

Fall 2006



Academic Year 2006-2007 Holds Promise of New Courses, Faculty, and Events

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Beginnings are always exciting, and this year is no different. Fall 2006 finds us welcoming new faculty, developing new courses and programs, and offering exciting events. This fall, the Middle East Institute [MEI] proudly offers our first Freshman Learning Community (FLC). In addition to some general college and GSU orientation activities, Dr. Dona Stewart will guide this group of 13 students through academic and community oriented introduction to Middle Eastern history, politics, geography and culture.

The MEI would like to welcome two new assistant professors, Dr. Teirab Ash Shareef, who will teach Arabic and Dr. Isa Blumi, Middle East historian. We also welcome back our visiting instructors: Khalil Abdur Rashid (Arabic), Zipora Wagner (Hebrew) and Yesim Ozbarlas (Turkish). The spring 2007 MEI newsletter will have more information about Dr. Ash Shareef and Dr. Blumi.

We began the semester with a Town Hall Meeting to discuss the recent crisis in Lebanon and Israel; we will offer more opportunities to come together as a community, to listen to experts from a range of perspectives and to discuss important developments in the region. Inside this issue, you will find more information about our fall schedule. We invite you to take the calendar insert and put it on your bulletin board or calendar and share it with friends and colleagues.

NEW COURSE OFFERED SPRING 2007: WST 4910/6910 (Special Topics): Arab and Islamic Feminisms

This new course, taught by Dr. Amira Jamarkani in the Department of Women's Studies, offers an introduction to Arab feminisms, and will also explore the multiple intersections of Islam(s) and feminisms with a primary focus on the Middle East and North Africa. WST 4910/6910 will both look at the way in which Arab and Islamic feminisms articulate with the concerns of other feminisms indigenous to the global south and the way in which Arab and Islamic feminisms have emerged as oppositional discourses to colonialism, patriarchal nationalism, and Western feminism. Students will read literary, historical, and ethnographic texts with the aim of exploring the following topics (among others): early twentieth century Egyptian feminism; Muslim feminist interpretations of Islamic texts; the notions of emancipation and agency in Arab and Islamic feminisms; Arab and Islamic feminisms as transnational feminisms; and feminist engagement with fundamentalisms. For more information, please e-mail Dr. Jamarkani at wsiajj@langate.gsu.edu.

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<http://www.gsu.edu/mideast>

Faculty News

Dr. Donald M. Reid, Emeritus Professor of Middle East History at Georgia State, presented the Middle East Institute and the GSU Library with a wonderful gift this Spring: a collection of about 800 books in Arabic. Dr. Reid purchased these volumes during his many stays in Cairo, buying books that supported his research on Modern Egypt as well as items picked up for pleasure. The bulk of the titles relate to 20th Century Egyptian politics and history (including a lot of biographical material), but there are also titles regarding education, language and literature, and religion. Accompanying the Arabic books is a smaller collection of books in English and French, including a number of late-19th/early-20th Century travel and colonial narratives, contemporary Arabic literature in translation, and other items of interest. Many of the titles that Dr. Reid donated are not available in libraries in Georgia or, in some cases, the Southeast! These books will be an excellent resource for those who are interested in the Middle East at Georgia State, in the Atlanta area, or in the state of Georgia. Our deepest thanks go to Donald Reid for his donation.

Dr. Gayle Nelson, Chair, Department of Applied Linguistics and ESL, will spend the fall semester, 2006, at Bogazici University in Istanbul. Dr. Nelson will live on campus, overlooking the Bosphorous, and teach courses in research methods

and socio-cultural and political issues in English language teaching and learning. Most people do not think a lot about the cultural and political issues related to teaching English in Islamic and/or post-colonial countries. Within the field of applied linguistics, however, volumes such as Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching (Canagarajah, 1999) and The Sociopolitics of English Language Teaching (Hall & Eggington, 2000) are increasing popular; Dr. Nelson's research will draw upon her experience this fall to expand upon the existing literature on this subject. This program builds upon the existing exchange program with Bogazici University; over the past ten years, one Turkish graduate has studied at GSU for a semester and a GSU graduate student studied at Bogazici for a year.

