

January 2018

Dear Colleagues, Students, and Friends of Middle East Studies,

This semester will conclude my sixth and last year as director of Middle East Studies (MES), and I am very pleased to welcome Shahzad Bashir, Aga Khan Professor of Islamic Humanities, as the incoming director starting July 1, 2018. I am confident that under his leadership, MES will enhance the national reputation it has earned for its innovative thematically-driven approach to regional studies, and that it will consolidate its position as one of the top programs in the country.

The Spring 2018 semester also marks a big step forward in our efforts to build a sustainable platform in terms of funding, faculty positions, and institutionalization. Working in tandem with a dedicated team from advancement and with strong support from the senior administration, we have embarked on the final phase of a plan to fully endow MES. We also plan to transition MES from a program into a center at Watson by the end of this semester. And the homestretch phase in the search for a senior anthropologist of the Middle East begins in two weeks. This position will bring us much closer to a critical mass of scholars that can sustain our growing research, teaching, and public outreach profiles.

This is not to mention the exciting programming and wide range of new courses on tap for this semester. Thanks to our terrific faculty, almost 900 students enrolled in courses on the Middle East during the Fall 2017 semester, a four-fold growth since the MES initiative started in 2012. Some of the new MES courses include Shahzad Bashir's "The Imaginary Lives of Muslims," Shamiran Mako's "Middle East Politics," and my "Palestine versus the Palestinians."

In addition to our regular lecture, seminar, and film series, MES will host a special visit by Mai Masri, who will show her award-winning film, *3000 Nights*. Khalid Fahmy, University of Cambridge, will deliver the Peter Green Lecture; and Faiz Ahmed will introduce his new book, *Afghanistan Rising*. In March, we will hold the fifth annual New Directions in Palestinian Studies on the theme: "The Shadow Years: Material Histories of Everyday Life." A major workshop titled "Assessing the Islamic Past: Historical and Philosophical Interventions" will be held in April. And we look forward very much to the paper series and other activities by the MES DUG and the MES Graduate Student Association. Please check out our website for more information.

The Middle East is often the canary in the mine at moments of unprecedented global transformation, such as the one we are witnessing today. In times like these, the contrast between mainstream public discourse



and rigorous knowledge production is especially stark. At MES, we are dedicated to producing critical and engaged scholarship and to providing our students with the tools they need to make a positive difference.

Thank you, as always, for your participation and support.

Beshara Doumani

Joukowsky Family Distinguished Professor of Middle East History

Director, Middle East Studies