



ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT

Middle East Studies (BA)

May 2016

MEST Vision Statement

The Middle East Studies Program (MEST) at the University of Arkansas offers an interdisciplinary learning community dedicated to the critical regions of North Africa and the Middle East. MEST takes a unique approach to the study of regional issues and topics by linking complex aspects of landscape in our core curriculum, with a focus on our academic departments, partners, and thrusts: artistic, cultural, environmental, geographic, historic, linguistic, and political.

MEST Mission Statement

The Middle East Studies program (MEST) in the J. William Fulbright College of Arts & Sciences at the University of Arkansas should enrich the lives of our students and community, and provide the best opportunities for intellectual, professional, and personal development. Our curriculum comprises a foundation that enables students to inquire about the complexities of life, our World, and its societies and cultures.

- ◆ *The MEST curriculum will provide our students with the tools to improve their perception and understanding of the Middle East and North Africa while encouraging them to make new connections between these cultures, nations, peoples, and places.*
- ◆ *The MEST curriculum will encourage independent and interdisciplinary thinking in our challenging and changing World. It will enable students to develop opinions, attitudes, values, and beliefs, based on their own evaluations of arguments and evidence, acquired through faculty interaction, independent study, fieldtrips, internships, colloquia, visiting presentations, and through active participation in our MEST learning community.*
- ◆ *The MEST curriculum will prepare students to meet the challenges of an expanding, diverse, technological, and complex global society. They will gain knowledge, and learn skills and abilities that will promote success in the many careers available to them as they pursue their work as scholars of Middle East Studies, and as citizens of the world.*

For the following discussion, the original MEST Assessment Plan components are listed in grey, while the narrative and explanation of our results are in black.

Program Goals

1. International Focus

To foster a global vision for UA students, faculty, and community that focuses primarily on North Africa and the Levant, but including the regions of Iran, Turkey, and current strategic areas (Turkic, etc.) in context with broader perspectives of regional and global knowledge, sensitivity, and awareness.

2. Interdisciplinary Focus

To foster education from a spectrum of disciplinary perspectives within context of our regional and global thrusts including geography, politics, history, culture, society, art and architecture, agriculture and resource management.

3. Area Studies Focus

To foster understanding of geographic, cultural, and historical processes that define different geo-cultural areas of academic study: North Africa, the Levant, and the broader Middle East.

In the Middle East Studies Program (MEST), we are fortunate to have undergraduates who enter our program because of their deep passion and interest in the Middle East and North Africa regions (MENA). Often our students exhibit a great thirst for knowledge of the region and its languages, cultures, geography, societies, landscapes, resources, arts, and architecture before they have officially declared their major, and thus experience a high rate of success while in the Program. The Spring 2016 semester is an ideal time for our first assessment. A record number of students have graduated with a co-major in MEST: 21 students, representing roughly 30% of the MEST major cohort. This success supports observations that programmatic changes undertaken in previous years are proving effective, and offers a solid platform for future refinement.

The MEST Curriculum was created to encompass the primary program goals of (1) *International*, (2) *Interdisciplinary*, and (3) *Area/Regional* foci. These foci are aligned with the vision and mission of the Fulbright College of Arts & Sciences. MEST coursework (required and elective) addresses broader aspects of global and regional geography, history, landscapes, political systems, cultures, literature, fine arts, and classical and vernacular architecture. Specific issues of country and regional politics, society, language and dialects, music, clothing, food and agriculture are integrated into the broader curricula.

In addition to the required course Introduction to the Middle East (MEST 2013), our offerings currently include popular and well received courses like Geography of the Middle East & North Africa (MENA), Middle East Cultures, Regional History (i.e. classical, modern, Ottoman), Politics of the Middle East, Modern and Classical Arabic Literature, and Modern Standard, and Colloquial Arabic. However, based on faculty and student recommendations and our recent student exit interviews, additional courses in Islam and Christianity (Eastern rite, modern, classical) have been requested and will be implemented, in addition to expanded foreign language offerings. Hebrew literature and language will be offered in 2016-2017, with discussion of adding Farsi (Persian) and Turkish in the future. A site visit to Cyprus is planned for 2016 in the hopes that summer and semester courses in Modern Turkish may be offered to our undergraduate MEST students.

Student Learning Outcomes

1. Global Geo-Cultural Vision

To foster appreciation of global complexities including geographic, political, economic, historic, and cultural forces that have shaped and are currently shaping geo-cultural regions of North Africa and the Middle East.

