

**Department:** MCL

**Course No:** ARAB 121

**Title:** Traditional Arab Literatures, Cultures, and Civilizations

**Credits:** 3

**Contact:** Roger Travis

**Content Area:** CA1-Arts and Humanities and CA4- International

**Catalog Copy:** ARABIC 121. Traditional Arab Literatures, Cultures, and Civilizations  
Either semester. Three credits. Representative works from the cultures of the Arab world. Pre-Islamic poets to later writers and thinkers. Relation of literary and artistic forms to their historical contexts.

**Course Information:**

a. course goals and objectives. This course introduces students to important elements of traditional Arabic culture and complements Arabic Language instruction that is offered by the department of Modern and Classical Languages. Through a variety of media, it surveys traditional Arabic culture from Pre-Islamic poets to later writers and thinkers. Students are introduced to the period of Jahiliyyah , that is the period before the rise of Islam, and to the history, art, literature, philosophy, religion, historiography and social customs of the traditional Arab world that developed after the Koran. By means of a broad chronological survey leading students from the Umayyad to the aftermath of the Abbasside dynasties, this courses facilitates students' appreciation of the traditional values, symbols, and myths of the Arabic culture heritage that endured until the 17th and 18th century but whose echoes resonate in modern Arabic culture as well. Since the approach is both interdisciplinary and comparative, this course encourages students to think critically about another culture and making sense of an unfamiliar world by moving past Western conceptual categories while, at the same time, become aware of the shaping influences of traditional Arabic culture on the Western world.

b. Course requirements: Quizzes, 4 short papers, mid term and final exams. The exams are in the form of short essay questions, definitions and identifications. Exams also include background, factual information, and interpretative material presented during the lectures and class-discussions. Students are also asked to write 4 short essays on the main topics around which this course is structured.

c. List the major themes, issues, topics, etc., to be covered.

- 1) Arabic Civilization before Islam (500-622): the poets of the Hedjaz
- 2) The Rise of Islam: The Koran--
- 3) The Culture of the Umayyad dynasty (622-661): the qasida , the mu'allqât , the ghazal ..
- 4) The first period of the Abbasside dynasty (750-847): Basra , Kûfa and Baghdad and the development of urban society.
- 5) Patronage and the Arts: the majâlis ; Harun ar-Rachîd , the poetry of Abû Nuwâs , Abû

Tammâm .

- 6) The second period of the Abbasside dynasty (847-945): historiography: and philosophy, the spread of Islam
- 7) The third period of Abbasside dynasty (945-1055): The rise of new cultural centres -- Aleppo ( hamdanide ); Cairo ( fatimide )
- 8) The fourth period of the Abbasside dynasty (945-1055): the Saljûkîdes : Nizâm al Mulk and the madâris .
- 9) The culture of Andalusia : Geographers and travelers
- 10) Popular and epic literature: The 1001 Nights, The Tale of Antar , The Tale of Baybars , The Tale of the Banî Hillal .
- 11) Arabic literature in the 17th and 18th centuries: the contact with Persia and the waning of the cultural identity of desert dwellers
- 12) The enduring influence of the traditional Arab cultural heritage

**How Meets Goals of Gen Ed.**: This course is based upon a selection of a rich body of works, including religious parables, homilies, and injunctions, poetry and prose, historical, philosophical and geographical accounts, that exemplify the richness of traditional Arabic culture from the sixth century to the modern period. Hence, students will not only acquire intellectual breadth and versatility by gaining an understanding of how major political and social developments shaped traditional Arabic culture under the differing influences of its dynastic powers and the encounters with the Western world but will become sensitive to the variety of human responses encountered in their weekly readings and screening. These range from the early pre- islamic beliefs of polytheism to the monotheistic beliefs codified in the Koran and the Hadith , sent by God to Muhammad, to the historical, philosophical, and scientific thought that flourished under later Abbassides dynasties and with the rise of urban centers as well as through the encounters with Western civilizations. Moreover, by way of lectures, class-discussions, readings, and writing assignments, students will become more articulate while also developing the skills that are necessary for any critical, responsible, and serious assessment of the way culture responds to and participates in different visions of world in which we live.

