

Modern Language Center (MLC)

(AM/GENS 360) Creating and Becoming: Arab Women, Authority, and Leadership

Total Hours: 45

Recommended Credits: 3

Primary Discipline / Suggested Cross-Listings: Gender Studies / Sociology / Religious Studies / Middle Eastern Studies

Language of Instruction: English

Prerequisites: None.

Course Description

This course provides a comprehensive and academically grounded exploration of Arab women's roles, authority, and leadership throughout history and in contemporary society. Beginning with the Arab Renaissance (al-Nahda), students trace the evolution of feminist thought, the struggle for rights, and the shifting definitions of womanhood across diverse Arab contexts.

The course examines the paradoxes that define women's lived experiences—being primary creators of social and political leaders while often being denied equal access to leadership positions themselves. Students analyze how cultural, religious, economic, and political dynamics shape women's opportunities, limitations, and strategies for resistance across multiple spheres, including family, education, religion, arts, politics, and public life.

Through textual analysis, case studies, discussions, and field-based learning, students explore feminist theory, cultural narratives, representations of women in literature and media, and competing interpretations of women's rights. The course highlights how women navigate structural barriers, negotiate power, and develop agency within challenging social environments.

The course includes critical engagement with sensitive topics such as gender discrimination, patriarchy, extremism, violence, and internalized misogyny. Students learn to analyze these issues objectively and academically while developing empathy, cultural competence, and a deeper understanding of Arab women's diverse experiences and contributions.

Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Trace the historical development of Arab feminist movements across multiple ideological frameworks.
- Analyze intersections of religion, culture, economy, and politics in shaping women's leadership opportunities.
- Examine how cultural narratives and stereotypes influence social perceptions of women.
- Identify strategies Arab women use to resist injustice, claim agency, and expand leadership roles.
- Assess achievements of Arab women across varied fields including politics, education, arts, and activism.
- Develop strong analytical writing and discussion skills using academic terminology related to gender and leadership.
- Engage respectfully and critically with sensitive gender-related content in classroom discussions.

Course Requirements

Students must attend all classes and participate actively in discussions. Class content may include complex or sensitive themes; respectful and academically grounded engagement is required.

Assignments include:

- **Homework:** Readings (5–15 pages each), reflections, and peer interviews.
- **Weekly Presentations:** Students research and lead class discussions on assigned themes.
- **Reflection Papers:** Students develop 750-word analyses based on opinion polls conducted in Amman.
- **Field Study:** Visits may include gender-related institutions, scholars, journalists, or women's rights organizations.
- **Final Exam:** Analytical written responses demonstrating understanding of course themes.
- **Final Paper:** A 10–15 page research project with outline, draft, revisions, and oral presentation.

Grading

Participation: 20%

Homework: 20%

Reflection Papers (2): 20%

Presentations: 15%

Final Exam: 10%

Final Paper & Presentation: 15%

Readings

Readings include scholarly research, cultural studies, and feminist writings addressing gender, leadership, discrimination, and historical developments affecting Arab women. Materials are curated from academic journals, books, and regional perspectives without external links.

Additional Resources

Supplementary materials may include:

- Interviews and testimonies from Arab women leaders
- Articles on gender roles, power dynamics, and feminist movements
- Sociological studies on discrimination and social structure

Case studies from Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Gulf states, and diaspora communities

These materials enhance cultural understanding and support analytical writing

Outline of Course Content

Topic 1: Historical Roles of Women in Islam

Women's contributions to Islamic history; leadership models; advocacy movements.

Topic 2: Arab Feminist Movements

Origins, achievements, obstacles, and ideological tensions within feminism in the Arab world.

Topic 3: Women's Leadership in the Family

Family structure, socialization, stereotypes, rights, and family power dynamics.

Topic 4: Professional Limitations

Women in education, politics, medicine, and professional spheres.

Topic 5: Achievements of Arab Women

Contributions to arts, culture, media, science, religion, and public life.

Topic 6: Challenges to Women's Leadership

Harassment, stereotypes, social pressure, and extremist rhetoric.

Topic 7: Religion, Leadership & Resistance

Interpretations of guardianship, agency, autonomy, and case studies of minority women.

Topic 8: Paths to Empowerment

Government reforms, feminist successes, cultural movements, and notable leaders

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