

Peoples & Cultures of the Middle East (P&C)

Spring 2019, Amman, Jordan

4 credits

Dr. Doug Magnuson, mesp.director@gmail.com

Office Hours & Class times: Flexible. I am normally working in the office – located in the Magnuson apartment on the 2nd floor – on Monday and Thursday afternoons. You are welcome to “drop in,” or to ask for an appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION — This course seeks to acquaint students with some of the diversity of peoples and cultures in Jordan and in the Middle East (and North Africa) region as a whole. A significant emphasis is placed on understanding some of the key elements of the Arab-Muslim culture which creates the sociocultural context for Jordan and the broader region. We will take advantage of the experiential learning which is possible through being “in context,” with a significant emphasis placed on encounters with local people, site visits, local speakers, and cultural activities. In addition to focusing on the specific local culture(s) and cultural diversity of Jordan and the region, emphasis will be placed on understanding the concept of culture and the nature and challenge of intercultural understanding, adaptation and growth - i.e., how do we become people who can understand and engage any cultural context in a positive way. The course seeks to create in students a sense of empathy for and understanding of all of the peoples of the region. In addition, as part of our desire to understand people “in context,” we will look at history and current issues in Jordan and the region, including the Syrian war and refugee crisis, “Arab spring” movements, and more.

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

a. General Objectives—The course is designed to establish an experiential foundation as a prelude to further academic study and experiential learning. It uses the people and culture of the region as a mirror in which students might see themselves, including aspects of their faith, more clearly as products of culture and society. While the course cannot fully examine the nuances, differences, and complexities of cultural components like identity, ethnicity, customs, ritual practices, and religious traditions, it emphasizes their importance as prerequisites for any genuine understanding of the cultural mosaic in the Middle East. Readings, lectures, speakers, site visits, and personal encounters with the peoples of the area are all used to achieve this introductory objective. In addition, it also seeks to develop a humble respect for the basic moral integrity of cultural and religious others, with the major focus in the Jordanian context of encountering Muslims and Eastern Christians. The course also seeks to instill in students a sense of how culture influences thinking and behavior.

This course will promote intercultural development through providing students with numerous opportunities to practice and develop intercultural skills, such as entering into the world of different others, adapting behavior within that other context, suspending judgment, shifting perspective to see the world from other perspectives, practicing empathy, and more. In regard to Christ-centered learning, students will be challenged to ask questions such as, How should we, as followers of Christ, relate to different peoples and their cultures?; What are the boundaries of becoming ‘all things to all people’?; and other questions at the intersection of faith and culture.

b. Specific Objectives — This course aims to help students to:

1. Understand the concept of culture, and the cultural context and conditioning of all of life.
2. Develop a basic understanding of some of the core elements of “Arab culture(s)” (Muslim and Christian).
3. Begin to understand how Islam forms the cultural context for most of the people in the Middle East.
4. Utilize a basic framework for how cultures differ (that of Craig Storti) to articulate some of the features of their own culture, and to compare and contrast those features with the culture(s) of the people around them in Jordan and on travel to other countries in the region.
5. Understand and discuss the process of intercultural adaptation, understanding, and growth, using the *Intercultural Development Continuum* as a framework for understanding and explanation.
6. Practice and seek to grow in specific intercultural skills.
7. Develop confidence in their ability to enter the world of the “other,” through participating in dialogue / relationship building events with Jordanian young people, and through spending time exploring the local area, taking taxis, interacting with shopkeepers, etc.
8. Reflect on the intersection and relationship between *faith* and *culture*, and the boundaries and relationship between the *Divine* (that of God) and the *human*.
9. Live out *humility* in the face of the complexity of human culture in terms of beliefs and behaviors.
10. Engage and develop a basic understanding of key local and regional history and current issues.
11. Experience intercultural growth as measured by the *Intercultural Development Inventory*.¹

Course Format

¹ Students take the IDI both before and near the end of the semester, and meet with Dr. Doug one-on-one to go over the results. The IDI is a valid and reliable measure of intercultural development (information available upon request).

This course relies primarily on site visits, local speakers, regional travel, and personal encounters with local Muslims and Christians, and with others (Palestinians, Israelis, Moroccans, and others) as we travel. There are relatively few formal lectures during the course (though virtually everything we do, study, experience, read, etc., in this semester, is relevant to the topic of “peoples & cultures”). The experiential setting offers a comparative advantage in terms of learning about the culture in a manner that cannot be replicated in a conventional classroom. *MESP facilitates a number of cultural events, but students are also expected to follow up with activities and relationship building with local people, beyond the walls of our Center and apartments.*

Given that Islam is an essential element of Jordanian and Middle Eastern cultural context, there will be considerable interconnection between this course and the Islam course.

