



NELC news

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IU COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES ALUMNI ASSOCIATION • DEPARTMENT OF NEAR EASTERN LANGUAGES & CULTURES

From the chair

World-class program enhances department's offerings

It is a pleasure to share with you the latest issue of *NELC news*, as we conclude a very busy and productive academic year. This edition focuses on our Arabic instructional program, which has grown tremendously.

For the past three years, my esteemed colleagues **Çiğdem Balım-Harding** and **Zaineb Istrabadi** have collaborated in putting together an excellent four-year Arabic Language Curriculum. Close to 200 students now benefit from this world-class program.



Shahrani

We are also delighted about the possibility of hiring a tenure-track faculty member in Arabic pedagogy to further strengthen the program. I would like to express our thanks for support from the IU administration as well as from the College of Arts and Sciences. We plan to begin the search for the very best scholar in the field this fall.

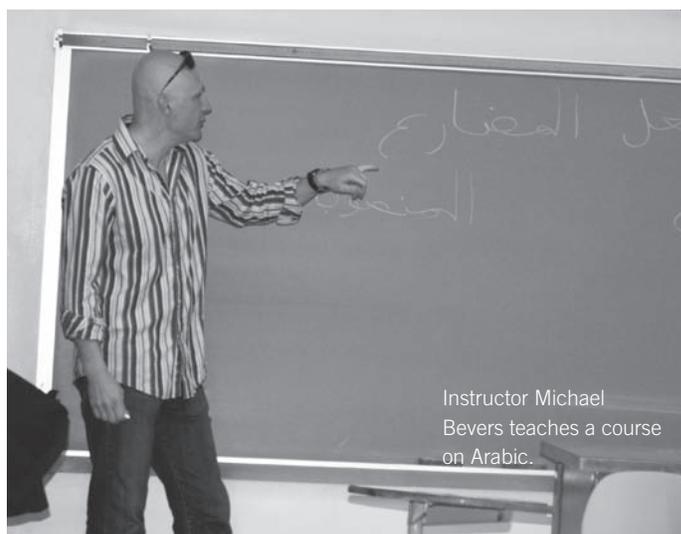
I am also pleased that this edition of *NELC news* introduces one of our newer faculty members, Professor **Kevin Martin**, a historian of the modern Middle East with a particular focus on *ash-Sham* (Syria and the Levant).

Much to our deep disappointment, our other historian of the modern Middle East, **Sara Scalenghe**, resigned from her positions in the NELC and History departments, effective the end of this academic year. We wish her well in her new teaching position in the Washington, D.C., area.

This semester we were honored to welcome Professor Michael Sells of the University of Chicago, who delivered the eighth Annual Victor Danner Memorial Lecture in Islamic Studies on April 19. It was a great pleasure, on that occasion, also to be able to publish Professor **Sachiko Murata's** earlier Danner Lecture, delivered in 2005. Murata's lecture is now available on our department's Web site. Rounding out the semester, at our spring reception on April 26, we celebrated **Elaine Wright's** 30 years of service at IU; presented the Haddawi Scholarship to **Adelaide (Addy) Bryant**, an excellent undergraduate NELC and anthropology major; and presented the Best Arabic Associate Instructor Award to **Waed Athamneh**.

Please read on for more news and information about the NELC community. I wish you all a safe, enjoyable, and productive summer.
— M. Nazif Shahrani

Introducing summer Arabic Language Curriculum



Instructor Michael Bevers teaches a course on Arabic.

Danie M. Becknell

Under the guidance of professors **Çiğdem Balım-Harding** and **Zaineb Istrabadi**, the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures' Arabic Language Curriculum — the core of the department's educational mission — has continued to grow in size and depth.

In the spring semester alone, we saw 190 undergraduate and graduate students enroll in one of 10 Arabic-language classes, and we hope to see these numbers increase further in future years.

In addition to the regular academic-year classes, NELC now offers summer Arabic courses at the elementary and intermediate levels. Offered in partnership with IU's Summer Workshop in Slavic, East European, and Central Asian Languages (SWSEEL), these intensive courses will allow students to take two full semesters of material in the space of only two months.

In all of these classes, the department teaches Arabic as a medium of understanding, expression, communication, and research and stresses reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills — as well as grammar and vocabulary learning. Language teaching and culture teaching are not separated; therefore, students are taught an understanding of the cultures where Arabic is used as much as they are Arabic itself.

> For more information:
More about the Arabic Language Curriculum can be found online at:
www.indiana.edu/~nelc.

Conversations: Q&A with a NELC professor

Kevin Martin reflects on what shapes his life, work

by Cal Margulis, graduate assistant

Cal Margulis (C): Your research has focused primarily on the modern Middle East, and particularly on Syrian history following World War II. When was your first academic trip to Syria, and what brought you there?

Professor Kevin Martin (K): My first academic trip to Syria was in 1998, when I attended summer Arabic courses for foreigners at the University of Damascus.

C: Where were you raised, and how do you think that has impacted your life?

K: I spent the first 20 years of my life in Houston, Texas. At the level of superficialities, after spending much of the subsequent years elsewhere, I have developed an aversion to the extreme heat, humidity, and mosquitoes that are such prominent features of the semitropical environment of the Gulf Coast. I also still love Tex-Mex cuisine, and I suppose that my sense of humor is still very “Texan” in tone. At a deeper level, I think that spending my childhood and adolescence in one of the world’s busiest

port cities made me very conscious of the experience of immigrants to the United States and of their economic and cultural contributions to American society. This, in turn, made me more interested in “foreigners” and “foreignness” than I probably would have been had I been raised in an inland city like Omaha or Denver. Perhaps this long-term inclination eventually led me to Middle East studies.

