As the Center for Middle Eastern Studies (CMES) enters its fiftieth year, I am pleased to report that we have once again been designated a National Resource Center under the Title VI program administered by the United States Department of Education. This grant, which will provide approximately two million in funding for CMES between 2010 and 2014, comes at a critical time. While many other universities are responding to the current economic environment by shrinking and cutting departments, we will be able to maintain our level of academic excellence. We remain committed to funding students with Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) fellowships, providing grants to faculty for new course development, offering classes with an excellent teacher-to-student ratio, and hosting quality academic and cultural programming for the campus and the community.

This summer, we premiered one of our newest initiatives: an intensive Advanced Persian Summer Language Institute, which joins our Arabic Summer Language Institute. Administered by CMES and cosponsored by partner institutions in the western United States, the Institute provided students learning advanced Persian a ten-week study experience that can only be rivaled by spending time at a university in Iran. Students in the program were given Oral Proficiency Interviews (OPI) at the beginning of the program, as well as at the conclusion. The results far exceeded our expectations; most students improved their language ability by one or two levels on the ACTFL scale. We are already planning for next summer’s Institute, and we will also be adding a Biblical Hebrew Institute.

Our language programs continue to grow in other aspects as well. This fall we welcomed Jeannette Squires Okur, our new lecturer in Turkish, who is offering courses on literature and culture in Turkish and in English. We are also excited about the new curricula our faculty are developing for the teaching of Turkish, Persian, and Kurdish, which incorporate text, audio, video, and interactive exercises. Furthermore, we are also hosting five Fulbright Language Teaching Assistants (FLTAs) who are lending their support to our language programs.

Our language programs are not the only ones expanding in new directions. The Department of Middle Eastern Studies (DMES) has introduced a new program in Ancient Israel and the Near East, which admitted its first cohort of highly qualified students this fall. The University of Texas has defied the national trend of cutting programs in the humanities by nurturing and supporting this new initiative.

The Center’s publications program has also had an exceptional year. It launched a fourth book series, Emerging Voices from the Middle East, with the publication of an English translation of Egyptian author Ghada Abdel Aal’s best-selling blog-turned-book-turned-television series I Want to Get Married! The book has generated a significant amount of media attention, and we are excited to introduce a new generation of Middle Eastern writers to an English-speaking audience. We were pleased to welcome Abdel Aal to campus this fall as part of our new writers lecture series for the launch of her book. The writers lecture series also included a visit by Adonis, perhaps the most famous living Arab poet, for a reading of his work to a standing-room-only crowd in the Texas Union Theatre.

DMES Chair Kristen Brustad and I are excited about the recent developments at MES. Despite the current economic storm, we continue to expand with the addition of new programs, course offerings, faculty, and outreach events. —Kamran Scot Aghaie
Ancient Israel and the Near East

At a time when many universities around the country have started cutting programs and faculty that focus on topics relating to the ancient Middle East, it might seem a bit strange that the University of Texas has been quietly building its program up—or does it?

“It would be a shame to lose all of this knowledge,” says Jo Ann Hackett, Professor of Middle Eastern Studies. “Many universities are discarding these programs, but these topics are still just as popular—and important—as they ever were, so it doesn’t make much sense from an academic perspective. Eventually these questions will be asked again in better economic times, and they’ll have to start all over again.”

When Hackett and her colleague and husband John Huehnergard joined the faculty at Texas, they found that the administration was willing to invest for the long term. And so, the Ancient Israel and the Near East (AINE) program was launched this fall. “The fact that [Dean of Liberal Arts] Randy Diehl and the College are behind this is key,” Hackett says. “We wouldn’t be here without their support.”

Several factors have come together to make this an opportune time for the new AINE program. The Department of Religious Studies has just introduced a new doctoral portfolio in Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean that offers specialization in Formative and Classical Judaism, as well as Christian Origins and Ancient Christianity. Students in both programs benefit from the resources of the same faculty and resources to get a broader picture of the whole. Both will want language classes; some of our students will want theory courses; both will want to read the Bible in Hebrew, so we can serve two groups with specialized needs.”

Hackett laughs as she describes an “embarrassment of riches.” “A couple of our classes could actually benefit from being smaller,” she says. “It’s actually a wonderful problem to have!”

