This is an advanced course in how to read and write about a unique episode in the history of French colonialism. For much of its history, northern or “French” Algeria was not technically a colony at all. Rather it was annexed to the French metropole, and was thus legally “France” as much as Alaska, Hawaii, or Texas are part of the “United States.” This did not mean, however, that all of the inhabitants of French Algeria enjoyed equal status, far from it.

Algeria attracted more European settlers than the rest of the French Empire put together. However, many of these settlers did not originate in France, rather in Spain, Italy, Portugal, Malta, or elsewhere in the Mediterranean. They created their own hybrid culture and became known as the pieds noirs. At their most numerous, European settlers and their descendants made up perhaps 15 percent of the total population, the remainder comprising Arabs, Berbers, and various other minorities. But the pieds noirs held most of the property and nearly all of the political power. Their power and their sense of themselves as “Algerian” as well as “French” made the separation of France and Algeria by 1962 the most excruciating episode in decolonization in the French Empire, for the colonizer as well as the colonized.

With a few exceptions, the course deals with secondary rather than primary materials. The readings vary widely in their methodological approaches and in their difficulty. The material is often quite unforgiving in terms of historical context. We will spend time talking about context in class. We will also devote two separate classes to teaching each other the rudimentary components of a highly complex political history. Even so, students should expect to spend a considerable amount of time reading about places, events, and people they don't understand very well.

The course addresses two main tasks—obtaining a certain level of proficiency in learning what historians call the “facts” of the history of the French and Algeria, and learning and critiquing approaches to writing that history. Reading and writing in different ways for different purposes is one of the most useful skills one can acquire in college.
Requirements:

The format of the course is discussion. Regular and intensive participation by each member of the class is essential to the success of the enterprise. Though grading remains more an art than a science, approximately 50 percent of each student’s final grade will depend on her or his ability to contribute to class discussion.

I. Readings:

The following books have been ordered for purchase at the Oberlin College Bookstore:


Albert Camus, *The Stranger* (originally published 1946)


If they use the bookstore, students are advised to purchase early, as the bookstore returns unsold books at a certain point in the semester. All of the required books are also on reserve. Many are also available with sufficient planning (at least one week) through OHIOLINK. A number of other readings will also be made available through Blackboard.

II. Discussion format

The first half hour of each class will be wholly student discussion. That is, the instructor will sit patiently and take notes, but will say nothing. The instructor will then
comment on the discussion up to that point, and the remainder of the class will be back
and forth among the assembled company.

This format means that students have to come to class with things to discuss. As
you read, keep in mind some of the following questions:

- What are the main lines of the author’s argument?
- What sorts of sources does she or he bring to bear to make that argument?
- How convincing is the argument?
- How does this reading fit in with other readings of the course so far?
- What about the reading requires additional explanation?
- Are there alternative interpretations that suggest themselves on the basis of this
  reading?
- How does this reading shape my understanding of the history of France and
  Algeria?

For two meetings of the class, we will deviate from this format. Any standard
political narrative of the history of France and Algeria is both complicated and (to most
of us) unfamiliar. Two “mutual instruction” days have been scheduled in order to
acquaint ourselves with basic “facts” of the case. The first such meeting is the second
meeting of the class, February 8, and will consider the basic story of the colonial
encounter in Algeria from conquest to independence. The second such meeting will take
place on April 11, and will consider the chronology of the Algerian War of
Independence. Different students will be assigned different parts of the narrative, and we
will instruct each other toward the end of a common understanding.

III. Papers:

The writing component of the course comprises three short (4-5 page) essays.
Students must come up with their own topics, though the instructor is happy to provide
help clarifying their interests. Students must write one paper before Spring Break, and at
least two by May 1.

Rewrites will be allowed for the first two papers if students are not satisfied with
their grades. Rewrites are due one week after the original paper is handed back. The
rewrite grade will be recorded as the final grade for the paper. Students who wish to
rewrite their papers may wish to have a conference with the instructor to discuss
problems with the original version. There is more to rewriting a paper than changing a
sentence here and there.
Schedule of Classes and Readings:

February 1       Introduction:

Readings (to be done before class):

FLN Proclamation, 1 November 1954 (sent electronically, English and French versions available)

February 8       Overview through Mutual Instruction

Readings:


February 15      The Making of Settler Colonialism in Algeria

Readings:


February 22      Tocqueville: Algeria and the French Liberal

Readings (available on Blackboard):

Alexis de Tocqueville, “First Letter on Algeria (23 June 1837)”; “Second Letter on Algeria (22 August 1837); and “Essay on Algeria (October 1841)”

February 29      Demarcating French Algeria?

Readings:


March 7          The Second Empire and the Arab Kingdom

Readings (available on Blackboard):

March 14  Who’s Other?: The Jews of the Sahara

Readings:


Spring Break!!

March 28  Visit to the Allen Memorial Art Museum

April 4  Algeria and the Third Republic

Readings:


April 11  The Algerian War of Independence: Mutual Instruction

Readings:


April 18  France and Algeria: Inclusion and Exclusion

Readings:


April 25  The Power of Film: Discussion of *The Battle of Algiers* (1966)
May 2 The Power of Literature: Camus and Daoud

Readings:

Albert Camus, The Stranger (originally published 1946)

Kamel Daoud, The Meursault Investigation (originally published 2013)

THIRD PAPER DUE AT TIME FOR THE FINAL EXAM
AS SET BY THE COLLEGE SCHEDULE

Additional Ground Rules:

1) Due dates and page-limit requirements are to be taken most seriously. I am not in the business of persecuting students if a genuine problem exists, but in principle I strongly dislike giving extensions. Normally, I take off 1/3 of a letter grade for every 24 hours a paper is overdue.

2) Three excuses for requesting extensions will never be acceptable: 1) a self-defined character flaw of procrastination; 2) extracurricular activities, including political activism; 3) work in other classes.

3) Papers must be double-spaced and have 1-inch margins. I will return unread any illegible paper.

4) All written work at Oberlin College is covered by the Honor Code. Students are expected to familiarize themselves with its provisions, and to sign the Honor Code on each paper submitted.

5) All written work for the course must be completed in order to pass it. That is to say, a student who receives an A on the first two papers and does not write the third will fail the entire course.

6. Electronic devices, including phones, tablets, and computers, are not permitted in class except under special circumstances.

7. No permission is granted to upload ANY materials from this course on to a third party web site. Such materials are for the use of students in this class only.

8. Students with learning or other disabilities are advised to make proper arrangements with the Office of Disability Services at the beginning of the term.