

Fall 2014

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

I am happy to report that the Middle East Studies Initiative at Brown University had an incredibly successful Fall 2013 semester. Hundreds of participants and thousands more online packed the Syria teach-in, the 20th anniversary of Oslo events with Hanan Ashrawi, the first national symposium on Digital Islamic Humanities, and major conferences on Syria and Iran. We also inaugurated a film series alongside our regular lecture, luncheon, and student paper series. The number of concentrators has doubled, and we added faculty and visiting scholars who are offering new exciting courses. Fall 2013 was the first semester for Assistant Professor Faiz Ahmed, department of History; for postdoctoral fellows Mayssun Succarie and Sa'ed Atshan; and for visiting professor Bashir Abu-Manneh.

The Spring 2014 semester will have just as innovative programming and the addition of new scholars and courses. Highlights include the first international conference on the revered Turkish poet, Nazim Hikmet; the first annual symposium of "New Directions in Palestinian Studies"; the second annual conference on Engaged Scholarship; and the third annual Aga Khan conference, titled "Sharia, Government, and Development." Professor Bogac Ergene, who will join us this semester as the Aga Khan Professor in Islamic Humanities, is organizing the latter conference and will be teaching a course on Islam and human rights. We are also very pleased to announce that Mohsen Namjoo, the renowned Iranian musician, will be joining Brown as a visiting professor in Iranian Studies starting January 2014.

The challenge we face is how to raise the resources needed to keep up with the rapid growth of Middle East Studies at Brown, to meet strong student demand for courses, and to institutionalize the Initiative we launched in the Fall 2012. In this regard, I would like to express my sincere thanks to former Chancellor Stephen Robert who endowed a chair to the Watson Institute with preference for a Middle East Historian. This position is crucial for anchoring the growth and sustainability of Middle East Studies at Brown University and we are very appreciative for his vote of confidence. We also appreciate the support of Provost Mark Schlissel for the Iranian Studies Initiative, which we launched this year.

We have more good news. Internationally distinguished philosopher, Adi Ophir, has been appointed as Visiting Professor of Humanities and Middle East Studies in partnership with the Cogut Center. In addition, the Cogut Center Governing Board awarded the Department of Italian Studies and the Middle East Studies Initiative one of two Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowships for 2014-2016. We are also fortunate that the Watson Institute has extended for an additional year the post-doctoral fellowship of Sa'ed Atshan who has, in a very short time, contributed so much to Middle East Studies at Brown.

We are well on our way to integrating Middle East Studies into the intellectual life of the campus and to making Brown an international leader in this field. Thank you very much for your support.

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