

April 24, 2018

This report concludes my sixth and last year as director of Middle East Studies (MES). It has been an extraordinary journey of rapid growth and community building. What began as a concentration in 2012 is now one of the top MES programs in the United States. By the end of this year, MES will transition into a center within the Watson Institute and enter the final phase of endowing its operations.

Unlike the traditional area studies models in peer institutions, MES is organized around signature thematic research initiatives –such as [Displacement and the Making of the Modern World](#), [New Directions in Palestinian Studies](#), and [Islam and the Humanities](#)-- that tap into Brown's tradition of interdisciplinary and engaged scholarship. Through collaborative partnerships around these themes, MES has succeeded in integrating Middle East Studies into the larger streams of intellectual life at Brown University by building a cutting-edge research community, by producing innovative and relevant programming, and by offering an exciting array of courses and opportunities for students.

Over the past six years, the number of core faculty and concentrators has tripled. There are currently 28 declared concentrators, and almost 1500 students enrolled in Middle East courses in 2017-2018. The number of graduate students increased from 26 in 2014 to 38 in 2017. This has had a positive impact on student interest in Middle East languages. In Arabic, for instance, enrollments in the advanced third-year course have more than doubled over the past five years.

Shahzad Bashir, Aga Khan Professor of Islamic Humanities, joined our faculty this year, and I am pleased to report that he will replace me as director starting July 1, 2018. I am confident that under his leadership, MES will consolidate the national reputation it has earned for its innovative approach to regional studies. I am also thrilled to report that the search for a senior anthropologist to fill the Stephen Robert Chair has concluded successfully with the hire of Nadjé al-Ali, a leading scholar of gender and politics in the modern Middle East.

MES was built from the bottom-up around the engaged scholarship of our faculty and the intellectual passions of our students. Since 2012, MES has organized over 250 events, 46 of which were conferences and workshops. These resulted in several publications including an edited volume on digital humanities, special issues of journals, and the launching by the University of California Press of two book series headed by MES faculty.

The Middle East has long been a pivotal region that is key to understanding global challenges and transformations. Yet, the contrast between mainstream public discourse and rigorous knowledge



production has never been so stark. At MES, we are dedicated to producing informed and impactful scholarship and to providing our students with the tools they need to make a positive difference.

Thank you, as always, for your support.

Beshara Doumani

Joukowsky Family Distinguished Professor of Middle East History

Director, Middle East Studies