2. Intercultural Sensitivity/Cross-cultural Communication

To foster critical understanding of numerous alternative, integrated, and complex world views.

3. Global Identity Politics – Ethnic, Religious, Geographic, National, Gender, etc.

To foster appreciation of complex intersections of identity, meaning, and interpretation on a regional and/or global scale.

4. Global Power/Political Relations

To foster critical understanding of global politics and diverse perspectives at various levels and scales including national, regional, global, as well as in the broader context of multiple scales.

5. US in World History/Affairs

To foster critical understanding of US international relations in the regional and/or global arena.

6. Geographic/Historical Roots of the Present

To foster appreciation and understanding of how history and geography have shaped our world, the Middle East, North Africa, and the Mediterranean.

7. Foreign Language Skills

To foster appreciation/understanding of global cultures through language acquisition/literacy.

8. Study Abroad Experience

To foster and facilitate opportunities to study and/or live in a foreign setting related to area studies major for broader cultural, geographic, historic, and social understanding.

9. Additional skills

To foster additional skills related to their major fields of study that enhances the links between regional major (i.e. Middle East Studies) and their broader discipline (geography, history, political science, anthropology, and comparative literature and language). These may include archaeological field methods, cartography and GIS, statistical analysis, survey instrumentation, and archival research.

MEST majors develop a strong and broadly interdisciplinary knowledge - not only from the diverse curriculum available to them, but also from the breadth of their instructors. Each professor/instructor has a background in his or her discipline of instruction, so faculty research agendas, in addition to their training, experience, and skills, adds to the rare and valuable inter- and multi-disciplinary nature of our program. MEST majors are also required to learn (and test out) in modern standard Arabic (MSA) -- an invaluable skill for North Africa and Middle East studies. These learning outcomes are directly linked to the completion of the program goals through related coursework in the MEST curriculum.

As all MEST major undergraduates are secondary co-majors with a primary major (Anthropology, Geography, History, International Studies, Political Science, etc.), they develop knowledge, skills, and abilities within MEST and within their primary field. This acquisition of skill represents a direct manifestation of assessment (knowledge, skills, and abilities). The following co-majors contribute extensively to the MEST undergraduate student skill-sets:

MEST + Anthropology:

archaeological field methods, statistics, survey instrumentation, communication skills (written, oral), critical examination of written material and oral presentations.

MEST + Geography:

cartography, statistical analysis, geographic information systems (GIS), geo-visualization, survey instrumentation, communication skills (written, oral), critical examination of written material and oral presentations.

MEST + History:

archival research, communication skills (written, oral), critical examination of written material and oral presentations.

MEST + International Studies:

communication skills (written, oral), critical examination of written material and oral presentations.

MEST + Political Science:

critical examination of written material and oral presentations, statistical analysis

Process for Assessing Student Learning Outcomes

1. Timeline for assessment and analysis

Each Spring semester, graduating undergraduates will be surveyed (formal instrument) and interviewed within 1-2 months of matriculation. In addition, GPAs are updated and compiled every year for our majors, and related co-majors in the MEST program as a part of annual tracking and progress assessment. Tracking will be done from official MEST major declaration through undergraduate graduation for Cohort tracking and progress.

2. Means of assessment and desired level of student achievement

Completion of a survey instrument (attached) by all/most graduate MEST undergraduates
Participation in a final interview by all/most graduate MEST undergraduates
Advisement and facilitation of a breadth of related courses that create broad perspectives of understanding, skills, and experiences

3. Reporting of results

Annual documentation is created annually for submission to the Dean of Fulbright College through the Fulbright College Annual Report/Middle East Studies and King Fahd Center Annual Report, and the Middle East Studies and King Fahd Center Newsletter (a semi-annual report of student/faculty/alumni achievements and activities)

4. Means of assessment and desired level of student achievement

Required introductory and capstone courses – MEST 2013/4003
Student GPA and other statistics
Awarding/tracking scholarship recipients
Alumni tracking
Exit survey (attached) – to be completed by graduating seniors
Study Abroad Survey (attached) – to be completed by sponsored study abroad students

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the undergraduate MEST curriculum, **direct** assessment of student outcome is found in varied forms. Though MEST colloquia vary in topic (Islamic Art & Architecture, Orthodoxy in Christianity and Islam, Culture and Music, etc.), they are all structured to be consistent in their requirements. MEST colloquia require a lengthy research paper or report, complete with in-text citations, bibliography, and captioned graphics. This format is required to develop our students' ability to create, research, compile, and complete a professional report, thesis, or research paper. In addition, many of the MEST colloquia require presentations (public or in class) done in a convention conference format (12-minute oral presentation, 3-minute Q&A period). 67% of graduating MEST students believed that it was these research papers and presentations that prepared them for

effective research and report-writing in their chosen career paths (i.e. diplomacy, international NGOs, agencies, military, etc.).

