteous to the speakers, disruptive to the class, and detrimental to the Washington Semester Program's reputation.
5. Once a session has started, you should not leave the classroom or meeting room except in cases of emergency. Unexpected departures from a session already in progress are discourteous and could be interpreted by a speaker as a rude expression of disapproval of his or her views. If, because of a health emergency, you must leave the classroom during the course of a seminar session, you should do so discreetly and politely. If you must leave a session, you should abstain from re-entering the classroom or meeting room. Departures and returns by students during a session, whether to go to the restroom or for any other reason, are discourteous, disruptive, and detrimental to the Washington Semester Program's reputation.
6. Internship search or research project interviews are not valid excuses for absenteeism unless the student has secured prior approval.
7. If you miss a seminar session because of an illness or emergency, you must inform me (preferably via e-mail) before the session. Any notice after the session must be accompanied by a doctor's note.

Class Participation and Professionalism

Speaker events will be split between presentations and student questions. Meetings with the professor will include lectures on major concepts and questions, student questions and commentary, group discussions, and other activities—all designed to ensure that students will walk out with significant added value. In addition, there will sessions devoted to student presentations and discussions of readings and speaker presentations. Participation in class will be assessed not only in terms of attendance but also in terms of the substance contributed by each student.

Students should turn off cell phones before class. The seminar sessions can only be as good as the students make them through their active and polite engagement. Accordingly, a good record of participation, which accounts for 20% of the final seminar grade, is an easy way to do well in the course. On the other hand, a poor record of participation and professionalism will not only make a student lose these points, but could also have a further detrimental effect on his or her final grade.

All students must observe proper professional etiquette when raising questions and participating in the seminar sessions and class discussions to ensure constructive interaction with guest speakers, other students, and the professor. Accordingly, in order to avoid misunderstandings about the nature of the seminar sessions and to avoid the repetition of some truly regrettable incidents, please read and observe carefully the detailed description of the proper etiquette for this course, provided below. Should a student have any doubts after reading the following rules, he or she should speak with me.

- The Washington Semester Program relies on the good will of guest speakers who volunteer time out of their busy schedules to meet with our students. You *must* be attentive and show *utmost respect*. During sessions, students must not converse or spend any time on browsing the Internet or checking their text-messages.
- You should not make gestures or pass notes to each other, unless extremely necessary for the orderly conduct of the class.
- The meetings with guest speakers are not debate club sessions in which the students try to change a speaker's mind or another student's opinion. Actually, one of the main purposes of inviting guest speakers is to expose students to different perspectives. Every student should keep an open mind, listen to what the speakers have to say, and try to understand the speaker's perspective before asking questions. You must keep in mind that some speakers may express very controversial views. Yet, the sessions with guest speakers must not become arguments. You will have plenty of time during class discussions to talk about the presentations made by guest speakers.
- Unless the speaker explicitly asks for questions during his or her initial presentation, all students should wait until the speaker finishes his or her presentation, and then raise their hands and wait for the speaker's acknowledgement. The speaker may become sidetracked if interrupted, and the group will thereby be prevented from enjoying the benefit of a clear and comprehensive presentation of the speaker's perspective.
- Once you have asked a question, you should not interrupt the speaker's response, but should wait until the speaker finishes (even if the speaker seems to have misinterpreted the question) before asking a follow-up question, if necessary. All students should be considerate towards their classmates by observing a limit of one follow-up question when other students have also raised their hands. If you wish to ask more than one follow-up question, please look around the class to make sure that no other classmates have raised their hands to ask questions. More than one follow-up question may lead to a one-on-one debate, pre-empting the time for questions by other students.
- You must consider all the remarks made by guest speakers "not for attribution." You must never refer either to a specific previous speaker by name or even in a general fashion to "a previous speaker" when questioning another speaker. For example, instead of saying "Ms. X, you advocate dialogue with Iran, but one of our previous speakers told us that such a course of action is nothing but appeasement." Use a much more diplomatic style such as "Ms. X, how would you respond to those who argue that dialogue with Iran is not an effective course of action?" By using the latter style—that is, by not volunteering the information from other speakers, and by placing some distance between the policy choices and the student's personal opinion—a student can ask a very probing and challenging question without antagonizing the guest speaker. While most speakers will understand that the students are going to be exposed to several perspectives, we still do not want any speaker to get the impression that he or she was being set up.
- The class discussions that I will lead will require the active participation of all students. You are expected to freely to express your opinions, but please avoid monopolizing the discussion. The

class discussions will not seek to produce a consensus, but rather foster the free and cordial consideration of all the different viewpoints, and thus allow each student to form his or her own opinion.