COURSE TEXTS, NEWS SITES, FILMS & DOCUMENTARIES

Texts:

i. ***Figuring Foreigners Out: A Practical Guide (Craig Storti)***: This book is foundational to and provides a framework for the cultural and intercultural understanding and perspectives that will guide us through all that we do in our course together. **You should have read the book and done the exercises, before arriving in Jordan** (we will go over the exercises during Orientation). The book consists more of exercises than reading, and should not be extremely time consuming; but you need to consider the questions in the exercises carefully. The heart of the book (i.e. the exercises to pay special attention to) is in chapters 2-4.

ii. ***When in the Arab World: An insider’s guide to living and working with Arab Culture (Rana F. Nejem)***: this book, by a Jordanian who is one of our MESP speakers, provides a good introduction to understanding and adapting to Arab society and culture. As you read it, you can think about the dimensions of culture that we process with the Storti exercises regarding ways in which cultures differ (which we will go over at the beginning of the course); and be looking for how your experience of Arab culture matches (or not) with what Nejem describes.

iii. ***Readers***: You will be reading several articles relevant to this course, in the semester Reader and in the Morocco and Egypt Travel Reader.

iv. Optional / recommend for your devotional study - ***Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes (Kenneth Bailey)***: Bailey spent 40 years teaching Bible and Theology in the Middle East. These devotional studies help us to learn from the insights of Middle Eastern Christian perspectives (e.g., through their Bible translations and commentaries), helping us to place Jesus in his Middle Eastern context. I would encourage you to use Bailey devotionally through the semester (e.g., to read through one study per week), and/or to use one of his chapters as the basis for the devotional you will lead us in at some point during the semester. Pay attention to: what do you learn about the Bible and about Jesus, through the cultural insights Bailey presents? How does an understanding of Jesus in his Middle Eastern context impact your faith and discipleship?

v. Optional / additional cultural insight – ***Understanding Arabs (Margaret Nydell)***: This is another good foundational book, supplementing *When in the Arab World* but from an “outsider” perspective (we will only be reading certain of the chapters; the book is available in the MESP library). As with Nejem’s book, think about the dimensions of culture that we process with the Storti exercises regarding ways in which cultures differ (which we will go over at the beginning of the course); and be looking for how your experience of Arab culture matches (or not) with what Nydell describes.

News sites - these are important resources for keeping up on contemporary issues and events relevant to the course objectives and subject matter. You are encouraged to regularly read the news re. Jordan and the Middle East as a whole.

Jordan:

- **Jordan Times** <http://jordantimes.com/>
- See <https://kingabdullah.io/en/speeches> for King Abdullah’s speeches (well worth reading/listening to)

For the Middle East:

- **Al Jazeera** <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/>
- **Al-Monitor** <http://www.al-monitor.com/>
- **NY Times** <http://www.nytimes.com/pages/world/middleeast/index.html>

For Israel/Palestine:

- **Haaretz** <http://www.haaretz.com/>
- **Jerusalem Post** <http://www.jpost.com/>
- **Palestine Chronicle** <http://palestinechronicle.com/>
- **PNN** <http://english.pnn.ps/>

- **Ma'an News** <http://www.maannews.net/eng/Default.aspx>

For Morocco:

- <http://www.moroccoworldnews.com/>
- <http://www.moroccoonewline.com/>

Films & Documentaries You May Explore

'Café' documentaries can be found online on Al Jazeera (English)
(<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/thecafe/>)

Other films include *Dbeeb*, *Captain Abu Raed*, *The Lemon Tree*, *Amreeka*, *The Syrian Bride*, *The Other Son*, *Arranged*, *Wajda*

COURSE SPEAKERS, EVENTS AND SITE VISITS

a. Speakers (subject to availability) and field trips/site visits. (You will occasionally find some overlap in the material presented by speakers in the C&C and ITP courses)

Both in Jordan and during regional travel, you will have the opportunity to hear from many speakers and guides who will address topics relating to the people and culture of the Middle East.