Many students also expressed that their MEST experience provided the opportunity to augment skills developed in their co-majors. For example, students in Geography are required to complete a cartographic portfolio of personally designed maps and graphics of their sub-field within MENA; these map collections are assessed in class and by instructors using rubrics conventional in the discipline. In Anthropology, students created maps and written field reports from their work on archaeological excavation sites.

Indirect methods of assessment also indicate solid progress. The methods implemented in MEST include course and assignment grades, self-evaluation of knowledge, skills, and abilities, in addition to satisfaction ratings of personal experiences, learning, and skills. MEST has started overseas internship programs as well, and these represent another potential area of self- and independent evaluation -- by students, faculty, and supervisors.

Moreover, exit interviews and survey instruments were conducted throughout April and May 2016 for all matriculating undergraduate MEST majors, building on a practice implemented in previous years. The results proved to be effective in assessing improvement, identifying positive and negative aspects of the program, and providing suggestions for future improvements and additions to the overall curriculum. These exit surveys and interviews are valuable in recognizing student career targets, paths, and aspirations, and are vital in initiating aspects of student reflection -- what MEST means to them as students of the disciplines, in the broader global context, and in life.

Program Statistics

The MEST Program offers a major and a minor in interdisciplinary Middle East Studies, and incorporates courses in Anthropology, History, Political Science, Geosciences, Literature, Foreign Language, and International and Religious Studies. Requirements may be fulfilled with courses offered by MEST, MEST faculty, or approved by the MEST Director. The MEST Major requires 30 hours of course work, to include:

- *MEST 2013 Introduction to ME Studies (3 hours)*
- *MEST 4003 MEST Colloquium (3 hours)*
- *9 hours of MEST Core Courses in 1 Discipline*
- *9 hours of MEST Core Courses in a Variety of Disciplines*
- *6 hours of Arabic beyond ARAB 2016*

The MEST Minor requires 18 hours of course work, to include:

- *MEST 2013 Introduction to ME Studies (3 hours)*
- *MEST 4003 MEST Colloquium (3 hours)*
- *6 hours of MEST Core Courses*
- *6 hours of Arabic beyond ARAB 2016*

Undergraduate majors are drawn to MEST for a variety of reasons: intellectual curiosity, family background/heritage, travel experience and, for a small but growing number during the last decade, military service. As many of our colleagues around the country have reported, this makes for an interesting mix and an ongoing series of challenges.

MEST Program Numbers

In Academic Year 2015-2016, the MEST Program consisted of 60 students: 53 majors and 7 minors. In comparison to previous years (Figure 1), these numbers are in slight decline. This is largely as a result of an increasing number of graduates, but also signifies a satisfactory retention of students. MEST Minors continue to represent only a small fraction of the program as many choose to upgrade their program to a major before graduation.