C: Why did you want to work at Indiana University Bloomington?

K: One always makes such a move for a mix of personal and professional motives. Initially, I was more motivated by personal considerations. Now, however, I have come to understand the great benefits of working in an area studies department at a “Research I” university. I teach classes exclusively of my own conception and design. I have the opportunity to work with students at every level, from entering freshmen to those writing PhD dissertations. And the institution supports my research in numerous ways. All of these are privileges unknown to the overwhelming majority

of those teaching at the college and university level in the United States. Just being an academic is, in my opinion, the best job in the world. Considering all of the aforementioned bonuses that a school like IU Bloomington provides its regular faculty, I can’t imagine wanting to leave.

C: Who has had the greatest influence on your work?

K: That is, of course, a difficult question. From among the “big names,” I would have to cite Michel Foucault, Raymond Williams, E. P. Thompson, and Robert Darnton. Foucault’s relentless skepticism about the received wisdom of modernity will always inform my work and my understanding of human relations. Williams’ desire to grasp the meaning of transformative historical experiences for the average person is, for me, the ultimate, perhaps eternally unobtainable, goal of the historian. Both Williams and Thompson were extremely significant contributors to the “cultural turn” of late 20th-century historiography. Thus, I always find rereading their signal works rewarding. Finally, Darnton has, in my opinion, most precisely defined the core project of the cultural historian, understanding the otherwise inexplicable manifested in human thought and practice.

Within the field of Middle East studies, Hanna Batatu will always serve as an exemplar of patient, meticulous, empathetic scholarship. More recently, I have found the work of Timothy Mitchell, Khaled El-Rouayheb, and Joseph Massad most instructive and provocative.

C: What was your undergraduate focus?

K: As an undergraduate I majored in history and minored in German area studies. My institution didn’t offer Middle East studies as a major or minor field, so I suppose I took the easy way out, taking courses and minoring in the field that enabled me to use German, the only foreign language in which I had reading proficiency at that time.

C: What projects are you currently working on?

K: I’m currently in the final edit stage of an article about urban disorder at the Damascus International Exposition that will appear in the August issue of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. In May I will finish the draft of an article about the cultural and political consequences of “Syria’s Kennedy Assassination,” the murder of Colonel Adnan al-Malki in 1955. This summer I will go to Beirut and Damascus for the final research on an article about the Syrian Desert in the popular imagination of 1920s and 1930s Damascus. When I return in August, I will write a draft of that article and begin revising my dissertation for publication in late 2012.



Martin

NELC semester in review

From **Jan. 15 to Feb. 12**, the NELC department, in conjunction with the Monroe County Public Library, staged an exhibit in the library's gallery space showcasing the photography of **Laurie Miller** and **Michael Bevers**, two NELC graduate students. Miller and Bevers both served in Iraq with the U.S. military and used photography as a way to chronicle the daily events that shaped their lives during that time.



"Iraq: Personal Perspectives," a photo exhibit held Jan. 15–Feb. 12.

On **Feb. 17**, Professor **Kevin Martin** gave the inaugural lecture of the new NELC Faculty Colloquium series. The series is envisioned as a venue for NELC faculty to discuss current research projects as well as other topics of general and specialized interest. Martin discussed his ongoing research — forthcoming in the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* — into the first Damascus International Exposition, held 1954.

On **April 7**, Professor **John Walbridge** gave the second lecture, on the rationalist tradition in Islam, the subject of his forthcoming book.



2010 NELC Faculty Colloquium Series poster

April 19, 2010, marked the Eighth Annual Victor Danner Memorial Lecture. This year, we were honored to present University of Chicago Professor **Michael Sells**, who spoke to a well-attended gathering of students, faculty, and laymen on the subject of 13th-century lyricism. His talk looked at poetry of both European and Islamic traditions, focusing specifically Ibn al-'Arabi's love poetry.

This year, NELC graduate and undergraduate students have taught basic Arabic language skills to more than 1,000 children, from pre-kindergarten through eighth grade, through the Alef Baa Program. Created under the auspices of NELC in 2006 to promote Arabic instruction within the community of Bloomington, Alef Baa also provides a way of mentoring IU Bloomington students in teacher training and professionalization.

Starting in fall 2010, NELC will offer an elementary-level course in the Kurdish language. This course aims to develop students' skills in the Kurmanji dialect of Kurdish, the dialect spoken by 20 million of the estimated 27 to 30 million speakers of Kurdish worldwide. Kurmanji is found throughout the Middle East, the former Soviet republics of the Trans-Caucasus and Central Asia, and in Western Europe, where approximately 1 million Kurds reside.



Alef Baa Program



Danie M. Becknell

The NELC Drama Club created a 20-minute shadow play of *Majnun and Layla*, a classical Arabic story of two 7th-century Bedouin youths and their star-crossed love. It was performed on the opening night of "Intersections."

Celebrating National Poetry Month

After months of planning, NELC was proud to host a number of events timed to coincide with National Poetry Month. The goal was to celebrate the rich tradition of Near Eastern poetry and lyric verse, while making it accessible to an English-speaking audience.

The project with the broadest scope was "Intersections." On each of the first three Thursdays in April, NELC worked with the Indiana University Art Museum to host a two-hour series of poetry readings and musical presentations. In all, 32 artists presented pieces in a Near Eastern or Central Asian language, with accompanying English translations. Performances were recorded, and video and audio podcasts will soon be available on the NELC Web site.

In addition, NELC Professor **Suzanne Stetkevych** honored National Poetry Month by organizing two poetry workshops for graduate students and faculty members. The workshops, on poetry and theory, were conducted in Arabic.



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