Field of Study Course Proposal  
MLC 346

A. Cover Application

1. **Proposed field of study:** FSLT

2. **Course number:** MLC 346

3. **Course title:** Insiders and Outsiders: Arabic Encounters with the West

4. **Catalog description:** Examines how the Arab world has the perceived the non-Arab world, particularly the west, from the beginnings of Islam to the present day. The texts will cover fiction—including film—and academic writing, historiography and travel literature, political publications and private blogs and diaries. What do these texts tell us about the perception of the Arabs of their own world?

5. **Prerequisites:** None

6. **Unit:** 1 unit

7. **Estimate of student enrollment:** 15

8. **By whom and when the course will be offered:** Martin Sulzer-Reichel, every two or three years

9. **Staffing implications:** none

10. **Adequacy of library, technology, and other resources:** mostly adequate; some works of Arab writers in translation will need to be acquired

11. **Relation to existing courses and curricula:** This course adds to our offering of MLC courses about Arabic cultures and literatures. Students will be able to take this course with a C-LAC component to fulfill their elective requirement for the Arabic minor. The course will satisfy the FSLT requirement and also fulfill a requirement for the Middle East concentration of International Studies.

12. **Contact person:** Martin Sulzer-Reichel

B. Explanation of Field of Study fulfillment

**How the course fulfills FSLT:**
This course examines how the West has been represented in different types of texts from the eighth to the twenty-first century. There will be a three-fold approach so that students will not only consider what is represented, but also how different types of documents (films, works of fiction, political discourse, newspaper articles, etc.) are employed to convey specific concepts and images, and last, but not least, what these texts reveal about the world view and the image of the culture of their writers. Students will learn interpretive tools to analyze how genre influences our vision of specific cultural and historical concerns and will consider the extent to which literary texts are central to understanding complex political phenomena. In both, class activities and writing assignments, students will be required to engage in close readings of texts and to think about how each text’s formal characteristics produce meaning.

**Sample syllabus**

**MLC 346: Insiders and Outsiders: Arabic Encounters with the West**

Instructor: Martin Sulzer-Reichel  
Office: CWIC 216  
Telephone: 484-1612; private 261-5713  
E-Mail: msulzerr@richmond.edu  
Office hours: MWF 11:00–12:00 a.m.
Schedule of topics and readings:

1) This course will concentrate mainly on the last two centuries of the encounter between the Arab-Islamic world and the West. However, first it will be necessary to hearken back to the so-called “Golden Age” of Islam. We will approach this period by grouping the writings according to their genre. The first group of texts we will analyze are reports of travelers who tell their countrymen and contemporaries about what they encountered in the outside world. Naturally, there is an element of comparison between Arab culture and the “strangers,” a contest about levels of progressiveness and virtue, but in many cases there is less of a hidden agenda in these travel reports than there is in other genres.

Readings

a) The perception of the other in their domain: travel literature:

Ibn Fadlan (10th c.): Description of the Rus Vikings from: Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies 3 (2000), containing "Ibn Fadlan and the Rūsiyyah", by James E. Montgomery, with an annotated translation of the part of the account pertaining to the Rus.

Ibn Jubayr (1145-1217): The Travels of Ibn Jubayr, transl. Roland Broadhurst, particularly the sections on Spain, Sicily, and India


2) In the second group of writings, we will look at later travel accounts by Arabs whose writings were meant to fight the outside world, in particular the West and its ideas. We will ask questions of these texts such as: what is the ideological agenda in these texts, and how do the authors attempt to persuade? In what ways are they successful (or not)? Are these writings propagandistic, and why? How do the authors strive to not only describe the things that are (or appear to be), but also to hold up a mirror to society and force people to decide which camp they actually belong to: are they “good” or the “enemy”?

Readings

b) The perception of the enemy


Film: The 13th Warrior, 1999.

