Building Excellence in Lean Times

Dr. Valerie J. Hoffman, Director of CSAMES; Professor, Department of Religion

The Center for South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies (CSAMES) promotes scholarship and teaching about two of the most volatile and strategically crucial regions of the world, the Middle East and South Asia. CSAMES’ mission is central to the mission of the University of Illinois as a global leader in international education and in preparing students to play a constructive role in the world by offering interdisciplinary courses and degree programs on the Middle East and South Asia, promoting the study of less commonly taught languages that are among those the U.S. government considers most critically important, and organizing educational events for students, K-14 educators, and the general public. CSAMES also provides a network for some 80 scholars across campus, creating interdisciplinary engagements and perspectives that would otherwise be missing from campus life, and facilitates the visits of foreign researchers who come to our campus to learn and to contribute to the university’s fund of knowledge.

This vital mission has, to a great extent, depended on external funding. In 2012 CSAMES was awarded a two-year grant of $213,110 from the U.S. Department of Education’s Undergraduate International Studies and Foreign Language (UISFL) program, which enabled the creation of a new faculty position in Arabic literature, the hiring of a Persian Lecturer, the creation of an interdisciplinary, team-taught, undergraduate course on the Arab Spring, a Middle East film series, an Indian film series, undergraduate study abroad scholarships, faculty grants to develop new study abroad courses, and multiple public events. It also helped fund Uzbek and Sanskrit language instruction, an Arabic pedagogy workshop, and two textbook projects, one on elementary Persian, and the other an edited collection, The New Middle East. Also in 2012, CSAMES received a grant of $26,500 from the Sultan Qaboos Cultural Center, which provided funds for a conference and teachers’ workshop on the Indian Ocean (see page 4), expanding the university’s library collection on Oman and Ibadi Islam, and for a workshop on Ibadi Islam, held as part of the first Summer Research Lab on Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (see page 3), in addition to providing funds for a new interdisciplinary, team-taught undergraduate course on Muslim cultures and societies. In 2014 CSAMES received a new two-year UISFL grant of $183,968. This grant provides funding for the addition of Urdu and Bengali language to the curriculum, the creation of online materials for Hindi language instruction, the creation of a new course on Hindi for Agriculture, the continuation of Sanskrit language instruction, pedagogical training for instructors of modern South Asian languages, a new interdisciplinary, team-taught course on Sustainable Development in South Asia, undergraduate study abroad scholarships, a South Asian film series and other public events, and the creation of a one credit-hour course on South Asian cultures, ethics and practices for students who plan to study abroad or take internships in South Asia.

Federal funding for area studies has decreased in recent years. UISFL funding in 2014 was less than in 2012, and funding of the Title VI program, the lifeblood of area study centers, has been drastically reduced: in last year’s competition only 100 centers were funded, whereas in 2010 some 134 were funded. At the state level as well, funding for higher education has decreased; the university is currently bracing for the result of budgetary negotiations in Springfield. In the current fiscal climate, it is vital that CSAMES find new sources of outside funding. We have submitted a proposal to a private foundation and are looking into other sources of support. Now, more than ever, CSAMES will be relying on faculty strength and expertise, as well as campus advancement resources, to help generate new fundraising opportunities. If you value CSAMES’ contribution to the campus and community, would you consider making a contribution?

This is a year of transition here at CSAMES. We lost our former Office Support Associate and welcomed Linda Bauer in her place. In August I will step down as Director of CSAMES in order to become Head of the Department of Religion. Serving as Director of CSAMES has been unexpectedly satisfying. It has been a great pleasure to get to know faculty from so many disciplines and to build South Asian and Middle Eastern studies on our campus; I believe so strongly in CSAMES’ mission and in the value of its activities. During the fall semester, Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi, Associate Professor of History and Sociology, will serve as Interim Director of CSAMES, while the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences goes through the process of selecting a permanent Director. Professor Ghamari has served on the CSAMES Executive Committee and has been a key contributor to CSAMES’ activities. It is good to know that CSAMES’ leadership will be in capable hands.
Celebrating the Past, Present and Future of Indian Cinema

Mara L. Thacker, South Asian Librarian

Fall 2013 was a great time to be at the University of Illinois for film enthusiasts and South Asia scholars alike! Starting in September 2013, University of Illinois scholars came together with the local Champaign-Urbana community for “Past, Present, Future: Indian Cinema at 100”, a semester-long series of events celebrating the centenary of Indian cinema. Festivities included eight film screenings, a lecture and Q&A with visiting director and social activist, Onir, a reception, an academic symposium featuring internationally renowned scholars, and a lecture by UIUC alumnus Professor Corey Creekmur.

