Arabic has joined MESAS

We are excited to announce that, as of the fall of 2017, the Arabic Language Program has become part of the Middle East and South Asia Studies Program!

Since Dr. Darlene May created the program in 2005, Arabic has been one of the fastest growing areas of language study at Wake Forest. Before graduation in the spring, there were 17 students with Arabic minors. Arabic course offerings and faculty have been housed in a number of departments prior to its merger with MESAS: Romance Languages, Classical Languages and Religion. However, the MESAS program has long been a meeting place for students and faculty affiliated with Arabic. The Arabic Language Program attracts a variety of students, including those interested in ROTC, debate, Semitic languages, and the Middle East in general, as well as students who are Arab, Muslim, or even have distant ethnic connections to the Middle East. The program is currently staffed by two full-time professors, Dr. May and Jumana Al-Ahmad, and a Fulbright teaching assistant, Marwa Ben Salem.

We are hopeful that MESAS will provide a vibrant intellectual space for our Arabic faculty and students, as the program continues to develop and grow.


**Arabic Film Series**

The Arabic Film Series screens two films in the fall and plans to present three additional documentaries in the coming semester.

On September 13th, the 2014 documentary *Silvered Water, Syria Self-Portrait* written and directed by exiled filmmaker Ossama Mohammed and Wiam Simav Bedirxan, was shown to students and faculty as a compilation of videos shot by 1,001 Syrians documenting the horrific civil war since 2011. This film, which won the Best Documentary Award at the London Film Festival in 2014, provides eye-witness accounts of atrocities and day-to-day struggles of Syrian civilians, militants, and revolutionaries. This gripping perspective of the violence was poignant for students to view and brought a new level of humanity and connection to the conflict from an on-the-ground point of view.

On September 28th, students and faculty had the opportunity to watch the 2008 film *Sufi Soul: The Mystic Music of Islam*. This film documents the variety of musical subcultures of Sufism and how they are adapted by different cultures, places, and sects of Islam. It offers a look at spiritual expression and shows the integral role music plays in different cultures. A post-screening discussion was led by MESAS professors Nelly Van Doorn Harder (Religion) and Darlene May (Arabic).

Spring films will explore the 2011 uprising in Egypt, the significance of 1948 for Palestinians and Israelis, and the experiences of Syrian immigrants to the United States. A full schedule is found in the announcements section of this newsletter.

**Faculty Focus: MESAS Welcomes Dr. Lina Benabdallah**

As the newest member of the Politics and International Affairs department, Dr. Lina Benabdallah is engaging her students with fresh topics and ways of looking at international politics. Dr. Benabdallah was offered a Fulbright scholarship and came to the United States from Algeria after completing her undergraduate degree at the University of Batna in 2004. She then attained her masters in Political Science from the University of Florida and went on to complete her Ph.D. as well, focusing on International Relations, Political Theory, and Comparative Politics.

Dr. Benabdallah’s main research agenda examines the politics of Chinese foreign policy in
Africa. However, her scholarship and her teaching more generally considers the ways in which Global South perspectives decenter International Relations theories. A scholar whose research spans China, Africa and the Middle East, Dr. Benabdallah has conducted extensive fieldwork in Kenya, Ethiopia, and China and is developing plans to travel to Benin, Ethiopia and the Sudan in the coming year.

In the fall semester, Dr. Benabdallah is teaching a topics course on international relations on rich and poor nations, which looks at emerging powers and their impact on development. In the spring, Dr. Benabdallah will offer a topics in comparative politics course centered on her research in Chinese and African encounters. She will also be teaching the International Studies 250 capstone seminar for INS students.

Dr. Benabdallah will be looking for students to fulfill research assistant positions to aid her in her ongoing research projects, including Chinese peacekeeping practices in Africa and exploring Chinese foreign policy in the Global South in Africa and beyond. This is a great opportunity for those who wish to engage further with this subject matter beyond the classroom.

**Visiting Arabic Faculty: Jumana Al-Ahmad**

The Arabic program is pleased to welcome visiting lecturer Jumana Al-Ahmad this semester. Ms. Al-Ahmad completed her undergraduate studies at the University of Jordan several years before completing a masters degree at the University of Virginia. She has previously taught at the University of Virginia, the University of Richmond, and additionally began Arabic language programs nearby at Salem College and Forsyth Tech.

Ms. Al-Ahmad has an extensive background in working with the Arabic language in different professions, such as translation and interpretation, quality control linguistics, and teaching. Before coming to North Carolina, she worked in her native country of Jordan, as well as Qatar and Canada. At Wake Forest, she now teaches second- and third-year Arabic courses.

