

**COMPARATIVE GULF STUDIES:
PERSIAN GULF AND THE GULF OF MEXICO**

IDS4930

SPRING 2025

Course Information:

Instructor:	Onursal Erol, PhD
Email:	oeol@ufl.edu
Course Time:	M/W/F 12:50 PM - 1:40 PM
Course Location:	FLI 0117
Office Location:	Pugh Hall 236
Office Hours (in-person, walk-in):	Th 10:30AM – 12:00PM
Remote Office Hours (by appointment):	W 3:00PM – 4:30PM
Appointment Link:	https://calendly.com/oeol/remote-office-hours

Course Description

In this course, we will investigate the political geography of two critical global regions: the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Mexico. Through the lens of political geography, and with a focus on energy resources, geopolitics, and migration, as well as the natural and urban environment, we will explore the extent to which these regions are shaped by various interconnected politics of space. We will emphasize comparative analysis and challenge ourselves to critically assess similarities and differences between these two "gulfs" while considering the broader implications of regional dynamics on global politics and society. Our task is to engage with diverse materials—including academic readings, media, and case studies—to develop insights into the spatial, political, and cultural forces that define these areas.

Learning Goals

- Focus on analyzing political, economic, and cultural connections between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Mexico.
- Critically assess academic readings, media, and case studies to synthesize insights into the interconnected politics of space in global and regional dynamics.
- Collaborate in teams to develop and deliver presentations that apply political geography concepts to real-world regional comparisons.
- Communicate ideas effectively through evidence-based presentations and essays, integrating insights from diverse course materials.

Course Materials

This course is committed to affordable education and there are no required textbooks to purchase. All materials will be accessed through Perusall.



Grade Distribution	
Reading Engagement	15%
Participation	15%
Gulf Comparison Project	40%
Final Essay	30%

Grading Scale
(A) 94-100 (A-) 90-93 (B+) 86-89 (B) 82-85
(B-) 78-81 (C+) 74-77 (C) 70-73 (C-) 66-69
(D+) 62-65 (D) 58-61 (D-) 54-57 (E) 53 & below

Reading Engagement (5%x3 = 15%)

This grade reflects the quality of your engagement with the course materials. My expectation is *not* that every student reads every word of every piece of assigned material. Rather, I expect us as a group to make an honest and sustained enough effort throughout the semester to spend quality time with most of the materials before class. This way, when we do get too busy or tired and miss certain things here and there, there is reliably someone else to close the gaps for us when we discuss it in class. Reading engagement will be measured in Perusall and graded in three separate installments at the end of Weeks 5, 9, and 14. Students are expected to access all course materials on Perusall (linked on Canvas), read/watch a majority of the assigned materials before class, add thoughtful comments on at least two separate occasions in each grading period.

Participation (5%x3 = 15%)

This grade reflects the overall quality of your participation in class. Please mind that, “participation” is not the same as “attendance.” Your attendance is not graded. If you are feeling unwell, have a job interview, or are pressed for time before an important exam, please feel free to miss a class or two as you see fit. But understand that you are missing out on your opportunity to establish a quality participation record. To establish a quality participation record, my expectation is that you are present for the overwhelming majority of our meetings, you come to class having read and contemplated on the required readings, voice your opinions, share your agreements/concerns freely, raise questions, and uplift and engage with your peers in intellectually meaningful ways. Participation is graded in three separate installments at the end of Weeks 5, 9 and 14, and posted on Canvas with feedback. This way students periodically get a clean slate and can adapt as necessary.

Gulf Comparison Project (10+10+20=40%)

Students will complete a multi-step “Gulf Comparison Project,” where they will select a specific empirical comparison between two equivalent units of analysis—one from the Persian Gulf and the other from the Gulf of Mexico. Some example ideas might be: “Propaganda Posters in Iranian and Cuban Revolutions” or “Race and Tourism in Miami and Dubai.”

The Gulf Comparison Project is a scaffolded group assignment with multiple components. Groups of two or three students will sign up for a specific theme and commit to its associated deadlines. [Sign up for one of the available spots, here.](#)

Below are the project’s stages and their respective grading criteria:

Gulf Comparison Project#1 – Idea generation (10%)

- Your first task is to come up with specific ideas. Collaborate as a group to generate at least two distinct ideas for your project (more ideas are encouraged if possible).
- Use the following questions to guide your deliberations: Are your ideas viable? Does it make sense to compare these cases? Would you have access to the necessary data or resources? Would this comparison create an interesting story to share with the class?
- Rank your ideas in order of preference and provide 3-sentence explanations for each, detailing your thought process.
- Submit your ranked choices on Canvas by your group’s due date. I will provide feedback within 24 hours, and we will have selected an official topic for your project.