This fall, DMES admitted the first cohort of graduate students to the AINE program. Not just anyone can be part of the program, according to Pat-El. “The best students in the country applied.”

“They really are a cohort,” adds Hackett. “They hang out together. And they’re very serious about the program—no one has come unprepared for a single class yet, which is wonderful from my perspective!”

When asked what makes the AINE program stand out on a national level, Pat-El immediately responds, “We’re a gem. We have fantastic faculty, we have great support from other programs in the University as well as the library, and we’re going against this national trend of cutting or eliminating programs that focus on the ancient Near East.”

Aran Wright-Wilson, a graduate student in the program and part of the first admitted cohort, agrees. “John [Huehnergard] and Jo Ann [Hackett] were really what brought me here.” Asked if the program is living up to his expectations, he says, “Yes,” and adds, “It’s exactly what I was hoping it would be.”

Since other MES programs are more modern-focused, how does this new program fit in to the overall mission and purpose of the larger program? “The period that we focus on really sets the background for the cultures that come thereafter in Mesopotamia and the Fertile Crescent,” Pat-El says.

“When you look at it, the only thing that really differs between AINE and the other programs at MES is the time period; everything else is the same. We’re providing a solid background in culture, language, and literature. And we find a lot of remnants and traces from AINE in Arabic and Islamic Studies and modern Hebrew, so it’s not unconnected at all.”

Hackett adds, “When you look at certain places in the region—Iraq, for example—so much of what’s going on there right now reflects things that were going on there two thousand years ago. In order to deal with the contemporary issues, you have to know what’s been done in the past, so you don’t keep repeating the same mistakes over and over.”

DMES Chair Kristin Brustad says, “Not only does this new program put us on the map nationally and internationally because of the caliber of the faculty and students, but it also expands our Hebrew program, and links with our strong program in Arabic linguistics, creating exciting possibilities for new directions in Semitic linguistics. In addition, AINE connects us directly with the departments of Religious Studies, History, Linguistics, and Classics. All these connections heighten awareness of the breadth and quality of our programs, bring us more students, and spread knowledge of the Middle East and its peoples—the core of our mission.”

For more information about the new AINE program, visit the MES Web site and click on “graduate programs.”
With three new publications and the launch of a new literature series, the Center for Middle Eastern Studies publications program has had a banner year.

June saw the arrival of the latest volume in the Modern Middle East Series: Muslim Reformers in Iran and Turkey: The Paradox of Moderation by Gáuñez Murat Tezcür, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Loyola University Chicago, completed exhaustive field research to construct this comparative analysis of Islamic politics. Turkey and Iran have followed very different trajectories in modern history, yet both countries have witnessed the rise of Muslim reformers in recent years. Tezcür’s study reveals how these reformers have come to embrace electoral democracy and the surprising implications for the spread of democracy in the Middle East.

This fall marked the release of two new translations. First to arrive was The Paradox of Moderation, also heralds the creation of a new publications series: Emerging Voices from the Middle East, edited by Tarek El-Ariss, with M. R. Ghanoonparvar and Karen Grumberg serving on the Editorial Committee. The series showcases up-and-coming authors from all over the Middle East and introduces an English-speaking audience to the latest in literary developments in Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, and Turkish.

The Center’s second release this fall, The Puppet, is the latest in our long-running Modern Middle East Literatures in Translation Series. Translator William M. Hutchins, Professor in the Philosophy and Religion Department at Appalachian State University, expertly renders into English the beautiful prose of award-winning Tuareg author Ibrahim al-Koni. Originally published in Arabic, The Puppet, like many of al-Koni’s other novels, is set in the Sahara, where al-Koni grew up. In the mythic oasis of Waw, al-Koni explores the tensions between nomadic and settled life, with a passionate love affair and bloody betrayal added to the mix.

For more information about the Middle East Series, visit www.utexas.edu/utpress/topics/cmes.html.

Interview with Ghada Abdel Aal, author of I Want to Get Married!

Q: Would you talk about what inspired you to start blogging?

I started blogging mainly because I had something to say, and I didn’t have anyone to talk to. My mother was my best friend—she used to chat for hours about everything, including suitors. She passed away in 2003, and after a couple of years I felt the need to speak out, and she wasn’t around, so I looked for people to talk to through the blog.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about the reception of the blog, then the book, and then the TV series?

