Rethinking Politics and Religion in the Mediterranean
MDES-3000 (3 credits / 45 hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:
Tunisia and Italy: Politics and Religious Integration in the Mediterranean

PLEASE NOTE: This syllabus is representative of a typical term. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from term to term.

Description
This interdisciplinary seminar addresses ways in which politics and religion are being rethought, re-conceptualized, and approached in Tunisia and across the Mediterranean. The succession of revolutions in the MENA region and ensuing disintegration of authoritarian political systems, the accentuation of human mobility across North Africa and Europe, the rise of the global threat of ISIL, and the entanglement of politics and religion with the discourse on violence have urged policy makers, political scientists, and religious scholars to rethink conceptual frameworks, design, and strategies to appraise transnational politics and political linkages, democracy and democratization processes, subjectivity, religious affiliation, and radical expressions of Islam. The seminar explores the role of state and civil society in the democratization process and the reorganization of the religious landscape in Tunisia, examines the impact of secular politics and Sufi Islam in curbing the discourse of violence and intolerance circulated by radical groups, and assesses the importance of affiliation and belonging to transnational political spaces in the formation of subjectivities, affiliations, and collective identities.

Learning Outcomes
The "Rethinking Politics and Religion" seminar comprises 45 class hours of instruction (3 credits). Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Gain factual knowledge of the geopolitics of the Mediterranean basin;
- Identify various forms of conflict and cohesion between the different polities, cultures, and religions in the region;
- Recognize the manifest and discrete modes of resistance against the dissemination of radicalism and extremism;
- Recognize the role of political Islam in Tunisia’s democracy-building process;
- Gain direct comprehensive knowledge of the role of Tunisian civil society organizations in the success of democratic transition;
• Formulate an informed, culturally appropriate and intellectually rigorous paper in which you address an aspect of politics and/or religion in the Mediterranean.

Language of Instruction
This course is taught in English. Students will be exposed to vocabulary related to course content through in-country expert lectures and field visits in a wide range of venues and locales.

Course Schedule

*Please be aware that topics and excursions may vary to take advantage of any emerging events, to accommodate changes in our lecturers’ availability, and to respect any changes that would affect student safety. Students will be notified if this occurs.

Module 1: Mediterranean Revolutions and Geopolitics
This module is designed to familiarize the students with the concept of Mediterranean history and culture, exploring common political, social, religious, and economic features. Salient among these features today is the Arab Spring revolutions and the recent success of democracy-building in Tunisia and its impact on regional geopolitics and on specific countries on both shores of the Mediterranean.

Session 1: Conceptualizing the Mediterranean
In this session the students will explore the idea of a Mediterranean culture, dwelling both on the similarities and the differences, continuities and disruptions between the different national “cultures” on the Mediterranean shores.

Required Readings:

Session 2: The Arab Spring and Mediterranean Geopolitics
This session explores the impact that the Arab Spring has had on the geopolitical relations in the Mediterranean. In particular, the session analyzes the Euro-Mediterranean partnership in light of pressing migration trends and increasing security concerns.

Required Readings:

Session 3: Tunisia and Italy: Shared Itineraries
This session provides a historical overview of the intertwined relationship between Tunisia and Italy while focusing on politics and religious integration. The session looks in particular at the ways in which Italy has been impacted by the Arab Spring.

Required Reading:

**Session 4: Rural Tunisia and the Arab Spring**

This session will be devoted to studying and assessing the role that rural Tunisia played in the January 2011 Revolution and which it continues to play in the ongoing democracy-building phase. The session will be timed to coincide with an onsite visit to *I-Lead* in Sidi Bouzid and *Promo-Thala*, youth associations for rural development and self-empowerment.

**Required Readings**


**Session 4: Secular Trade-Unionism and Civil Society**

This session analyzes the role played by various minority groups organized in civil society association that operate as watchdogs for democracy consolidation in Tunisia, chief among which but not exclusively are the vigorous trade unions. Students will examine in this session the UGTT historical role in the post-revolutionary democratic transition “national dialogue” (which earned it the Nobel Peace Prize); women’s association both secular and Islamic, and the thriving minorities associations: LGBT, Jewish, Amazigh, Tunisians of sub-Saharan origin

**Required Readings**


**Session 5: Group discussion and reflection on thematic content of the module**

**Module 2: Political Islam and Democracy in Tunisia**

The module examines the crucial role that political Islam and various social and cultural movements played both during the revolution of January 2011 and the subsequent democracy consolidation phase. Mainly, the module will trace the transformation of Islamism from radical ideological movement advocating the reinstitution of the Caliphate into a political party abiding by the rules of democracy; and it will appraise the numerous social movements and civil society organizations, arguing that without them democracy remains a fragile process.