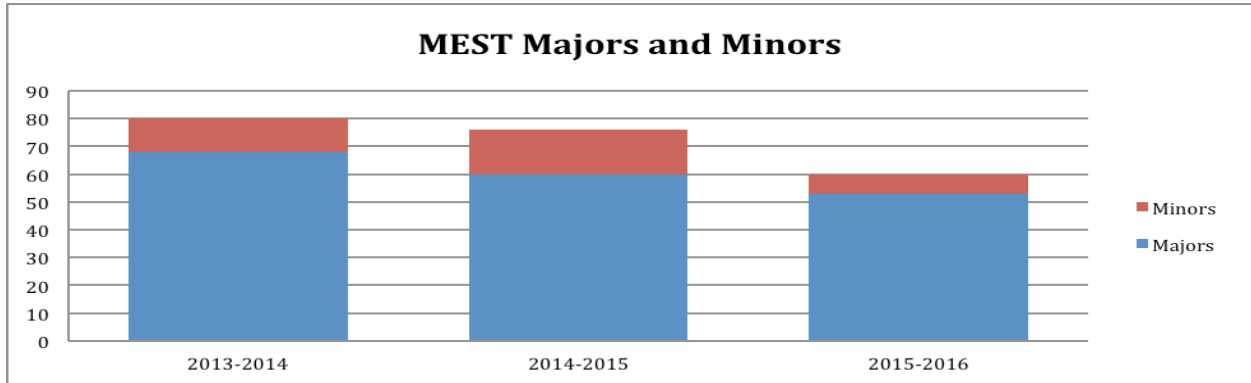


Figure 1: Totals of MEST Majors and Minors over the last three academic years

MEST Co-Majors

Commensurate with other area studies programs at the University of Arkansas, the MEST major is classified as a combined major. MEST majors hold a second co-major, most often in another academic unit of Fulbright College (Figure 2). Most are International Relations/Studies co-majors (51%), followed by Political Science (13%), Geography (8%), Anthropology (6%), History (5%), Psychology (3%), Communications (2%), French (2%), and Journalism (1%). Many MEST majors choose to undertake more than one additional major. Of 53 MEST majors, 10 (18.8%) have tertiary majors.

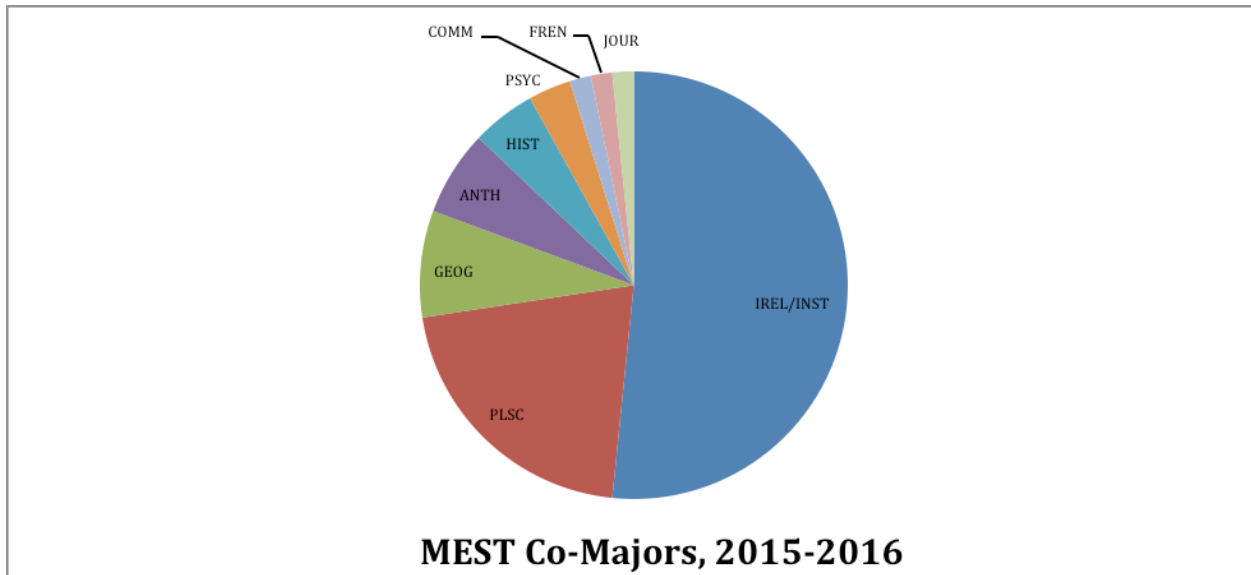


Figure 2: MEST Co-Majors, 2015-2016. (n=53; International Relations/Studies: 32; Political Science: 13; Geography: 5; Anthropology: 4; History: 3; Psychology: 2; Communications: 1; French: 1; Journalism: 1).

Additional Minors

Most MEST majors have chosen to add one or more minors to their program (Figure 3). A total of 30 students (56.6%) have one or more minors, 23 of whom carry the Arabic minor (76.6%). At this point there is no Arabic co-major available; however, many students working toward an Arabic minor have shown an interest in using ARAB courses currently excluded in the course catalog to satisfy the MEST 3 course disciplinary requirement, prompting plans to incorporate this into official language.

