AFRI 598 Research Seminar in African Studies
The Contested Conceptions and Realities of Africa’s Past, Present, and Future
Winter 2018

Time: Tuesdays and Fridays, 4:05-5:25pm
Place: Birks 205
Instructor: Dr. Philip Gooding
Email: philip.gooding@mcgill.ca
Office Hours: Thursdays at 1:00-3:00pm
Office: Peterson Hall 236

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course uses an interdisciplinary approach to address themes that link Africa’s ‘past’ trajectories with its ‘present’ and ‘future’ political, social, and environmental realities. Specifically, it links the legacies of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, colonialism, and the period of African independence to issues and challenges that are prominent in contemporary Africa. Important themes include Africa’s relationships with the wider world, long-term competitions for land and resources, urbanisation and the emergence of distinct urban identities, the dynamics of cross-border networks, competing conceptions of gender and sexuality, and issues of governance in the African context.

As a research seminar, this course is driven by student participation. Students are required to complete the readings before seminar sessions and to use them to inform a discussion about the prescribed topic. The role of the instructor is to facilitate and direct the discussion when necessary (it is not to lecture). Each seminar session will be designed so that its theme is analysed from a range of disciplinary perspectives, including anthropology, development studies, economics, environmental studies, history, political science, and others. Students will then use the interdisciplinary techniques used in seminar sessions to design, present, and conduct their own research project.

The course is split into three sections. The first section (covering the first eight weeks) tackles pre-determined topics that are prominent in Africa’s current affairs and its academic discourses. In the second section (covering weeks 9-13), students present their own research projects. Finally, the final week of the semester is reserved for an interdisciplinary analysis of an as-yet-determined event that is prominent in the news.
LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- Students will develop the tools to analyse Africa’s past, present, and future from a range of disciplinary perspectives.
- Students will develop research skills so that they can present, conduct, and write-up their own independent research.
- Students will be introduced to a research environment that prepares them for a potential future career in research.

INSTRUCTIONAL METHOD

This course is a series of seminar sessions, held on Tuesdays and Thursdays between 4:05pm and 5:25pm. Students are required to read the set readings before each seminar with the discussion topic in mind. Students are also expected to participate in the course outside of prescribed seminar times by interacting via the MyCourses discussion board. This will act as a forum to discuss current themes and methods in African studies.

COURSE MATERIALS

As far as is possible, all assigned readings will be made available electronically on MyCourses on the Friday before the relevant classes (e.g. readings for week 2 will be uploaded by the end of Friday of Week 1). Limited copies of most books are also available in the library. Readings may change as the course goes on, depending on their availability.

EVALUATION

Students are assessed on their participation in different aspects of the course and on their independent research projects.

Participation: 20%

- **Participation in Seminars:** Attendance of each seminar session is mandatory. Absences must be approved in advance or justified with relevant documentation. Students will be assessed on the quality of their contributions to class discussions and on their presentations of assigned readings (10%).

- **Participation in MyCourses Discussion Forum:** Students should share interesting articles, perspectives, and sources to provoke discussion and debate. This will serve as the basis from which to interact with fellow students about contemporary issues in Africa. A list of potential sources for articles will be shared with students in the first seminar of the semester (Students should not feel limited by this list however). (10%).
Independent Research Project: 80%

Students will design and conduct their own research projects in response to the key theme of this course: the contested conceptions and realities of Africa’s past, present, and future. This theme is broadly conceived, and so students have the opportunity to interpret it in numerous ways or from a variety of case studies. Nevertheless, the topic should be approved by the instructor before the student embarks on the project. Meetings to this effect will be organised in the second and third weeks of the semester. Students’ research projects are evaluated in three stages:

- **Research Proposal:** The proposal should be up to 1500 words in length, and should outline the key debates, themes, and questions that the research project addresses. The format of this proposal will be outlined in the first session of the course. Students’ proposals should be submitted via MyCourses by **11:59pm on Friday 16 February 2018 (20%).**

- **Research Presentation:** Students will present their research proposal along with their initial findings to their peers in seminar sessions allocated between weeks 10 and 13. Presenters should circulate 1-2 relevant readings to students **on the Friday before they are due to present.** The presentation itself should be 15-20 minutes in length. It will be followed by a discussion based on the presentation and the circulated readings **(20%).**

- **Final Paper:** Students will submit a 4,000-6,000 word paper based on their research project. It should be submitted to the instructor via MyCourses by **11:59pm on Monday 16 April (40%).**

**OFFICIAL POLICIES**

**Language:** In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. This does not apply to courses in which acquiring proficiency in a language is one of the objectives. (Approved by Senate on 21 January 2009 – see also the section in this document on Assignments and Evaluation).

