Module Description

Culture is generally equated with customs, beliefs, and ideas of a particular society. Yet, in social sciences, the term remains contentious and debatable. This module probes into what culture means to Malays. The central questions that will be asked in this module include: What are the different components of Malay culture? How does culture shape and govern the Malays? What are the dominant stereotypes about Malay culture and identity? Who are the Malay cultural elites and how do they respond to modernisation? How can we account for cultural diversity in our globalised world today? Students will be introduced to key sociological concepts related to culture and traditions. The module applies different approaches in studying culture. Students will examine the history of Malay society from the feudal era, through the colonial period, post-independence, and the contemporary era. By comparing cases studies in Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia, the module exposes students to critical issues concerning the Malays. It covers the following issues:

- The politics of knowledge production of “Malay culture” in the context of intensified globalised forces and Islamic reformist movements
- Countering stereotypes towards the Malays
- The consumption and production of material and visual culture such as food, film, fashion and music;
- The spread of “myths” in the community
- The construction of individual and collective identities and subjectivities, as well as symbolic boundaries through taste and distinction

At the end of the module, students will understand the contemporary debates in Malay culture and society. They can also critically analyse a range of social processes, representations, and cultural forms and practices. Students will have a hands-on experience of Malay culture, through fieldwork and attending cultural performances. This module welcomes all NUS students, irrespective of disciplinary training. No prior background of social sciences and cultural studies is necessary in order to take this module.

Module Requirements & Assessment

1. Students will be assigned readings for the weekly topics drawn from a wide variety of interdisciplinary sources (journal articles, book chapters, newspaper/magazine articles, popular literature, internet articles, etc.).
2. In addition to the readings, films and other popular material will be used, which will constitute a legitimate and crucial dimension of the course material.

3. Student discussions and research presentations will be based either on specific readings, mini-fieldwork exercises and films (to be undertaken in groups), interspersed with an empirical component. The focus of this module underscores the imperative of appreciating the lived complexities of Malay culture and society, which will include field-trips to specific sites.

4. The module does not have a final examination and students will be appraised based on a 100% continual assessment. The C.A. will be apportioned in the following manner:

   (a) Mid-term Assessment (1500 words) (60%)
   (b) Fieldwork response paper (max. 800 words) (20%)
   (c) Tutorial group presentation (20%)

5. These assignments are designed to enable students to procure and critically analyse data on Malay culture and societies and link their findings, experiences and insights with the conceptual and theoretical apparatus introduced to them in the lectures and readings.

**Module Outline**

Week 1: Culture, Approaches, and the notion of “Malay-ness”
Week 2: Material Culture and Symbolic Power
Week 3: Recess
Week 4: Engaging modernity and globalisation
Week 5: Challenges facing Malay society