News in Brief

> Celebrating New Faculty Appointments

Congratulations to Asma Afsaruddin for her appointment as the next Chair of NELC at IU and Zaineb Istrabadi for her promotion to Senior Lecturer position in Arabic. We wish them both the best.

> Center for the Study of the Middle East: Title VI Success & Lectures

This academic year, the Center for the Study of the Middle East (CSME) successfully acquired Title VI status, which allows for greater funding to study Middle Eastern languages at Indiana University. Languages now available through the NELC department include Arabic, Modern Hebrew, and Kurdish for CSME FLAS fellowships. The FLAS funding will allow for a revival of the Kurdish language program, as well as the creation of a number of new faculty positions including Arabic pedagogy and Israel Studies to be filled this year.

> Intersections: Middle Eastern Poetries in/and the Arts series

In celebration of National Poetry Month, NELC/IU Art Museum will hold the second annual Intersections: Middle Eastern Poetries in/and the Arts event on three Thursday evenings, April 7, 14 and 21 from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the IU Art Museum. The organizing committee, chaired by Dr. Suzanne Stetkevych, includes Dr. Christiane Gruber from the Department of the History of Art, Dr. David McDonald of Folklore & Ethnomusicology, Dr. Judy Stubbs and Juliet Istrabadi-Gravers of the IU Art Museum, NELC graduate assistant Danie Becknell, and NELC graduate student Justin Kitchen. Each evening will feature poetry readings in their original languages accompanied by English translations. There will also be a short lecture/concert with a musical performance and a short talk on Islamic art to be followed by a gallery tour. The program and texts will be available on the NELC website at http://www.indiana.edu/~nelc/events/intersections.shtml.

From the chair

Celebrating the Moral Force of the People

I write these lines on Feb. 11, 2011 as hope and joy burst into the city streets, towns, and villages in Egypt and across the Middle East. Today, Arab and non-Arab alike celebrate the willpower and moral force of the people who have suffered decades of tyranny, cloaked by a deceptive mythology of stability and security. Our educational mission as a NELC department in a major American university has been to produce and share knowledge and contribute to the understanding of complex realities in this strategic part of the world. In classrooms, lecture halls, and print media, our efforts to communicate the desire of the peoples of this region for social justice, democracy and peaceful coexistence with the world were met with only minimal success because of the shrill voices of extremists and terrorists in the region and demagogues in the Western media.

During the last several weeks, the youth in Tunisia and Egypt have managed far more effectively to convey their own unmistakable wishes and the hopes of millions across the region and the world for liberty, justice and self-governance with vociferous clarity and considerable success. The humbling of dictators subjugating the millions is indeed cause for celebration, but the harder tasks lie ahead, i.e. the establishment of appropriate governance to ensure the realization of popular will for democracy and justice. As a unit responsible for the teaching of languages, cultures, histories and political dynamics of the Middle East, NELC at IU is better prepared now than ever before to make significant contributions to the study of the transformative changes awaiting this critical area of the world.

Ten years ago when I was called upon by my colleagues to chair this department (2001-04 and again in 2007-11), we began taking steps to rebuild a unit of few faculty and even fewer students. A decade of hard work and determination by my colleagues, aided by considerable support from the College of Arts & Sciences, the administration, and the wider community has transformed the NELC Department into a robust unit once again. Our faculty numbers have grown steadily in recent years, filling all critical fields of study covering the region. We are currently in the final stages of recruiting an Arabic pedagogy assistant professor to manage our rapidly growing Arabic language instructional program. In collaboration with our partner, the newly Title VI funded Center for the Study of the Middle East (CSME), we are poised for a successful application to an Arabic Flagship program.