**Academic Integrity:** McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see [http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/) for more information). (Approved by Senate on 29 January 2003).

**Late Penalties:** There will be no extensions for written work unless a student has made prior arrangements with the instructor. There will be a 2% penalty per each day that a piece of graded work is submitted late (inclusive of weekends).

**Formatting Style:** Please abide by the following guidelines for all submitted work:

- Use Times New Roman font, size 12, double-spaced, and with normal margins.
• Use a widely accepted citation style (for example: Chicago, Harvard, APA, or MLA).
• Footnotes should be size 10 and single-spaced, and are included in the final word count.
• Attach a bibliography (bibliographies do not count towards the word count).
• Submit work in either doc, docx, or pdf format.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: Introduction to Africa.

Tuesday 9 Jan: Introduction to the course.
Thursday 11 Jan: The multiple, changing, and competing conceptions of ‘Africa.’

Readings

• Derricourt, Inventing Africa: History, Archaeology and Ideas (2011), Ch. 1, 6.

Optional Additional Media


Week 2: Africa’s place in the ‘modern’ world.

Thursday 18 Jan: Development and ‘Modernity’ in Africa

Readings

• Ellis, Season of Rains: Africa in the World (2012), Ch. 1, 2.
• Cooper, Africa Since 1940: The Past and the Present (2002), Ch. 1.
• Ferguson, Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order (2006), Ch. 1, 7.

Optional Additional Media

• Film: Bamako (2006).

Week 3: Governance and Democracy in Contemporary Africa

Tuesday 23 Jan (ADD-DROP DEADLINE): The Institutions of Governance
Thursday 25 Jan: Political participation from below
Readings


Optional Additional Media


**Week 4: Human-Environment Interaction**

**Tuesday 30 Jan:** Land and resource exploitation and their responses.
**Thursday 1 Feb:** Africa in the era of global climate change.

**Readings**


Optional Additional Media

- Film: *Virunga* (2014).
**Week 5: Borders and Borderlands**

**Tuesday 6 Feb**: International and inter-state approaches to the border.

**Thursday 8 Feb**: ‘Borders’ from the perspective of those who live near them.

**Readings**


**Optional Additional Media**


**Week 6: Demographic Considerations**

**Tuesday 13 Feb**: Africa’s population boom since WWII.

**Thursday 15 Feb**: The growth of urban spaces.

**Readings**

- Sippel et al. *Africa’s Demographic Challenges: How a Young Population can make Development Possible* (2011), Executive Summary, Ch. 2.
- Davis, *Planet of the Slums* (2006), Ch. 3.

**Optional Additional Media**

**Week 7: Subaltern and Rebellious Cultures**

**Tuesday 22 Feb:** Urban Identities.
**Thursday 24 Feb:** Youth and Youth Cultures.

**Readings**


**Optional Additional Media**


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**Week 8: Gender and Sexuality**

**Tuesday 27 Feb:** Shifting and contradicting conceptions of femininity and masculinity.
**Thursday 29 Feb:** LGBTQIA+ discourses and Africa.

**Readings**

- Epstein, *The Invisible Cure: Why We are Losing the Fight Against AIDS in Africa* (2008), Ch. 4.

**Optional Additional Media**

**Week 9** (Tuesday 6 Mar & Thursday 8 Mar): No Sessions – Study Break

**Week 10-13** (Tuesday 13 Mar – Thursday 5 Apr): Student presentations of their research projects.

**Week 14** (Tuesday 10 Apr – Thursday 12 Apr): Interdisciplinary analysis of a case study in Africa’s current affairs.

Topic and Readings TBD.