India’s film industry is best known for the popular Hindi language films produced in Mumbai, popularly called “Bollywood”. Yet the Indian film industry also produces thousands of other films per year including films in the state and regional languages of India, documentaries, art films, and more.

Co-directors Robert Cagle, Rini Mehta, and Mara Thacker celebrated the diversity in the Indian film industry by going beyond the ever-popular Bollywood films to also show independent films, art films, and a Bengali film by renowned director Satyajit Ray. The series started off with the 1957 Hindi film “Mother India” and ended with the classic 1975 “curry Western” blockbuster “Sholay”. The most popular screenings were films by our featured guest director, Onir, “My Brother…Nikhil” and “I Am”.

Onir attended the screening of his film “I Am” and took questions from the audience. Questions and comments covered a range of topics from lighting and using a city as a character in a film, to questions about the social issues raised in these films, such as the stigmatization of homosexuality. Onir also paid a visit to Rini Mehta’s Indian cinema class where students had the opportunity to ask him about his work.

Following the screening of Onir’s film “My Brother…Nikhil”, the audience was treated to a panel discussion led by visiting scholars Sumita Chakravarty, Ajay Gehlawat, Lalitha Gopalan, and Manjunath Pendakur. These four scholars came from as far away as India to participate in festival activities, most notably the academic symposium held at the Coordinated Sciences Laboratory on October 31st. The festival would not have been possible without the many sponsors from across campus including funding from CSAMES provided by the Undergraduate International Studies and Foreign Language (USIFL) grant, a Public Engagement Grant from the UIUC Office of Public Engagement, and generous funding from the University Library, the Gender and Women’s Studies Department, and the Center for Advanced Studies.

By any measure, this festival was a success as evidenced by size and diversity of the audience, as well as the richness of the conversation at the symposium and film screenings. The fact that it was fun and entertaining was the icing on the cake.

CSAMES will host a multidisciplinary symposium, “Ganga (the Ganges), National River of India: Cultural Significance and Environmental Concerns,” on October 9, 2015. This symposium will bring together scholars from disciplines as diverse as religious studies, geography and the arts, to discuss the Ganga’s multifaceted heritage, and how this precious heritage is at risk, and to develop an integrated framework guiding ecologically and culturally sustainable approaches to conservation.

CSAMES will host “A Celebration of Rumi and Other Persian Poets” on October 30, 2015. Leading scholars from seven different universities will do readings from the works of Rumi, Hafez, Saadi and other great Persian poets and will discuss the poems’ context and meaning. The celebration will also include music and food!

Richard Davis, Emeritus Professor of Persian at Ohio State University, will be a George A. Miller Visiting Professor for the duration of the Spring 2016 semester. He will teach two courses on Persian literature, one using texts in Persian and the other using texts in English.

CSAMES will host a conference called “Partition and Empire: Ireland, India, Palestine and Beyond,” on September 22-23, 2016.
A New Idea Helps Market the Library’s Collection

Laila Hussein Moustafa, Middle East and North Africa Librarian

The Library of the University of Illinois is the largest public library and the second largest university library in North America. The Library has 13.3 million volumes, besides serial publications and e-books, and it has 400 electronic databases. The Middle East and North Africa collection has 56,395 books in Arabic and 30,341 books and 2,776 serials in Islamic studies. In 2012 CSAMES received a grant from the Sultan Qaboos Cultural Center that included funds to enhance the Library’s collection on Oman and Ibadi Islam.

The International Area Studies Library and CSAMES hosted the first Summer Research Lab (SRL) in Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies from May to August 2014. The Summer Research Lab included two workshops, one on July 14 and the second on July 16. The goal of the SRL was to offer scholars, not only from the U.S. but also from around the world, an opportunity to use the library’s collection on the Middle East and Islamic studies. Scholars at each workshop had lists of relevant sources that cover each topic of the workshop. Registration for the SRL was very affordable, thanks to the funds from the Sultan Qaboos Cultural Center. Housing was also provided for participants free of charge for up to five nights, and each participant had free breakfast, lunch and dinner on the day of the workshop.

The first workshop, “Ibadi Islam: History and Bibliography,” was taught by Valerie Hoffman, Director of CSAMES and Professor of Religion at the University of Illinois, Adam Gaiser, Associate Professor of Religion at Florida State University, and Paul Love, Ph.D. candidate in the Near Eastern Studies at the University of Michigan. It introduced scholars to Ibadi doctrines, terminology and history, and to major sources on Ibadi Islam, utilizing sources in the Sultan Qaboos collection.

The second workshop, “The Arab Spring,” taught by Laila Hussein Moustafa, the Middle East and North Africa Librarian, introduced scholars to Arabic sources on the Arab uprisings and taught them how to use the library’s collection on the Middle East and the Arab Spring.

