About Us

AUC has been teaching BA Middle East Studies since 1974, MA Middle East Studies since 1980, and consolidated the programs over the last 20 years within the Middle East Studies Center (MESC), which is part of the School of Global Affairs and Public Policy at The American University in Cairo. MESC has continued to offer its students and visiting scholars a unique opportunity to engage in Egypt and from that gateway, directly with one of the world’s most complex regions. Housed in a modern and pleasant campus in New Cairo, a range of course choices are available, spanning anthropology, religion, history, political science, public policy and administration, migration, economics, gender, law and literature. Middle East Studies is at its most vibrant in Egypt. It is enriched further by our series of workshops, conferences and cultural activities related to Middle East Studies.

MESC goals are to:

1. Establish AUC as a recognized regional and international leader in Middle East Studies

2. Establish AUC as a recognized hub for expert comment, debate, and recommendations concerning contemporary Middle East peace and security issues

3. Expand faculty, visiting scholar and student enrolment in Middle East Studies and meet demand for appropriate resources for training in the field

4. Establish and strengthen relations between the Middle East Studies Center and other leading Middle East Studies centers/universities through international exchange programs, joint research projects and the possibility of dual award MA degrees

5. Strengthen relations between the Middle East Studies Center and the Cairo/Egyptian/international community with regards to creating internship and job opportunities for our students and graduates, cooperation and financial support
Academic Programs

The center offers a wide range of courses, all of which are interdisciplinary in nature. Students choose from courses taught by Middle East scholars from various academic departments, including political science, sociology, anthropology, psychology, Egyptology, economics, Arab and Islamic civilizations and history, public policy and administration, as well as the Cynthia Nelson Institute for Gender and Women’s Studies, Center for Migration and Refugee Studies and Department of Arabic Language Instruction.

Students are eligible for multiple fellowships and other forms of financial aid.

Bachelor of Arts: Middle East Studies

The Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Middle East studies is an interdisciplinary program taught by faculty members from anthropology, Arabic studies, economics, history, management, political science and sociology. Through intensive study of the region’s history, culture and current issues, students gain a comprehensive understanding of the modern Middle East.

Admission

A minimum GPA of 2.7 is required in order to declare and maintain a major in the Middle East Studies program.

Language

Non-Arabic speakers must take six credits of colloquial or literary Arabic.
Graduate Diploma: Middle East Studies
The diploma program in Middle East Studies is designed to fill the need for familiarity with modern Middle Eastern culture and society, particularly for students who have not been exposed to an intensive study of the Middle East at the undergraduate level. Students are expected to finish the program in two semesters, although they may take up to four semesters to complete their requirements.

Admission
An applicant should have an undergraduate degree of high standing (a GPA of 3.0 or above). Prerequisites may be assigned depending on the applicant's academic background.

Language
To obtain the diploma, each candidate must demonstrate, in addition to the normal University requirements in English, proficiency in Modern Standard Arabic, up to the completion of ALNG 1101-1102-1103.

Master of Arts: Middle East Studies
The Master of Arts (MA) in Middle East studies is an interdisciplinary degree program that offers courses in Arabic language and literature, anthropology, economics, gender and women's studies, history, law, political science and sociology, with the purpose of introducing students to a variety of methodologies for studying the Middle East. The program focuses on the period from the 18th century onward and addresses issues of religion, ecology, history, economy, society, polity, gender and culture.

Admission
Applicants for admission should have an undergraduate degree of high standing (GPA of 3.0 or higher). Prerequisites are often assigned depending on the individual student's academic background. Students are normally admitted to the MA program in the fall only.

Language
To obtain the MA degree, each candidate must demonstrate, in addition to the normal University requirements in English, proficiency in Modern Standard Arabic, up to the completion of ALNG 2101-2102-2103. Proficiency is tested by an examination administered by the Department of Arabic Language Instruction. Students who have no background in Arabic are strongly advised to enroll in the Arabic Language Unit's intensive summer course (20 contact hours per week, 12 credit hours) before beginning their MA program.

Exchanges
MESC hosts international students enrolled in a full, degree-seeking program or as part of their study-abroad programs (credits transfer).

Visiting Scholars
The center welcomes MA candidates, Fulbright scholars and faculty members conducting fieldwork in Egypt. Visiting scholars benefit from their affiliation to the center and access to its facilities, in addition to the AUC library and professional networks for faculty members. Further details are available at http://www.auccegypt.edu/research/graduate-research/scholar-without-stipend
Our Research

Our research teams consist of multidisciplinary academics and diplomats from across the Middle East, Europe and the USA. We are members of various institutions and networks, including the Boston Consortium for Arab Region Studies (BCARS), along with other founding institutions such as the American University of Beirut, Boston College, Boston University, Harvard University, Tufts University and University of Massachusetts Boston.

Egyptian and Gulf Studies

Egypt continues to be a cultural and political beacon in the Middle East. Its control of the Suez Canal, cold peace with Israel, concern about neighboring Gaza, mediation and interest in the Israel-Palestine conflict, and the marginalization of the Muslim Brotherhood are all points of significance. The Egyptian military is the largest in the Arab world, and there is a close and expanding, defense and security relationship between Egypt and the GCC states, most evident in the inclusion of Egypt in Saudi Arabia’s new Sunni counterterrorism alliance.

The latest research project brought together a range of international scholars at the Gulf Research Meeting 2015 and is the subject of a new book entitled Egypt and the Gulf: A Renewed Regional Policy Alliance. The book contextualizes historical linkages, analyses adversarial postures (especially Egypt’s contentious relations with Qatar and Turkey), and studies Egypt’s strategic relations with Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates in particular.