The blog was a success from the first post, and the first edition of the book was sold out in twenty days. The TV series was also huge success, but it created some controversy as it addressed taboo topics, and some people were a little bit defensive about that.

Q: How involved were you with the creation of the TV series?

I wrote the screenplay by myself, as I had already studied screenplay writing, and also I felt that no one else would understand the real depth of the issue.

Q: What do you think of I Want to Get Married! being compared to Sex and the City?

I want to get married! was compared to Sex and the City, and before that it was compared to Bridget Jones’s Diary, and lately it has even been compared to Mad Men. I guess Western media or journalists are trying to make the idea a little more familiar to their readers/watchers, but there are not any similarities between I Want to Get Married! and any of these works.

Q: How are you enjoying your stay in the United States? Any impressions you’d like to share?

I’m really enjoying my time here; I found out that the America they show on American TV is not really true. If you watch American soaps you’d think that women stay in their fancy dresses all day, if you watched TV series you would expect to find a dead body at each corner, but this is not real life here.

Q: What do you hope an American audience will take away from your book?

I hope that everyone who reads the book will end up having a good idea about one part of the lives of women in my country/region and that they will stop lumping us all together when thinking about women’s status in Muslim/Arab communities, because Egypt is not Saudi Arabia, which is not Iran, which is not Afghanistan, which is not Palestine, which is not Indonesia; I hope everybody will understand that.

Q: What’s next for you?

I’m working now on my second book and on a screenplay for a movie, and I hope that both of them become as successful as I Want to Get Married.

GHADA ABDEL AAL works as a playwright and continues to blog.

NORA ELTAHAWY is also from Egypt, recently coauthored a book, and coedited Sudanese Refugees from Darfur.
Traditionally in Muslim societies learning took place in the setting of small hajalat, or study groups, that met in mosques, shrines, or other study spaces. This type of intimate, group-based learning is the approach Arabic PhD candidate Alex Magidow had in mind when he was thinking of new ways to organize an academic conference for students of Arabic. Frustrated with the current conference model wherein presenters read their prepared papers and then face a less than engaging traditional question-and-answer session, Magidow searched across academic disciplines to find a better, or at least different model. Investigating how everyone from physicists to political scientists organize their conferences, Magidow consulted with DMES faculty and created the Jil Jadid Conference, which is scheduled for February 18–20 of next year. The Jil Jadid (“New Generation”) Conference attempts to address both flaws of Arabic. Frustrated with the current model that dispenses with the traditional presenter-audience power dynamic is another important goal of the conference, as is utilizing technology to bring far-flung voices to the meeting. Recognizing the conference to the idea.” With this in mind, he has proposed a model that dispenses with the traditional format where presenters read long papers, face questioners, and then move on from the topic. Instead, the Jil Jadid Conference will have presenters read short summaries of papers they have previously circulated to attendees, after which they will break off into small groups reminiscent of the hajalat. Expanding the role of moderators to improve the discussion and to break down the traditional presenter-audience power dynamic is another important goal of the conference, as is utilizing technology to bring far-flung voices to the meeting. Recognizing the new and dynamic nature of this model, the conference will embrace opportunities to modify its shape (literally by organizing around more plastic, rearrangeable facilities) and methods throughout its duration. Promoting camaraderie among the new generation of Arabic students is another primary goal of the conference. Thus, Jil Jadid will be organized in such a way that both literature and linguistics students are encouraged to attend and participate in each other’s panels instead of streaking away to happy hour. As another means of fostering collaboration, students from both disciplines are intimately involved in planning and organizing the conference. Recognizing that presenting at a graduate student conference is not the flashiest line to have on an academic CV, the Jil Jadid Conference organizers, with generous support from the Dean of Graduate Studies, Victoria Rodriguez, and the Director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Kamren Agah, will offer to fly presenting students to the conference. This, along with bringing in experienced keynote speakers, forms the major part of the effort to convince graduate students to submit abstracts and attend the conference.

While Magidow notes that this “new generation” is something he and his peers will age out of at some point, he hopes to use the conference to “create those bridges” that he and his colleagues will use to engage each other throughout their careers. He hopes that by drawing on the models of the past, the Jil Jadid Conference will inspire his colleagues to work together more closely and to think and learn in new ways.

