

POS4931 / ASH3931 / IDS4930:
Special Topics in Interdisciplinary Studies
ENVIRONMENT AND POLITICS IN THE
MIDDLE EAST
Spring 2026 | 3 credits

NOTE: This course complies with all UF academic policies. For information on those policies and for resources for students, please see UF's "[Academic Policies and Resources](#)" web page.

I. General Information

Meeting days and times: T (10:40 AM - 11:30 AM)
R (10:40 AM - 12:35 PM)

Class location: TUR 2349

Instructor(s):

Name: Onursal Erol

Office Building/Number: Pugh 236

Phone: (352) 846-1575

Email: oyerol@ufl.edu

Office Hours: T (12:00PM – 2PM, in-person, walk-in or make an appointment)
W (3:30PM – 4:30PM, remote, by appointment only)

Appointment Link: <https://calendly.com/oyerol>

Course Description

Advanced study of selected topics. Content varies from term to term.

In this course, we will think about the Middle East through the analytical lens of political ecology. We will politicize the issues, conditions, conflicts, outcomes, imaginations, and projects that pertain to various environmental phenomena in the region. Our task is multifold. Together, we will question the place, representations, and socio-political functions of “nature,” its conservation, and its degradation in the Middle East. We will develop sophisticated understandings of the various relationships of power embedded in environmental disasters, conflicts, and infrastructural projects. We will investigate historical and contemporary human-pathogen interactions to think about the political ecologies of infection and disease in the region. We will situate the Middle East in the world of carbon/post-carbon politics and debate the potentials and limitations of environmental activism in the region. Lastly, we will develop a cultural literacy of and refine our critical outlooks on the multispecies experiences that form the texture of biological life above and beyond human life in the Middle East.

Course Materials: All course materials are free and available online on Canvas/Perusall. Students are required to read/watch/listen to all materials listed in the “Calendar” section of this syllabus before class.

Materials and Supplies Fee: N/A.

II. Course Goals

Course Objectives

In this course we will:

- Examine the Middle East through the analytical framework of political ecology, with attention to the relationships among environment, power, and politics.
- Explore how environmental issues in the Middle East are shaped by conflict, infrastructure, public health, extractive economies, and global carbon and post-carbon dynamics.
- Investigate representations and governance of nature, including conservation, degradation, and multispecies life, in their historical and cultural contexts.
- Engage in collaborative, public-facing digital authorship as a mode of critical inquiry, knowledge production, and scholarly communication.

Student Learning Outcomes

A student who successfully completes this course will be able to:

- Identify and summarize core concepts and debates in political ecology and environmental studies related to the Middle East.
- Analyze environmental case studies in the Middle East by applying political ecology frameworks to questions of power, conflict, and governance.
- Evaluate the role of the Middle East within global carbon and post-carbon systems and environmental activism.
- Produce and revise digital essays that integrate scholarly sources, critical analysis, and multimedia content.

III. Graded Work

Graded Components

Participation (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. Participation is graded in three separate installments (3x5=15) at the end of Weeks 5, 9, and 14. This way

students periodically get a clean slate and can adapt as necessary. The participation grading rubric is attached at the end of this syllabus.

Reading (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 effort throughout the semester to spend quality time with an overwhelming majority of the assigned 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 will be measured in Perusall and graded in three separate installments (3x5=15) at the end of Weeks 5, 9, and 14. Students must access all required course materials on Perusall (linked on Canvas) and read/watch/listen to a majority of the assigned materials before class. You are encouraged to comment on the materials on Perusall to engage with each other as well, but this is not part of your reading grade.

Bookcreator Digital Essays (60%): Students will complete three scaffolded digital essays using Bookcreator over the course of the semester. Each essay focuses on a specific empirical case connected to a course theme and analyzes it through the lens of political ecology, with writing aimed at a general public audience and supported by embedded media. The three essays are designed to build on one another, allowing students to develop stronger arguments, deeper analysis, and more effective public-facing digital writing over time. Students may write Bookcreator#1 (15 points) during Weeks 3, 4, or 5; Bookcreator#2 (20 points) during Weeks 7, 8, or 9; and Bookcreator#3 (25 points) during Weeks 11, 12, or 13. Detailed guidelines and a grading rubric are provided at the end of the syllabus.

Self-Reflection Memos (10%): These are brief, informal check-ins that ask students to reflect on their path to success in some aspect of the course in a few sentences. They are meant to be a quick and informal way for students to reflect on their strategies for success in this course. The memo prompts will become available on Canvas/Assignments one week before they are due. They are graded (Memo#1=1-point, #2, #3, and #4 =3 points each) for completion.