Sources from the Internet Islamic History Sourcebook, collected by Fordham University:
http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/islam/islamsbook.html

3) The third group of texts is from the pens of thinkers and scholars, journalists, politicians, and “average” citizens. The majority of their observations stem from the last two centuries, a period that has seen the reawakening of Arab self-esteem and the development of indigenous political theories and movements (an-nahda, pan-Arabism, pan-Islamism, etc.). At the same time, many voices have attempted to work within the leading ideologies of their times – such as capitalism and socialism, assimilation, globalization, or fundamentalism – and explore of their cultural and ideological roots. These writings might serve as an indication that the fundamental questions about our identity are no more resolved in the west than they are in the Arab world. To gain insights, we will read excerpts of the works of influential scholars, philosophers, journalists, and politicians, but we will also look for texts that are less well-known (in the West), including personal correspondence, diaries, as well as textbooks used in high schools and universities in the Arab world, designed to shape the minds and views of the new generation.
Readings

c) The other as a subject of academic inquiry

Muḥammad ibn Ahmad Muqaddasī (b. ca. 946): Best divisions for knowledge of the regions: a translation of Ahsan al-taqasim fi marifat al-aqalim / al-Muqaddasi; translated by Basil Anthony Collins; reviewed by Muhammad Hamid al-Tai


Al Jabarti, Napoleon In Egypt: Al-jabarti's Chronicle Of The French Occupation, 1798.


For resources on the perceptions of young people, we will turn to a variety of Internet resources, including blogs.

Each student will choose, research, and analyze individual texts and present his/her findings to the class for critical discussion. The basis of these discussions will be a written analysis of an entire work. This written analysis will be read by the colleagues in class and class discussion will be introduced by a presentation of the researcher in class. The same proceedings will be applied for the second written assignment, a research paper on a specific topic. The research into specific topics will be done and presented in groups; different aspects of this research, however, will be the topic of the individual research papers.

Readings, usually in excerpts

This list will be expanded in the course of the semester, not least based on the results of the different research groups

d) The outside world in private experience

Letters from people living abroad, excerpts from translations in Bernard Lewis, The Muslim Discovery of Europe. New York : W.W. Norton, c1982

Zahid H. Bukhari ... [et al.]: Muslims' place in the American public square : hope, fears, and aspirations. Walnut Creek, CA : AltaMira Press, c2004

Tawfiq al Hakim: A Sparrow from the East.

Taha Hussein, Sheherzad's Dreams / The Voice of Paris, 1943

Tayeb Salih: Season of Migration to the North, 1969

Additional suggested bibliography


Secondary works:

Euben, Roxanne Leslie: Journeys to the other shore: Muslim and Western travelers in search of knowledge. Princeton: Princeton University Press, c. 2006

COURSEWORK AND EVALUATION

Class attendance and participation 20%
Title and project description (for both essays, one paragraph each) 10%
Analysis of one larger text (1,500 words) 25%
Topic research paper (1,500 words) 25%
Presentation of both papers in class 20%

Grading:

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Expectations

All readings have to be completed before the class for which they are assigned. Take notes, formulate questions and be ready to discuss them in class.

Semester plan

Weeks 1 through 4:

The perception of the other in their domain: travel literature
a) What is travel literature? Analysis of the genre as it came into existence during the 10th-14th centuries and was re-used in the writings of the 19th and 20th centuries
b) Travelers
c) Travel literature as fiction

Weeks 5 through 8:

The perception of the enemy
a) What is the purpose of writing about the enemy? How does political propaganda work?
b) Texts written by people involved in warfare between the Dar al Islam and the Dar al Harb

c) Travel literature as fiction

Weeks 9 through 13:

The other as a subject of academic inquiry
a) What is the purpose of academic inquiry? Who chooses the topics of the inquiry and why? And who reads the results—in the past, in the present—and how is the knowledge received? As intended by the writers? Apart from the impact of academic research upon its intended audience, which impact does it have also on the observed?
b) Academic writings of Arabs in the Arab world as well as of those living abroad
c) Shaping young minds: the outside world as presented in select textbooks from various countries in the Arab world for high schools and colleges (LAC)

Weeks 14 and 15:

The outside world in private experience
a) The outside world as represented in private correspondence of Arab exiles abroad: Why are letters and diaries written? What do they reflect? Whom do they reach? What impact may they have?
b) Literary descriptions of the experience of living outside of the Arab world

Final wrap-up session