—James Casey

Interested students may submit paper abstracts for the Jil Jadid Conference here: http://linguistlist.org/confstms/jjdata/UTI.

Student Initiatives: The Jil Jadid Conference

On October 21–22, 2010, the University of Texas hosted Adonis, one of the most celebrated Arab poets alive today, accompanied by translator and poet Khaled Mattawa, for a series of events including a public poetry reading and various roundtable discussions with faculty and students. Organized by Assistant Professor Tarek El-Arissi (Middle Eastern Studies), the visit was sponsored by the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, the Department of Middle Eastern Studies, the Arabic Flagship Program, the Program in Comparative Literature, the Department of English, the Chair in Ethnic and Third World Studies, the Department of French and Italian, the Humanities Institute, the College of Liberal Arts, and the James A. Michener Center for Writers.

Born Ali Ahmed Said in the village of Al-Qassabin, Syria, Adonis moved to Beirut in 1956 following a year spent in prison for political activism. Once in Beirut he joined a vibrant community of artists and writers and co-founded and coedited Shir; and later Mawajif, both progressive journals of poetry and politics. He studied at St. Joseph University in Beirut, obtaining his doctorate in 1973. He has taught at the Lebanese University (where MES Professor Mahmoud Al-Batal studied Arabic literature and thought with him), Damascus University, and the Collège de France. Short-listed for the Nobel Prize, Adonis is the recipient of many honors and awards, such as the Bjørnson Prize, the International Nâzim Hikmet Poetry Award, the Syria-Lebanon Best Poet Award, and the highest award of the International Poet Biennial in Brussels. He was elected a member of the Stéphane Toulon (2010), translated by Khaled Mattawa, Associate Professor of English at the University of Michigan–Ann Arbor. Mattawa, an accomplished poet and critic himself, is the author of four books of poetry, most recently Torceville (2010). He is the recipient of the Academy of American Poets Fellowship Prize, the PEN award for literary translation, a Guggenheim fellowship, and three Pushcart Prizes.

Addressing a packed auditorium at the Texas Union Theatre, Adonis read a series of poems from his recently translated work and addressed questions about his writing and its trajectory, and his views on Arabic literature, culture, and language. He also participated in a roundtable discussion with graduate students and faculty in the Arabic program, and visited with fellow poets at the James A. Michener Center for Writers. Adonis’s visit was inspiring to the UT community on many levels and serves to anchor the University as the center for Arabic and Middle Eastern studies in the Western Hemisphere.
The success of UT's distinguished Arabic Flagship Program (AFP) is due in part to the many ways language learning is encouraged outside of the classroom: language partners, guest lectures, films, and BBQs; to name a few. The Arabic Flagship Program’s newest endeavor takes language learning to a new level: a cooperative, Arabic language living community. With a freshman, a grad student, and everything in between, eleven students of Arabic are living under one roof with the commitment to learn from and with one another.

**DAILY LIFE IN ARABIC**

Arabic House is a truly unique experience; the residents of the house are living their normal lives, just in Arabic. From the moment they wake up until the lights go out—while engaging in such varied activities as cooking communal dinners, tending an herb garden, downloading music and making YouTube videos, studying for Arabic class, and smoking hookah on the patio (often done in conjunction with studying)—the residents speak in Arabic. This not only improves their listening and speaking skills, but it also creates a relaxed atmosphere where anxiety from speaking a foreign language seems to disappear. Resident Kaylea Box explains, “The Arabic home environment makes language learning more comfortable and less intimidating, which I feel opens the door to using the language more and developing as a confident speaker.”

**SIMULATING STUDY ABROAD**

The residents are dedicated to the exploration of intellectual, social, and cultural life in the Arab world, creating an Arabic living environment without having to leave the country. The residents teach and learn from each other with their mix of varying levels and dialects of Arabic and experiences with different Arab cultures. The house simulates aspects of study abroad while conveniently located in Hyde Park.

**COMMUNITY**

Residents also find camaraderie and solidarity in living with fellow students of Arabic. George Kimson, a freshman in third-year Arabic, explains, “Living at Arabic House has provided me with a fantastic language support system at home; I’m living with people who have all, at some point, experienced the same frustrations and challenges that I experience while learning Arabic.”

