

Call for Five College Undergraduate Student Applications:

“Global Approaches to Local Political Change in the Middle East and North Africa”

A Five College Faculty-Student Summer Research Seminar

June 6 – July 15, 2011

Faculty: Sohail Hashmi (Mt. Holyoke), David Mednicoff (UMass), Gregory White (Smith)

APPLICATION DEADLINE: March 28, 2011

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is in the midst of a major upheaval, where groups of activists have succeeded in galvanizing long-simmering pressures for sweeping political change in diverse countries. Now that popular mobilization has dislodged the long-standing military rulers of Tunisia and Egypt, Arab and broader regional politics are more central than ever as a subject for careful research.

The relation of recent likely seminal political developments to broader international issues and processes is particularly under-theorized and under-studied. For decades, the MENA region, particularly in its Arab and Islamic dimensions, has been treated as an exception to many global trends, such as democratization, secularization or fealty to international legal norms. The ongoing popular, ideologically diverse, peaceful movement to remove authoritarian rulers calls such exceptionalism directly into question. This seminar anchors itself around the question of regional exceptionalism, framed in terms of the relation of the region to global ideas and trends. It thereby will engage faculty and students in an innovative, shared research agenda that could not be more timely.

To meet these goals, each of us proposes a project that looks specifically at transnational issues that help make sense of social and political issues generally, and link to recent movements for liberalization in particular. Prof. Hashmi will build on his current research to consider contemporary Islamic responses to international law. Prof. Mednicoff will study the impact and connection of diverse global examples of the rule of law and political liberalization to political change in the MENA region. Prof. White will consider the relation of North African mobilization to broader trends in European political framing and perception of the Mediterranean Basin as a zone of insecurity. These projects overlap in their concern for linkages between recent politics in the MENA and global political discourses like law, migration and values.

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH COMPONENT

Six student participants, selected by competitive application, will be integral to the shared research endeavor, enjoying a unique opportunity to work closely with faculty on current issues of Middle Eastern politics. They will be expected to engage in seminar-style weekly working group meetings during the six weeks of the workshop. **Students will receive housing and meals at Amherst College, as well as a \$400 weekly stipend.** Students will be responsible for:

(1) familiarizing themselves with a common core of several books and articles prior to the start of the workshop from a list that will be distributed soon after students are selected.

(2) producing an independent research paper on an issue that connects global issues and current Middle Eastern political liberalization and that is distinct from the research proposals of the faculty members. Examples might be the role of Israel and Palestine, the impact of media, and the significance of oil. Encouraging students to produce their own research that complements the faculty members will allow for more comprehensive treatment of the workshop's major theme of global links to the current Middle East.

(3) working with one of the three faculty members (in three teams of two students each) to consult and assist the faculty research project, with the possibility of sharing publication credit if appropriate.

(4) enhancing the Five College Middle Eastern Studies website at: <http://www.fivecolleges.edu/sites/middleeast/index.php>. In particular, students will add course lists, renew or expand links to faculty web pages. Their main work would be assembling a database that can direct media inquiries to relevant Five College faculty, and that includes a toolkit of current website and blog resources, along with general bibliography, to increase traffic and facilitate research related to the workshop's theme. The website expansion will be done in a manner allowing easy subsequent updates.

Upon acceptance of an offer to participate in the Workshop, students will receive a one-page reading list of relevant, current books and articles, as well as a reading guidance handout. They will be expected to come to the first workshop meeting ready to discuss these readings in terms of the guidance provided. From this starting point, three-hour meetings each week from the beginning of June through the middle of July will take place. Each meeting will comprise (1) an ongoing discussion on the broad themes and specific projects of the workshop, likely focused around a particular reading chosen by the participants, and (2) a unique component for that week devoted to expanding students' connection to the workshop. The latter will feature visits from additional faculty, outside policy analysts and other relevant guests.

WORKSHOP FACULTY AND RESEARCH PROJECTS

(1) Sohail Hashmi (Ph.D., Political Science, Harvard University) is Professor and Chair of International Relations and Alumnae Foundation Chair in the Social Sciences at Mount Holyoke College. Hashmi's research and teaching interests focus on comparative international ethics, particularly concepts of just war and peace, and on the study of religion in politics, especially Islam.

Prof. Hashmi's current book project begins with Muslim juristic responses to international law starting in the late nineteenth century. It then focuses on contemporary discourses and state responses, particularly in the area of international humanitarian law. During the Seminar, Prof. Hashmi will study the implications of current MENA political transitions for Muslim acceptance of or accommodation to international law.

(2) David Mednicoff (J.D., and Ph.D., Political Science, Harvard University) is Assistant Professor of Public Policy and Acting Chair of the Social Thought and Political Economy Program at UMass. His research and teaching link global and national legal and political ideas in the contemporary Middle East and North Africa, especially with regard to questions of democratization, human rights and US policy.

Prof. Mednicoff's project builds on his broad research into the meanings of the rule of law in five Arab societies, as well as more focused recent work on the politics of legal regulation of non-citizen workers in the Arab Gulf. This article will consider how global discourses around law, democracy and stability have contributed in different ways both to regime stability and to recent political transformation in several Middle Eastern societies, including Egypt, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates.

(3) Gregory White (Ph.D., Political Science and African Studies, U. of Wisconsin – Madison) is a Professor of Government at Smith College, where he is also an Environmental Fellow at the Center for the Environment, Ecological Design and Sustainability (CEEDS). He is the author of books and articles on North African politics, immigration, and development, especially as these also relate to Europe.

Prof. White has recently completed *Climate Change and Migration: Borders and Security in a Warming World* (Oxford University Press, 2011) in which he examines the role of transit states in the Mediterranean. Transit states such as Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, and Turkey have increasingly played a complicated political role as sites of transit for mixed migration seeking to enter Europe. For the Seminar, Prof. White will write a monograph that would use this framework as a point of departure for examining the ways in which the recent turmoil in North Africa has deepened the ways in which the region is framed as a zone of insecurity for Europe.

STUDENT RECRUITMENT PROCEDURE

Schedule:

- Deadline for applications: March 28, 2011 (no late applications will be accepted)
- Review of applications and interviews (if necessary): March 29-31
- Final decisions: March 31

Criteria for selection:

- Priority in order for (1) rising seniors majoring in Middle Eastern Studies or earning the Middle Eastern Studies Certificate, and likely to produce a related senior thesis related to the seminar theme, (2) other Middle Eastern Studies majors or Middle Eastern Studies Certificate students, (2) students with Arabic (or other relevant language) skills and/or relevant courses in Middle Eastern politics and society
- Evidence of excellent research background and organizational skills

Application materials:

- Letter of application, including reason for interest, relevant background, and specific research interest
- Short writing sample, if available
- Resume, including accurate contact information in case of the need for interviews
- Informal transcript
- One recommendation from a Five College Faculty member who has taught the student, sent directly by the Faculty member

All materials should be sent **electronically by no later than March 28** to Ms. Sue Dickman, Academic Programs Liaison, Five Colleges, Inc. at sdickman@fivecolleges.edu.