



BROWN UNIVERSITY  
CENTER FOR  
MIDDLE EAST  
STUDIES

# 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.

*"Criticality in thought and a justice-oriented consciousness are the two greatest lessons that the Middle East Studies community has bestowed upon me in the last four years. The staff, faculty, alumni, and current and prospective concentrators—all integral constituents of the vibrant community nurtured by the department—have molded who I have become at Brown. If I had to hand-select my favorite experiences of college life, I would find that each memory is inevitably associated, in one way or another, with a course, idea, or person affiliated with MES. - Anchita Dasgupta' 21*



# 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 contexts. Concentration requirements are structured around four major cornerstones: language, foundational knowledge and methods, multi-disciplinary 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: 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.

- **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:

- ARCH 1025 Greece–Egypt–Anatolia–Mesopotamia: Transcultural Interactions in the Ancient World
- FREN 1410R Images d'une guerre sans nom: The Algerian War in Literature and Film
- RELS 0600E Islamic Modernities: Religion, Culture, and Power

### Social Sciences:

- HIST 1969C Debates in Middle Eastern History
- IAPA 1804A Iran and the Islamic Revolution
- 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' (or 'S' with distinction) 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 Director of Undergraduate Studies or other designated MES faculty during the first semester of thesis writing.

## Sample MES Courses

### COLT 1431B Modern Arabic Poetry

An advanced course with readings in modernist Arabic poetry, beginning with the so-called neo-classical poets and proceeding through Romanticism and Modernism, from Egypt to Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, and beyond. We will examine such recurring themes as love, loss, and longing; war, exile, and homeland; cultural heritage (turath) and creative innovation (ibda'); gender and genre. All readings in Arabic; at least three years Arabic language study (or equivalent) required for enrollment.



### 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.



# 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 *hajj* 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.

*"My encounter with the Middle East Studies department at Brown over the past four years has been humbling and inspiring. The endless support, encouragement, and advice that I have received from faculty members, staff members, and students have shaped my academic and personal journeys with lessons about patience, integrity, and purposefulness. Without a doubt, the MES community has given me the drive to hold myself accountable as a lifelong learner who wishes to bridge the gap of understanding between different communities and for that, I am grateful to call MES my second-home."*

- Huma Ramazan Ali '21.5





# 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 on feminist anti-racist activism in the Middle East and North Africa; a discussion on the decolonization of museums; a film series highlighting issues of women, gender, and sexuality in the Middle East and North Africa; Professor Emily Drumsta's presentation of her translation of Nazik al-Mala'ika's *Revolt Against the Sun*; a collaboration with the Climate Change Lab on climate change and global warming in the Middle East; and an Iranian studies lecture series, including lectures on gender segregation in contemporary Iran and the role of urban space in facilitating collective action.





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