Ms. Al-Ahmad's approach to teaching involves a proficiency-based, communicative approach to learning a language that emphasizes productive skills of speaking and writing in addition to listening and reading. She hopes to inspire her students to be lifelong learners and continue their studies of Arabic and Middle Eastern culture, which she does by integrating Arabic cultural studies into her language courses.

Welcome to Wake Forest Ms. Al-Ahmad!
Dr. Chanchal Dadlani Honored for Her Research

Following the completion of her soon-to-be released book, entitled *From Stone to Paper: Architecture as History in the Late Mughal Empire*, assistant professor of Islamic and South Asian Art and Architecture Dr. Chanchal Dadlani has been dually honored with two distinctions for her work.

Dr. Dadlani recently received the Mellon Author Award from the Society of Architectural Historians, which is selectively given to first-time authors for their outstanding architectural history contributions. She has also been invited to deliver the Annual Benjamin Zucker Lecture in Mughal Art at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, where she will address an audience of scholars and an informed public on November 7th of this year.

Dr. Dadlani's upcoming monograph is largely based on her dissertation for her Ph.D. from Harvard University, but she has done extensive research on Mughal visual culture over the past decade. The book is set during the period of transition from the late Mughal Empire to the British Empire, and centralized around the role that architecture played during these critical times.

Throughout her time spent studying and admiring Mughal visual culture, Dr. Dadlani has had unique opportunities to experience this culture from a variety of different perspectives. Since her start as an 18-year-old girl seeing Mughal monuments for the first time in person, she has been able to explore these sites in ways most people never have the opportunity to do. As an architectural historian, Dr. Dadlani has requested and received permission from the Archaeological Survey of India to gain special access to view monuments that are otherwise restricted to the general public. “It’s really only by travelling and conducting site-specific research that you can understand the architectural monuments as an embodied space and can similarly understand architecture as a multi-sensory experience, not only visual,” says Dr. Dadlani.

Luckily for her students who have not been able to see these monuments first-hand, Dr. Dadlani has worked hard to cultivate a non-western art curriculum, which has been welcomed by the department. She has collaborated with MESAS in doing so, and students have certainly benefitted from exposure to non-western perspectives over the past six years. She is teaching a variety of classes on Islamic and South Asian art and architecture and general art and architecture history, including one upcoming class, “The Architect”, which coincides with an article she is currently writing on Mughal architects. Her students have the exclusive opportunity to read her research in process, which should tide them over until the official release of her book in 2018.
**Staff Focus: Director of Muslim Life Programming Najila Faizi**

As a North Carolina native, Wake Forest Class of 2014 graduate, and former President of the Muslim Student Association, Ms. Faizi has strong ties to Wake Forest and seeks to provide more support for the Muslim community on campus. As the only undergraduate Muslim woman who wore a hijab at the time, Ms. Faizi felt outcast and found it difficult to make friends before she became involved in the MSA, where she made her closest friends: “We had to make our own feeling of belonging at Wake.”

When Ms. Faizi started at Wake Forest in 2010, Imam Griggs was just beginning his seven -year stint as the official Muslim Chaplin and Program Director for Muslim Life. He quickly became an impactful mentor to Ms. Faizi at Wake Forest, and she attributes much of the Muslim community’s growth to Imam Griggs. “He put up with a lot of things that I haven’t had to and truly laid the groundwork,” says Ms. Faizi. “We wouldn’t be here without him.”

With her mentor in mind, Ms. Faizi hopes to make the Wake Forest community more open and welcoming to Muslim students upon their enrollment. She says that one of the problems contributing to students not feeling welcome is the minimal visibility of the Muslim community on campus. Ms. Faizi hopes to inspire the entire Wake Forest community to be more willing to engage with difference. She says that students should not shy away from their differences, and that everyone should try to learn as much as possible from people who are different while encouraging others to embrace their own differences without pressure to assimilate. “A lot of people feel that being Muslim is a stigma, it’s something negative that they carry with them,” says Ms. Faizi while discussing how many Muslim students feel the need to assimilate to their environment at Wake Forest.

In order to promulgate cross-cultural engagement, Ms. Faizi encourages students, faculty, and staff to make an effort to expose themselves to different things and urges non-Muslims to attend any of the events she organizes and insists that all are welcome to come and learn about Islam through prayer, discussion groups, and the Judaism and Islam 101 Lunch-and-Learn series that Ms. Faizi co-leads with Ms. Gail Bretan, the Program Director of Jewish Life at Wake Forest. Similarly, she hopes that people will come to understand the incredible diversity within the Muslim community at Wake Forest, which is made up of Muslims from around ten different countries and several sects of Islam.

