

Geography 515 - Fall 2014

Contemporary Dilemmas in International Development

This semester's theme:
Development and the Arab Spring

11:35 am – 2:25 pm Monday
Room 429 Burnside

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Office hours: By appointment

Course Description

This is a 500 level seminar course on issues pertaining to contemporary dilemmas in international development. For this class we take 'dilemmas' to mean 'no easy answer'. The course is intended to facilitate critical thinking and writing along the thesis, dissertation, and career interests of the individuals in the class. Within the overall theme of the semester, students are expected to select topics, lead discussions, robustly participate in discussions, make presentations and write term papers.

This semester's theme is, 'development and the Arab Spring'. The ongoing uprisings and changes in government in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) will see profound geographical, sociopolitical and economic changes for societies in a number of countries in the region--with repercussions for the rest of the world. The promise of the Arab Spring leading quickly to forms of representative governance was large, but to date has been difficult to realize for most of the countries involved. This difficulty has resulted in a wide variety of development dilemmas for MENA countries and the way forward is unclear, uncertain, and volatile for a number of populations in the region. At the same time the involvement of countries outside MENA--the West, Russia, China, sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere--is fraught with agendas, vested economic and security interests and humanitarian concern. This involvement is often competitive, duplicates efforts and can be difficult for newly formed governments to reconcile.

Following initial presentations and discussion led by the instructor, the interests of the students in the seminar will govern which specific examples of 'development and the Arab Spring' will be addressed. To facilitate the pursuit of student interests, each student will have an opportunity to select a topic and lead class discussion. Discussion leaders will distribute to the class one week prior to their discussion, a minimum of two academic papers, book chapters, documents from the grey literature, or websites. These readings will provide background to the rest of the class regarding the specific topic within 'development and the

Arab Spring' to be discussed the following week. Students are responsible for providing copies of their reading material to all other members of the class. This is most easily done by using myCourses or email. The rest of the class will then need to do the readings prior to coming to class and be ready to discuss them.

Each discussion will begin with the student whose turn it is to lead discussion, briefing the class as to what particular aspects of the Arab Spring the student would like class discussion to focus on. Discussions should elicit from the class, thoughts, opinions, and critiques on the readings and the specifics of the issue(s). If you would like to explore an idea on which little or nothing has been published (and this is encouraged), please provide papers that describe the components, aspects or background that contribute to the idea. Through these discussions, this class is the place to try out novel, new, innovative, untried, and provocative ideas, and talk about the different prospects and possibilities for how the world works, or could work. Discussions are held in an informal, cordial, and respectful manner.

Each class session is three hours long. Two students will present/lead discussion in each class--1.5 hrs each. Between discussions, there will be a 10 min break.

Apart from reading selected papers and discussion, students will also be responsible for presentations and a term paper, and the topics of the presentation and the term paper should be the same. The presentations will take place toward the end of the course and will need to be approximately 20 minutes in length, with 10 minutes for questions (along the lines of presentations in an academic conference). Feel free to use media in your presentations. The term paper will need to be approximately 15-20 pages in length, double spaced, 12 point font--excluding references.

Class Material

Readings are provided by the instructor and students who are leading discussion in the following week. Discussion leaders are responsible for providing the readings to the rest of class. This is in place of any textbooks.

Class Grading

Leading class discussion: 15 percent; Class participation in discussions: 35 percent; Presentation: 10 percent; Term paper: 40 percent.

Class Policies

Attendance Students are expected to attend class. Class discussion is worth 40 percent of the final grade.

Term papers are due by 5 pm on the first day of finals week. These should be emailed to the instructor as a pdf.

Accommodation for religious observances are dealt with according to McGill policy.

"McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the

Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).(approved by Senate on 29 January 2003)

"L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/)."

"In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded." (approved by Senate on 21 January 2009 - see also the section in this document on Assignments and evaluation.)

"Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue)."