A LibGuide was produced for each workshop and was designed to help the SRL participants to locate materials on the topics dealt with by the workshops.

Of the twelve participants, two were assistant professors, two were associate professors, one was a Master’s student, and the rest were Ph.D. candidates. They came from various institutions, including the University of Michigan, the University of Chicago, Georgetown University, Stanford University, the University of Colorado, the University of California – Santa Barbara, McGill University, Florida State University, Iliff School of Theology, and North Carolina Central University, in addition to two scholars from Turkey. Almost all the participants attended both workshops and had full access to all library materials, including electronic materials. Some stayed for one day, while others stayed on campus for periods ranging from three days to a month.

The Middle East and North Africa Librarian received approximately thirty inquiries and follow-up emails from the participants, both during their time at the library and after they left. Most of these queries demonstrate that scholars need to have such an opportunity as the SRL, where they can access research materials unavailable at their home institutions and have the opportunity to meet with outside experts.

The SRL was a great opportunity for the library to demonstrate the strength of its Middle East collection and to develop its collection in targeted areas. The development of the SRL is very promising. Attendees highly valued the organizers, the professors who taught the workshops, and the materials and help they received.

The Summer Research Lab was the work of a team of many people, in addition to Professor Valerie Hoffman, Director of the Center for South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, and Laila Hussein Moustafa, the Middle East and North Africa librarian. I would like to thank Angela Williams, Associate Director of CSAMES, and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, as various departments of the Library, such as Acquisitions, Content Access Management (CAM), Information Technology (IT), and Circulation. All these departments were very helpful in bringing the vision of the International Area Studies Library and CSAMES to fruition.
Indian Ocean Conference and Teachers’ Workshop

Although interest in the history of the Indian Ocean as the “cradle of globalization” has grown in recent decades, very few events on the Indian Ocean have been held in the United States, and few nonspecialists are aware of the role the Indian Ocean has played as an arena of cultural contact and political contestation for many centuries. On October 16-17, 2014, CSAMES hosted a conference, “The Indian Ocean: History, Networks, and Spaces of the Imagination,” which brought together fourteen specialists in Indian Ocean history from different vantage points and regional perspectives: politics, cultural exchange, economic networks, anthropology, religion, architecture and literature. On October 18, we held a workshop for K-14 educators, “Integrating the Indian Ocean into World History Courses.”

Abdul Sheriff, former Professor of History at the University of Dar es Salaam and former Executive Director of the Zanzibar Indian Ocean Research Institute, a pioneer in Indian Ocean studies, opened the conference with a keynote lecture titled “Difference Is the Norm: Globalization in the Indian Ocean World.” He noted that Ptolemy thought the tip of Africa joined Southeast Asia, making the Indian Ocean an inland sea, like the Mediterranean. Although geographically incorrect, the implications of his statement are not entirely wrong, because the Indian Ocean has served as a major cultural crossroads and economic highway in a fashion similar to the Mediterranean. He said that trade overcomes differences, because traders need to be sensitive to other cultures in order not to alienate potential customers, and traders settled on distant shores, intermarrying with the local population. Indian Ocean trade also promoted religious tolerance around the ocean rim.

Scholars from thirteen institutions spoke on interactions across the Indian Ocean from 800 CE to the present, between Arabia, India, East Africa, Southeast Asia, and East Asia, covering trade, cultural exchange, political rivalries, religious identity and interactions, diasporas, piracy, race and wonder tales.

Edward Alpers, Research Professor Emeritus of History at UCLA, gave the first of five sessions at the educators’ workshop, where a copy of his book, *The Indian Ocean in World History* (Oxford University Press, 2013), was given to participants. Susan Douglass, educational outreach coordinator for Georgetown University’s Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, demonstrated the Sultan Qaboos Cultural Center’s interactive online website on Indian Ocean history. Utathya Chattopadhyaya, a History doctoral student at the University of Illinois, discussed the interaction between economy and environment in the Indian Ocean and suggested instructional exercises appropriate to different grade levels. Fellow History student Irina Spector discussed sources and methods for teaching about slavery in the Indian Ocean world. Graduate students from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction shared online resources for educators, and Karla Moller, a professor of Curriculum and Instruction, shared children’s books that can be sued to integrate the Indian Ocean into elementary school curricula.