**CAI Criteria**: This course brings together historical, critical and aesthetic modes of inquiry. All readings/screening selected survey the social and political developments that gave rise to the main schools of thought of traditional Arabic culture. Hence, students are introduced to the poets of the Hedjaz from the pre-Islamic period, the culture that followed the Koran, the sciences of Rhetoric and Grammar of the first Abbasside dynasty, the emergence of prose literature, the historiography of Ibn al- Hakam , Balâdhurî , Ya'qûbi , Tabarî and the Philosophy of Al- Kindî , Al- Fârâbi , the cultural impact of centres of culture such as Aleppo ( hamdanide ) and Cairo, the spread of Islam and the encounter with Western civilizations, the culture of El Andalus and the rise of geography and travel narratives, the growth of popular literature (the 1001 Nights) and their wide dissemination in the culture of Medieval and Renaissance Europe. Because of this wide selection, students become aware of the intricate relations between specific rhetorical genres and fundamental historical, social, and cultural developments. The variety of texts that are included in this course also provide students with a deeper comprehension of the modes of Arabic verbal, musical and visual arts.

**CA4 Criteria:** This course fulfills a number of categories listed under Group 4. By introducing students to a variety of texts, including religious injunctions, homilies, and parables, forms of calligraphy, historical and geographical accounts it introduces students to a variety of modes of creativity. However, the most significant aspect of this course is the introduction of the commonalities and divergences between traditional Judaic, Christian and Islamic thought as well as the mutual influences between Judaic, Christian and Islamic communities of the past. By being confronted with beliefs that are distinct from their epistemologies (i.e., values of modernization vs. tradition, scientific empiricism vs. traditional metaphysics, secular vs. theological society, gender roles, etc.) students become aware that interpretive systems (and the social structures that often derive from them), are cultural creations and therefore subject to a process of redefinition. At the same time, this course stresses the importance of inter-cultural dialogue and seeks to establish similarities across diverse cultures by making students aware that traditional Arabic and Western cultures not only shared similar concerns but flourished because of their mutual influence.

**Role of Grad Students:** None.

**Supplementary Information:** syllabus

#### DEPARTMENT OF MODERN AND CLASSICAL LANGUAGES SYLLABUS: ARABIC 1XY. Traditional Arab Literatures, Cultures, and Civilizations

Description: This course introduces students to representative works from the cultures of the Arab world, from Pre-Islamic poets to later writers and thinkers, and focuses on the relation of literary and artistic forms to their historical contexts.

Week 1:

Arabic Civilization before Islam (500-622): the poets of the Hedjaz : Umr'l Qays , Zuhayr , An-Nâbigha , Amr Ibn Kulthûm .

Week 2:

The Rise of Islam: The Koran

Week 3:

The Umayyad dynasty (622-661): the qasida , the mu'allqât , the ghazal ..

Week 4:

The first period of the Abbasside dynasty (750-847): Basra , Kûfa and Baghdad and the development of urban society. The Sciences of Rhetoric and Grammar: Al- Khalîl , Sibawayhi .

Week 5:

Patrons and poets: the majâlis ; Harun ar-Rachîd , the poetry of Abû Nuwâs , Abû Tammâm .

Week 6:

Founding of Bayt al- Hikma ; the emergence of prose literature: al-‘ adab . The disputes

concerning the Chu 'ûbiyya and the zandaqa .

Week 7:

Second period of the Abbasside dynasty (847-945): Jâhiz and Ibn Qutayba ; historiography: Ibn al- Hakam , Balâdhurî , Ya'qûbi , Tabarî . Philosophy: Al- Kindi , Al- Fârâbi .

Week 8:

Third period of Abbasside dynasty (945-1055): New centers of culture: Rayy ( bûyide ); Aleppo ( hamdanide ); Cairo ( fatimide ); Chi'ism and Ismailism . Mutanabbî and Sayf ad- Dawla ; al- Hamdânî , Al- Ma'rrî .

Week 9:

The third period of the Abbasside dynasty, suite: Hamadhânî , Harîrî : the maqamât ; Mas'ûdi , ' Isfahânî , Tha'âlibî , Khwârzimî ; Tawhîdî . The sajj ' .

Week 10:

Fourth period of the Abbasside dynasty (945-1055): the Saljûkîdes : Nizâm al- Mulk and the madâris .

Week 11:

Andalusia : The Almohades and Almoravides : the Muwachchah : Ramâdî , Ibn ' Ammar . Ibn Hazm . Geographers and travelers: Al- ' Idrîsî , Al Bakrî , Ibn Battûta , Ibn Khaldûn . Philosophy: Ibn Sînâ , Ibn Rushd , Al- Ghazâlî .

Week 12:

Popular literature: The 1001 Nights, The Tale of Antar , The Tale of Baybars , The Tale of the Banî Hillal .

Week 13:

Arabic literature in the 17th and 18th centuries: the contact with Persia and the waning of the cultural identity of desert dwellers

Week 14:

The enduring influence of the traditional Arab cultural heritage