Gulf Comparison Project#2 – Outline (10%)

- Your next task is to draft a detailed outline for a 20-25 minute class presentation.
- Your outline should specify: the number of slides you plan to present; the approximate content and purpose of each slide; as well as expected time allocation for each slide.
- Submit your itemized outline on Canvas by the assigned deadline. Feedback will be provided to help you refine your presentation.

Gulf Comparison Project#3 – Presentation (20%)

- Deliver a max. 25-minute in-class presentation based on your approved outline and the feedback you will have received from me.
- Your main task with these presentations is to tell an interesting and relevant story that relates to your chosen theme. Successful teams will bolster the telling of this story with appealing and informative visuals, and engaging and dynamic presenters, while articulating connections to key concepts discussed in course materials.
- You may use PowerPoint, Google Slides, or Canva as your presentation medium.
- You can divide tasks like research, slide preparation, rehearsal as you see fit, but all team members must participate in the active presentation on the day.
- Team leaders must submit the finalized presentation slides on Canvas by the group's due date.
- After the presentation, each team member will complete an anonymous survey to assess whether all teammates pulled their weight for all three components of the project.

Final Essay = 30%

Multiple prompts and detailed instructions will be circulated on the morning of Apr 23. Please write a short essay (max. 1500 words) responding to **ONE** of them (**due on Canvas by 11:59pm, May 1**). All academic integrity rules apply. Reference at least two readings from the syllabus. Any citation style can be used. There is no minimum word-limit for the essay. The bibliography does not count towards the word-limit. All late papers are accepted with a 1-point penalty for every 8-hour period and for four days. A detailed grading rubric is attached at the end of this syllabus.

Course Schedule

Week 1 – POLITICAL GEOGRAPHIES OF “THE GULF”

- Jan 13** *Course Introduction (No readings)
- Jan 15** Geographies of “the Gulf” (No readings)
- Jan 17** Smith, Sara. “Introduction.” In *Political Geography: A Critical Introduction*, 16–32. John Wiley & Sons, 2020.

Week 2 – GULF HISTORIES

- Jan 20** MLK Day – No Class
- Jan 22** Darnell, Rezneat Milton. “Historical Background.” In *The American Sea: A Natural History of the Gulf of Mexico*, 1–6. Texas A&M University Press, 2015.
- Jan 24** Potter, Lawrence G. “Society in the Persian Gulf: Before and After Oil.” *Center for International and Regional Studies Occasional Papers*, no. No 18 (November 2017): 1–20.

Week 3 – PETROSTATES & CARBON DEMOCRACY

- Jan 27** Potter, Lawrence G. “Society in the Persian Gulf: Before and After Oil.” *Center for International and Regional Studies Occasional Papers*, no. No 18 (November 2017): 21–30.
- Milman, Oliver. “‘This Used to Be a Beautiful Place’: How the US Became the World’s Biggest Fossil Fuel State.” *The Guardian*, July 24, 2024.
- Jan 29** No Class (Instructor at the Study Abroad Fair)
- Jan 31** Mitchell, Timothy. “Carbon Democracy.” *Economy and Society* 38, no. 3 (August 1, 2009): 399–432.

Week 4 – PETROEDUCATION & ENERGOPOLITICS

- Feb 3** Al-Saleh, Danya. “Who Will Man the Rigs When We Go?” Transnational Demographic Fever Dreams between Qatar and Texas.” *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* 40, no. 5 (August 1, 2022): 1130–46.
- Feb 5** *Texas’s Power Disaster Is a Warning Sign for the US*. Vox, 2021.
- Feb 7** Gulf Comparison Presentation - Group 1

Week 5 – GREENWASHING & RENEWABLES

- Feb 10** Boyer, Dominic. “Ixtepec.” In *Energopolitics*, 27–59. Duke University Press, 2019.
- Feb 12** Simon, Alex. “In Dubai, a ‘Good Vibes Only’ Approach to Climate Change.” *The New York Times*, December 8, 2023.
- Feb 14** Gulf Comparison Presentation – Group 2

Week 6 – REVOLUTIONS RED AND GREEN

- Feb 17** *Soy Cuba*. Drama. Mosfilm, Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industrias Cinematográficos (ICAIC), 1964. Runtime: 2hr21min.
- Suggested Reading:** Rowlandson, William. “Fidel Castro: Cuban Conundrum Fought for Freedom but Entrenched State Power.” *The Conversation*, November 26, 2016. <http://theconversation.com/fidel-castro-cuban-conundrum-fought-for-freedom-but-entrenched-state-power-69453>.
- Feb 19** Riazi, Toloo. “From Moncada and Sierra Maestra to Siahkal.” In *Myth Making: A Comparative Study on the Iranian and Cuban Revolutions*, 26–42. University of California Santa Barbara, 2019.
- Riazi, Toloo. “Hurricane over Sugar and Revolution in the Revolution: A Global Prescription?” In *Myth Making: A Comparative Study on the Iranian and Cuban Revolutions*, 54–67. University of California Santa Barbara, 2019.
- Feb 21** Gulf Comparison Presentation – Group 3