Ms. Faizi’s dedication to enriching Muslim life on campus draws deeply from her experiences at and commitment to Wake Forest and our community will certainly benefit from her leadership.
Fulbright FLTA in Arabic: Marwa Ben Salem

This year, the Arabic program has the pleasure of welcoming a new teaching assistant, Fulbright Scholar Marwa Ben Salem from the University of Sousse in Tunisia. As a hopeful Ph.D. candidate, Ms. Salem is very excited to have the opportunity to work with Jumana Al-Ahmad and Darlene May to hone her teaching skills during this academic year.

Ms. Salem has been working with Arabic classes at the elementary level, as well as leading reading practices for the intermediate level and conversation practice at advanced levels starting at the end of October. In the spring, she will be creating a curriculum for and leading her own Arabic 218 class.

Ms. Salem discovered her desire to teach after working as a private tutor for students in Tunisia and is highly interested in developing her pedagogical experience in the United States before ultimately returning home to teach or pursue her Ph.D. if she does not find a program here.

Ms. Salem is also working on completing her thesis on the poverty debate in Tunisia for her master’s degree in cultural studies. She is driven by her desire to impact the educational system in Tunisia and hopes to make positive changes for students in Tunisia as an English studies teacher at the university level upon the completion of her Ph.D.

For now, Ms. Salem is grateful to have Wake Forest’s educational resources at her disposal while she wraps up her thesis, which she plans to defend when she returns to Tunisia next June. She is glad to be working with Wake Forest students and has commended MESAS students’ genuine interest and desire to improve their Arabic skills.

MESAS is equally as glad to have Ms. Salem on board this fall and spring!

Student News: The Arabic Student Association

Even though the Arab Student Association was just chartered this past spring, it is already making a difference for Arab students at Wake Forest. As founder and president of the ASA, junior Heba Beshai has certainly made her mark with her impressive leadership and drive in making her goals a reality.

Despite the fact that she did not feel like she had a place at Wake Forest during her first year, Ms. Beshai decided that she wanted to change things here rather than leaving: “I’m very attached to Middle Eastern culture and I knew there was just something missing when I came to Wake and there wasn’t an Arab student congregation of any kind,” says Ms. Beshai.

Deciding that if it was not there that it was up to her see it built, Ms. Beshai worked with
other Arab students on campus to establish the ASA as a space for students of Arabic heritage to build community and to celebrate and share with the campus their love of Arabic culture and people. As an Egyptian native herself, Ms. Beshai says that she hopes the ASA will inspire its members to visit the Middle East and do good things for Arabs in their native countries.

Although Ms. Beshai originally intended to start the ASA, which now has 43 active members, as a space for Arab students to build connections with one another, she soon found that there was an interest on the part of non-Arabic students who just wish to learn more about the culture to participate. As a result, the organization has a rich membership of both Arab and non-Arabs. The group has also expanded its outreach to other cultural groups on campus.

On November 16th at 4pm on Manchester Plaza, students can look forward to celebrating with a Layalina event, which means “Our Night”, with plenty of traditional Middle Eastern music, dancing, and food. The ASA will also have a table at the joint Diwali-Eid celebration on November 7th at 6pm on Magnolia Quad. In the spring, there will be an Arabian Nights themed celebration for students with similar festivities, and even Arabic poetry reading. Ms. Beshai expects that these events will provide opportunities both to connect Arab students to their culture and educate non-Arabs about Arabic culture.

Expanding Ties Between Muslim and Jewish Communities

Building relationships and expanding knowledge and understanding across religious communities has long been the mandate of many groups on campus. The directors of Muslim Life and Jewish Life, Naijla Faizi and Gail Bretan, have joined forces to develop a year long series, entitled Judaism & Islam 101: Lunch-and-Learn. Judaism 101 has been running for over five years now, but the Islam aspect was just added on this semester. Students, faculty, and staff are encouraged to participate. The meetings run from 12-1pm on Thursdays in Benson 409 and offer participants a casual setting in which they can discuss, ask questions and learn more about both Islam and Judaism.

