

Form E-1-A for Boston College Departments/Programs

Department/Program: Eastern, Slavic, and German Studies,
Program in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations

NELC 2161/RLRL2292/ENGL2348: Modern Middle Eastern and Arabic Literature (Salameh)

NELC2062/SOCY1150: States and Minorities in the Middle East (Salameh)

- 1) **Have formal learning outcomes been developed? What are they?** (What specific sets of skills and knowledge does the department expect its majors to have acquired before they graduate?)

Learning outcomes for the courses listed above vary. But both, satisfying cultural diversity core, address enduring questions made especially significant in our time: What are the Near and Middle East? Where are they situated geographically, historically, culturally, linguistically, emotively, and religiously? Who are the peoples of the Near and Middle East, how do we approach their varied histories, languages, traditions, and religious accretions, and how do their cultural, political, linguistic, and literary rituals compare to and differ from one another and those of the “cultural west”? How does our understanding of the cultural production and other traditions of the Near and Middle East (religious, linguistic, artistic, political...) shape our understanding of the region itself, *our* selves, and the world at large. In seeking answers to this quest for understanding, the courses examine ways in which language and history—remembered, restored, invented, and suppressed—have been used in the process of myth building and in the development of collective memories and corporate identities in the Near and Middle East of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The courses also consider the cultural and political challenges of the twenty-first century. Likewise, the courses try to shed light on alternative and revisionist views challenging prevalent conceptions/assumptions about the Near and Middle East. In various contexts, and relying on a variety of texts (literary, journalistic, political, legal, religious, and historiographical) we consider how Middle Easterners, at least since the 2011 events formerly known as “The Arab Spring,” have been questioning and rethinking their assumptions about themselves, their region, their identities, and the world outside of their immediate “neighborhoods.” In sum, the courses help students navigate their own “thinking” and “rethinking” of their own paradigms, stereotypes, and *idées reçues* about the Near and Middle East, which, shattered as they may be, remain “mosaics” *not* “monoliths,” and in that sense closer to—and in some cases more so “progenitors” of—the “cultural west” than conventional knowledge might suggest. The skills students developed and honed at the conclusion of these courses relate to reading literature and other elements of cultural production critically, *not* only for meaning, but for implication as well, pointing to alternative ways of looking at the topics under consideration, bringing into

their analyses a diversity of perspectives and a world of references spanning literature, philology, linguistics, history of ideas and political thought, and even archaeology, biology (genetics,) and human geology—elements of what the French refer to as “un paysan travaillant un paysage qui fait naître un pays où vient germer une culture” [a peasant honing a landscape yielding a country that gives birth to culture...] In a sense, students in both courses, at times, read and reflected almost “on a mirror.” But a mirror where certitudes got (hopefully) shattered, revealing wider, cleaner, deeper verities; doubting certitudes as a pathway to new discovery, and knowledge; reading *not* to form opinions or change opinions, but to understand and slake curiosities; *not* assert certainties and defend certitudes, but to ask questions.

In sum, the Near and Middle East of both “States and Minorities” and “Modern Middle Eastern and Arabic Literature” invited students to “not prove or persuade,” but rather to “search and investigate” with the knowledge that “much remains to be discovered and learned.” *Un esprit ouvert vaut plus qu’un débat gagné* (to use one “Near Eastern language” (yes French) of some of the texts we explored this year); “an open mind is worth so much more than a clinched debate.”

- 2) **Where are these learning outcomes published? Be specific.** (Where are the department’s learning expectations accessible to potential majors: on the web or in the catalog or in your dept major handouts?)

Learning outcomes are spelled out in the course syllabi, made available to students at the beginning of the semester through Canvas and hard-copies, also on the department website <https://www.bc.edu/content/bc-web/schools/morrissey/departments/eastern-slavic-german/undergraduate/arabic.html>

- 3) **Other than GPA, what data/evidence is used to determine whether graduates have achieved the stated outcomes for the degree?** (What evidence and analytical approaches do you use to assess which of the student learning outcomes are being achieved more or less well?)

In States and Minorities, students write weekly (500-word) “reactions” which they post on Canvas, reflecting on the week’s readings, and constituting the bases of our online and in-class conversations. Students also write a 2000-word mid-term assignment that is an analysis of a primary and a secondary source relating to a Near/Middle Eastern “state” and one of its “minority” populations. The final assignment is a group project; a mock United Nations Debate and Final Paper, where different groups (two teams each) take on the roles of “States” and “Minorities” debating the nature of their relationship, raising at least five points of contention, and proposing a solution to them. The Final Paper portion of this exercise is a “collective” work of each team, summarizing each of their mock UN Debate. In modern Middle Eastern and Arabic Literature, students likewise post weekly responses on Canvas, but also a midterm Book Review (not a “book report”) with an eye toward a final Review Essay (not a “book review”) elements of which they present in class (for peer review) toward the end of the semester. All written assignments and topics are planned in consultation with the instructor, and designed to synthesize, analyze, and respond to various questions generated in assigned readings and in-class discussions, and in an attempt to frame, question, challenge, and augment “self” and “other” understanding.

4) **Who interprets the evidence? What is the process?** (Who in the department is responsible for interpreting the data and making recommendations for curriculum or assignment changes if appropriate? When does this occur?)

The instructor in collaboration with NELC colleagues interpret the evidence. Additionally, course evaluations are studied closely, including the qualitative narrative responses, and course adjustments are made accordingly.

5) **What were the assessment results and what changes have been made as a result of using the data/evidence?** (Have there been any recent changes to your curriculum or program? Why were they made?)

Students' written work (weekly responses, as well as mid-term and final paper) is commented extensively, usually using the "comments" function in Word, and subsequently discussed in person and by way of class conversations. This is done for the purpose of future improvement in student performance and achievement, and further course development.

6) **Date of the most recent program review.** (Your latest comprehensive departmental self-study and external review.)

2024

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June 8, 2025