The conference and workshop were funded by grants from the Sultan Qaboos Cultural Center in Washington and the U.S. Department of Education’s Undergraduate International Studies and Foreign Language program, in addition to a Hewlett International Conference Grant from International Programs and Studies and co-sponsorships from the Center for African Studies, the Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies, the Center for Global Studies, the Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities, the Program in Arms Control, Disarmament and International Security, the School of Literatures, Cultures and Linguistics, the Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory, and the Departments of Anthropology, Curriculum and Instruction, East Asian Languages and Cultures, English and History.
Welcome, New Faculty

**Eric Calderwood** is the new Assistant Professor of Arabic Studies and Comparative Literature in the Program in Comparative and World Literature. Dr. Calderwood received his Ph.D. from Harvard University in 2011. Before coming to Illinois, he taught for three years as an Assistant Professor of Spanish at the University of Michigan. He was also a Junior Fellow at the Michigan Society of Fellows. His research focuses on the politics of representing the past in modern Arabic and Spanish literature and culture. Dr. Calderwood’s work has appeared or is forthcoming in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies, The Journal of North African Studies, and the Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*. In addition to his academic publications, he has also pursued literary journalism and creative non-fiction in such venues as NPR, the BBC, the *Boston Globe*, *The American Scholar*, and *McSweeney’s*.

**Michael Dann** will join the Department of Religion as an Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies in August. He received his Ph.D. from Princeton University’s Religion Department in 2009. He received his B.A. from the University of Michigan in Arabic and Islamic Studies in 2006 and his M.A. from Princeton in 2012. His main area of interest is Islamic intellectual history with a focus on the genesis and development of the Sunni-Shi’i divide in Islam and the subsequent interactions and overlaps between the two sects. His dissertation addresses the question of how Sunni and Shi’i hadith critics dealt with the problem of early hadith narrators who were incorporated into the canons of the opposing sect.

**Avital Livny** is a newly minted Ph.D. from the Department of Political Science at Stanford University. Beginning in AY 2015-16, she will be an Assistant Professor of Comparative Politics at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, after spending AY 2014-15 as a Junior Research Fellow at the Carlos III-Juan March Institute in Madrid, Spain. Her dissertation evaluates Islam’s growing significance for socio-economic cooperation and political mobilization in Turkey and the Muslim World: using survey data and experimental methods, she shows that references to a common religious identity are increasingly valuable to political and economic groups because they build trust among individual Muslims. More broadly, her research interests include the politics of religion and ethnicity, electoral dynamics in developing democracies, and variations in interpersonal trust across space and time. She is currently supported by a U.S. Department of Education Foreign Language and Area Studies Dissertation Fellowship and will hold a Mellon Foundation Dissertation Fellowship in 2012-13. Avital holds an M.Phil. in Modern Middle Eastern Studies and an M.Sc. in Comparative Politics from Oxford University and a B.A. in Political Science from Washington University in St. Louis.

**Mauro Nobili** is an Assistant Professor of African History at the University of Illinois. He is historian of pre-colonial and early colonial West Africa, with a special interest in the area of the modern Republic of Mali and the town of Timbuktu. His special focus is on Muslim societies of the region and their Arabic manuscript heritage. He conducted research in several collections of Arabic manuscripts from West Africa, stored in public or private libraries in Africa (Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Niger) and in Europe (Denmark and France). Professor Nobili worked and published on topics linked to Arabic calligraphies and script styles, Islamic eschatology, genealogies, and the West African chronicle tradition.

**Adam Osman** is an Assistant Professor of Economics at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. His research centers on issues of youth unemployment and credit market access with a special emphasis on issues that affect the MENA region. Much of his work utilizes Randomized Control Trials (RCTs) along side insights from economics to rigorously test theories about how to improve outcomes of poverty alleviation programs. He is currently working on projects that deal with issues including vocational education, apprenticeship training, Islamic microfinance, expanding credit access for SMEs, increasing microsavings and studying the impacts of opening up access to foreign markets. Adam received his Ph.D. in Economics from Yale University in 2014.
Faculty Achievements >>

Congratulations to the following faculty on their promotions, awards and publications:

**Fouad Abd El-Khalick**, Professor and Head of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, was named Associate Dean for Research and Research Education in the College of Education in August 2014.

**Evelyne Accad**, Emeritus Professor of French, was among the leading cultural figures who were honored by the Cultural Center of Antelias in Beirut, Lebanon on March 15, 2015.

**Elabbas Bennamoun**, Romano Professorial Scholar of Linguistics, was promoted from Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs to Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs and Academic Policies in August 2014.

**Mohammad Babadoost**, Professor of Crop Sciences, was awarded the Madhuri and Jagdish N. Sheth Distinguished Faculty Award for International Achievement for his work in improving the science of plant pathology and global food security throughout the world, especially in Mexico, the Caucus Region, Central Asia, China, and the Middle East. As coordinator of the Library Assistant Program, he has created access to agricultural and educational information to universities and research institutes around the world.

