Course description:

This course will encourage students to reach informed assessments of how the particularities of politics and laws in the Middle East and North Africa (the MENA region) play into the situation of women in the region, where the obstacles in the way of women’s empowerment have constituted a drag on development. State policies affecting women will be critiqued, entailing references to the 2005 UNDP Arab Human Development Report, and the implications of the Arab Spring for women will be considered. The role that laws play in fostering or impeding human development will be emphasized, although social and economic issues will also be considered. Problems of human development in several Arab countries will be examined, as will the problems in Afghanistan and Iran, with the special situation of Turkey coming in for comparisons. Experiments with imposing socialist development models and US interventions in the region as these pertain to gender issues will be assessed. The rise of Islamist forces and countervailing Islamic feminist currents in the late 20th century will be examined. Topics will include the legacies of European Imperialism; the Islamic legal heritage and problems in reforming Islamic law; changing ideological and political orientations in post-independence states; the deployment of concepts of gender and gender mainstreaming in development projects; and the growth of NGOs and women’s human rights activism.

Potential deviations from/additions to syllabus assignments:

The current list of assignments should be regarded as subject to change. Because of the turbulence and upheavals of the Arab Spring, new issues may come to the fore, and we may want to add new topics during the semester. Students will be advised if new readings are added and consulted if the current syllabus is being adjusted.

Advisory: Depending on the level class interest in individual topics and the length of class discussions, we could fall behind and might not cover all the materials listed.

Course prerequisites:

Previous training in law or familiarity with Islam or the MENA region is not required. However, students will need to possess the intellectual maturity to grapple in an objective
manner with complex and often controversial political and legal issues. Students will be expected to demonstrate an ability to handle problems on the basis of informed and reasoned assessments of the relevant literature and data.

Excellent verbal skills, a mastery of accurate communication of ideas, and the ability to read a variety of materials critically and with good comprehension will be essential!! Students should ask themselves: Can I convey my ideas effectively both orally and in writing? Taking this course is definitely NOT advisable for students for whom communicating ideas coherently and clearly in written form is difficult!!

Format:

Both lectures and discussions will be used. Students will be expected to come to class prepared for discussing issues raised in the assignments and ready to handle problems that will be assigned for discussion or for written assessments. Quality of class participation will be counted in the course grades.

Grading:

Grades will be calculated with the midterm counting 40% and the final 50%. Class participation will count 10%. Participation will include handling a number of short writing assignments involving critical analyses of problems. If the majority of the class prefers take home exams, this preference may be accommodated.

Optional project:

With advance approval by the instructor, students may write papers concerning a problem directly related to the course. To get a project approved, by the end of the fourth week of the semester, students wanting to do papers must submit well-organized, complete outlines of their proposed papers with a specific listing of the sources that they intend to utilize.

The paper must investigate a problem and present informed, reasoned conclusions. Mere description of material available in the literature will not suffice. The paper must be completed in accordance with Penn’s code of academic integrity. It must be documented with appropriate citations to the sources relied on, including footnotes and a bibliography. The footnotes/endnotes must be done according to standard styles like those of the University of Chicago or the MLA. The completed paper must be submitted in hard copy double spaced by the last day of class. Although quality of research and analysis will ultimately be more important than quantity of pages, students should aim for a paper of at least 16 pages in a normal-sized font (approximately 4,000 words). The 16 pages refer to the text of the paper and exclude tables, bibliography, and the footnotes/endnotes.
Grading will be based on an adjusted version of the normal scheme, with the paper project counting for 30% of the course grade, the midterm 30%, and the final exam 30%, with the remainder being the participation grade.

Students are urged to consult the professor about any questions pertaining to the project and/or for more details about the format.

**Course pack and other assignments:**

Most of the assigned readings will be handled by Wharton Reprographics using study.net. Handouts will also be distributed in class, including updates reflecting new developments. In addition, students will be asked to consult various Internet websites.

Students will be expected to buy the following books or to consult them in Lippincott Library, where they will be placed on reserve:


Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani, Iranian Women’s One Million Signatures Campaign for Equality: The Inside Story (Women’s Learning Partnership Translation Series, 2009).

Valentine Moghadam, Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East, 2nd Edition (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2003).

**The importance of student input:**

Students are encouraged to share their ideas for enhancing the learning experience. If class members decide that a topic or current development not on the present syllabus deserves attention, this can be taken into account. Among other things, when students identify informative source materials, websites, and speakers, they are invited to bring these to the attention of the class and the professor. Students who have relevant experience are likewise urged to share what they have learned.

**General assessments and background documentation that will be referred to often during the course:**


Indices for MENA countries taken from World Bank: Governance -- Countries

Transparency International
Among the sections that will be often referred to are the surveys and indices.
http://www.transparency.org/

United Nations Development Program. Arab States.
http://arabstates.undp.org/


World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2010

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
Among the sections that will be often referred to are the text, reservations, and country reports.
http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/

Freedom House, Women’s rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010
http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=383&report=86

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OUTLINE OF TOPICS AND MATERIALS (Please note that the “sessions” in the following syllabus may turn out to comprise from one to several class meetings.)