In the following pages, I invite you to read about the accomplishments of my colleagues, our alumni, and graduate students. The department has been fortunate to have constant and continuous support from several families with deep roots in our community: the Jwaideh, Istrabadi, and Alotma families. Since this will be my last letter through the NELC news pages, allow me to express my heartfelt thanks to everyone, especially my colleagues, staff members, and graduate student assistants over the last seven years who have helped me run the NELC office. I also would like to take this opportunity to thank the dean and associate dean of the College and other Indiana University officials who have offered both moral and material support to the NELC Department. I am equally grateful to many wonderful colleagues across the US who visited our campus during my tenure as chair to deliver the Wadie Jwaideh and Victor Danner Memorial Lectures. These lectures and our other activities would not have been possible without the financial support of many who have contributed directly, or through our IU Foundation accounts, to help our mission. They have my personal thanks and gratitude for their generosity. Please continue your valuable support of NELC. —M. Nazif Shahrani
Faculty News


Afsaruddin gave the papers “Sabra: the Qur’anic Foundation of Sustained Peacebuilding in Islam” at the Center for Middle East Studies at Lund University and “Reading Martyrdom in the Qur’an: An Exegetical Survey of Key Verses” at the Center for Global Islamic Studies of George Mason University.

She also presented “Islam in an Age of Pluralism: Rethinking Modernity” at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. She gave the paper “Negotiating Exclusion and Inclusion: The Hermeneutics of Moderation in Qur’anic Exegeses” at the Middle East Studies Association conference in San Diego. Afsaruddin continued her editorial work with the Islam Section of Religion Compass and became a senior editor with the Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam and Women.

Salman al-Ani is on sabbatical this semester, researching Arab grammarian Ibn Jinni. In addition to investigating Ibn Jinni’s life and work, al-Ani is also rendering an analytical translation of one of Ibn Jinni’s Arabic grammar books. The title of the book is al-Luma’ fi al-Nahw, or Flashes on Syntax. Al-Ani was also invited by the International Prometic Origination Center to serve as consultant in evaluating the Arabic TOAFL Examination. ALTA Language Services also invited al-Ani to serve as a panelist, and The American Council for International Education invited al-Ani to serve as consultant for Teachers of Critical Languages.


Cigdem Balim Harding published a chapter titled “Turkish Literature Between the 10th and 18th Centuries” in The New Cambridge History of Islam, Volume 4. She continued as the Middle East Editor for Women’s Studies International Forum, and served on the Editorial Board of Linguistic Analysis. In February, she was the moderator of a workshop for the new book series titled Redrawing of Borders: Reconstruction of Identities in Eurasia and Turkey, of which she is one of the authors. In the fall and spring, she conducted three workshops in Turkey to train International Baccalaureate Diploma Program teachers.

During summer 2011, she will take part in the School of Education project, training Turkish and Armenian teachers at IU, and the STARTALK project to train Turkish language teachers. She has served as chair of the Literature Prize Competition (2011) for the Bloomington National Society of Arts and Letters (NSAL). In April, with the help of CSME, she invited Professor Yasir Suleiman of Cambridge University (UK) to talk about language and conflict and teaching language through literature.

Hasan El-Shamy has contributed to several new scholarly publications. The Motif Index of Folk-Literature, by savant Stith Thompson was Arabized by Prof. El-Shamy. A translation and augmentation for requirements of Arabic-Islamic applicability of the superstructure of Stith Thompson’s classic work and El-Shamy’s adaptation appeared in Al-Thaqāfah al-Sh’biyyah (Folk Culture) this past summer. El-Shamy also contributed to a book review of Muhsin Jassim Al-Musawi, The Islamic Context of The Thousand and One Nights (Columbia University Press, 2009) which explored the motivic structures in Arabic literary works. Prof. El-Shamy wrote the recent entry on motif published by Cambridge University Press, 2011 edition.

He published the article, “Folkloric Behavior: A Theory for the Study of the Dynamics of Traditional Culture.” By invitation of the Saudi Ministry of Culture and King Sa’ud University, El-Shamy presented two lectures last March, titled “Folkloric Behavior and The Brother-Sister Syndrome” and “An Open Symposium on Arab Folklore.” He was selected to present the inaugural lecture of a biannual series in honor of folklorist P.N. Borotov at Bogazici University.

