



# middle east studies

Middle East Studies (MES) at Brown University promotes greater understanding of the cultural, social, and political dynamics that have impacted and continue to impact the Middle East and the people who inhabit it. MES seeks to increase knowledge and informed discussion of the region and its societies through research, teaching, and public engagement.

MES focuses faculty and student interest in this region by building a cutting-edge research community, producing innovative programming, and offering an exciting array of courses and opportunities for undergraduate concentrators. Through thematically-driven collaborative initiatives, MES taps into Brown's tradition of critical and engaged scholarship to integrate the Middle East into the DNA of the university.

*"The Middle East Studies department has been at the core of my experience here at Brown—not only has it helped me pursue my academic interests, but it has also provided me with a wonderfully supportive community within which I've been able to do so. I feel very lucky having been a part of MES and knowing that both my education and the relationships I have built here will stay with me long after graduation." – Zahra Asghar '20*





## about the concentration

The concentration in Middle East Studies (MES) seeks to build a strong, interdisciplinary understanding of historical and contemporary issues within the Middle East, broadly defined. Requirements are intentionally flexible to accommodate the focused interests of students in understanding the diverse dynamics, histories, and societies of this region. A variety of courses from departments across the University expose students to methods and materials of different disciplines and help them build a framework for understanding the Middle East in historical and contemporary context. Concentration requirements are structured around four major cornerstones: language, foundational knowledge and methods, multidisciplinary area studies, and research.

## 6x intermediate to advanced language seminars

Concentrators are expected to achieve competence in at least one of the modern Middle Eastern languages, such as Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, or Turkish. This entails the completion of at least six semesters of Brown language coursework in one of these languages.

Students who have reached proficiency in a Middle Eastern language but have not received six credits at Brown (including transfer and/or study abroad credits) can fulfill this requirement:

- through advanced reading and writing courses in a Middle Eastern language;
- by taking courses in a second Middle Eastern language;
- or through courses in a non-Middle Eastern language to be used in a senior capstone project (for example, Spanish for the study of Andalucía or French for the study of North Africa).

## 2x foundational courses

Students are required to take both MES 0100 The Middle East: Cultures and Societies and MES 1968: Approaches to the Middle East. Students should take MES 0100 before taking MES 1968.

- **MES 0100 The Middle East: Cultures and Societies**

This interdisciplinary course is offered every spring and provides an overview of major historical, cultural, religious, and social developments within the region presently described as the Middle East. It is intended to provide concentrators with a shared baseline of knowledge about the region and to begin forming an intellectual community of MES concentrators.

- **MES 1968 Approaches to the Middle East**

This seminar offered every fall introduces students to the interdisciplinary

field of Middle East studies in the broader context of the history of area studies in the humanities and social sciences. It is designed to solidify the intellectual community of MES concentrators by introducing them to core texts and debates, as well as to new research trajectories, in the field.

## 3x electives

These are chosen from the list of elective courses selected in consultation with the Director of Undergraduate Studies. Students must take at least one course in the humanities (offered within the departments of Archaeology and the Ancient World, Classics, Comparative Literature, History of Art and Architecture, Modern Culture and Media, Philosophy, or Religious Studies) and at least one course in the social sciences (offered within the departments of Anthropology, History, International Relations, Political Science, Sociology, or Urban Studies). Examples of recent courses that would fulfill these requirements include:

### *Humanities:*

- CLASS 0660 *The World of Byzantium*
- COLT 1310J *The Arab Renaissance*
- RELS 0088 *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*

### *Social Sciences:*

- ANTH 1150 *Middle East in Anthropological Perspective*
- HIST 0243 *Modern Middle East Roots: 1492 to the Present*
- URBN 1870K *Jerusalem Since 1850: Religion, Politics, Cultural Heritage*

## 1x capstone project

All concentrators are required to conduct a capstone project within their senior year. The purpose of the capstone is to synthesize and apply the skills and knowledge that concentrators have acquired through the Middle East Studies curriculum to particular interests developed through the concentration. All students are expected to present their capstone research in the final semester before graduation.

## honors requirements in middle east studies

As above with the following differences:

### *'A' grades*

To be eligible for honors, students will have earned an 'A' in the majority of courses for the concentration.

### *1x Honors Thesis*

Two semesters of Independent Study toward the honors thesis (MES 1970) are required; one of these should take the form of a thesis writing workshop supervised by the the DUS or other designated MES faculty during the first semester of thesis writing.



## sample mes courses

### ANTH 1911 Gender and Sexuality in the Middle East

The seminar offers an overview of the key issues in the study of gender and sexuality with reference to the Middle East. It will provide a gendered understanding of prevailing structures, ideologies, social practices and trends for those students interested in Middle East societies, cultures and politics, as well as those interested in women and gender studies.

### COLT 0510K The 1001 Nights

This course explores the origins, performance, reception, adaptation, and translation of the *1001 Nights*, one of the most beloved and influential story collections in world literature. Students will spend the semester in the company of genies, princes, liars, slaves, mass murderers, orientalist, and Walt Disney, and will consider *the Nights* in the context of its various literary, artistic, and cinematic afterlives.



## undergraduate research travel awards

Grants are available to students concentrating in Middle East Studies to defray the costs of transportation for undergraduate research projects that focus on Middle East-related topics. Recent awards have supported student research on colonial conceptualizations of the 19th century *haji* and on the Dönme, a sect of Jewish converts to Islam who have communities in modern day Turkey.

## mes undergraduate fellowship

Middle East Studies offers two competitive Undergraduate Fellowship awards to rising seniors writing an Honors Thesis and concentrating in MES. The fellows are expected to play an active role in MES life and assist with outreach efforts to current undergraduates and alumni.

## undergraduate dug

The Middle East Studies Departmental Undergraduate Group (DUG) is run by MES concentrators who host events and activities in addition to advising their peers and endeavoring to build community both inside and outside of MES. The DUG-organized Undergraduate Paper Series provides opportunities for MES concentrators to showcase their work within the Brown community. All students are welcome to attend and participate in the DUG regardless of concentration.

*"Middle East Studies has been an invaluable community that has pushed me to grow both as an individual and as a student in my time at Brown. In addition to the outstanding faculty support MES offers, the support of my peers has been a highlight of the concentration, and I'm happy to call many of my classmates my friends." – Ryan Saadeh '20*





## highlighted events

Middle East Studies hosts a range of events featuring leading scholars, policymakers, and practitioners speaking on important issues in the study of the Middle East and on developments in current events.

Recent highlights include a panel comparing experiences of incarceration in the United States and in Syria; a film series highlighting comedic cinema from across the Middle East and North Africa as well as political choices in new cinema from the region; engaging luncheons on topics like gender-based violence, transgender lives in modern Turkey, and the Syrian refugee crisis; a year-long Iran Today lecture series aimed at sophisticated discussion of contemporary Iranian society and culture; a concert highlighting classical Syrian music; scholarly symposiums such as the fifth Engaged Scholarship Conference on 'Middle East Toxic Wars' as well as an Islam and the Humanities workshop on 'Assessing the Islamic Past.'





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