**Asef Bayat**, Professor of Sociology and Catherine C. and Bruce A. Bastian Professor in Global and Transnational Studies, was named a 2014 Guggenheim Fellow.

**Antoinette Burton**, Professor of History, Catherine C. and Bruce A. Bastian Professor in Global and Transnational Studies, and Interim Head of Sociology, was awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship for 2015 for a project titled “Wars Against Nature? Environmental Fictions of the First Anglo-Afghan Wars.” She was also named Interim Director of the Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities.

**Jennifer Cole**, Professor of Linguistics, was appointed Chair-Elect of the Linguistics and Language Sciences section of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Her term began in February 2015.

**Ken Cuno**, Associate Professor of History, published *Modernizing Marriage: Family, Ideology, and Law in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Egypt* (Syracuse University Press, 2015). In November 2014 he presented “Contextualizing Muhammad Abdul’s views on the family, marriage, and divorce” at a workshop on Reforming Islamic Legal Thought at Exeter University. He guest lectured on modern Middle Eastern history and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and spoke about aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on more than one panel. He also taught a new course on Palestinian history and submitted the paperwork to make it a regular course offering.


**Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi**, Associate Professor in History and Sociology, was named a Conrad Humanities Scholar in September 2014.


**Rachel Harris**, Assistant Professor of Comparative and World Literature, published *An Ideological Death: Suicide in Israeli Literature* (Northwestern University Press, 2014).

**Linda Herrera**, Associate Professor of Educational Policy, Organization and Leadership, published *Revolution in the Age of Social Media: The Egyptian Popular Insurrection and the Internet* (Verso, 2014) and an edited collection, *Wired Citizenship: Youth Learning and Activism in the Middle East* (Routledge, 2014).

**Hans Hock**, Professor Emeritus of Linguistics, co-edited *Selected Papers from ICOSAL 10*, which was published as a special issue of *Lingua Posnaniensis*, vol. 55, no. 2 (2013). He also an invited speaker at the International Workshop on Linguistic Microareas in South Asia in Uppsala, Sweden in May 2014 and was an invited participant at a workshop on language contact and structural isomorphism in the Himalayan Region at the annual meeting of the Societas Linguistica Europaea in Poznań, Poland in September 2014. He delivered the 10th Prabha Joshi Memorial Lecture at the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute in Pune, India on October 6, 2014 and was the keynote speaker at the International Seminar on Archaeology and Language at Deccan College in Pune, India on October 7, 2014. He also served on the Editorial Board of the *Journal of South Asian Languages and Linguistics* and will be a co-convener of the Veda Section at the 16th World Sanskrit Conference in Bangkok, Thailand in July 2015.

Faculty Achievements, cont. >>

Prasanta Kalita, Professor of Agricultural and Biological Engineering, was awarded the Madhuri and Jagdish N. Sheth Distinguished Faculty Award for International Achievement for his efforts in water resources management, which have improved water quality and created pollution control connections spanning multiple continents, as well as for his mentorship of students.

Susan Koshy, Associate Professor of English, became Director of the Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory in August 2014.

Rini Bhattacharya Mehta, Assistant Professor in the Program in Comparative and World Literature and the Department of Religion, published *The Indian Partition in Literature and Films*, co-edited with Debali Mookerjea-Leonard (Routledge, 2015). In 2014 she was named a Junior Research Fellow by the Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory.


Ambar Flores, a student in the CSAMES M.A. program with a concentration in Middle Eastern Studies, was awarded the 2015 National Security Education Program (NSEP) David L. Boren Fellowship. She will be spending the year at the Center for International Learning in Muscat, Oman, where she will take intensive courses in advanced Arabic. She will travel throughout the country with the program and live with an Omani family for a portion of her time there. In addition, she will study the country’s progress in women’s empowerment while interning at the Omani Women’s Association in Muscat. She plans to develop a project documenting her experiences learning from Omani women and supporters.

Eduardo Alvarez Gutierrez, a student in the CSAMES M.A. program with a concentration in Middle Eastern Studies, was awarded the 2015 National Security Education Program (NSEP) David L. Boren Fellowship. As a Boren fellow, Eduardo will travel to Amman, Jordan for the academic year 2015-16 to study Arabic at the Qasid Arabic Institute. At this institution Eduardo will continue his training in Modern Standard Arabic. He will also study Arabic in Mass Media, Arabic for diplomacy, and Jordanian colloquial Arabic. At the completion of the fellowship, Eduardo will return to UIUC to finish his M.A. degree.