Additionally, El-Shamy was invited by Yale University to present at the symposium on Counter-Stories and Entangled Histories: Shared Heroes in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam International Conference. He presented his paper, “Qāla al-Samaw’al `Ibn Ādíyā al-yahūhiyy (The Jew, Al-Samaw’al Son-of- Ādíyā Said): Conscientiousness and Fidelity as Heroic Qualities in Arab Traditions (The Jewish Example).”


Suzanne Stetkevych gave the lectures “New Trends in U.S. Arabic Pedagogy” and “Learning Language through Literature: Arabic Poetry in the Arabic Language Classroom” at Osaka University. In May, she will present poetry of the Arabian Peninsula at the NEH Bridging Cultures symposium, Illuminated Verses: Understanding Muslim Cultures through Poetry, organized by City Lore and Poets House in New York City. She will be a keynote speaker at the University of Chicago Middle East History & Theory symposium in Chicago on May 13-14. She will again be at the University of Chicago to present her paper, “Al-Akhtal and the Construction of Umayyad Legitimacy” at the Non-Muslims in the Umayyad State symposium.


John Walbridge has been awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship for 2011–12 to translate two Arabic works by the 12th century Muslim philosopher Shihab al-Din al-Tusi. They are comprised of a systematic survey of logic, physics, and metaphysics, and a commentary on the difficulties in the first work. Walbridge has formerly translated the most famous of Suhrawardi’s works, The Philosophy of Illumination, with Dr. Hossein Ziai of UCLA. He published a study on the role of reason in Islamic intellectual history and is presently completing editions and translations of three late antique commentaries on works of the philosopher Galen that survive only in Arabic.

Congrats to New PhD Students

Three NELC PhD students in Arabic literature under the supervision of Dr. Suzanne Stetkevych successfully defended their dissertations in the past year. Last June, Imed Nsiri defended his dissertation on “Poetic Quest in a Comparative Context.” He is currently Assistant Professor of Arabic at the American University in Sharjah. This past November, Mishari Al-Musa defended his dissertation on “Andalusian Panegyric Mu`aradat: Literary Influence and Speech Act Theory.” In February, he accepted his new position as Assistant Professor at Kuwait University. Also this February, Huda Fakhreddine defended her dissertation titled, “From Modernists to Muladhathun: Meta-poiesis in Arabic Poetry.” She is an Assistant Professor of Arabic at Middlebury College in Vermont.

Grad Student Accomplishments

Allan “Greg” Gregory Auclair has been abroad in Oman and Syria on a Boren Fellowship since last August, and will continue his work there until next July. Greg is a dual MA student in the NELC and SPEA programs here at Indiana University. He is currently enrolled at the French Institute for the Near East and researching UNHCR efforts in the region. Greg is also a contributor to the NELC Study Abroad Travel blog, online at http://nelctravel.blogspot.com.

Bilal Maanaki, PhD candidate in NELC, organized and performed the play “Majnun Layla” with the NELC Drama Club for Poetry Month in April at the IU Museum of Fine Arts as part of Intersections. During the year, Bilal and Michael Bevers presented Arabic songs one hour a week on the Musiqa Sharqiyya program of WIUX Student Radio. Last summer, Bilal also worked with the National Endowment of Humanities (NEH) on a translation review for the online project Picturing America. He recently passed his PhD exams in NELC.

Visiting Scholars

The Department would like to warmly welcome the scholars and graduate students visiting from Turkey this semester. Nilufer Oba, PhD candidate at Sorbonne Paris on Economics and Turkey, is here to work with IU professors on her research and use the Wells Library. Nagihan Dogan, PhD candidate and research assistant at Hacettepe University’s History Department in Ankara, Turkey, is here to work in the library and take classes with professors working on Islam and the Middle Ages. Yusuf Gokalp, Assistant Professor from Cukurova University’s History Department in Adana, Turkey, is here working in the library and with Dr. Walbridge.
Conversations: Q & A with the Istrabadi Family

Graduate assistant Olivia Wolf recently spoke with Juliet Gravers Istrabadi, Zaineb Istrabadi, and Feisal Istrabadi to learn about their commitment to the community and the study of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures at Indiana University.