**EVENTS**

The newly furnished, spacious duplex with large front and back yards also provides the community of Arabic scholars in Austin a space for celebrating Arabic culture and language. The Arabic Flagship has invited University faculty, administrators, and guests such as artists, authors, and musicians to Arabic House. Since its opening in August, the house has hosted a dinner with University faculty, staff, and funders, as well as a large welcome BBQ.

**THE ARABIC FLAGSHIP PROGRAM**

AFP is shaping language learning outside the classroom at UT, and Arabic House is just one of the many new projects it has initiated and supported. Resident Charley Peterson shares her experience, “It’s a really great feeling to be part of the UT Arabic Flagship community because it is never stagnant. It is always innovating and trying to find new ways to make Arabic education better, and you get to be part of this collaborative process. At the UT Arabic House you even find incredible opportunities to meet and talk to the people who are pioneering this nationwide initiative to create a group of youth that are culturally competent and fluent in Arabic.” For more information about Arabic House, please visit the Web site at: www.utarabicflagship.org/index.html.

On June 3, the Center for Middle Eastern Studies launched the first ever Advanced Persian Summer Language Institute offered at the University of Texas. Funded by Title VI grants through the University of Texas’s Center for Middle Eastern Studies and the Western Consortium of University Centers of the Middle East, the Persian Institute provides those students at the Advanced and High-Advanced levels an experience rivaled only by time spent at an Iranian university. To achieve this goal, a ten-week program was developed, focusing on improving students’ skills in speaking, writing, listening, and reading.

I had the opportunity to participate in this inaugural session of the program. As a PhD student in Middle Eastern history, I’m no novice to intensive summer language programs: over the years, I have enrolled in seven of them (four in Arabic, three in Persian). UT’s Persian Summer Institute is among the best I’ve experienced because it combines a very structured program of courses with activities that reinforce language skills.

The ten weeks of the program were quite intense, with six hours of classes each day (and, of course, several hours of required homework every night). We began our mornings with two classes. Those of us at the Advanced level took “Urban Youth Culture in Iran” and then either “Iranian Film and Cinema” or “Iranian Revolutionaries and Reformists.” The High-Advanced class studied “Religion and Society in Iran” and then either “Iranian Film and Cinema” or “Iranian Revolutionaries and Reformists.” The classes were comprehensive—each included weekly short presentations and writing tasks, in addition to various reading and listening assignments and spirited discussion.

In my experiences with other summer language programs in the United States, it can often be difficult to find opportunities to practice speaking and listening skills; summer programs often focus predominately on reading. That’s where the program here at UT is different—every afternoon we participated in activities that specifically focused on the more active skills of writing and speaking. Each day we had an hour of media activities where we watched Persian movies and documentaries and discussed the content with our classmates. Then, we either had a writing lab or group conversation with our instructors and teaching assistants. In these writing labs, we revised our assignments from the week. Our instructors would provide guidance regarding our errors by indicating the nature of the problem (for example, spelling, syntax, verb tense, grammar, etc.), and then—as a class but with our instructors’ assistance—we discussed what the problem could be and worked to correct it. This helped us learn how to recognize errors and correct our writing assignments more effectively. Group conversation is another key aspect of the program; during these meetings, we discussed and new different topics unrelated to our classes—this gave us the opportunity to learn new words and put to use the analytical vocabulary that we were being taught in our other classes. We participated in a range of activities from conversing on such controversial social topics as gun control and gay marriage to solving word games designed to help us build vocabulary skills.

In addition to the above class activities, we also had individual conversation sessions with our instructors—two sessions of thirty minutes each week. Further, cultural activities designed to teach us a bit about Persian life and culture while improving our speaking and listening skills were scheduled every Friday. Professor Faeqeh Shirazi hosted a luncheon for us at her home and taught us about Persian rugs, and Professor M. R. Ghanoomparvar, who is a renowned author of several Persian cookbooks, gave a cooking demonstration where we all learned how to make the famous Persian dish fesenjoon. We also took lessons on calligraphy, Persian music, and went on an outing to Hamilton Pool.

The University of Texas’s Advanced Persian Summer Language Institute provides a unique opportunity for those seeking to improve their Persian language skills and fills a gap in Persian instruction in the United States. The effectiveness of the program is obvious in the great strides the participants made—some improving as many as three levels on the ACTFL scale. —Christine Baker
STUDY ABROAD: NOT JUST FOR STUDENTS ANYMORE!