Pronoy Rai, a Ph.D. student in Geography, received the Dissertation Proposal Development Fellowship from the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) in 2014. The fellowship provided Pronoy with an opportunity to travel to rural Maharashtra in India to carry out pre-dissertation fieldwork during summer 2014 and to attend proposal development workshops in Oxford University, UK in spring 2014 and in Washington DC during fall 2014. Pronoy’s research concerns circular migration of rural landless laborers and the consequent changes in the social power relations of class, caste, and gender in the home villages of the laborers. Pronoy was also awarded the Marion G. Russell graduate fellowship by the Department of Geography & Geographic Informational Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for the fall semester, 2014. In addition, Pronoy was awarded the Rita & Arnold Goodman fellowship and the Due & Ferber International Research Award for 2015-16 by Women and Gender in Global Perspectives.
Our Students >>

Ambar received a Bachelors of Arts degree in English and Islamic Civilization and Societies from Boston College. While at BC she took classes on the Hadith, Ibn Arabi, and modern Middle Eastern literature. She also studied Arabic, Islamic history and architecture in Morocco. Ambar’s past projects include her senior thesis about Latino Muslims and a study of a Sufi order in Mexico City. Her academic interests include modern Middle Eastern history, languages, and anthropological research.

Eduardo began his M.A. in Middle Eastern Studies in the Fall of 2014. His research interests focus on twentieth century Islamist political thought and Islamist movements in the Middle East. Eduardo plans to pursue a PhD in political science with a concentration in Islamist political thought.

After graduating summa cum laude from UIUC in May 2014 with a double major in history and political science, David joined the CSAMES M.A. program. David’s research interests include Islamic religious authority and Iranian social and diasporic history, which he explored in his award-winning undergraduate thesis on the Iranian Revolution.

Stephen graduated from UIUC with a B.A. in History. His current academic path has been shaped by courses in political science and geopolitics that sparked his interest in Middle Eastern studies. He has occasionally focused on the Iranian revolution when writing papers in history courses, but has begun to tackle Arabic language study as a way to broaden his understanding of the histories and current experiences of the Middle East. He aims to eventually become a policy analyst at a think tank in New York or DC, but for now he is perfectly happy in Champaign!

Matt is an incoming M.A. student with a Middle Eastern specialization. He grew up in south suburban Chicago and graduated from the University of Illinois in May 2012 with a Bachelor's degree in History. His primary area of interest is the study of North African history, and the interactions between Berber, Arab, and Mediterranean cultures. Matt wrote his senior thesis on English Tangier, and as he found that the lack of English sources on the region was a significant detriment to his research, he began studying Arabic in order further his study of the region.

CSAMES Undergraduate Scholarship Winners 2013 and 2014

Dominique Walker Barnes, Social Work, India
Rachel Bowlus, Global Studies Morocco
Crystol DeJohnette, Global Studies Morocco
Agueda Garcia, Political Science and Religious Studies, India
Brittany King, Social Work, India
Benjamin Lee, Economics and Political Science, minor in International Development Economics, India
Sherine Mahrat, Integrative Biology, minor in Arabic Studies, Morocco
Bianca McCree, Elementary Education, India
Loren Piedrasanta, Technical Systems Management, minors in Portuguese and Brazilian Studies, India
Shail Shah, Statistics, minor in Computer Sciences, India
Students’ Perspectives >>  
A Student’s Praise of Professor Feiz

The Persian program initiated at UIUC has impacted by life in so many ways. I am currently a sophomore majoring in Global Studies with a career goal to promote women’s rights specifically in Iran. I first got introduced to the Persian program at UIUC by learning the language of Farsi. One of the biggest obstacles I have to face while pursuing my career dream is the gap between me and women in Iran. The first way to diminish the gap is through communication. Although I came only expecting to learn the language of Farsi, the Persian program has taught me so much more.

My Persian professor, Professor Feiz, believes that learning the language goes hand in hand with learning the culture. She does this through creative, hands-on activities that are open to the entire community. One of my favorites are the cooking classes she conducts. She teaches us how to cook delicious, traditional Iranian dishes, while explaining the history behind them. I appreciate that Professor Feiz makes these activities culturally relevant. For example, you may think a cooking class may only teach students how to cook Iranian dishes. However, Professor Feiz takes it to the next level and explains the cultural relevance of the dishes today, answering questions such as when people eat certain dishes (during birthdays, funerals, or everyday meals) and the significance of each dish.

Not only do her cooking classes appeal to students interested in Persian delicacies or students who are just plain hungry, but they also appeal to students like me for whom learning about the cultural relevance of food in Iran means learning more about the place and people I want to work with. Her lessons bring me one step closer to my career goals, and this is just the example of the cooking classes! She also conducts movie nights at which she buys us pizza and we watch a Persian movie. The movies she chooses are always related to issues that are significant in Iran today.

