SOAN 237
ARAB CULTURE & SOCIETY

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Course Description:
This course provides an introduction to recent anthropological investigations of that very real, very nebulous entity known as the Arab world. It is intended for students advancing in SOAM studies and/or eager to acquire new ways of thinking about what it means to live and interact with Arab culture(s). The main aim is both to stimulate curiosity about ways of being Arab and debate about ways of perceiving Arabs. A second aim is to increase understanding of anthropological theories and methods.
Required Texts available at the University Bookstore

A Course Packet, a set of photocopied articles and selections can be acquired from the bookstore. These start the course. Additional articles will be posted on Moodle.

You must bring the readings for each session with you to each class! Yeah, I’m maniacal about it.

Course Objectives:

Upon completing this course students will have acquired a strong grasp of:

• specific knowledge about diverse groups and regions in the Arab world that enables a more critical and demanding response to the current local and global roles of Arabs as agential individuals and socio-cultural groups,
• the holistic approach to human life,
• the anthropological concept of culture,
• basic observational and analytical skills for studying human society,
• the development of scientific analysis of culture, the creation of ethnographic materials,
• primary anthropological theories of human interaction,
• the ethics of studying humans as culture-making creatures.

Course Requirements & Grade Weights

1) Given the importance of participation through discussion of readings and first-hand research, attendance each day is essential. More than three absences will lower your final grade in the course. More than 7 absences by the Nov. 4 will lead to your forced dismissal from the course.

2) Fieldnotes, at least 2 entries per week (including holidays). Use the specified notebooks. = 20%

3) Archive assignments 1 & 2 = 10% EACH
4) Mid-term 1 & 2 = 20% EACH

5) Final reflective, fieldwork based analysis of a topic of inquiry = 20%

**Readings:**
In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of what anthropology is and how it’s done, you are expected to read a variety of articles (or extracts) during this semester (differs according to your fieldwork topic). The weekly readings are usually 40-60 pages. They should be completed by the day listed in the calendar. You must budget your time.

If you do not know how to skim – to read for the main ideas – please see the SKIMMING GUIDE on the course Moodle site.

Give yourself advance time to find the readings, and PLAN FOR PROBLEMS: Inform me immediately so that you still have time to complete the assignment. **Not finding the text at the last minute will not be an acceptable excuse for failing to do the work.**

WHY, you ask, is this class so demanding? Please see page 6.

**Assignments:**  **Always keep a copy of your assignments!**

In order to acquire the skill of applying anthropological thinking to your own life, you will be given various assignments. Fieldnotes (see below) should be entered in your personal journal and brought to class on Tuesdays. I will collect them at that time for review and return them to you with comments on Thursdays.

Whenever your need to upload (or download) is your duty to deal with the internet and meet any relevant deadline. Please note that sometimes AUB’s internet is slow; if you postpone submitting till the last minute you take a great risk that may affect your grade. **Late submissions will be deducted three points per day late.**

**Fieldnotes:**
One exercise that will increase your comprehension of course concepts and anthropology’s basic relevance to your life is to make fieldnotes in which you record your observations of life around you. This is an essential skill for making an anthropologist of yourself and valuable
resource material of your life. It consists of carefully attending to events, speech, expectations, emotions, and as thoughts are provoked, jotting these in your journal, and then, when time allows (within 24 hours), fleshing out your jottings to fuller sentences. It does not consist of making theoretical analyses, only observations that may lead to wanting to know more about what you saw, or didn’t see.

These fieldnotes must be entered in your personal journal. They will be graded not in the sense of being “right or wrong” but for completion, and so I can make comments to help you develop your reflexivity or observation skills (remember, fieldnotes go “in” and “out”). Ideally, your fieldnotes will feed into your field research.

**Class Participation and Attendance Policy:**

By attending class and participating in discussion you contribute to the learning atmosphere. Your absence diminishes from the intensity of classroom thinking, just as your silence contributes to a sense of passivity. Raise a ruckus – but an informed one!

Your active participation will be evaluated as part of your final grade in terms of:

- arriving on time and with your reading
- preparing the in-class material when asked
- sharing your ideas based on assigned texts and course concepts
- listening attentively and respectfully to others in class
- taking notes on lectures, discussions, and presentations
- not even appearing to own a phone, computer, iPad, or any such electronic device
- not eating
- not leaving the room unnecessarily

**Academic Integrity Policy:**

Formulating your own response to ideas presented in texts or class is a fundamental component of the learning process. It also provides the main medium by which your instructor can evaluate your skills acquisition and intervene where necessary to ensure your success. Therefore, your resorting to copying others’ words or thoughts demonstrates a breakdown in the learning process.

AUB offers an on-line tutorial that explains exactly what plagiarism involves and how to avoid committing it. You are required to take this
tutorial and pass its test. Once you have taken it you will be held responsible for your commitment to academic integrity. Turn-It-In may be used to verify the integrity of your work. Plagiarism will be dealt with severely. By this I mean, I will give you a “0” for the assignment. I will also report you to the Student Disciplinary Affairs Committee, which can request a Dean’s Warning or more, depending on their assessment of the gravity of the offence (I’m on that committee).
Why is this class so demanding?

Thank Scott Jaschik, 'Academically Adrift' Inside Higher Education, January 18, 2011

If the purpose of a college education is for students to learn, academe is failing, according to *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*, a book being released today by University of Chicago Press.

The book cites data from student surveys and transcript analysis to show that many college students have minimal coursework expectations -- and then it tracks the academic gains (or stagnation) of 2,300 students of traditional college age enrolled at a range of four-year colleges and universities. The students took the Collegiate Learning Assessment (which is designed to measure gains in critical thinking, analytic reasoning and other "higher level" skills taught at college) at various points before and during their college educations, and the results are not encouraging:

- 45 percent of students "did not demonstrate any significant improvement in learning" during the first two years of college.
- 36 percent of students "did not demonstrate any significant improvement in learning" over four years of college.
- Those students who do show improvements tend to show only modest improvements. Students improved on average only 0.18 standard deviations over the first two years of college and 0.47 over four years.

What this means is that a student who entered college in the 50th percentile of students in his or her cohort would move up to the 68th percentile four years later -- but that's the 68th percentile of a new group of freshmen who haven't experienced any college learning.

The main culprit for lack of academic progress of students, according to the authors, is a lack of rigor. They review data from student surveys to show, for example, that 32 percent of students each semester do not take any courses with more than 40 pages of reading assigned a week, and that half don't take a single course in which they must write more than 20 pages over the course of a semester. Further, the authors note that students spend, on average, only about 12-14 hours a week studying, and that much of this time is studying in groups.

The research then goes on to find a direct relationship between rigor and gains in learning:

- Students who study by themselves for more hours each week gain more knowledge -- while those who spend more time studying in peer groups see diminishing gains.
- Students whose classes reflect high expectations (more than 40 pages of reading a week and more than 20 pages of writing a semester) gained more than other students.
- Students majoring in liberal arts fields see "significantly higher gains in critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing skills over time than students in other fields of study.” Students majoring in business, education, social work and communications showed the smallest gains. (The authors note that this could be more a reflection of more-demanding reading and writing assignments, on average, in the liberal arts courses than of the substance of the material.)