TOTAL: 100%

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

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.

IV. Calendar

| Date | Topic | Readings/Preparation | Work Due |
|------------------|---|--|---|
| January 13, 2026 | INTRODUCTION | No readings assigned | |
| January 15, 2026 | POLITICAL ECOLOGY | <p>Jamieson, Dale. "The Environment as an Ethical Question." In <i>Ethics and the Environment: An Introduction</i>, 1-25. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.</p> <p>Robbins, Paul. "Political versus Apolitical Ecologies." In <i>Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction</i>. 2nd ed., 11–20. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2012.</p> | |
| January 20, 2026 | MIDDLE EASTERN ENVIRONMENT | Cline, Eric. "What Happened After Civilization Collapsed." Interview by Rund Abdelfatah and Ramtin Arablouei. <i>Throughline</i> , NPR, January 11, 2021. Podcast, 57:42. | |
| January 22, 2026 | MIDDLE EASTERN ENVIRONMENT & BOOKCREATOR WORKSHOP | Burke, Edmund, III. "The Transformation of the Middle Eastern Environment, 1500 B.C.E.–2000 B.C.E." In <i>The Environment and World History</i> , edited by Edmund Burke III and Kenneth Pomeranz, 81–91. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009. | Consider bringing a laptop for Bookcreator Workshop |
| January 27, 2026 | NATURE IN CONSERVATION: WILDERNESS & ENCLOSURE | Cronon, William. "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." <i>Environmental History</i> 1, no. 1 (1996): 7–28. | |
| January 29, 2026 | NATURE IN CONSERVATION: | Davis, Diana K. "Enclosing Nature in North Africa: National Parks and the | Study Bookcreator Highlights#1 |

| Date | Topic | Readings/Preparation | Work Due |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| | WILDERNESS & ENCLOSURE | Politics of Environmental History.” In <i>Water on Sand: Environmental Histories of the Middle East and North Africa</i> , edited by Alan Mikhail, 159–79. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. | |
| February 3, 2026 | NATURE AS CRISIS: DISASTERS & HAZARDS | Angell, Elizabeth. “Assembling Disaster: Earthquakes and Urban Politics in Istanbul.” <i>City</i> 18, no. 6 (November 2, 2014): 667–78. | |
| February 5, 2026 | NATURE AS CRISIS: DISASTERS & HAZARDS | Popperl, Simone. “Geologies of Erasure: Sinkholes, Science, and Settler Colonialism at the Dead Sea.” <i>International Journal of Middle East Studies</i> 50, no. 3 (August 2018): 427–48. | Study Bookcreator Highlights#2 |
| February 10, 2026 | NATURE OF DISEASE | Gratien, Chris. “The Ottoman Quagmire: Malaria, Swamps, and Settlement in the Late Ottoman Mediterranean.” <i>International Journal of Middle East Studies</i> 49, no. 4 (2017): 583–604. | |
| February 12, 2026 | NATURE OF DISEASE | Clifton, Eli, and Marmar Kabir. “A Deadly Combination in Iran: Coronavirus and Sanctions.” <i>Washington Report on Middle East Affairs</i> 39, no. 3 (May 1, 2020): 14–18. Stone, Richard. “Iran Confronts Coronavirus amid a ‘Battle between Science and Conspiracy Theories.’” <i>Science</i> , March 29, 2020. | Study Bookcreator Highlights#3 |

| Date | Topic | Readings/Preparation | Work Due |
|-------------------|--|--|--------------------------------|
| February 17, 2026 | ENVIRONMENTAL IMAGINARIES OF THE NATION | Harris, Leila M. "Salts, Soils, and (Un)Sustainabilities? Analyzing Narratives of Environmental Change in Southeastern Turkey." In <i>Environmental Imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa</i> , edited by Diana K. Davis and Edmund Burke, 192–217. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011. | |
| February 19, 2026 | ENVIRONMENTAL IMAGINARIES OF THE NATION | Barromi-Perlman, Edna. "Visions of Landscape Photography in Palestine and Israel." <i>Landscape Research</i> 45, no. 5 (July 3, 2020): 564–82. | |
| February 24, 2026 | NATURE IN TRANSFORMATION: DESERTS OF MODERNITY | Günel, Gökçe. "Air Conditioning the Arabian Peninsula." <i>International Journal of Middle East Studies</i> 50, no. 3 (August 2018): 573–79. | |
| February 26, 2026 | NATURE IN TRANSFORMATION: DESERTS OF MODERNITY | Sowers, Jeannie. "Remapping the Nation, Critiquing the State: Environmental Narratives and Desert Land Reclamation in Egypt." In <i>Environmental Imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa</i> , edited by Diana K. Davis and Edmund Burke, 158–91. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011. | Study Bookcreator Highlights#4 |
| March 3, 2026 | ENERGY & THE ENVIRONMENT | Mitchell, Timothy. "Carbon Democracy." <i>Economy and Society</i> 38, no. 3 (August 1, 2009): 399–432. | |
| March 5, 2026 | ENERGY & THE ENVIRONMENT | Cantoni, Roberto, and Karen Rignall. "Kingdom of the Sun: A Critical, Multiscalar Analysis of Morocco's | Study Bookcreator Highlights#5 |