Dr. Michael Herb received a Fulbright research grant to study relations between the parliament and the regime in Kuwait. He will leave for Kuwait at the end of Fall semester and will return in the summer of 2007. He also received a Research Initiation Grant from Georgia State University to fund short visits for research in the five other Gulf Cooperation Council states.

Dr. Dona J. Stewart received Georgia State University's 2006 Exceptional Service Award. This award recognized her efforts in building a Middle East Studies program at GSU.

Staff Notes

Ms. Autumn R. Cockrell, M.A. (MEI Business Manager) recently returned from study trips to the United Arab Emirates and Egypt. Ms. Cockrell traveled to the U.A.E. to study authentic Khaleeji styled dance and culture. She was also selected as one out of ten professional Middle Eastern dancers, from the U.S., Europe and South Africa, to work intensively with the legendary choreographer/dancer Mahmoud Reda and Farida Fahmy in Cairo, Egypt. She is also proud to have been invited to give a workshop/lecture at the forthcoming 2006 annual meeting of the Congress on Research in Dance, an international body of dance scholars.



Autumn Cockrell [center front] with international dance colleagues at an intensive dance workshop given by legendary choreographers Farida Fahmy and Mahmoud Reda in Cairo, Egypt.

Featured Community Organization: The Alif Institute—Atlanta's Window to the Arab World

Alif is the first letter of the Arabic alphabet, the origin of the Greek word alpha, and a most fitting name for this local Arab cultural organization. Located in Doraville, the Alif Institute serves as a community center for the local Arab American population and as a window to Arab culture for anyone with an interest in learning about Arabic language, cuisine, or art.

The Alif Institute began as the dream of a local community member, Mr. Haitham Haddad, in the early nineties, at a time when there were no true Arab cultural centers in the United States. In the past, various Arab American organizations, including the Arab American Business and Professional Association, and the Arab-American Fund of Georgia (AAFG), made serious attempts to establish an Arab American community center. Mr. Haddad's idea about a cultural-- rather than a community--center gained popularity among Arab Americans as the need to invite their fellow Americans to learn about their culture became more important than simply finding a physical space for the community to gather.



Mrs. Ghada Muhanna with her Arabic for youth class.

The Arab American Women's Society of Georgia [AAWSG] supported this effort as its growing cultural programs needed a "home". In 1999, the Arab-American Fund of Georgia adopted the project. Dr. Abdallah Najjar clarified that having a tax-exempt status since 1986 allowed AAFG to begin a fundraising campaign for the Alif Institute. In January 2004, the Alif Institute dream became true...

Mrs. Ghada Muhanna, one of the Arabic instructors at the Alif, commented on the role of identity in the Arab American immigrant experience. The early wave of Arab immigrants came at the turn of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, mostly from Lebanon and Syria, and assimilated into mainstream American culture. After the 1950's, Arab immigrants came from all over the Arab world and under many different circumstances. Citing Dr. Michael Suleiman, a political scientist at Kansas State University, Mrs. Muhanna explained that unfortunately, American interpretation of the events of the last 40 years in the Middle

East painted the Arabs and Arab-Americans all with one brush, and all in negative terms. As a result, the question of identity resurfaced and became very important.

The volunteers who played active roles in AAWSG activities felt this need of identity building. A physical space was crucial to bonding these Arab Americans who are proud to live their American culture and ethnic heritage. "Religion is not an issue, and as a community, our good will to engage the public is genuine." Dr. Abdallah Najjar, a patriarch of Atlanta's Arab American community, expressed great pride that his father, an immigrant from Lebanon, served in the U.S. Army during W.W. I.

Many Arab Americans regard language as central to keeping a connection to their cultural heritage. Mr. Haddad chose the institute's name to reflect the importance of language in Arab culture and believes that "It is important for young children to learn Arabic together with children whose parents have similar unfamiliar names and accents. If it happens in a vacuum, it is not the same."

