

COURSE SYLLABUS FOR ACADEMIC YEARS 2013-2014

AS 248: Southeast Asia – Burma/Myanmar

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CORE AREAS: International

Purpose: To introduce students to Burma/Myanmar's modern history (late-1980s to present) and its recent/sudden democratic transition after five decades of military dictatorship.

Background: Burma had been under the British colonial rule from 1885-1948 and gained independence in 1948. The military government took over power from the civilian government in 1962 and has controlled the country since then. In 1989, the military regime changed the name from Burma to Myanmar for political reasons. Aung San Suu Kyi's return to Burma in 1988 changed the country's political landscape as she has become the opposition leader and the symbol of Burma's democratic movement. Her party won elections in 1990; however, they were not allowed to govern the country and she was put under house arrest. Aung San Suu Kyi spent 15 of the past 21 years under house arrest and was released in November 2010. She decided to run in the 2012 by-elections and has become a Member of Parliament. Suffering from one of the world's longest civil wars (between ethnic minorities and majority Burmans), Burma has become one of the least developed countries in Southeast Asia. In March 2011, a nominal civilian government has been established with Thein Sein appointed as President.

REQUIREMENTS: The student must write four essays (maximum two -page, single-spaced) responding to each of the questions listed below. Students are encouraged to write each essay sequentially, to submit them at regular intervals, and, if they wish, to rewrite any or every essay for a higher grade. Essays will be graded on quality of theme and thematic development, originality of ideas, supporting evidence, proper citations, good grammar and correct spelling. Any paper with a grade of B- or less MUST be revised and resubmitted no later than one week after initial return to student. Students with grades higher than B may also submit a revised draft of her paper.

There are no due dates for essays per se. It is strongly suggested that the student submit each essay within the suggested timeframe below. The instructor must receive at least 50 percent of the required work by the exact end of the second month of the semester. All work must be received by the last date of the semester and any missing work after that date will be considered a failure.

Students will need to buy or borrow three books for this class: Alan Clements: *Aung San Suu Kyi: the Voice of Hope* (2008), David Steinberg, *Burma/Myanmar: What Everyone Needs to Know* (2013), and Jessica Harriden, *Authority of Influence: Women and Power in Burmese History* (2012).

Weeks 1-3: First Impressions of the Country

For the first assignment, students shall watch this documentary called "*Burma VJ: Reporting from a Closed Country*" – which follows the September 2007 protests against the military government with footage smuggled out of the country. This network of video journalists was tracked down and arrested.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gxAJF6v-I-](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gxAJF6v-I-U&playnext=1&list=PL9A191CDF0643A85A&feature=results_main)

[U&playnext=1&list=PL9A191CDF0643A85A&feature=results_main](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gxAJF6v-I-U&playnext=1&list=PL9A191CDF0643A85A&feature=results_main)

(There are nine parts of the documentary on YouTube. This is the first part and you can find the rest on YouTube.)

Students are required to reference the following reports and country ratings in their essays:

- Freedom House's *Freedom in the World 2013 Report – Burma*:
<http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2013/burma>
- Transparency International's *Corruption Perception Index Report* (2012):
<http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2012/results/>
- Heritage Foundation's Economic Freedom Scores/Map:
<http://www.heritage.org/index/images/book/2013/region-web-map-AP-large.jpg>

Assignment I (Two-page essay – 15%)

For the first assignment, students shall share their first impressions of the country in a two-page essay. They will discuss the situation of the country, what they learned about the role of Buddhist monks in the 2007 saffron revolution, as well as recent political changes in Burma – based on this documentary and readings.

