

University of Virginia

January 2023

Department of Middle Eastern and South Asian Language and Cultures

MEST 3225: Cultural Authenticity in a Modern Middle Eastern Society
(3 credits)

Instructor: Bilal Humeidan, Assistant Professor of Arabic (General Faculty) & Director of J-Term in Jordan

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Wednesday, December 28 th , 2022 (Arrival) – Tuesday, January 10 th , 2023 (Departure)
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Syllabus is subject to modification

Course description:

This course offers students a first-hand regional experience in the Middle East through an exploration of multiple sites in Jordan. Throughout the program, students will be gaining knowledge about the multiethnic and pluralistic components that comprise the Jordanian society. In turn, participation in the course will develop students' cultural competence, and thus contribute to their ability to become thoughtful global citizens. The course is taught in English, taking an interdisciplinary approach to the history, politics, economics, demography and the culture of Jordan. As an added extra-curricular value, the proposed program will provide an opportunity for students with proficiency in Arabic to practice the language with native speakers. Given its combination of sites visits, cultural activities, and classroom instruction, this program will provide students with a diverse learning experience that brings together the critical and the experiential.

Objectives:

The course will help students to:

- Develop cultural (and perhaps linguistic) competence.
- Increase their knowledge of the diverse Arab cultures, dialects and history.
- Broaden their understanding of the history of Jordan and the Middle East.
- Discover ancient sites and traditional food that very few people get to see and try in an authentic milieu.
- Realize how the modern Middle East evolved politically, socially, and economically into a region burdened by webs of power and influence.
- Understand a number of contemporary issues in Jordan (and in the Middle East), especially issues related to women, gender, and inequality.

Textbooks:

There are no required texts to purchase for this course. All readings will be available via our course Collab site. Students should therefore come to Jordan with a laptop computer or tablet through which they can access the site daily. Much of the material will be posted well before the departure date, and participants are encouraged to read the materials before departure.

Academic Responsibilities and Expectations:

Students are required to attend all classes and site visits (**ON TIME!**), and to come prepared with questions and comments about the texts under consideration **each day**. Students can expect around 1-2 hours of preparation, reading, thinking, and writing each day

Evaluation:

- A 1000-1200 word essay in response to a question to be distributed shortly before arrival in Amman. 15%
- A brief (which is to say 3-5 minute) introduction and critical appreciation of ONE of the field trips. 15%
- Active participation in discussions and site visits. 30%
- Final reflection paper: Answering the questions: What sorts of things have you noticed? What have you learned? What aspects of the course did you find most (or least) intriguing, and why? And more questions will be given by the program director. 40%

More information about participating in this course will be provide at the pre-departure orientation.