Olivia Wolf (O): The Istrabadi family has contributed a great deal of their talents to Indiana University. Juliet Gravers Istrabadi is Acting Curator of Ancient Art at IU Art Museum. Ambassador Feisal Istrabadi is the Director of the Center for the Study of the Middle East (CSME), Professor in the Maurer School of Law, and Deputy Permanent Representative of Iraq to the United Nations (currently on leave). Dr. Zaineb Istrabadi teaches Arabic in the NELC department and is active in Interfaith outreach. What drew you all to Indiana University?

Feisal Istrabadi (F): Between our families combined, we are working on our tenth Indiana University degree. Zaineb received her BA, MA, and PhD degrees within the NELC Department under the advising of Dr. Danner. I received my BA in Chemistry and JD in Law here.

O to (Z): Can you share some highlights of your recent teaching experiences?

Z (Z): My favorite class is first year, though I have taught other levels. Nothing excites me more than making the journey with these young men and women from no Arabic whatsoever to their ability to converse, read, and write.

O to Feisal Istrabadi (F): Dr. Feisal Istrabadi, can you tell us about your various roles on and off campus and some of the awards you have received?

F: I am currently a Professor at the Maurer School of Law, affiliated with the School of Public and Environmental Affairs (SPEA) and NELC. My courses have focused on issues including transitional justice in Iraq, constitutionalism in the Middle East, and feminist readings of Legal Texts. As Director at CSME, I worked to acquire Title VI status and promote interdisciplinary scholarship in Middle Eastern issues. As Acting Foreign Ministry Ambassador, I am currently on leave after serving as Deputy Permanent Representative of Iraq to the United Nations from 2004 to 2007. Prior, I was the principal legal drafter of the Interim Constitution of Iraq, which led to my appointment as Ambassador. I received the Maurer School of Law Distinguished Alumni Award, as well as the Indiana Foundation Award. I also received the 2004 Superlawyer Award, for which I was nominated by my colleagues.

O to (J) and (F): Both the Istrabadi and Graver families have a strong educational history at Indiana University.

J (J): Yes, we have a long legacy here. My father received his PhD in Mathematics at Indiana University, and I received my MA and am currently pursuing my PhD in the Department of the History of Art here.

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Z (Z): Being an Iraqi, an Arab, and a Muslim, I have been called upon to explain Islam since 1970, and it has only gotten busier since 2001. If I had any goal, it would be that each person would respect himself and respect others. I want people to understand that Muslims worship the Almighty, that Entity whom Moses and Jesus worshipped. My interest in Sufism stems from the belief that its approach helps foster what is best in humanity. Recently I heard someone say, “Think good, do good, see good.” I think this idea sums up our goals as human beings.

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Jwaideh. She taught at the University of Baghdad and also at the University of the United Arab Emirates, where she chaired the department. She received honors from the Jordanian Society for her work.

(O) to (J): Juliet, can you tell us more about your role and the materials available at the IU Art Museum?

(J): As Acting Curator of Ancient Art, I am responsible for Ancient Greek, Roman, and Near Eastern collections. My work with Middle Eastern art at the museum is shared with Judy Stubbs, who handles the post-ancient portion of the collection. The Ancient Near East collection features pottery, tools, small sculpture and jewelry. I am always struck by the quality of our collection.

(O) to (J): In what ways does the museum promote the education of Near Eastern culture?