Weeks 4-6: Aung San Suu Kyi

Readings/Videos:

- Watch *BBC Documentary, "The Choice"* (2012)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1_ljNKT_T5o
This 2012 BBC documentary focuses on the life of Aung San Suu Kyi (Burmese opposition leader and Nobel Peace Laureate) while providing a historical overview of Burma.
- Watch "*Aung San Suu Kyi – Lady of No Fear*" (July 2013)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7KuA_GY9Gkc
- Alan Clements: *Aung San Suu Kyi: the Voice of Hope* (2008)

Through her conversations with Alan Clements, the *Voice of Hope* discusses details of Aung San Suu Kyi's life as a national leader, her struggle to bring democracy to Burma through non-violent means, and her upbringing and religious beliefs as a Buddhist. Note that the regime

was called the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) then as referenced in the book – and it is now called the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).

Buy/borrow the revised version published in May 2008 and read the following chapters:

- Introduction and Chapter 1 – We are still prisoners in our own country
 - Chapter 3 – Truth is a powerful weapon
 - Chapter 4 – Working for democracy
 - Chapter 8 – I never learned to hate my captors
 - Chapter 9 – Violence is not the right way
 - Chapter 10 – Nobody can humiliate me but myself
 - Chapter 11 – We only have ourselves to rely on
 - Chapter 12 – The courage to face yourself
 - Chapter 13 – To learn the power of the powerless
- Jessica Harriden: *The Authority of Influence – Women and Power in Burmese History* (2012)
 - Chapter 7 – Aung San Suu Kyi's Political Influence and Moral Power (*e-copy to be sent by instructor*)

Assignment II (two-page essay – 30%)

After reading these chapters and watching the documentary, discuss who Aung San Suu Kyi is and what you have learned about her as a person. What kinds of experiences and lessons influenced her? Who are her role models? What are her interpretations of notions of freedom, power, truth, fear and compassion, what do you think about them, and how does she apply them to Burma's struggle for democracy? Why is she important in Burma's half-century long struggle for democracy? What role do you think she will play in Burma's politics in the future?

For reference, some songs inspired by Aung San Suu Kyi:

Unplayed Piano by Damien Rice: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NgQUBecM7OM>

Walk On by U2: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NgQUBecM7OM>

Weeks 7-9: Modern History of Burma/Myanmar

Readings

- David Steinberg, *Burma/Myanmar: What Everyone Needs to Know* (2013)
 - Preliminary notes and introduction
 - Chapter 1 – The crises that are Burma/Myanmar
 - Chapter 5 – the Military coup, the socialist period (1962-1988) and the perpetuation of military role
 - Chapter 6 – The SLORC/SPDC era (1988-present): continuation of military power

Assignment III (two-page essay, 30%)

After reading David Steinberg's book, share your views on the past and present situation of Burma. Why was the 1988 People's Revolution significant – and what factors contributed to it? What has been the role of military in governing the country? How did the country's history affect the way it operates today? Discuss Burma's foreign relations with its neighbors – China, India and Japan.

Weeks 10-12: Crises and Gender Issues Facing Burma/Myanmar

Readings

- David Steinberg, *Burma/Myanmar: What Everyone Needs to Know* (2013)
 - Chapter 7 – The nature of Burmese politics
 - Chapter 8 – Issues in Myanmar's future
 - Chapter 9 – The power of positive change
- Jessica Harriden: *The Authority of Influence – Women and Power in Burmese History* (2012)
 - Chapter 1 – Ambiguous status of women in Burmese society (these chapters will be sent by instructor electronically)
 - Chapter 8 – Women's advancement under the SLORC/SPDC

Assignment IV (two-page essay, 25%)

After reading David Steinberg's book, describe some major political, social and economic crises facing the country. What did you learn about the nature of Burmese politics? How do you think it will affect the future of the country as it strives to move forward? What role do you think the military regime will play vis-à-vis the role of Aung San Suu Kyi in the next five to ten years (with the next elections scheduled in 2015)?

What has been the role and status of women in the Burmese society based on Jessica Harriden's book? What are some opportunities you see, as well as challenges that they face – compared to your experience in the United States? What needs to be done to address these gender issues in your opinion?