Course description:

This experimental course will encourage students to reach informed assessments of how the particularities of the political systems and laws prevalent in the Middle East and North Africa (the MENA region) play into the situation of women in the region. There is general agreement that limitations on Arab women’s participation in state and society have constituted a drag on development. Problems of human development in several Arab countries will be examined, as will comparable problems in Afghanistan and Iran, with Turkey coming in for comparisons. The role of law in human development will be emphasized. Topics will include the legal legacies of European Imperialism; the Islamic legal heritage and governmental reform programs; changing ideological and political trends in post-independence states; rare and short-lived experiments with imposing secular socialist development models; dimensions of discrimination affecting women and obstacles in the way of women’s empowerment; gender and citizenship; US interventions in the region as these pertain to gender issues; the rise of Islamist forces and countervailing Islamic feminist currents in the late 20th century; the growth of women’s NGOs and women’s human rights activism; and critiques of contemporary state policy affecting women, including the 2005 UNDP Arab Human Development Report.

Potential deviations from/additions to syllabus assignments:

The current list of assignments should be regarded as preliminary and tentative. We may want to add new topics and new materials during the semester. Students will be told in advance if new readings will be added or substituted for those currently on the syllabus.

Once the syllabus is finalized, depending on the level class interest in individual topics and the length of class discussions, we could fall behind in covering the assignments 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 and the ability to read a variety of materials critically and with good comprehension are essential!! Taking this course is definitely NOT advisable for students whose general language ability and English skills are not strong!!

**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 to be discussed in class or to be written up. 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%. 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:

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

The importance of student input:

Students’ ideas for enhancing the learning experience and inputs are encouraged; feedback from class members will be welcomed at all stages. 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:

- World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2009

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

PROPOSED SYLLABUS -- Current 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 and unstable country afflicted by revolutions and warfare and successively subjected to Soviet and US domination

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.


Haider Ala Hamoudi, The Muezzin's Call and the Dow Jones Bell: On the Necessity of Realism in the Study of Islamic Law, 56 American Journal of Comparative Law 423 (2008). [The section on specifics of Islamic finance starting on p. 438 and running to p. 452 can be omitted.]

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

http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2008/04/19/perpetual-minors-0

http://www.bepress.com/mwjhr/vol5/iss1/art1/


Saudi Arabia Report by Freedom House
http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=384&key=264&parent=24&report=86

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, the only theocratic state in the MENA region

Moghadam, Modernizing Women, 193-226.

http://www.bepress.com/mwjhr/vol5/iss1/art2/


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

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


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 where Islamists and feminists clash.

Readings to be added covering developments since the early 1990s and 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 with a stagnant economy where a long-standing military dictatorship seeks to quell all opposition and confronts conflicting feminist and Islamist demands


SESSION 13: Yemen – women’s situation in the aftermath of the merger of the conservative Republic of Yemen and the Marxist DPRY, creating a fragile state with a weak economy


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.

Badran, Feminism in Islam, 253-278.

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