In 2005, Outreach Director Christopher Rose and CMES Director Kamran Aghaie spent four weeks in Egypt with a group of classroom educators participating in a program funded through the Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad. “Group Projects Abroad are wonderful,” Rose says, “because the grant really funds most of the program. The MES outreach program has been wonderful, too. In 2009, Outreach Director Christopher Rose says, “We have a lot of academic lectures at MES,” but “it's often hard for someone who doesn’t have some sort of academic background in the topic to attend them and participate fully.” Similarly, events for the public and K–12 educators are usually conducted in a workshop setting, and are often closed to the public, K–12 educators, and faculty, staff, and students from the University. Outside of these events, programming tends to be more specialized, especially when it comes to faculty lectures. In order to make the program affordable, MES negotiates directly with tour guides and travel agencies in Egypt. “We know where we can cut corners,” Rose says. “We don’t need to stay in deluxe hotels if we know from experience that there’s a clean, friendly place around the corner that’s less than half the price. Then we can spend a little more money hiring excellent guides who normally work with programs that charge three times as much.” Bolstered by the success of the 2010 program, MES has already started promoting a follow-up program for spring break 2011. And after that? “I love Egypt,” Rose says, “but I’d like to go somewhere new. We have faculty who want to organize programs in Turkey, Israel, Lebanon, and other places. It’s just a matter of finding time to do it!”

The Outreach Lecture Series, he says, was conceived to fill this gap. “The idea is that we’ll focus on more introductory level discussions. That way, we can attract students who don’t major in our programs, members of the public, K–12 educators, and even our own students who specialize in other topics. It’s a way to share our resources and to attract potential students at the same time.” The idea was inspired by a similar lecture series offered by the Environmental Science Institute called Hot Science–Cool Talks. “The Faculty present basic lectures on their research, and they sometimes get 500 people at their lectures,” Rose says. “I thought, ‘Why can’t we do something like that?’ And, honestly, there’s really no reason we can’t.” When he began polling the MES faculty to gauge their interest, Rose got an enthusiastic response, and formally proposed the Outreach Lecture Series as part of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies’ Title VI grant application for 2010–14. The first event was held on October 20, 2010, with MES Professor John Husniertgard. The lecture, “We All Write Hieroglyphs: The Origin and Spread of the Alphabet,” attracted a crowd of over seventy attendees.

In addition to the usual advertisements, fliers and posters were sent to public libraries in Travis, Williamson, and Hays counties, as well as to teachers and district officials in school districts in those counties. As further encouragement, the MES outreach program offered K–12 educators professional development credit for attending, and also offered copies of the lecture and curriculum materials related to the topic to educators who were present. The audience at the first lecture consisted primarily of members of the campus community. “A lot of them were interested in what we do, and they saw the topic as accessible to someone who didn’t have a background in Middle Eastern studies or archaeology,” Rose says, adding that he was “ecstatic” about the response to the lecture. The Outreach Lecture Series will feature one or two lectures during both the fall and spring semesters. Check the calendar on the MES Web page for upcoming offerings.

Y ears later, some of us may look back and wish we’d taken advantage of that college study abroad opportunity when we’d had the chance. The MES outreach program has been working diligently over the past few years to help give K–12 educators and curriculum specialists the opportunity to spend time in the Middle East in an academic setting.