In addition, the Pit is now offering Halal and Kosher meals once a month on Wednesdays, in addition to labeling food options as such when available. The interfaith council has been working on this for years, as it is difficult for workers to know how to handle and prepare these meals. Darlene May’s own contribution to the Halal menu was featured in October: the Egyptian national dish koshary. The foods add both to the variety and to the international character of food options on campus. The interfaith council hopes that these dining options will continue to be served more often to accommodate the needs of Muslim and Jewish students.
The Muslim Alumni Association

The same group of students who played an integral role in the formation of the Muslim Student Association has come together ten years later to create the Muslim Alumni Association. Mustafa Abdullah, Naijla Faizi, Zahir Rahman, Maggie Ryan, Fahim Gulamali, and Muhammad Siddiqui successfully founded the new alumni association this semester, kicking off their official induction into the Wake Forest alumni association with a Saturday brunch during Homecoming Weekend in September.

As active members in the Muslim community both inside and outside of Wake Forest, Mr. Abdullah and Ms. Faizi both expressed that they would have loved to have had more alumni support while they were students. The motivation to start the MAA came this past spring after no large-scale public action was taken to condemn conservative elected officials and speakers who gathered nearby in Kernersville, N.C. and made violent threats against Muslim lives. Mr. Abdullah explained further that they were driven by the growing need for support of the local Muslim community in light of recent anti-Islamic discourse from government officials. “We’ve seen white supremacists and white nationalists feeling emboldened, and we have already had a target on our backs since 2001,” said Mr. Abdullah.

As an activist for more than just Muslim rights, Mr. Abdullah is passionate about protecting minorities from discrimination on institutional and systemic levels. Since graduating from Wake Forest in 2010, Mr. Abdullah has been notably involved in social justice efforts as the current Lead Organizer for the American Civil Liberties Union of Missouri. He received the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee’s “Excellence in Advocacy Award” for combatting racial profiling and police brutality with Muslims for Ferguson, which was heavily involved in the aftermath of the fatal shooting of Michael Brown on August 9, 2014 in Ferguson, M.O.

As the number of self-identified Muslim alums, which is currently 75, will nearly double within the next four years, it is more important now more than ever that Wake Forest stands behind this rapidly expanding community.

There is no doubt that the MAA’s presence in the alumni association at Wake Forest will help the growing Muslim community on campus. All Muslims and allies of the Muslim community are encouraged to reach out and connect with the MAA.

To support the MAA, visit their Facebook page listed as the WFU Muslim Alumni Association.
**MESAS Study Abroad Opportunities**

MESAS students have options for studying abroad in the coming year, and all are encouraged to travel if possible. Both of these interdisciplinary study abroad programs offer students the opportunity to get academic credit over the summer in unique locations.

Wake Forest’s Summer Program in Nepal (SPIN) is being offered in the summer of 2018 during session I. The goal of the trip is to have students conduct research on how social status affects peoples’ lives in a semi-urban town roughly 100 miles west of Kathmandu. Additionally, students will have the opportunity to take part in a development project that assesses community needs of marginalized people and how best to meet those needs in terms of health, education, poverty, and women and children. Dr. Steve Folmar is running the program and will be offering Anthropology 383 and 384 for a total of 6 hours of credit. Students who are interested in SPIN can apply on the Wake Forest study abroad webpage and contact Dr. Folmar at folmarsj@wfu.edu.

Wake Forest’s summer program for culture and communication in Delhi, India is being offered by the Communications department for summer session II in 2018. This program offers an immersive experience that relates the intertwined aspects of geography, history, and cultures of India from the Himalayas to the oceans. The learning component of this trip is expanded by a service focus which allows students to work with children of Tibetan refugees and Buddhist scholars. Dr. Ananda Mitra is the resident professor for the trip and is offering COM 360 for three credit hours. Students who are interested in applying should go to the study abroad webpage and contact Dr. Mitra at ananda@wfu.edu.
The Program in Middle East & South Asia Studies

The Middle East and South Asia Studies program organizes events, encourages study abroad, and offers an undergraduate minor, all aimed at providing students with opportunities to engage in a multidisciplinary study of the history, politics, literature, peoples, and cultures of the region. To sign up for the minor in Middle East and South Asia studies, see Silvia Correa in Kirby 313.

Upcoming Events

- **November 7** Diwali-Eid Celebration
  Magnolia Quad 6pm
- **November 16** Layalina
  Manchester Plaza 4pm
- **January 21** Recital for Every Campus a Refuge
  Brendle Recital Hall 3pm
- **January 25** Arabic Film Series Presents “Clash”
  ZSR Library Auditorium Room 404 4pm
- **February 20** Arabic Film Series Presents “1948: Creation and Catastrophe”
  ZSR Library Auditorium Room 404 7pm
- **April 4** Arabic Film Series Presents “Dalya’s Other Country”

For additional information about Middle East & South Asia faculty, events, course offerings, visit [http://college.wfu.edu/politics/mesasprogram/](http://college.wfu.edu/politics/mesasprogram/)