In addition, realize that every speaker, whatever their topic, is part of the fabric of the "peoples and cultures" of the Middle East (see the list of speakers for ITP). You will want to be listening and looking for what you are learning about peoples and cultures – Arab, Jordanian, Palestinian Jordanian (and other), Jewish, Egyptian, Moroccan, Israeli and Palestinian and other – through every speaker, every event, every site visit and everything we see and experience this semester.

- Dr. Raed al Tabini, Director, Hashemite Fund for the Development of Jordanian Badia. Former academic director with SIT Study Abroad in Jordan, receiving 30 students per semester. Jordanian culture.
- Dr. Bader al Madi, professor, University of Jordan, "The Political History of Jordan"
- Rana Nejem, author of *When in the Arab World* and founder of Yarnu, the Art of Social Intelligence (<http://www.yarnu.com/>). Understanding and adapting to Jordanian culture.
- Dr. Levi Sabine, "The Syrian War and Refugee Crisis"
- Stephen Allen and Anna Knutsen, "The Syrian Refugee Crisis"
- A visit to Dr. Bader's brother, Shaykh Talal, in the northern badia, to hear about tribal culture.
- Organized relational opportunities with Jordanian young people, at our Center, at the American Corner at JU, and elsewhere.
- Attending Arab church services at the Coptic Orthodox church in Abdali and/or other Arab church service(s).
- Visiting the *King Abdallub I Mosque* in Abdali (and/or another mosque), and observing prayer.
- A visit to a Jordanian family in the northwestern countryside, to learn about rural Jordanian culture and enjoy a traditional Jordanian meal of *mansaf*.
- Other speakers, subject to availability.
- Other site visits in Jordan, including Wadi Rum, Bethany (Jesus' Baptism Site), and more

Israel/Palestine (subject to availability)

- Ophir Yarden on Jewish society and culture, Judaism and modernity, nationalism, and the Holocaust
- Many other speakers, Palestinian Muslim and Christian, Jewish
- Walking tour of the Christian quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem
- Other site visits, including Ramallah, Hebron, the Old City, Bethlehem, and more

Cairo (subject to circumstances)

- Visit to American University, and interaction with Egyptian students
- Attending an Egyptian church service
- Tours of the Pyramids, the Egyptian Museum, Coptic Cairo, and Islamic Cairo
- Time to wander in the Khan al-Khalili
- The Tannoura Sufi Music and Dance performance
- Various speakers

Morocco (subject to circumstances)

- Moroccan music and culture night
- Tours of Marakkech, the "Berber" Ourika Valley, Fes, Hassan II Mosque
- Free time to explore and interact with local people in Marakkech and the old medina of Fes

- Opportunity to experience a local Hammam (public bath)
- Various speakers

b. Events

- *Relationship and Culture Exchange* — We have ongoing relationship with various Jordanian young people and groups, and seek to arrange meetings for sharing and discussion. After the initial meeting, students are encouraged to seek out opportunity for further relational time and interaction (e.g., getting together for coffee, etc.). These times are invaluable for helping you to better understand Jordanian experience(s) and perspective(s), including religious experience. In addition, students are encouraged to pursue relational opportunities with Jordanians they might meet through running and other avenues.
- *Homestays* – You will be spending several days staying with both a Palestinian family and a Jewish family, if we are able to travel to Israel-Palestine, experiencing their life and culture.
- *Service Projects*. Service Projects present you with a great opportunity to get out in the community for regular interaction and relationship with a segment of the population. Be open to what might develop, including invitations for coffee or possibly a meal.
- *Other life activity*. This (these) is not an event so much as an ongoing opportunity to mingle with people, develop relationships, and learn about the culture. Every day presents opportunities, whether you are sitting in a coffee shop, observing the people around you; riding in a taxi, conversing with the driver; interacting with a shopkeeper; etc. Be a *participant observer*, learning all day, every day!

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING:

Grading for this course will be based on the following:

Participation – presence for all required activities, plus active engagement including taking notes on speakers	10%
Reading – completing the reading, as reported on a weekly basis	20%
Storti 3%	
Nejem 6%	
Required Reader articles 5%	
Morocco-Egypt Travel Reader 6%	
Journalling	20%
Final / Integrative Essay	50%
	100%

Assignment 1: Participation including Speaker Notes (10%).

Students are required to attend all lectures and site visits, etc. and to be both attentive and participatory, with good “speaker etiquette” (no sleeping, no use of electronic devices, etc.). For a satisfactory score in each of the units, you need to ask at least 3 questions of speakers, over the course of the semester. (More is better, though if you’re a particularly active participant, please leave room for your quieter MESP cohort members to ask questions!)

