

**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.

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**

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.



### ***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

Nugent, ‘Arbitrary Lines and the People’s Minds: A Dissenting View on Colonial Boundaries in West Africa,’ in Nugent and Asiwaju eds., *African Boundaries: Barrier, Conduits and Opportunities* (1996).

Feyissa and Hoehne, ‘State Borders & Borderlands as Resources: An Analytical Framework,’ in Feyissa and Hoehne (eds.), *Borders and Borderlands as Resources in the Horn of Africa* (2010).

Seymour, ‘Sovereignty, Territory and Authority: Boundary Maintenance in Contemporary Africa,’ *Critical African Studies*, 5, 1 (2013).

Asiwaju, ‘Transfrontier Regionalism: The European Union Perspective on Post-Colonial Africa with Special Referenes to Borgu,’ in Nicol and Townsend-Gault (eds.), *Holding the Line: Borders in a Global World* (2005).

#### Optional Additional Media

Podcast: *Africa: Past and Present*, Episode 113: ‘East African Borderlands: Somalia, Kenya, and Belonging.’

### ***Week 6: Demographic Considerations***

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

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

#### Readings

Canning et al. (2015), Overview.

Sippel et al. *Demographic Challenges: How a Young Population can make Development Possible* (2011), Executive Summary, Ch. 2.

Freire, Lall, and Leipziger, (2014).

Davis, *Planet of the Slums* (2006), Ch. 3.

#### Optional Additional Media

TV Series: BBC, *Welcome to Lagos* (2010).

***Week 7: Subaltern and Rebellious Cultures***

**Tuesday 22 Feb:** Urban Identities.

**Thursday 24 Feb:**

**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.