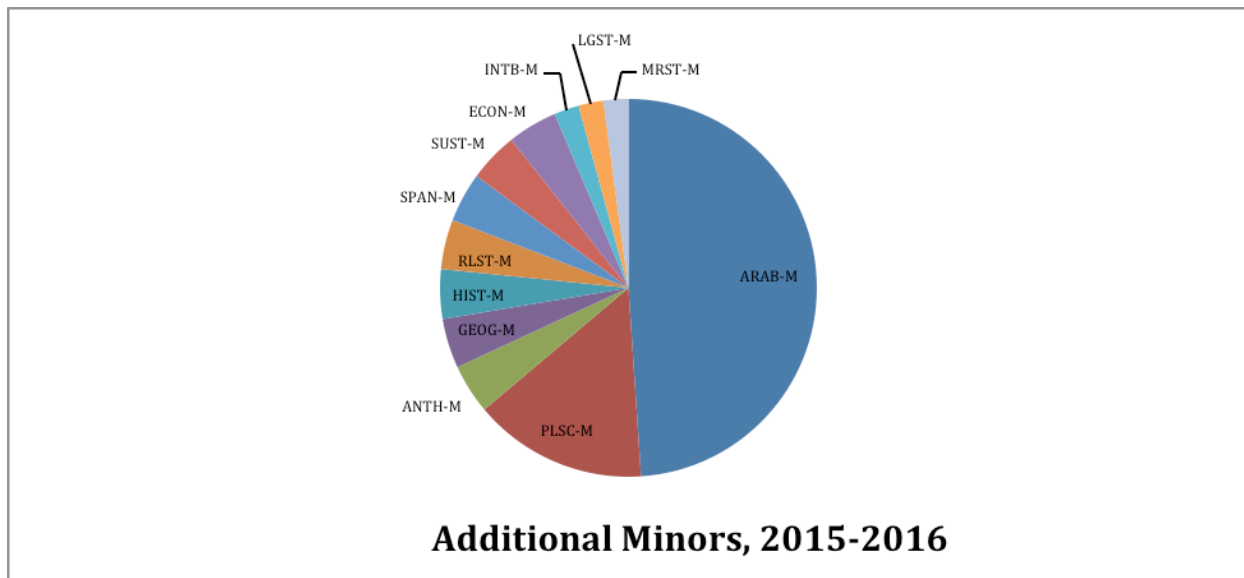


Figure 3: Additional Minors, 2015-2016. (n=30*; Arabic: 23; Political Science: 7; Anthropology: 2; Geography: 2; History: 2; Religious Studies: 2; Spanish: 2; Sustainability: 2; Economics: 2; International Business: 1, Legal Studies: 1; Medieval Studies: 1) (*Students with 3 additional minors: 3; Students with 2 additional minors: 12)

Average GPAs

MEST co-majors have an average GPA of 3.35 (n=53), ranging from 1.945 to 4.0 with a median of 3.425. This is a steady increase from previous academic years (2013-2014: 3.26, n=52; 2014-2015: 3.34, n=47).

Academic Year Scholarships

The King Fahd Center awards undergraduate scholarships annually to outstanding majors who have reached junior status. In Academic Year 2015-2016, full scholarships were \$6,000 per academic year with a cap on 2 years of support. Partial scholarships of \$3,000 were offered to students who either need only 1 semester of support or who had other sources of scholarship income. Applicants must have obtained Junior status (>60 credit hours) by the beginning of the funding period, and are required to make satisfactory progress toward fulfillment of their MEST co-major, maintain a general GPA of 3.25, and a GPA in MEST courses of 3.5.

The increased number of applications submitted in recent years has required and allowed MEST to be more selective in awarding funding. 27 scholarships were awarded between academic years 2013-2014 and 2015-2016 (2013-2014: 2 full, 5 partial; 2014-2015: 4 full, 6 partial; 2015-2016: 7 full, 3 partial). This represents an average program expenditure of \$40,000/academic year on undergraduate academic scholarships during that time period.

A total of 10 scholarships were awarded in 2015-2016: 7 full and 2 partial scholarships, representing a program expenditure of \$51,000 in undergraduate scholarships. Scholarship awardees for AY 2015-16 had an average GPA of 3.67 and an average MEST course GPA of 3.77.