In sum, all students must behave professionally and show respect for all the participants in the MEWA learning community. Observance of these standards will ensure a positive experience for all involved. NOTE: The class participation segment may also include short written assignments in preparation for a class discussion or simulation. “Participation Essays” must be submitted electronically. Papers that miss the electronic deadline will be considered late and receive a penalty. I will keep participation essays as evidence of every student's record of participation and as a sample of the student's writing.

Papers, Simulations and Service Learning

Issue/Policy Brief: You will draft an issue/policy brief that discusses an issue and/or offer policy recommendations regarding a Middle Eastern crisis. You will start working on the brief in class, defining the problem you will tackle, the approach you will use, your targeted audience, and some facts informing your analysis. The draft outline will be peer-reviewed. With the feedback you will turn the draft outline into submission of a final draft in the sixth week of the semester. The brief will consist of at least 5 pages.

Short Country Background Research Paper and Simulation: This simulation will require a 3-page background research on a Middle Eastern country and its government's views on a crisis situation that will be described in a special handout. This short paper will form the foundation for your participation in deliberations aimed at reaching resolutions to deal with the situation. There will be other peace and conflict simulations during the semester that will prepare you for this assignment.

Travel Report: You will submit a 7-page report, analyzing observations you made during the overseas trip. The report should focus on the salient issues of this course, particularly information on cultural patterns and perspectives of speakers on local, regional and international affairs. An “A” grade paper will be based on field notes taken during the trip. I advise you to take a notebook to record your observations during the trip. You should carry it with you all the time during travel. Your notes should be dated and should include names of places and persons involved in the event you are observing or attending, including visits to organizations and speakers. You should jot down observations with regards to cultural ideas and practices as well as the political views of individuals you meet. Upon returning to the United States, you will study the recorded notes and use them to write a report comparing your travel experiences and observations to your prior knowledge of the Middle East and/or the visited countries. You may reflect back on your earlier writings in the semester, the readings and the views of Washington speakers.

Service Learning or Research Paper (Non-Travel Option): Students who choose the non-travel option will engage in service learning and/or special research and study projects carefully designed to enhance their academic knowledge and professional experience. Students will spend adequate time for three weeks in the field—volunteering service and interacting with communities or organizations whose activities are relevant to the program of study. The experience can be tailored to each student's circumstances and can be conducted in or outside Washington. By the end of the three weeks the students will compiled worthy information to analyze and reflect on in a 10-15 page paper. Students will have kept a daily journal describing and reflecting on their work.

All papers should be written double spaced, size 12 Times New Roman font. More details will be handed to you during the semester for each of these assignments.

Assessment and Grading

Class attendance and participation are crucial elements of the seminar; and being prepared by keeping up to date with your readings are essential to getting the most from the guest speakers and class discussions. The exams will require student integration of learning from speakers. The exams will also emphasize comprehension of the required readings.

The course grade will be broken accordingly:

Unit I:

Quiz: 10%.

Exam I: 40%.

Policy/Issue Brief: 30%.

Class Participation: 20%.

Unit II:

Short Country Background Research Paper and Simulation: 20%.

Travel Report or Non-Travel Paper: 20%.

Exam II: 40%.

Class Participation: 20%.

The grading system is as follows:

A: > 92

A-: 90-92

B+: 87-89

B: 83-86

B-: 80-82

C+: 77-79

C: 73-76

C-: 70-72

D: 66-69

F: <66

Blackboard and Technical Support

Most of our communication will take place during face to face meetings. Emails and Blackboard announcements will be important too, especially for posting weekly readings and class notes. Please get acquainted with Blackboard features as soon as possible. Also, check Blackboard announcements and email every morning and evening.

American University's Computer Helpdesk provides technical support during the week, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The Helpdesk can be reached at **202-885-2550** and via email at helpdesk@american.edu. Please do not hesitate to ask for technical support; the team is happy and ready to support. The Helpdesk's website can be found on: <http://www.american.edu/technology/sites/helpdesk/section.cfm?ID=1>. For online technical support on Blackboard, see: http://www.american.edu/cte/bb_students.htm.

