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**ARST 640 – Human Development in the Arab World:  
Theories, Issues and Socio-Cultural Perspectives**

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The class begins with an examination of the history of development, development theory and conflicting perspectives on what constitutes progress or human development. We also consider which actors and institutions have been engaged in development work in the region, and the ways various institutions have shaped our understanding of development and development challenges in the region. The course will address the following questions and themes:

- 1) What is development? How did “development” emerge as a discourse and a set of powerful institutions for promoting “growth”, stability, “modernity”, etc.? How has the concept of development changed (or not) over time?
- 2) How do mainstream contemporary development institutions frame development issues, problems and solutions in the region?
- 3) What are considered the primary challenges to development in the Arab world? What are the presumed solutions?
- 4) What are the political interests that shape and define development problems and provide the parameters within which development solutions are constructed and imagined?

We will explore these questions via an issue approach – examining key human development issues that have been the focus of development discourse and policy in recent times, among them: education, gender, civil society, conflict, and environment. By the end of the course students will be able to:

- Historicize contemporary notions of development.
- Critically assess the political projects, bureaucratic incentives and technical expertise that shape and drive development paradigms for the Arab world.
- Identify and critically engage the primary development challenges in the region today.
- Analyze and critique development reports produced about the region.
- Consider “development” issues that fall outside the bounds of mainstream development categories or parameters.
- Identify the ethical dilemmas posed by development endeavors.
- Conduct critical and rigorous research about development in the region today.