Week 7 – GEOPOLITICS

- Feb 24** Swift, John. “The Cuban Missile Crisis.” *History Review*, no. 57 (March 2007): 6–11.
- Feb 26** Windecker, Gidon, and Peter Sendrowicz. “Cold War in the Gulf: The Rivalry of Saudi and Iranian Narratives for Hegemony in the Middle East.” *Demographic Change: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung*, 2016.
- Naar, Ismaeel. “Saudi Arabia and U.A.E. Tread Cautiously With Syria’s New Leaders.” *The New York Times*, January 3, 2025.
- Feb 28** Gulf Comparison Presentation – Group 4

Week 8 – POLITICS OF “MAN-MADE” DISASTER

- Mar 3** Syal, Richa. “‘Gushing Oil and Roaring Fires’: 30 Years on Kuwait Is Still Scarred by Catastrophic Pollution.” *The Guardian*, December 11, 2021, sec. Environment.
- Mar 5** “The Spill (Deepwater Horizon).” *Swindled*. Accessed January 2, 2025. Runtime: 59min.
- Mar 7** Gulf Comparison Presentation – Group 5

Week 9 – POLITICS OF “NATURAL” DISASTER

- Mar 10** Taras, Raymond. “‘Political Storms in the Gulf of Mexico in 2005: Cuban and Mexican Leaders’ Critiques of the Disaster Response to Hurricanes Katrina and Wilma’.” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 28, no. 4 (December 1, 2015): 283–302.
- Mar 12** Deutsche Welle. “Flooding Exacerbates War Hardships in Yemen,” August 13, 2022.
- Mar 14** Gulf Comparison Presentation – Group 6

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SPRING BREAK

Week 10 – MIGRANTS & ASYLUM SEEKERS

- Mar 24** Kanna, Ahmed. “Outsiders of the Oil States.” In *Global Middle East: Into the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Asef Bayat and Linda Herrera, 387–406. University of California Press, 2021.
- Mar 26** Kanno-Youngs, Zolan, and Eileen Sullivan. “Is That Legal? How Scores of Migrants Came to Be Shipped North.” *The New York Times*, September 16, 2022.
- Chen, Stefanos, and Jeffery C. Mays. “To Avoid New York Rules, Hundreds of Migrants Dropped Off in New Jersey.” *The New York Times*, January 1, 2024.
- Mar 28** Gulf Comparison Presentation – Group 7

Week 11 – AN EXPAT, YOU SAY?

- Mar 31** Le Renard, Amélie. “How Western Residents in Riyadh and Dubai Produce and Challenge Exceptionalism.” In *Beyond Exception: New Interpretations of the Arabian Peninsula*, by Ahmed Kanna, Amélie Le Renard, and Neha Vora, 55–79. Ithaca, United States: Cornell University Press, 2020.
- Apr 2** *Why Americans Are Relocating To Mexico City For A Better Life*, 2023.
- Apr 4** Gulf Comparison Presentation – Group 8

Week 12 – TOURISM & THE CITY-I

- Apr 7** Morrison, Alastair M., and Cristina Maxim. “Sustainability in World Cities.” In *World Tourism Cities*, 1st ed., 1:196–220. Routledge, 2022.
- Apr 9** Zaidan, Esmat, and Jason F. Kovacs. “Resident Attitudes Towards Tourists and Tourism Growth: A Case Study From the Middle East, Dubai in United Arab Emirates.” *European Journal of Sustainable Development* 6, no. 1 (January 31, 2017): 291–307.
- Apr 11** Gulf Comparison Presentation – Group 9

Week 13 – TOURISM & THE CITY-II

- Apr 14** Leibowitz, Aaron. “How a Viral Ad Campaign and ‘Draconian’ Crackdown Changed Miami Beach Spring Break.” *Miami Herald*, April 3, 2024.
- Apr 16** Wylie, Lana. “American Tourists in Cuba: Implications of Cross-Cultural Encounters.” *International Journal of Cuban Studies* 16, no. 1 (2024): 82–103.
- Apr 18** Gulf Comparison Presentation – Group 10

Week 14 – CONCLUSION

- Apr 21** OnurGames
- Apr 23** Final Essay Workshop

Course Policies

Extra Credit: Three opportunities for extra credit (each worth 1-point towards the course grade) will be offered to the entire class throughout the semester. No individual extra credit opportunities can be provided privately.

Email Policy: Please include the course information in the subject line so I can better assist you. If your email includes a question, please allow up to 2 business days for a response.