(J): We have mounted a number of exhibitions that feature Middle Eastern art. We are also planning a new exhibit on musical instruments from countries of the Silk Road. Judy Stubbs, Dr. Christiane Gruber, and the departments of Art History and NELC are preparing an exhibition of posters from the Iran-Iraq War. Dr. Stubbs and Dr. Gruber also produced an exhibition on the Islamic manuscripts in the spring of 2009. The museum also consistently features Near Eastern artwork in our school group tours.

(O) to (J), (Z), and (F): How might you both like to see the education of Near Eastern Languages and Culture promoted further on the Bloomington campus?

(J): I am interested in helping faculty, students, and the general public become more aware of the resources available at IU and especially at the Art Museum. We support class visits and host programs such as visiting lectures, our Noon Talk series, and the Intersections: Middle Eastern Poetries in/and the Arts series, created in partnership with NELC and was extremely successful last year.

(Z): We have been having record numbers in our classes, not just because of increased interest in Arabic language, but because students have an opportunity at IU to learn it actively as a living language. We are promoting involvement in the Language Exchange Program, which gives our students the opportunity to practice their Arabic with native speakers. Both undergraduate and graduate students participate in this exchange.

(F): I would also like to build a greater sense of community with strong discussions of Middle Eastern issues by professors and students from diverse areas and closer partnership with nearby institutions like IUPUI. Currently, CSME is working towards acquiring its own building to serve as a gathering place for our lecture series. We strive to foster a true sense of involvement from various disciplines, from journalism to philosophy, rather than allowing isolated pockets of scholarships.

NELC Language Course Development

The Department will offer intensive summer courses through SWSEEL (Summer Workshop in Slavic, East European and Central Asian Languages) in Beginning, Intermediate and Advanced levels of Arabic from June 13 to Aug. 12. To find out more, check out the SWSEEL website at: http://www.indiana.edu/~swseel/program/languages.shtml

The Department was successful in getting a federal grant for STARTALK. The project is headed by the IU School of Education, and during summer 2011, NELC will help to train Arabic and Turkish language teachers for elementary education. If you would like to be trained and involved in this exciting program, write to Dr. Cigdem Balim Harding at cbalim@indiana.edu.

Shahrani Receives 2010 TASAM Strategic Vision Award for Scientist/Scholar

Professor Shahrani was presented the Strategic Vision Award for a Scientist/Scholar for 2010 by the think tank Turkish-Asian Center for Strategic Studies (TASAM). He attended the award ceremonies held in Istanbul this past December. Among this year’s Strategic Vision Award recipients for a Statesman was Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, former President of Brazil.
Dr. Christiane Gruber, assistant professor of Islamic art history, spent the winter break in a flurry of transnational research activity. She began the break in Scotland at the University of St. Andrews, where she delivered a paper as part of an international workshop on Portraits of Saints and Holy Figures in Islam. Her lecture focused on modern Iranian icons of the Prophet Muhammad, examining the devotional and political imagery that emerged after the Danish cartoon controversy. While in Scotland, she also consulted paintings of Muhammad included in the Ilkhanid illustrated manuscripts of Rashid al-Din and al-Biruni housed at the Edinburgh University Library.

Dr. Gruber then traveled to Tehran, spending ten days on two different research projects. Working at the Imam Ali Museum of Religious Art and the Gulistan Palace Library, Gruber acquired the remaining paintings and manuscript images of Muhammad needed for her third book, The Praiseworthy One: The Prophet Muhammad in Islamic Texts and Images. The book, to appear with Indiana University Press in 2013, will be published in a large format edition featuring over 100 color images. She also documented religious and political imagery in contemporary Iranian visual culture, in particular, photographing objects and images included in annual Muharram ceremonies. This documentation is also linked to her research on votive objects and practices in Iranian Shi’ism, which she will present this spring in New York at the Bard Graduate Center’s international symposium on votive practices around the world. This research will also be presented at Indiana University as part of the Brown Bag lecture series organized by the Department of the History of Art on April 22.