SESSION 1: The variety of factors shaping women’s situations in MENA countries; comparative perspectives on gender gaps and human development; issues in women’s empowerment

Valentine Moghadam, Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East, 2nd Edition (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2003), 1-77.


SESSION 2: An early experiment with revolutionary change in women’s status via the imposition of Marxism/secularism in Soviet Central Asia and the unexpected blowback

Gregory Massell, Law as an instrument of revolutionary change, Law & Society Review 2 1968, 179
http://www.jstor.org/pss/3052781
Alternative link http://hdl.library.upenn.edu/1017/6965 [requires search for title of article]

SESSION 3: Afghanistan -- shifting state policies on women in an impoverished country afflicted by upheavals and warfare and subjected to foreign invasions

Moghadam, Modernizing Women, 227-276.


http://www.wcl.american.edu/hrbrief/12/1grenfell.cfm

Human Rights Watch, “We Have the Promises of the World” - Women’s Rights in Afghanistan http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2009/12/03/we-have-promises-world


http://faculty.chass.ncsu.edu/akhater/personal/Articles/Lila%20Abu%20Lughod%20-%20Do%20Muslim%20Women%20Need%20to%20be%20Saved.pdf
Cyra Akila Choudhury, Empowerment or Estrangement?: Liberal Feminism's Visions of the "Progress" of Muslim Women, 39 University of Baltimore Law Forum 153 (2009).


SESSION 4: Islamic law affecting women in formulations adopted by various contemporary states and critical perspectives and prospects for reforming these

Moghadam, Modernizing Women, 79-150.


SESSION 5: Contrasting views of the role of women articulated in Islamism and in secular and Islamic feminisms

Moghadam, Modernizing Women, 151-192.


SESSION 6: Saudi Arabia – resistance to enhancing women’s role in an oil-rich country ruled by a traditional monarchy allied with a conservative Islamic establishment


SESSION 7: The impact on women’s rights of the overthrow of a modernizing monarchy and the triumph of Islamism in the Islamic Republic of Iran

Moghadam, Modernizing Women, 193-226.


Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani, Iranian Women’s One Million Signatures Campaign for Equality: The Inside Story (Women’s Learning Partnership Translation Series, 2009).


Be Like Others (also known as Transexual in Iran) video
http://documentaryheaven.com/transsexual-in-iran/

SESSION 8: Women mobilizing for change -- women’s activism and civil society groups


Sheila Carapico, NGOs, INGOs, GO-NGOs, and DO-NGOs; Making Sense of Non-Governmental Organizations, MERIP Spring 2000.
http://www.merip.org/mer/mer214/214_carapico.html


SESSION 9: Aspects of violence and exploitation affecting women

http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/fulltext/118784923/PDFSTART
Alternate link http://hdl.library.upenn.edu/1017/19642 [requires search for title of article]

http://www.jstor.org/stable/3557618
Alternate link http://hdl.library.upenn.edu/1017/6965 [requires search for title of article]

Jordan Report by Freedom House
http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=174

Shadow NGO Report to CEDAW Committee Jordan July 2007

Mohamed Y. Mattar, Trafficking in persons, especially women and children, in countries of the Middle East: The scope of the problem and the appropriate legislative responses, 26 Fordham International Law Journal 721(2003).

Human Rights Watch, Exported and Exposed – Abuses against Sri Lankan Domestic
Workers in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Lebanon, and the United Arab Emirates, November 2007

SESSION 10: Morocco -- a poor country ruled by a monarchy that pursues gradualist policies of democratization and enhancing women’s rights

Additional readings to be added covering the most recent developments.

Further Global Rights resources on Moroccan reforms:
http://www.globalrights.org/site/PageServer?pagename=www_mid_index_64

Morocco Report by Freedomhouse

SESSION 11: Kuwait – an oil-rich state disrupted by the Iraqi invasion and ruled by a monarchy that oversees a relatively democratic system

Readings to be added covering the major changes in 2009.

Kuwait Report by Freedomhouse
http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=384&key=257&parent=24&report=86

SESSION 12: The situation of women in Egypt – a country where the Mubarak dictatorship tried to balance conflicting feminist and Islamist demands until its overthrow in 2011


Egypt Report by Freedomhouse
http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=384&key=253&parent=24&report=86
SESSION 13: Yemen – an impoverished country merging the conservative Republic of Yemen and the Marxist DPRY, creating a fragile state where women’s rights are bitterly contested


S. Carapico and A. Wuerth, Passports and Passages: Tests of Yemeni Women’s Citizenship Rights in Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East, 261-274.

Yemen Report by Freedomhouse
http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=384&key=268&parent=24&report=86

SESSION 14: Problems of drafting constitutional rights provisions in post-invasion Afghanistan and Iraq: the philosophies of US advisors vs local politics and traditions