The Alif Institute is not just a community center for Arab Americans; it is also a cultural center for all who enjoy or wish to explore Arab culture in the broadest sense. Dr. Rima Houssami described the Alif as "a place to reach-out and build bridges...a place [for non-Arabs] to come here and know us more." Currently, the center has three classrooms, a lecture hall, a workshop space, and a break room. As the community grows, so will the Alif; plans for future expansion include a theater/auditorium, a library/media center, an exhibit area, and outdoor grounds for festivals and additional parking areas.

Whether you go to attend a lecture, art exhibit, concert, or play, learn the Arabic language or sample some food, you are sure to encounter the traditional Arabic phrase for welcome-- "ahlan wa sahan!"

For more information about the Alif Institute and a calendar of classes and events, please visit <http://www.alifinstitute.org>.

New Student Group—Middle East Socio-Political Association

MESPA (Middle East Socio-Political Association) is a new student organization for any students interested in the Middle East. Sponsored by Dr. Rashid Naim of the Political Science Department and the Middle East Institute, it is a great opportunity for students to get connected to peers with the same interests and expand their understanding of Middle Eastern society and politics. It is split into two wings: Cultural and Political. The political wing will primarily train participants for the Model Arab League (MAL) team while the cultural wing will be involved with sponsoring and coordinating events and opportunities for the students to be involved in the Middle Eastern community. Some of the events in the works for this year are: film screenings, study groups, book clubs, participation in Model Arab League, lectures, cultural outings (with traditional food and dance) and volunteering with local high schools. Twenty-five people attended the first meeting on August 28th, and co-presidents Lindsey Stephenson [cultural director] and Charlie Keller [political director and MAL liaison] intend to hold weekly meetings throughout the semester. For more information contact Lindsey Stephenson at mespa.gsu@gmail.com.

Betwixt & Between: Turkey's Political, Historical and Cultural Structure on the Eve of the Twenty-First Century

By Yesim Ozbarlas

This new 2006 Maymester study abroad course explored the current historical, political and cultural aspects of Turkey. During three short weeks, we studied Turkey's synthesis of "East" and "West," rich in the history and tradition of two continents, as a backdrop to the rapid social transformation currently facing the modern nation.

This learning community encouraged language and cultural acquisition as we visited significant historical sites in Istanbul, the East Coast, Ephesus, Cappadocia, Konya and other parts of Turkey. We discussed the impact of Ataturk's policies, religion and modernism, and the role of women in Turkish society. Students had plenty of chances to ask our guide questions and were required to keep a journal throughout their trip and to write a paper on a topic of their choosing.

MEI Students Shine!

Two students received highly competitive scholarships under the National Security Education Program to continue their study of Arabic. Graduate student Chris Low spent the summer studying Arabic in Yemen. Jennifer Cotton will study in Egypt.

History Master's candidate Chris Low completed ten weeks of Arabic coursework at the Yemen Language Center (YLC) in Sana'a. Funded through a fellowship from the American Institute for Yemeni Studies (AIYS), he received this fellowship to study Intermediate Arabic and conduct research for his Master's thesis project, "Empire of the Hajj: Pilgrims, Plagues, and Pan-Islam under British Surveillance, 1865-1924." For more details on this fellowship program, <http://www.aiys.org>.

Chris was also chosen as a 2006-2007 David L. Boren National Security Education Program Graduate Fellow for his proposal titled, "Strategic Seas: Transnational Networks of Islamic Fundamentalism in the Persian Gulf and Red Sea." He will receive funding to continue his study of Arabic at GSU and Farsi at Emory University during the 2006-2007 academic year, and return to Yemen to study Advanced Arabic at the YLC during the Summer of 2007. For more details regarding this fellowship, please see <http://www.iie.org/programs/nsep/default.htm> or <http://www.nsepnet.org>.



Turkish instructor **Yesim Ozbarlas** and two of her students take a shopping break

As a new faculty member, I am pleased to emphasize that I loved creating such an interesting trip. Working with the Arnika Institute in Turkey was an amazing and valuable experience for my American students and for me. I hope we will continue this highly enriching trip for many years to come.