Dress Code

Proper attire is required for all class sessions. For seminar sessions with guest speakers on or off campus, the dress code is business casual. For men, business casual means slacks or khakis, rather than cargo pants, jeans, or shorts of any kind; closed shoes rather than sandals, flip-flops, or sneakers; and a dress shirt or polo shirt rather than T-shirts or sweatshirts (please avoid wearing clothes with graphics or lettering to seminar sessions), but there is no need for jackets or ties. For women, business casual means slacks or a skirt and a nice top, but no shorts, mini-skirts, T-shirts or sweatshirts (please avoid wearing clothes with graphics or lettering to seminar sessions), and dress sandals or shoes. For certain off-campus sessions, such as those on Capitol Hill, at government agencies, and foreign embassies, the dress

code is professional attire. For men, this means a suit or nice slacks, a tie, a jacket, socks and dress shoes; for women, this means a business suit or very nice slacks or a skirt and a nice blouse, or a dress; and dress shoes or dress sandals. Women are advised to acquire a scarf as it may be required during visits to mosques.

Topics and Weekly Schedule

The following is a tentative weekly plan of topics. The actual schedule of meetings, reading assignments, visits, and guest speakers will be posted on Blackboard on a weekly basis to reflect current events and policy priorities related to the Middle East.

1. The Middle East from the Rise of Islam to the Pre-Modern Era
2. The Middle East from Colonialism to the Post-Cold War Era
3. Oil, Development, Conflict, and Regional Integration
4. Israel and Palestine: Origins of the Conflict and Prospects of Peace
5. Religion and State: Conflict and Peace
6. The Arab Spring and Democratic Transition: An End to Post-Colonial Conflicts?
7. Islamists and the International System
8. Women and Minority Rights in the Middle East

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism and academic dishonesty are very serious matters. The professor is required to report cases to the Dean, which may result in a failing grade for the course. Please read the university's Academic Integrity Code closely, and be sure to clarify any questions. The code is available online at:

<http://www.american.edu/academics/integrity/index.htm>

Environmentally-Friendly Course

The professor is a Certified Green Teacher. This means, for example, that Email and Blackboard will be used extensively to communicate and to post handouts, collect assignments, and provide you with feedback on assignments. Paper will be used only when necessary. To help make the class as environmentally friendly as possible, you are encouraged to minimize paper use by submitting assignments electronically. If you choose to print, please use double-sided, single-spaced and reduced margin format. Also, please bring your favorite drinking canister to class instead of using paper cups and turn off the lights whenever you are the last one to leave the classroom.

Accommodation of Disabilities

Should a student experience difficulty in this course for any reason, please do not hesitate to consult with the professor. In addition to the resources of the department, a wide range of services is available to support the students to meet the course requirements.

Academic Support Center (x3360, MGC 243) offers study skills workshops, individual instruction, tutor referrals, and services for students with learning disabilities. Writing support is available in the ASC Writing Lab or in the Writing Center, Battelle 228.

Counseling Center (x3500, MGC 214) offers counseling and consultations regarding personal concerns, self-help information, and connections to off-campus mental health resources.
Disability Support Services (x3315, MGC 206) offers technical and practical support and assistance with accommodations for students with physical, medical, or psychological disabilities.

Emergency Preparedness

In the event of a declared pandemic (influenza or other communicable disease or other emergency), American University will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community. Should the university be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or use of distance instructional methods. I will design alternative means of completing classes. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format and requirements of each course and the timing of the emergency. I will communicate class-specific information to you via AU e-mail and/or Blackboard, while you must inform me immediately of any absence due to illness or emergency. Students are responsible for checking AU e-mail regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies. In the event of a declared pandemic or other emergency, you should refer to the AU Web site (www.prepared.american.edu) and the AU information line at (202) 885-1100 for general university-wide information. And contact me or the dean’s office for course and school/college-specific information.

After you have read the syllabus and penciled in important dates on your calendar, please fill this agreement form, then copy, paste and send it to the professor by email: nimer@american.edu. You may sign the form by hand and then send it as a pdf attachment or you may sign using a cursive font.

Deadline for emailing this agreement is January 18, 2013.

SYLLABUS AGREEMENT FOR MIDDLE EAST AND WORLD AFFAIRS SEMINAR

(SIS-319)

Professor and Director: Dr. Mohamed Nimer

I, _____, certify that I have read and understood this syllabus and that I am willing to assume the responsibility of complying with all of the rules and regulations contained herein.

Signature

Date

STUDENT'S FULL NAME IN PRINT