Reading Materials: The materials in this course are selected not to be endorsed, but to be debated. This means that we will not passively “learn from” or “agree with” these materials. Rather, we will engage with them. We will develop a diverse array of agreements and criticisms vis-à-vis these materials in a respectful but lively intellectual environment.

Grading Policies: All [UF grading policies](#) are observed.

Academic Honor Policy: UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. [Click here to read the Conduct Code](#).

UF Gulf Scholars Student Learning Outcomes: There are additional rubric criteria associated with the Gulf Comparison Project that gather anonymous data on students’ performance toward institutional UF Gulf Scholars student learning outcomes. These rubrics reflect the overall expected outcomes for students completing all UF Gulf Scholars courses. The scoring of these criteria does not impact your grade. All results will be anonymized.

Accommodations: Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the [Disability Resource Center](#). It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with me and discuss their access needs as early as possible in the semester as accommodations cannot be applied retroactively.

Publication of Class Lecture: Publication of a class lecture without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

GULF COMPARISON PRESENTATION GRADING RUBRIC					
Criteria	5 Points	4 Points	3 Points	2 Points	1 Point
Case Selection	Highly relevant and interesting case. Well-researched, with clear evidence and compelling examples provided.	Relevant and interesting case. Some evidence and examples are provided.	Somewhat relevant and interesting case. Limited evidence and examples are provided.	Marginally relevant case. Minimal evidence and examples are provided.	Case is not relevant. Lacks evidence or examples.
Visuals	Visuals are clear, engaging, and enhance the presentation. They effectively convey key information and support the overall narrative.	Visuals are clear and support the presentation. They convey key information but could be more engaging.	Visuals may lack clarity or relevance. They provide some support to the presentation but are not fully integrated.	Visuals are minimal, unclear, or poorly executed. They provide little support to the presentation.	Visuals are absent or do not contribute to the presentation in a meaningful way.
Presenter Engagement	Presenters are highly engaged, confident, and articulate. They do not read at their audience. They maintain eye contact, speak clearly, and engage the audience.	Presenters are engaged and articulate. They maintain eye contact and speak clearly, but occasionally break the flow by reading at the audience.	Presenters are somewhat engaged but may lack confidence or clarity. There is limited interaction with the audience, and they rely heavily on notes.	Presenters are minimally engaged, with noticeable issues in confidence, clarity, or audience interaction.	Presenters are disengaged, with significant issues in communication, confidence, or interaction with the audience.
Connection to Course Readings	Presentation makes strong and explicit connections to at least one course reading, clearly articulating how the case relates to a concept discussed in the readings.	Clear connections to a concept(s) discussed in a course reading, with good understanding shown.	Some connection to a concept(s) discussed in a course reading, but could be more explicit or thorough.	Minimal connection to a concept(s) discussed in a course reading, with limited understanding shown.	No clear connection to any concepts discussed in the course readings.

FINAL ESSAY GRADING RUBRIC					
	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor
Format Compliance	Assignment complies with all word-limit, citation, and bibliography requirements <i>(6 points)</i>	Assignment mostly complies with word-limit, citation, and bibliography requirements <i>(5 points)</i>	Assignment partially complies with word-limit, citation, and bibliography requirements, with several errors <i>(4 points)</i>	Assignment complies with only one of the word-limit, citation, and bibliography requirements <i>(2 points)</i>	Assignment does not comply with any of the word-limit, citation, or bibliography requirements <i>(0 points)</i>
Reference to Course Readings	Assignment engages deeply with at least two course readings <i>(8 points)</i>	Assignment engages with two course readings, but slightly superficially <i>(6 points)</i>	Assignment engages with two course readings, but superficially <i>(4 points)</i>	Assignment engages with one course reading <i>(2 points)</i>	Assignment does not engage with any course readings <i>(0 points)</i>
Quality of Writing	Assignment features well-structured, clear, and sophisticated writing <i>(8 points)</i>	Assignment is well-structured and clear, but the writing may not be particularly sophisticated <i>(6 points)</i>	Assignment is somewhat clear and well-structured, but the writing is not particularly sophisticated or may have some errors <i>(4 points)</i>	Assignment is poorly structured and the writing is not clear or sophisticated <i>(2 points)</i>	Assignment is poorly structured, the writing is not clear or sophisticated, and there are numerous errors <i>(0 points)</i>
Argumentation	Assignment presents a clearly communicated convincing main argument <i>(8 points)</i>	Assignment presents a main argument that is mostly clear and convincing <i>(6 points)</i>	Assignment presents a main argument that is somewhat unclear or not fully convincing <i>(4 points)</i>	Assignment presents a main argument that is unclear or not convincing <i>(2 points)</i>	Assignment does not present a main argument <i>(0 points)</i>