While in Tehran, Gruber also continued her research on Iranian post-revolutionary art, spending time at the Iran-Iraq war cemetery (Beheshti-e Zahra) and the Shrine of Imam Khomeini. Part of her research will be incorporated into the Iranian poster exhibition that will open fall 2011 at the Indiana University Museum of Art. The exhibit, titled “The Graphics of Revolution and War: Iranian Poster Arts,” is part of Indiana University’s War and Peace Themester initiative.

During her stay, Gruber was also publicly honored by the Tehran Municipality for her scholarly work on Iran. After delivering a lecture at the Imam Ali Museum, she was awarded with a Certificate of Achievement in Iranology, in which she was recognized for her work on Islamic codicology and post-revolutionary visual culture. The lecture, the award, and several interviews were televised. The Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures and the Department of the History of Art at Indiana University will greatly miss Dr. Gruber and her contributions to the Bloomington community. We wish her and her husband, Dr. H. Erdem Cipa of the Central Eurasian Studies Department, the very best as they move to Ann Arbor next year to continue their work at the University of Michigan. We are grateful for the remarkable contributions they have brought to Indiana University during their time here.
New Graduate Assistants and Interns

Muge Fazlioglu and Olivia Wolf have joined the NELC office team as new graduate assistants. Muge is working toward her law degree and is fluent in Turkish. Olivia is currently working toward a master’s degree in art history with a minor concentration in Islamic art. NELC would also like to welcome its new undergraduate interns, Adelaide Bryan and Alex Moler. Addy is a dual NELC and Anthropology major. Alex is a History major and minors in NELC.

New Alef Ba Participants

Naomi Spector, founder of the Alef Ba Arabic programs at the Monroe County Public Library in 2005, resigned this past December from the position of project coordinator of Bridges: Children, Languages, World, a project of the Center for the Study of Global Change. We are grateful for her efforts and creativity in designing this unique early learner language project. Arabic, Chinese, and Mongolian were taught in the fall of 2010 at various venues including the MCPL, The Project School, Knee High Daycare Center, and the Global Center. A leadership team remains to guide the Bridges project forward this semester. Kathleen Sobiech, MPA & MSES in the IU School of Public & Environmental Affairs, is project coordinator. Naoko Ozaki, Ph.D. candidate in Literacy, Culture and Language Education, is language coordinator. Roy Hooper, a senior in Near Eastern Languages & Cultures and East Asian Languages & Cultures in the International Studies Program, is project intern.

NELC IU Seminar in Arabic Literature

NELC Indiana Seminar in Arabic Literature will hold its spring 2011 workshop in Arabic on Poetic Creativity and the Poetics of Translation. The featured guest is Moroccan poet, critic, and translator Mohamed Bennis. He will lecture on "Creativity and Translation in the Global Age," with special reference to his Arabic translations of Mallarmé, and will serve as discussant for graduate student research presentations in Arabic. Readings of his poetry in Arabic, French, English and Turkish will be presented at the April 21 Intersections. The full program will be available at http://www.indiana.edu/~nelc/arabiclit/seminar.shtml.

The NELC Indiana Seminar in Arabic Literature is grateful for the generous funding of The Babtain Poetry Library and Foundation, Dr. Robert C. and Bridget McKinney, IU Center for the Study of Global Change, Prof. Alice Reid Jwaideh, Profs. Suzanne & Jaroslav Stetkevych, and The Lilly Library Literary Translation Lecture Series.

Thank you!

NELC would like to thank all those who have generously donated money in support of our lecture series, student events, and community outreach programs, with special thanks to Alice R. Jwaideh and Dr. Robert C. and Bridget McKinney for their support of the Indiana Arabic Literature Seminar. We would like to recognize the following individuals for their continuing support:

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Joseph Carter
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Farzad Fadae
Abdulrahman Y. Habil
Jameela Habil
Esti M. Koen
Charles R. Lunt
Lora G. Lunt
Andy Meltzer
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Suzanne Stetkevych
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NELC ALUMNI: What’s new with you?
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