| Date | Topic | Readings/Preparation | Work Due |
|----------------------|---------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| | | Solar Energy Strategy.” <i>Energy Research & Social Science</i> 51 (May 1, 2019): 20–31. | |
| March 10, 2026 | CLIMATE CHANGE | Klein, Naomi. “Introduction.” In <i>This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate</i> , 1–30. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014. | |
| March 12, 2026 | CLIMATE CHANGE | Stamatopoulou-Robbins, Sophia. “An Uncertain Climate in Risky Times: How Occupation Became Like the Rain in Post-Oslo Palestine.” <i>International Journal of Middle East Studies</i> 50, no. 3 (August 2018): 383–404. | Study Bookcreator Highlights#6 |
| --- SPRING BREAK --- | | | |
| March 24, 2026 | THE (UN)BUILT ENVIRONMENT | Cugurullo, Federico. “Urban Eco-Modernisation and the Policy Context of New Eco-City Projects: Where Masdar City Fails and Why.” <i>Urban Studies</i> 53, no. 11 (August 2016): 2417–33. | |
| March 26, 2026 | THE (UN)BUILT ENVIRONMENT | Ceylan Baba, Ece. “The Risks of Mega Urban Projects Creating a Dystopia: Canal Istanbul.” <i>City and Environment Interactions</i> 6 (April 1, 2020): 1–10. | |
| March 31, 2026 | POLLUTION | Movahedi-Lankarani, Ciruce. “A Ghoul at the Gates: Natural Gas Energy and the Environment in Pahlavi Iran, 1960–1979.” <i>International Journal of Middle East Studies</i> 54, no. 1 (2022): 80–99. | |

| Date | Topic | Readings/Preparation | Work Due |
|----------------|------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| April 2, 2026 | POLLUTION | <i>Costa Brava, Lebanon</i> . Directed by Mounia Akl. Beirut: Abbout Productions, 2021. | Study Bookcreator Highlights#7 |
| April 7, 2026 | POLITICS OF ENVIRONMENTALISM | Özkaynak, Begüm, Cem İskender Aydın, Pınar Ertör-Akyazı, and Irmak Ertör. “The Gezi Park Resistance from an Environmental Justice and Social Metabolism Perspective.” <i>Capitalism Nature Socialism</i> 26, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 99–114. | |
| April 9, 2026 | POLITICS OF ENVIRONMENTALISM | Cohen, Shaul. “Environmentalism Deferred: Nationalisms and Israeli/Palestinian Imaginaries.” In <i>Environmental Imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa</i> , edited by Diana K. Davis and Edmund Burke, 246–64. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011. | Study Bookcreator Highlights#8 |
| April 14, 2026 | MULTISPECIES STUDIES | <i>Kedi</i> . Directed by Ceyda Torun. Los Angeles: Termite Films, 2016. | |
| April 16, 2026 | MULTISPECIES STUDIES | Gutkowski, Natalia. “Bodies That Count: Administering Multispecies in Palestine/Israel’s Borderlands.” <i>Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space</i> 5, no. 1 (2021): 1–23. | Study Bookcreator Highlights#9 |
| April 21, 2026 | CONCLUSION | No readings assigned | |

V. Procedure for Conflict Resolution

Any classroom issues, disagreements or grade disputes should be discussed first between the instructor and the student. If the problem cannot be resolved, please contact Tim Karis, International Studies Undergraduate Coordinator (tkaris@ufl.edu, (352) 273-1087) or Marianne Vernetson, Graham Center Interim Director (mvernetson@ufl.edu, (352) 846-1575). Be prepared to provide documentation of the problem, as well as all graded materials for the semester. Issues that cannot be resolved departmentally will be referred to the University Ombuds Office (<http://www.ombuds.ufl.edu>; 352-392-1308) or the Dean of Students Office (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu>; 352-392-1261).