Professor Feiz also creates tea parties where we drink tea, eat cookies, and talk together with the local Persian community to practice our Persian. One of the biggest celebrations we do is Noruz (New Year’s celebrated in various Middle Eastern countries including Iran). On Noruz, we set up the traditional table of Haft Sin in the Foreign Language Department (see photo) and play traditional Iranian music, pass out informational fliers about the holiday, and give out free tea and free treats to students. During the week of Noruz, Professor Feiz bases her lessons on traditions, terminology and Iranian culture. There is also a Noruz dinner celebration conducted by an RSO named the Iranian Cultural Association. I have learned so much more than just the language of Farsi through the Persian program at UIUC. I have learned about holidays, food, media, and in general the beauty of Persian culture. I never thought I could gain so much from taking Farsi language courses and participating in the Persian program here. I am so thankful for this program opening a path of cultural awareness and fun for everyone in the community to enjoy.

Aazamosadat Feizmohammadpour ("Aazam Feiz") is Lecturer of Persian and Coordinator of Persian Language in the Department of Linguistics.

Recent Graduate Update: Where is Umair Rasheed?

Umair Rasheed graduated from the CSAMES M.A. program in December, 2014. He sends his update from Pakistan.

I have resumed work as a journalist in Lahore, Pakistan, after finishing graduate studies at Urbana-Champaign. The knowledge I gained over the course of my graduate studies on the history and sociology of modern Islamist movements is helping me closely observe day-to-day operations of various religious political parties while working at the Lahore desk of The Express Tribune newspaper. In particular, I am keenly following the strengthening of various coercive state apparatuses and its repercussions for marginalized social groups in the wake of a National Action Plan (NAP) against terrorism prepared by the federal government following the Peshawar school attack (claimed by the militant Islamist group Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan) that had left more than 200 children dead.

I am also following public debates on efforts to reform curricula of Islamic and Pakistani studies taught at both secular and religious schools (also under the NAP). The ulama (religious scholars) and Islamist intellectuals are both key stakeholders in these debates because of their entrenched investment in the country’s education sector (both secular and religious institutes) and their penetration of state apparatuses that regulate that sector.

Besides journalism, I am also working with a progressive political party in its effort to organize marginalized social and economic groups on a single platform.
Students’ Perspectives on Study Abroad

Crystol DeJohnette, Global Studies

Appreciating Multicultural Morocco

I’ve been back from Morocco for only two months, but it feels like a lifetime ago. Every now and then I remember the sights, like the sun rising over the giant sand dunes of the Sahara desert. I remember the things I heard, like the three different calls of prayer while I was on top of a mountain in the blue city of Chefchaouan. The sights and sounds were beautiful, and while it feels like a lifetime ago, my pictures remind me of the great experiences I had.

However, I don’t have pictures of the many conversations I had with locals or the things I learned while there. Being able to speak to, listen to, and interact with people was by far the most amazing part of study abroad. I learned about the culture firsthand and I now know more than any history book could ever tell me.

Morocco is, to me, a country of learning, built on the interactions between strangers. In fact, it’s normal to be multilingual. I suppose it is to be expected. It’s a historical and modern crossroads with a unique mix of African, Middle Eastern, and European culture. I’ve seen ruins of the ancient Roman city of Volubilis. I rode a camel for hours in the desert. Then I took a forty-minute boat ride to Spain. All these experiences have shown me how interconnected Morocco has always been to various cultural influences.

Being in such a connected country with a multicultural background was the best thing I could have asked for in a study abroad experience. Study abroad is all about discovery, learning, and connecting, and so is Morocco. So in order to keep the memories of the conversations, the heated discussions, and of the lessons I learned, I decided to behave as I did in Morocco for the rest of my life. I’ll forever remain interested in people, I’ll appreciate the complexity of cultural identity, and I’ll make sure I learn something wherever I go from whomever I meet.

Study Abroad in India: A Marketable Experience

Shail Shah double majored in Statistics and Computer Science and graduated in May, 2015. He now works in information technology at Baxter Healthcare in Deerfield, IL.

I’d taken two levels of Hindi classes on campus so I thought it would be neat to finally apply my proficiency to the locals in India. But more importantly, I’ve been a believer in the untapped potential in Third World countries. It’s not often we appreciate how fortunate we are with the resources we have here in the States. Hence, I decided to study the effects of globalization in India.

