

Spring 2014

As I write these words, the tragic and still unfolding humanitarian crisis in Gaza has yet again put the Middle East at the center of world attention. The importance of informed understanding is as high as ever, and I am truly grateful for being part of a vibrant and caring community at Brown University and for its generous support of Middle East Studies (MES). The recent endowment of two chairs – one by the former chancellor Stephen Robert to the Watson Institute for a Middle East historian, and one by HH Aga Khan for a professor of Islamic Humanities – represent strong votes of confidence in the future of the MES Initiative launched in 2012.

MES is approaching critical mass in terms of faculty and instructors. This year, and in addition to the searches for the two new chairs, we welcome philosopher Adi Ophir, visiting professor in MES and the Cogut Center; Shiva Balaghi, visiting professor in Iranian Studies; Amal Sachedina, Aga Khan visiting professor, and Nicola Perugini, Mellon Post-Doc at MES and Italian Studies. Rejoining us in 2014-2015 are Bashir Abu Manneh (visiting professor, English), Mayssun Succarie (Cogut post-doc), Sa'ed Atshan (Watson post-doc), and Mohsen Namjoo (artist in residence).

Undergraduate teaching is the heart of MES. This past year, the number of concentrators more than doubled, six new MES designated courses were introduced, and over a thousand undergraduate students enrolled in classes of our core faculty. An enthusiastic ceremony last May marked the graduation of our largest class, also notable for receiving multiple prestigious awards and for leading the most active DUG on campus. A new graduate students group of MES scholars will be launched in September, further enriching our community.

This past semester MES launched a state-of-the art website and organized its best-attended semester of programming to date. In addition to the regular luncheon seminars, lecture series, film series, undergraduate paper series, and Critical Conversations on Palestine/Israel, MES held four major conferences. The first ever conference in North America on the Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet; the groundbreaking international conference, “New Directions in Palestinian Studies,” the 3rd annual Aga Khan conference, “Sharia, Government, and Development;” and the 3rd annual conference on Engaged Scholarship, “Embedded,” which explored the relationship between militaries and the disciplines of Anthropology and Archaeology. This fall, in addition to our regular programming, please join us for the 2nd annual Digital Islamic Humanities workshop, led by Elias Muhanna; a film series on 1948, curated by Ariella Azoulay; a Critical Conversation panel on Palestine-Israel with Ian Lustick; a lecture series on Iran



in the 21st Century; a festival of underground Iranian music led by Mohsen Namjoo; and, to begin it all, a teach-in on Gaza. This promises to be another great year for MES at Brown. Thank you for your support.

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