

January 20, 2017

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

I write you on January 20, 2017, a day that marks an official transition to an uncertain world. Considering the pivotal position of this region, the mission of Middle East Studies (MES) at Brown—“to promote knowledge, understanding, and informed discussion about the Middle East, Islam, and Muslim societies through research, teaching, and public engagement”—is as pressing and as vital as ever. I am happy to say that we are ready to meet these challenges. Since the launch of the Middle East Initiative in 2012, our community has grown larger, stronger, and ever more interconnected within and outside of Brown.

At the beginning of the Spring 2017 semester, MES will conclude a search for a **visiting professorship in Iranian Studies**. This position will strengthen our teaching and research in a crucial area. The **Mellon Sawyer seminars** will continue with three workshops and a concluding conference in April on “Displacement and the Making of the Modern World.” As the organizer of this seminar, MES will also host the internationally renowned artist and videographer, Ursula Biemann, who will visit Brown to screen and discuss her films. Also this semester, MES will convene the Fourth Annual New Directions in Palestinian Studies workshop on the theme “Archives and Memory.” These research initiatives are in addition to our regular programming: the Peter Green Lecture Series, regular lecture series, luncheon seminars, film series, and additional events organized by the MES DUG and Graduate Student Association.

This year we **welcomed several new MES faculty, visiting professors, and postdocs** to our community. They offered new and popular courses, and they added great intellectual energy to the campus. Sreemati Mitter’s history course, Understanding the Middle East, had an enrollment of over 130 students last semester. **New and exciting courses** will be offered this semester, including Sarah Tobin’s GELT-funded undergraduate seminar on displacement, which features a class trip to Jordan during spring break.

Many of our faculty and students are active beyond the Brown campus on a variety of important public issues. For more information, please check out our revamped **website**, as well as the **five other websites** dedicated to research initiatives by MES.

Systemic and global challenges carry within them opportunities for deeper understanding and engagement in the struggle to build a sustainable world with equality, justice, and peace for all. We at MES are no strangers to difficult moments of transition and have learned a great deal about how to move forward constructively and with purpose.

I look forward to working with you over this coming year.

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