Students are expected to take notes on all the speakers during the semester, including Travel Component. Notes can be according to your style and approach, and have no requirement in terms of length. They are for your benefit, so you have details to draw upon for your paper. Note do not have to be turned in, but the Program Administrator or Director may ask to see your notes at any time. Note: students are not allowed to use electronic devices or laptops to take notes (or at all, during speakers).

Assignment 2: Reading (20%).

You will be given a schedule for the weekly reading, and asked to **report to the Program Assistant (according to their instructions) every Saturday by 10 pm** on the percentage you have completed of the reading for the week (on travel weeks, the reporting on the reading will come earlier). This is a busy semester, so it’s important to keep up with the reading and it is important that you refer to the readings in your papers. Note that there is reading assigned every week for each of the courses (other than the full week in Israel/Palestine). The reading (other than Travel Readers) will be done before our second trip (to Morocco & Cairo). The Morocco Travel reading will be due when we arrive in Morocco; the Cairo travel reading will be due when we arrive in Egypt.

Assignment 3: Journalling (20%)

Students are expected to write three journal entries per week (as specified below), on topics related to P&C, ITP, and/or C&C (if you want a word guideline, 300-350 is a good rough guideline – the point, though, is solid reflection, not number of words). Journals need to be clearly labeled, and **turned in to the Program Administrator every Friday by 10 pm, beginning January 12** (on Travel, it may be another day). **See the separate Journal Assignment document for specific dates and topics.**

Note: for any entry that is late, you will lose 1% of your journal grade, per day, per entry. For any entry that you do not do, you will lose 8% of your journal grade.

Assignment 4: Final/Integrative Paper (50%) - Personal Culture and Intercultural Development Reflection
2500-3000 words (this is a guideline – it can be shorter if it’s good; you can write more if you want/need to). Email paper to mesp.director@gmail.com. **Due Thursday November 29 (6 pm).**

Formatting instructions: 1 inch margins, 12 point font, include footnotes and bibliography (or sources / resources), you can have a separate title page or put your name and title at the beginning of your first page; title page and bibliography are not included in word count. *Be sure to include your last name and P&C in the document name (what you save it as).* Other than these specifics, you can use whatever paper / style system you are used to following.

Please include a self-evaluation with this paper, 1-2 paragraphs evaluating what grade you feel you deserve for the paper, and why. Be specific. List what you see as strengths and/or weaknesses. Grade it as if you were grading someone else’s paper. Give yourself a letter grade or percentage. Include the self-evaluation in the paper itself, at the end. Label it clearly. (Note: if you turn in the paper without a self-evaluation, you will be penalized 1 grade level, e.g., from A- to B+, etc.)

Note that the paper is titled "Final/Integrative Paper." I am not calling this a "research" paper, by which I would mean, you need to go out and find and read and refer to other sources (other than what you've been exposed to in this class). But to be “integrative” you should refer specifically to the materials (readings, speakers, etc.) of the course in your paper. If you're talking about a Biblical perspective, you should actually open, read, and refer to the Bible, not just go off your feelings about what the Bible says. Be sure to clearly reference all materials and sources (specifically, in footnotes with all necessary information, so that I can trace your reference easily, and with relevant detail so that the non-MESP reader understands what or who the source is). Include a “Bibliography” (or “Sources” / “References”) at the end.

You can't talk about everything; but what you talk about, do it well, clearly, developing your points and showing why you think what you think. Do not write "off the top of your head." Go deeper than that.

Prompt:

This paper should have two sections (if you want, you can think of it as two separate essays):

- 1) What have you learned about Arab culture (and, if you like, culture in general)? For this section / topic, you should interconnect your experience, the Nejem book and relevant speakers, and Storti (e.g., how does your experience illustrate things Nejem and/or speakers and Storti said about culture / Arab culture?).
- 2) How have you grown interculturally, through your experience this semester? For this section, you should return to your IDP and intercultural skills journal reflection earlier in the semester, and reflect on the goals you set, and what you hoped to practice in terms of intercultural skills. How did it go? What were some of the challenges/struggles and highlights? How have you grown (refer also to your end of semester IDI results – how do they correspond to your sense of growth)? And what goals do you have as you go forward from this semester?

You should refer to the materials of the course / semester (as relevant). Make sure to illustrate any general statements you make, with specific examples (and explanations).

This should be personal (first person), not a formal academic paper. But you still need to refer to sources and attribute information (that’s just good practice, in any writing).