

Spring 2013

By any measure, 2012---2013 has been a remarkable takeoff year for Middle East Studies at Brown University. Establishing a new unit on campus, critical faculty hires, and robust programming have generated a wave of enthusiasm in the Brown community and attracted national attention. None of this would have been possible without the support of donors and the administration, the enthusiastic participation by faculty and students, and the dedication of the Middle East office staff: Anthony Watson, Associate Director; and Barbara Oberkoetter, the Academic Program Manager.

A year ago I joined Brown University to help build a new kind of area studies program that is agenda, not legacy, driven. Our aim is to integrate knowledge production on the Middle East into the DNA of Brown through thematically driven collaborative initiatives that tap into Brown's tradition of interdisciplinary, critical, and engaged scholarship. Unburdened by the legacy of Oriental studies departments and the Cold--- War--- conceived Title VI program, Brown is an ideal home for this new model. Its small size and densely inter--- connected faculty as well as its reinvigorated Watson Institute for International Studies, give it the kind of intellectual dynamism and agility that few institutions of its stature can match.

This is an opportune moment. The historic rupture of the popular uprisings in Iran, the Arab world, and Turkey over the past few years opens a space for a much---needed re---evaluation of how we study and teach this region. How can we rethink the past? Imagine new futures? And find creative ways to contribute to social justice, economic development, mutual understanding, and democratic political systems?

With the help of superb core faculty who anchored Middle East Studies over the past few years as well as recent critical hires, these questions were addressed in over seventy well---attended activities. These include the lecture series, the luncheon seminar, the undergraduate paper series and several major conferences and public events. This generated a wave of new concentrators (from 16 to 36 by May, 2013), making Middle East Studies the largest concentration by far in area studies.

Next year will be even bigger as we welcome new Assistant Professor in History, Faiz Ahmed; visiting professors Bashir Abu---Manneh, Adi Ophir, and Mohsen Namjoo; and post---doctoral fellows Mayssun Succarie, and Sa`ed Atshan. We will also be adding a film series and organizing major conferences on Oslo, digital humanities, engaged scholarship, the crises in Syria, U.S. and Iran, and new directions in Palestinian Studies.

It is a privilege to work with such a talented and energetic group of faculty and students and we welcome all of you to join us next year and make your voices heard.

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