Beginning with the 2016-2017 funding cycle, the MEST Undergraduate Academic Scholarship was revised to increase the award amount per scholarship. Going forward, full scholarships will carry an amount of \$10,000; partial scholarships will carry \$5,000. Criteria for eligibility have remained constant. We are pleased to report exemplary scholars were selected for funding in the 2016-2017 cycle. 10 scholarships were awarded (8 full, 2 partial) in total, representing a \$90,000 commitment to undergraduate scholarship funding. Scholarship recipients have an average GPA of 3.67 and an average MEST course GPA of 3.77.

Graduation Rate

Over the past three years, the MEST program has graduated an average of 14 students per year (2015-2016: 14; 2014-2015: 14; 2013-2014: 15). 2015-2016 has seen a record number of graduates: 9 students in Fall 2015 and 20 in Spring 2016, with a handful of expected graduations during Summer 2016. This reflects positively on efforts by MEST administrators to more closely track and guide students through successfully navigating the program. In forthcoming cycles, MEST will concentrate efforts on recruitment to bolster program numbers after a graduation figure of this magnitude.

MEST Exit Survey

The MEST interview and survey schedule was conducted over April and May 2016. Of the 21-22 matriculating MEST undergraduates, fifteen (71%) were interviewed and surveyed. The broader results from these meetings follow:

1. What first attracted you to the MEST Program?
Introductory Arabic class (21%), Introductory MEST (14%), interest in the region (67%)
2. What other major(s) and/or minors did you combine with MEST? Would you have taken a stand-alone MEST major
Arabic (73% minor), International Studies/IR (60% major), Geography (14% major), Political Science (47% major), International Business (14% major)
3. What were the best parts of your learning experience with MEST? Why?
Excellent instruction (93%), small class size (21%), Faculty interaction (67%)
4. What were the worst parts of your learning experience with MEST? Why?
MSA Arabic (vs. Colloquial Arabic)(27%), not enough MEST-specific courses (21%)
5. Do you feel that the MEST program requirements were attainable?
Yes (100%)
6. What courses weren't offered that should be?
Country specific classes (47%), more Christianity, Islam (21%), more Colloquial Arabic (14%), more regional language offerings: Turkish, Farsi (27%)

7. How do you feel about the advising/mentoring you received with MEST?
Very good to excellent (100%)
8. What are your post-graduation career goals?
Diplomatic service (47%), graduate school (40%), regional employment: agency-NGO (40%), US Military Intelligence (33%)
9. What components of your MEST training do you expect to serve you well professionally? Why?
Arabic, cultural sensitivity, research and report-writing, geographic knowledge
10. What parts do you feel were less critical for your career? Why?
Islam-Christianity less critical but nonetheless important (47%), nearly nothing (80%)
11. Would you recommend this program to other students? Why?
Yes, absolutely valuable, current, interesting (87%)

My MEST training has...

12. increased my appreciation of global and geo-cultural complexities
a) strongly disagree b) disagree c) neutral d) agree (33%) e) strongly agree (67%)
13. increased my critical understanding of alternative world views
a) strongly disagree b) disagree c) neutral (8%) d) agree (25%) e) strongly agree (67%)
14. increased my appreciation of complex intersections of identity on a global/regional scale
a) strongly disagree b) disagree c) neutral d) agree (33%) e) strongly agree (67%)
15. increased my critical understanding of global politics
a) strongly disagree b) disagree c) neutral (8%) d) agree (25%) e) strongly agree (67%)
16. increased my critical understanding of US international relations
a) strongly disagree b) disagree c) neutral d) agree (33%) e) strongly agree (67%)
17. increased my understanding of how history and geography have shaped our world
a) strongly disagree b) disagree c) neutral d) agree (8%) e) strongly agree (93%)
18. increased my understanding of global trends and political/cultural/economic globalization
a) strongly disagree b) disagree c) neutral (14%) d) agree (33%) e) strongly agree (53%)
19. increased my understanding of global cultures through language acquisition/literacy
a) strongly disagree b) disagree c) neutral (22%) d) agree (25%) e) strongly agree (53%)

Extra-curricular Involvement

20. Did you participate in student clubs/organizations with interest in international or Middle East studies?
Yes: 33% (Arabic conversation table, MENA RSOs)
21. Did you attend MEST programming? What types of events?
YES: 93% overall (Nadi Cinema 80%, lectures and talks 73%, RSO events 14%)

22. What types of events /lecturers/topics would you like to see sponsored by the MEST program?
more hands-on (i.e. calligraphy) and professional workshops (i.e. résumé writing), informal speaker-student events, moderate Israel-Palestine presentations and talks