When I returned home, it turned out to be one of the greatest decisions I had ever made. And since I was in my senior year, this couldn’t have been timed better. Upon my return, I had a greater interest in my academic pursuits. I became a lifelong learner. It’s almost as if I’ve emerged as a different human being with new clarity regarding my goals. Additionally, I had imagined working in a corporate environment after graduation. More and more employers are seeking out culturally aware employees in an ever-changing global workplace. As India is one of the fastest growing economies, who knows, this trip may come to benefit my employer as they try to tap into new markets. When I come across advice-seeking students, I always encourage them to consider including a study abroad course in their college journey because, from experience, I know what a difference it made in my own life. I can confidently say that I’m a stronger and more well-rounded individual.
Conferences Abroad >>

Conference on Hindi Newspapers and Financial Literacy

Dr. Mithilesh Mishra, Hindi Lecturer

On May 23, 2015, Mithilesh Mishra, Senior Lecturer and Director of the Hindi-Urdu Program in the Department of Linguistics, organized a symposium on “The Role of Hindi Newspapers in spread of Financial Literacy” at the Press Club of India in New Delhi, India. Since Mishra has been using the business pages of Hindi newspapers for his Business Hindi course (HINDI 412) since Fall 2009, journalists and news editors of all major Hindi newspapers were invited to this symposium. Journalists from the following Hindi Print media group participated in this symposium: Harbir Singh (Moneybhaskar.com), S. K. Gupta (Dainik Bhaskar), Pankaj Kumar Pandey (Hindustan), Mahendra Singh (Amar Ujala), Ajit Jha (Dainik Jagran), Gangesh Mishra (Dainik Jagran), Manish Kapoor (Aaj Tak), Prashant Srivastav (moneybhaskar.com), Ajeet Singh (Outlook Hindi), and Rakshit Singh (ABP News).

The presence of Mr. Harbir Singh in this symposium was particularly important because he was the first one to have conceived of launching a dedicated business page in his newspaper (Dainik Bhaskar), a practice which was eventually followed by all other major Hindi newspapers. The participants discussed the challenges (linguistic, cultural, and even commercial) of introducing global business news to Hindi readers. The participants were unanimous in affirming that Hindi readers are keenly interested in reading economic and business news from across the world, especially from USA, even though they may not understand the full purport of the news items. The ‘How to’ articles (how to invest in mutual funds, how to reduce tax burden, how to buy and sell stocks, etc) seem to be particularly popular among readers.

Mishra will be using the recordings of this symposium for his future Business Hindi classes (both in class and an online course to be developed by Fall 2016). The success of this symposium can be measured by the fact that Mishra was invited by the symposium participants to host this symposium as an annual event in Delhi.

Conference on Women and War Gathers Academics, Activists

Angela Williams, Associate Director of CSAMES

Over 150 people met at the Crown Plaza hotel in Beirut June 8-11 to attend the conference, “Upholding Gendered Peace at a Time of War: Academics and Activists Speak Out on the Shifting Places of Women in the Arab World.” CSAMES affiliate professor emeritus of French, Evelyne Accad, played a leading role in the conference’s organization. Sponsored by the Institute for Women’s Studies in the Arab World at the Lebanese American University, Women in War, a France-based non-profit organization and think-tank, Beit El-Hanane, a Lebanon-based non-profit organization that deals with the problems of abused women in Lebanon, the conference was comprised of panels on gender and armed conflict, displacement, religious extremism, sexual violence, female fighters, cyberactivism, creativity, and legal accountability and peace-building. Keynote speeches were given by Nawal El-Saadawi, Egyptian activist, author and founder of the Arab Women’s Solidarity Association in Egypt, and Valentine Moghadam, Professor of Sociology and International Affairs and Director of the International Affairs Program at Northeastern University, Boston. In addition to the panels, a play was held at Beit el-Hanane, entitled “Quand Fatima se fait appeler Sophie” (“When Fatima Calls Herself Sophie”) by Ali Bader, staged by Laurence Katina and performed by Séverine de Witte for the Arab Women’s Solidarity Association of Belgium. The conference resulted in a commitment from attendees to continue to network and collaborate in working towards a greater awareness of women’s struggle and agency in times of conflict.

Facade Farewell

With regret, we bid farewell to the following CSAMES faculty affiliates:

Ercan Balci, Senior Lecturer of Turkish and Director of the Less Commonly Taught Languages program in the Department of Linguistics, became Director of the Center for Language Studies at Brown University in January 2015.

Lillie Gordon, Lecturer of Music (2012-2015), who will take a position as Lecturer of Music at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Radhika Govindrajan, Visiting Assistant Professor of Anthropology, will become Assistant Professor of Anthropology at the University of Washington.

Samir Meghelli, Assistant Professor of French and Afro-American Studies, will become Curator with the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC.

Feisal Mohamed, Professor of English, will take up a position at the Graduate Center in the City University of New York.

Shankar Nair, Assistant Professor of Religion, became Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia in August 2014.
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