

March 2015

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

Since 2012, Middle East Studies has been growing at a robust pace as it transitions from an undergraduate concentration into an endowed center with a reputation for innovative research, engaged programming, and rigorous learning. I am happy to report that the 2014–2015 academic year was pivotal for institutionalizing Middle East Studies at Brown on all three fronts. President Paxson has recognized this growth through a commitment to financially secure this program over the next five years.

Middle East Studies is a thriving academic field, and peer universities have been busy strengthening their departments and centers. In this competitive environment, it is significant that Middle East Studies at Brown is seen as a rising star. In large measure, this is due to our unique profile of thematically structured research and public engagement. Building on the passions of the faculty and the interests of the students, Middle East Studies organizes its activities around four themes that bridge the humanities and social sciences: Displacement and Partition, Islamic Humanities, Arts and Social Change, and Political Economy of Development. Highlights this year include the Iranian Underground Music Festival, which filled the RISD auditorium, and our Critical Conversations on Palestine-Israel, which featured Hanan Ashrawi and Stephen Robert. Our growing reputation is also due to our pioneering annual symposia, such as New Directions in Palestinian Studies, Digital Islamic Humanities, and Engaged Scholarship, through which we explore new lines of academic inquiry, intervene in important public debates, and promote understanding.

We have doubled our core faculty since 2012, and are well on the way to achieving our most important priority: a critical mass of faculty working across disciplines and a regular rotation of visiting professors and post-doctoral fellows. This year, a joint Watson-History search successfully recruited Sreemati Mitter, a Harvard-educated economic historian. In a separate search, the Department of History hired Jennifer Johnson, an African historian who works on colonial Algeria.

Middle East Studies faculty are popular on campus and we take special care in pursuing our educational mission. The number of concentrators has tripled since 2012, making Middle East Studies larger than all other area studies combined. Our expanding curriculum attracted more than 1,000 undergraduates, and our Departmental Undergraduate Group continues to be one of the most active at Brown. The number of graduate students has also grown quickly, and this year saw the establishment of our Graduate Student Association.

All this would not have been possible without the enthusiastic participation of our faculty and students and the dedication of our small but superlative staff. We are committed to making Middle East Studies part of the DNA of intellectual life at Brown and a national and international model for area studies in the Twenty-First Century. We thank you for your support.

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