Foreign Language(s)

23. Rate your Arabic reading proficiency? a) beginner (14%) b) intermediate (80%) c) advanced (7%)
24. Rate your Arabic writing proficiency? a) beginner (20%) b) intermediate (60%) c) advanced (20%)
25. Rate your Arabic conversational proficiency? a) beginner (40%) b) intermediate (53%) c) advanced (7%)
26. What was the most advanced Arabic language course you enrolled in?
a) ARAB3016 (20%) b) ARAB4016 (14%) c) ARAB4023 (14%) d) ARAB4033 (46%) e) ARAB470V (7%)
27. Do you plan to continue with your Arabic language training in the future?
Yes or hope so (87%) Darijah in Morocco, Rosetta Stone Arabic (and Farsi), on my own
28. Is there another MENA language not offered at the U of A that you would have liked to have taken in addition to/instead of Arabic?
Yes (100%): Farsi (67%), Turkish (33%), Dari-Pashto-Urdu (21%), Hebrew (14%)

Study Abroad

29. Did you study abroad in the Middle East during your college career?
Yes overall (53%): Amman, Jordan (20%), Oman (7%), Sharjah, UAE (7%), Turkey (7%)
30. Were you encouraged to study abroad in the Middle East?
Yes (87%)
31. What program(s) did you choose to attend?
AMIDEAST Jordan (14%), AIFS Turkey (7%), Oman (7%)
32. Did you receive any scholarships or financial aid?
Yes 21%: Fulbright (14%), ROTC (7%)
33. Do you feel that studying abroad contributed positively to your college/academic experience?
Yes: immensely, absolutely (having gone, or wanting to have gone) (80%)

Financial Aid

34. Did you receive an undergraduate scholarship or any other financial support from the MEST program?
What kind?
MEST undergrad scholarships (33%), MEST summer travel awards (7%)
35. Did you find the application process accessible?
Yes (60%), non-applicable/do not know (20%)

MEST Exit Interviews

Our exit interviews supported the survey findings. Additionally, we were able to elicit further information from our graduates regarding curriculum, faculty, and future plans for the direction of the MEST program as a whole. A number of suggestions were made by the students toward creating a stronger program, and one more in line with career needs and trends. Increased regional and topic offerings were suggest to increase MEST proficiency in the existing and emerging job markets:

- *more in-depth offerings in Islam in MENA (33%), politics (non-Levantine) (33%), North Africa region geography and politics (20%), and Conversational Arabic (20%).*
- *additional business-related, professional workshops on résumé-writing, technical writing (60%)*
- *elective credits in MEST for statistics, and research methods coursework (46%)*

Interviewed students were consistently positive about the level and quality of instruction from MEST tenured, tenure-track, and instructors; comments about faculty and courses follow:

- *Early/regional Christian History class (21%) - Spencer Allen (MEST instructor)*
- *Politics of the Middle East (21%) - Dan Brown (PhD instructor)*
- *Introductory Islam (14%) - Sarwar Alam (MEST instructor)*
- *Geography of Middle East & North Africa (14%) - Tom Paradise (professor)*
- *Mystical Islam (14%) - Kaveh Bassiri (PhD instructor)*

Alumni Tracking

These names represent those MEST undergraduates who have remained in touch with us since 2004.

- Khalid Ahmadzai (BA 2014): Student, Clinton School of Public Service, Little Rock, AR
- Nadia Akbar (BA 2007): Tax Accountant, New York City
- Kimberly Allen (BA 2009): Department of Defense Analyst, Washington DC
- Fareeda Alqatto (BA 2007): Analyst at BASF, San Diego, California
- Haya Al-Rowaei (BA 2005): Third Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bahrain
- Kalynn Barlow (BA 2016): US Air Force, Salt Lake City, Utah
- Cole Bockenfeld (BA 2008): Middle East Democracy Project, Director, Washington DC.
- Sean Bryant (BA 2015): US Air Force
- Kendall Byers (BA 2009): Curriculum Coordinator, Global Entrepreneurs, New Delhi, India
- Myles Carfagno (BA 2016): US Air Force
- Sydney Cason (BA 2016): Peace Corps, Morocco
- Ryan Cochran (BA 2007): Academic Counselor, University of Arkansas-Fayetteville
- Bailey Cox (BA 2015): Grassroots Outreach Coordinator, Malala Fund, Washington DC
- Charles Davidson (BA 2008): Law Student George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia
- Safiya Ghori (BA 2002): US Senate Foreign Relations Committee on South/Central Asia
- Robert Hintz (BA 2011): Graduate Student, University of Denver
- Beth Ibrahim (BA 2009): Elementary school teacher, Cairo, Egypt
- Cassie Kordsmeier (BA 2009): Defense Department Analyst, Washington DC
- Rebecca Luebker-Moll (BA 2005): High School Teacher, Haas Hall Fayetteville, Arkansas
- Constance Mash (BA 2005): Practicing Psychiatrist (MD), Seattle, Oregon