In 2005, Outreach Director Christopher Rose and CMES Director Kamran Aghaie spent four weeks in Egypt with a group of classroom educators participating in a program funded through the Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad. “Group Projects Abroad are wonderful,” Rose says, “because the grant really funds most of the program. In 2009, CMES worked with the Randrop Foundation, a local Turkish-American organization, to coordinate a ten-day trip to Turkey. This time, applications were accepted on a first-come, first-served basis, just like any organized tour. “It cost a little more,” Rose says, “but we had a great group. I had someone tell me on the afternoon of the first day in Turkey that it was the best program she’d ever been on in her life!” Having proven that it was possible to put together pay-your-own-way programs and recruit enough applicants to make them viable, Rose decided to take advantage of the cooler weather in the spring and organized “Spring Break in Egypt” in March 2010, which attracted sixteen participants. He also recruited MES Associate Professor Samer Als, who was on research leave in Egypt for the year, as a faculty leader to the program. “It really was an incredible experience,” says Rose. “We had teachers from all over the state, and it was a relief not having to worry about heatstroke!” In order to make the program affordable, MES negotiates directly with tour guides and travel agencies in Egypt. “We know where we can cut corners,” Rose says. “We don’t need to stay in deluxe hotels if we know from experience that there’s a clean, friendly place around the corner that’s less than half the price. Then we can spend a little more money hiring excellent guides who normally work with programs that charge three times as much.” Bolstered by the success of the 2010 program, MES has already started promoting a follow-up program for spring break 2011. And after that? “I love Egypt,” Rose says, “but I’d like to go somewhere new. We have faculty who want to organize programs in Turkey, Israel, Lebanon, and other places. It’s just a matter of finding time to do it!” The Outreach Lecture Series, he says, was conceived to fill this gap. “The idea is that we’ll focus on more introductory level discussions. That way, we can attract students who don’t major in our programs, members of the public, K–12 educators, and even our own students who specialize in other topics. It’s a way to share our resources and to attract potential students at the same time.” The idea was inspired by a similar lecture series offered by the Environmental Science Institute called Hot Science–Cool Talks. “The Faculty present basic lectures on their research, and they sometimes get 500 people at their lectures,” Rose says. “I thought, ‘Why can’t we do something like that?’ And, honestly, there’s really no reason we can’t.” When he began polling the MES faculty to gauge their interest, Rose got an enthusiastic response, and formally proposed the Outreach Lecture Series as part of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies’ Title VI grant application for 2010–14. The first event was held on October 20, 2010, with MES Professor John Husniertgard. The lecture, “We All Write Hieroglyphs: The Origin and Spread of the Alphabet,” attracted a crowd of over seventy attendees.

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In addition to the usual advertisements, fliers and posters were sent to public libraries in Travis, Williamson, and Hays counties, as well as to teachers and district officials in school districts in those counties. As further encouragement, the MES outreach program offered K–12 educators professional development credit for attending, and also offered copies of the lecture and curriculum materials related to the topic to educators who were present. The audience at the first lecture consisted primarily of members of the campus community. “A lot of them were interested in what we do, and they saw the topic as accessible to someone who didn’t have a background in Middle Eastern studies or archaeology,” Rose says, adding that he was “ecstatic” about the response to the lecture. The Outreach Lecture Series will feature one or two lectures during both the fall and spring semesters. Check the calendar on the MES Web page for upcoming offerings.
The Turkish program in MES is thriving these days with new teachers and curricula—including an innovative, communicative-based language curriculum—and new classes on Turkish culture.

Dr. Jeannette Okur has designed several new courses in Turkish literature and culture. This fall she is teaching “Love in the East and West,” a cross-cultural exploration of literary love in which students read and compare world classics such as Rumi, Goethe, Shakespeare, and Nizami. On October 29, students from this course collaborated with UT’s Middle Eastern Music Ensemble “Bereket” and participants from Persian, Hebrew, and Arabic to present an evening of poetry and music on the theme of love. In the spring, Dr. Okur will be teaching “Inspired by Istanbul.” Next year she plans to offer a course on “Negotiating Urbanization,” which she sees as an important theme in contemporary Turkish culture, as well as a course in Middle Eastern cinema with special focus on Turkey.

Intensive Turkish teacher Hayriye Kayi, a PhD candidate in Foreign Language Education, has designed and produced a new curriculum for Intensive Turkish, Türkçe ile Yakam [Life with Turkish], a colorful set of interactive materials focusing on listening, speaking, reading, writing, and culture that takes students to an intermediate level of proficiency. A grant from Liberal Arts Instructional Technology Services is supporting a Web site for the curriculum that will house audio, video, and interactive exercises. Students in the class have been performing skits, conducting live online chats with each other, and recently went to a new Turkish restaurant where they ordered and spoke with the owner only in Turkish.

Also gracing our program this year are two Fulbright Language Teaching Assistants: Derya Dogan from Turkey and Shohdia Easnova from Uzbekistan. Derya is assisting Hayriye Kayi in the Intensive Turkish class, and Shohdia is developing materials in preparation to teach Uzbek next semester.

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