**Session 1: Islam and Democracy**

This session discusses the much debated issue regarding Islam’s “compatibility” with democracy and Islamist political organization’s capacity and readiness to integrate democratic mode of governance. The session focuses on the transnational role of Islam and the impact of women’s NGOs and feminist discourse in reconciling tradition and modernity.
Session 2: Ennahda Party: Rethinking Politics and Islam
This session will focus, within political Islam, chiefly on its moderate and democratic expression, Ennahda Party. The session will trace the party’s progress since its inception in the early 1970s as a local chapter of the Muslim Brotherhood, to its access to power and power-sharing with secular political formations in the elections of 2011 and 2014. The students will learn to identify the internal revisions as well as the external geopolitical pressures behind this Islamist party’s ideological transformation.

Required Readings:

Discussion 5: Discussion and reflection on thematic content of the module.

Module 3: Civil Society and Social Movements
This module assumes that the fundamental challenges of the ongoing democracy-consolidation phase in Tunisia are social and economic development and the institutional founding of democratic system. Whereas the first challenge aims mainly at circumventing the very causes that triggered the January 2011 Revolution, the second one aims at shoring democracy from the return of authoritarianism. The module argues that in the response to both challenges the role of civil society and social movements is crucial. Students will therefore examine how traditionally marginalized
constituencies in Tunisian society, namely women, youth, LGBT, and ethnic minorities are engaging in civic action and social transformation.

Session 1: Youth, Globalization, and the Arab Spring
This session will be devoted to the examination of the rapport between the younger generation, the availability and use of social media and global communications, and the series of uprisings across MENA region.

Required Readings

Session 2: Youth and Social Engagement
The session will chiefly examine the paradox that consists in having, on the one hand, youth playing an essential role in the revolution, and on the other, by a very modest presence in engaged social action. The weakness of the notion of community or social service is to be linked to deficiencies in school curricula and political culture.

Required Readings

Session 3: Social Movements and Political Transformation in Tunisia
This session analyses ways in which social movements contribute to ongoing social and political transformation of Tunisia society. The focus is on women’s and LGBT movements. The session also addresses the impact of new and social media in facilitating the discussion around gender equity and TGBT rights.

Required Readings

Session 4: Field Visits
This module integrates experiential learning through field visits to a number of NGOs and associations including: “Nissa Tounes” (women’s association), “Chouf” (LGBT), “Mnemty” (Black consciousness-raising), Nawat (independent media), and Women Voters Association. During field visits, students meet with social and political actors and discuss the role of civil society in social and political transformation.
Session 5: Group discussion and reflection on thematic content of Module 3

Module 4: Mobility, Citizenship, and Security in the Mediterranean
This module focuses on the context of mobility across the Mediterranean and ways it impacts definitions of citizenship both in the host country and country of origin. The module also looks at the impact of mass migration and refugee flux and related security concerns on Mediterranean crossings. Discussions started in this module would continue during the excursion to Italy and students have the opportunity to see how issues such as security and citizenship play out in physical space and help reconstruct the social and cultural life-world of European societies.

Sessions include:

- Citizenship and the Nation State: Shifting Categories in a Changing Social and Cultural Environment
- Immigrants, Asylum Seekers, and the Question of Borders
- Youth radicalism in the Mediterranean and Beyond
- Can Europe Close its Borders to Humans Fleeing Zones of Conflict?
- Onsite visits to Italian associations concerned with immigrant integration

Readings:

Evaluation and Grading Criteria
Timely completion of all assignments is expected. Late hand-ins will be penalized. All assignments are evaluated according to organization, analytical quality, depth of understanding, argumentation, and presentation of evidence.

Description of Assignments:

- During the semester, students will be required to write one critical paper that analyzes an aspect of political or religious transformation in Tunisia. Students are also encouraged to extend the analysis to the Mediterranean region. The paper should be at least about five pages long.
- Students will also do a critical assessment of a social entrepreneurship project. This project can either appraise the reach and efficiency of an existing project or the blueprint of a project thought through and proposed by the student.
- Students will provide a 10 to 15 minute presentation of the social entrepreneurship project.
- Attendance during the thematic seminar is mandatory and your grade will reflect your involvement in class and during other activities and excursions.

Assessment:
Critical Paper 50%
Appraisal / Design of Social Entrepreneurship Project 30%
Oral Presentation of the Entrepreneurship Project 10%
Class Attendance and Participation 10%

Grading Scale:
Expectations and Policies

- Show up prepared. Be on time, have your readings completed and points in mind for discussion or clarification. Complying with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone.
- Have assignments completed on schedule, printed, and done accordingly to the specified requirements. This will help ensure that your assignments are returned in a timely manner.
- Ask questions in class. Engage the lecturer. These are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak.
- Comply with academic integrity policies (no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical).
- Respect differences of opinion (those of classmates, lecturers, and local constituents). You are not expected to agree with everything you hear, but you are expected to listen across difference and consider other perspectives with respect.

Disability Services: Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact Disability Services at disabilityservices@sit.edu for information and support in facilitating an accessible educational experience. Additional information regarding SIT Disability Services, including a link to the online request form, can be found on the Disability Services website at http://studyabroad.sit.edu/disabilityservices.

Academic Policies: SIT prides itself on providing students with an experientially based program; we hold ourselves, and our students, to the highest of academic standards. Students are asked to refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook for policies on academic integrity, ethics, academic warning and probation, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and the academic appeals process.