- Matt Malczyk (BA 1997): Associate Professor of History, Auburn University
- Meredith Melody (BA 2005): Boutique Photographer, Little Rock, Arkansas
- Michelle McKee (BA 2007): Mississippi River Nature Center Coordinator, Vicksburg, MI
- Robert Moore (BA 1996): Assistant Professor of History, John Brown University
- Saba Naseem (BA 2013): Journalist, Smithsonian Institute, Washington DC
- Gary Noel (BA 2011): research Analyst at the UAE Embassy, Washington DC
- Souad Nouri (BA 2006): Independent Copy Editor (English-Arabic), Abu Dhabi, UAE
- Homa Quazilbash (BA 2007): TV News Reporter, Channel WEWS, Cleveland, Ohio
- Nicholas Robbins (BA 2008): International Analyst (Walmart/Chemonics) US-Afghanistan
- Jacob Rowlett (BA 2016): Graduate Student, University of Arkansas-Fayetteville
- Kaitlyn Smithwick (BA 2016): Graduate Student, University of St. Andrews, Scotland
- Megan Turner (BA 2010): Municipal Coordinator, City of Beer-Sheba, Israel

Overview

A variety of metrics (indirect, direct) were used to develop a solid assessment of the MEST program. These included GPA, coursework, communication, critical thinking and visualization skills, and technical and graphic abilities. Overall, based on exit surveys and interviews, satisfaction with the MEST program was high with an overwhelming rating of *very good to excellent* (87%). In addition, it was found that the quality of instruction is perceived to be as strong as the curriculum offerings and program rating. Crucial, however, to the sustainability of the MEST Program, are suggestions for improvement. These recommendations included the following:

- *offer strategic country courses (i.e. Israel, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey) which encompass all aspects of landscape: economy, politics, culture, geography, agriculture, resources, and basic conversational language (Pashto, Dari, Hebrew, Turkish)*
- *in addition to Arabic, offer regional languages: Hebrew, Persian/Farsi, Turkish, etc.*
- *offer more conversational Arabic, and more informal offerings of conversational get-togethers for languages related to the regions (Farsi, Turkish, Hebrew).*
- *offer more study abroad options (country, length of stay), and the addition of MEST fieldtrips (possible 2017, 2018 MEST fieldtrips were discussed)*
- *offer more workshops offered in technical and résumé writing (professional), and MEST-related in calligraphy, creative writing, painting (arts and crafts)*

The recently conducted exit surveys and interviews proved to be productive and effective in better understanding perceived student needs, concerns, and opportunities. Linked to faculty input, the outcome will produce a more sustainable, efficient, and successful program -- in the perception of MEST students, and in the reality of post-graduation career and education paths.

In tandem with direct and indirect undergraduate assessments, the Middle East Program at the University of Arkansas will continue to improve and grow, and continue to attract the best students in the field. While, the King Fahd Center for Middle East Studies will continue to expand and represent a resource center of excellence for outreach, and scholarship for the Middle East and North Africa across our state, region, nation, and world. MEST undergraduates found the program to be excellent, germane, interesting, and valuable to their broad understanding of the field(s), possible career paths, and life in general.

Appendix

Study Abroad Questionnaire

1. What made you want to study abroad in the Middle East?
2. What program(s) did you choose to attend?
3. What considerations went into choosing your program(s)?
4. Did you receive any scholarships or financial aid?
5. What was your favorite moment/best experience while abroad?
6. What was the most challenging moment you experienced while abroad?
7. Would you consider attending this or a similar program in the future?
8. Would you recommend this program to other students?
9. Do you feel that studying abroad contributed positively to your college/academic experience?
10. Would you be willing to talk to other students considering study abroad in the future?