VI. Bookcreator Guidelines

- 1- There are no midterm or final exams in this course. Instead, we will collectively author a public-facing media-rich digital class project on bookcreator.com. Think of this project as a collective exercise in putting together an e-book. Throughout the semester, each student will produce three digital essays, select samples of which will be highlighted in class.
- 2- ASAP, sign up to reserve three spots for your Bookcreator entries, here: <https://tinyurl.com/hyhp6fb>
- 3- Try your best to join the Bookcreator Workshop on Jan 22, which we will hold in class. Consider bringing your personal laptop (even better with an external mouse!) on this day to make the best out of the workshop.
- 4- Select a topic for your essay. Opt for a specific empirical case that effectively illustrates the broader theme. This way you can ensure that your essay topic remains focused enough for comprehensive coverage within such a limited space, while allowing for intellectual depth as you can analyze it as an instance of a larger phenomenon.
- 5- Produce a digital essay on your topic in Bookcreator that features a text (500-1,500 words) to explain and discuss the issue and include relevant external media that can be embedded to enrich the entry. Pretend you are writing an Op-Ed that will be published in an online magazine for the general public. Your goals are to concisely introduce the particulars of your topic, explicitly identify a socio-political aspect of the topic that can be unpacked through the analytical lens of political ecology, communicate in an engaging way with regard to both your prose and the external materials you include in the piece, make your personal stance clear, and convince your readers as to why they should agree with you.
- 6- The submission deadlines are on the sign-up sheet. You can work on your Bookcreator essays until your selected deadlines. A copy of your essay will be automatically considered submitted by the deadline, and you do not need to actually “submit” your Bookcreator essays on Canvas.

VII. Grading Rubrics

| Participation Grading Rubric (per grading period) | |
|---|--|
| 5 | Student is one of the top contributors in class. |
| 4 | Student is a strong contributor in class with some room for improvement. |
| 3 | Student's contributions are at the level of class average. |
| 2 | Student's contributions are slightly below class average. |
| 1 | Student's contributions are significantly below class average. |
| 0 | Student has no participation record. |

| Bookcreator Digital Essay Grading Rubric | | | | |
|--|--|--|---|--|
| | Excellent <i>Bookcreator#1 (3 points)</i> <i>Bookcreator#2 (4 points)</i> <i>Bookcreator#3 (5-4 points)</i> | Good <i>Bookcreator#1 (2 points)</i> <i>Bookcreator#2 (3-2 points)</i> <i>Bookcreator#3 (3-2 points)</i> | Fair <i>Bookcreator#1 (1 point)</i> <i>Bookcreator#2 (1 point)</i> <i>Bookcreator#3 (1 point)</i> | Poor <i>Bookcreator#1 (0 points)</i> <i>Bookcreator#2 (0 points)</i> <i>Bookcreator#3 (0 points)</i> |
| Topic Selection | Highly relevant and engaging topic. Demonstrates original thinking and strong connection to the designated theme. | Relevant and engaging topic. Shows some originality or connection to the designated theme. | Topic is somewhat generic or lacks clear focus. Connection to designated theme is weak. | Topic is irrelevant. Shows no connection to the designated theme. |
| Format Compliance | Assignment complies with the word-limit and submission requirements. | Assignment largely complies with the word-limit and submission requirements with minor errors or inconsistencies. | Assignment falls short of complying with the word-limit and submission requirements. | Assignment largely fails to comply with the word-limit and submission requirements. |
| Media Enrichment | Includes impactful media (images, infographics, video, audio, etc.) that significantly enhance understanding and engagement, demonstrating critical judgment in selection. | Media is either impactful or effective in enhancing the essay. | Media is neither impactful nor effective in enhancing the essay. | Media choice actively disrupts or hinders understanding, or media is absent. |
| Writing/Engagement | Engaging and sophisticated prose that targets the general public. | Mostly clear and understandable public writing with some weaknesses. Engagement may be slightly inconsistent. | Writing is unclear, convoluted, or lacks engaging voice or variety. | Writing contains frequent errors that distract from the message, is difficult to understand, or lacks any sense of engagement. |
| Argumentation | Presents a clear and persuasive main argument with strong supporting evidence, addressing opposing viewpoints in a nuanced way. | Main argument is somewhat clear with limited evidence or counterarguments are weakly addressed. | Main argument is unclear or unconvincing. Evidence is lacking or irrelevant. Counterarguments are ignored or dismissed without explanation. | Main argument is absent or illogical. |