

CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ARAB STUDIES HISTORY

Who are the Arabs? To answer this question, a group of scholars in 1975 established Georgetown University's Center for Contemporary Arab Studies (CCAS). They recognized that there was a failure on the part of American universities to provide their students with adequate opportunities to know the Arab world and sought to meet this need. Among the faculty who contributed greatly to the Center in its early days and years after were internationally-renowned experts such as Dr. Hanna Batatu and Dr. Hisham Sharabi. The phrase that makes up the Center's logo—"The Arabs Today,"—*al-'Arab al-yawm*—captures their vision. The logo was designed by Palestinian artist Kamal Boullata.

The Center is part of Georgetown University's Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, the oldest school of international affairs in the United States. In recognition of the Center's work for the first 10 years, Senator J. William Fulbright wrote in 1985, "With remarkable foresight Georgetown University moved to fill the need for understanding the Arab people by creating the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies ... a significant contribution to our country." Building on this legacy, the Center has established itself as the most comprehensive university-based Arab studies program in the United States. It focuses on the contemporary Arab world, from Morocco to the Gulf, through teaching, scholarship, public events, research, publications, and outreach to the community. Today, CCAS is a premier source of information on issues concerning the Arab world both within the classroom and for the larger community.

The Center's Master of Arts in Arab Studies (MAAS) program is distinguished by its emphasis on study of the contemporary Arab world and its rigorous Arabic language training. An initial goal was to offer a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach to the Arab world, one that would address the Arab past in its efforts to analyze better the Arab present and future. Georgetown University has achieved this goal; it offers more than 150 Arab world-related courses each year, through CCAS as well as GU's departments of Arabic, history, government, business, economics, and law, among others. The MAAS program has grown to include the option of graduate certificate programs and joint degrees with other departments. Students from other disciplines have the option of adding an undergraduate or graduate Certificate in Arab Studies. Alumni of the MAAS program have distinguished themselves in key areas of economy, culture, and government around the world.

Students, faculty, and the community have the opportunity to learn from an impressive and varied list of invited speakers who provide an academic context for understanding the Arab region. The public affairs program now stands as an essential part of the Center and the student experience, hosting or sponsoring over 75 events each year. These events provide a forum for academics, policy makers, representatives from non-governmental organizations, political leaders, activists, filmmakers, visual artists, authors, and musicians from the Arab world, the United States, and other countries. The Center's annual two-day symposium has attracted scholars from all over the world.

The Center continues to attract expert faculty who publish widely and serve as a resource to the media, such as the Washington Post, NPR, CNN, and Al-Jazeera. In addition to teaching, these professors travel internationally, engaging in research projects and joint conferences, and bring dynamic learning back to Georgetown. They play an active role in professional associations, such as the Middle East Studies Association.

Dissemination of information and analyses beyond the campus is a priority. Through its publications and website, the Center is well known within the academic and greater community. Publications include occasional papers, books, and online articles. The Center's newsletter now reaches over 4,500 local, national, and overseas readers.

A Community Resource Service was established in 1983 to develop and provide resources for education about the Arab region and Islam. Teachers from kindergarten through 12th grade can participate in training programs and have access to a growing lending library and teaching modules. Faculty and graduate students from the Center visit local schools to share their expertise. This program has been recognized nationally for its contribution to furthering understanding of the Arab world in the classroom.

Since its inception, the Center has benefited from the support of numerous individuals, corporations, and government sources. The Center has flourished, adding more tenure-track faculty positions, staff, research opportunities, and scholarships in order to meet growing demands. Initial endowments of faculty lines have been supplemented by new research and outreach grants and support for fellowships. Since 1997, CCAS has served as the core of Georgetown University's National Resource Center on the Middle East, funded by a Title VI grant from the US Department of Education.

Few regions command as much attention as the Arab world. Georgetown University's Center for Contemporary Arab Studies has furthered understanding of this vital area with excellence and distinction, illuminating the lives and experiences of the Arabs today—*al-'Arab al-yawm*.