Further projects on the Gulf are expected to explore the following dimensions of Egyptian and Gulf studies:

- Political Economy
- Foreign Policy Analysis
- International Relations

A new Gulf Studies book collection is being established at AUC thanks to the generosity of the Gulf Research Center Foundation in Geneva, Switzerland.

Middle East Foreign Policies and the Regional Order

Reassessing Order and Disorder in the Middle East: Regional Imbalance or Disintegration unpacks the changing domestic political context and other leading foreign policy drivers of the primary Middle East powers over the last decade, up to and including the Arab Spring. Middle East expert Robert Mason, and other regional analysts, assess how these policies have impacted the regional balance of power in a penetrated system, identifying in conclusion whether the current disorder is a temporary imbalance or evidence of longer term disintegration.

MESC was represented at a 2017 workshop on Middle Powers in the Middle East held at the Center for International and Regional Studies (CIRS) at Georgetown University’s campus in Qatar.
The Syria Conflict
This book project analyzes the resistance partners and their efforts to affect desirable change within the Syrian conflict. The project investigates future scenarios and the dwindling impact of ordinary Syrian voices. For many Syrians interviewed for this volume, the Islamic State is shown to be a fringe political issue, and does not really feature in the broader changes being called for which include: a change of regime (including the removal of President Assad and the whole of the old guard), a new political class featuring Syrian patriots, territorial integrity and the abolition of the existing crony capitalist economy. However, since many of the leading political dissidents are silenced, and there are no concrete post-conflict plans, there is little interest in transitional governance and economic reform. At this moment, all are geared to a wartime environment.

Euro-Med Studies
MESC works closely with AUC’s Center for Migration and Refugee Studies on workshops and conferences that address the Euro-Med migration crisis. MESC also works with the EU Mission in Cairo and other European embassies on specific Euro-Med issues and is currently applying for a host of funding through EU mechanisms, with the aim of being one of just a few centers of excellence in this field in the Middle East.

Our MA cohort is a dynamic and mixed group of Egyptian and international students studying a broad range of concentrations and topics within Middle East Studies. Some of our recent MA dissertation titles include:

- “The Egyptian Financial Crisis of 1907: Capitalism and Regulation Under Fragmented Colonialism”
- “The Discourse of Drug Use in Egypt: An Interdisciplinary Exploratory Study”
- “Being Karaite in California: An Ethnographic Study of an Egyptian Jewish Community”
- “Where the Pavement Begins: Class, Lifestyle and Automobiles in Cairo”
- “Resurrecting Eden: Inaugural British Narration and Policy of Iraq”
- “Linguistic and Social Capital in Higher Education in Egypt”
- “The Sisters of the Brotherhood: Islamic Activism in the Shadows of the Brothers?”
- “Decision-Making Mechanisms to Prioritize Aid in Times of Financial Shortage: The Case of Jordan”
- “Contesting Ownership: A Case of Squatter Movements in Rights”
- “Egypt’s Desert Paradoxes, Promises and Possibilities: A Study of Capital Formations along Cairo–Alexandria Desert Road”
- “Constructing a Post-Saddam State: U.S. Policymaking in Iraq, 2003-2011”
- “An Understanding of the Interconnectedness Between the 1840 and 1860 Events in Mount Lebanon and the 1982-1984 War of the Mountains”
- “Surviving ISIS: Life Stories of Yazidi Women”
- “Islamophobia and the Muslim Minority in South Korea”
- “Investigating Illegal Migration of Egyptians: Representational and Reflections”
- “Black, Female and Christian: An Ethnography of South Sudanese Refugee Women’s Lives in Cairo”
Our Faculty

Robert Mason, Director
Robert Mason is an associate professor and director of the Middle East Studies Center at The American University in Cairo. He was a visiting research fellow in the Changing Character of War Programme at the University of Oxford in the Michaelmas term 2016, where his research concentrated on Iranian policy in the Syrian conflict.

Mason was also a visiting fellow in the Centre for International Studies at the London School of Economics and Political Science from December 2014 to December 2015, studying British, Turkish and Chinese economic policies in sub-Saharan Africa. Mason also joined the Centre de Recherches Internationales at Sciences Po in July 2015. His current research focus is on the international relations of the Middle East (with an emphasis on the Gulf), Islam and the state, security and development studies.

Ambassador Aly Erfan, Professor of Practice
Ambassador Aly Erfan is an Egyptian diplomat, with a 30-year career in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Egypt and the League of Arab States. He has served for more than 20 years in the cabinets of three Egyptian foreign ministers and the secretary general of the League of Arab States, during critical and eventful periods in the Middle East. He was responsible for issues that included the Middle East Peace Process, regional crises, arms control, Arab-Israeli affairs, Arab-American relations, Arab-EU relations as well as UN affairs. His most recent official position was chef de cabinet and political adviser to the secretary general of the League of Arab States during the critical years of the Arab Spring from 2011 to 2016.

Throughout his diplomatic career, Ambassador Erfan has also been a member of the Egyptian and Arab League delegations to multiple regional and international organizations, summits and conferences, including to: the UN General Assembly sessions; Security Council meetings, several international Arab and regional summits; ministerial conferences and meetings (relating to the Middle East Peace Process, the Arab League, Syria, Libya and Yemen, etc.); the Multilateral Peace Process (the Steering Committee and the Working Group on Arms Control and Regional Security); and the Nonproliferation Treaty Review Conferences.

The Middle East Studies Advisory Committee
Abdel Aziz Ezz El Arab, Department of History
Hani Sayed, Department of Law
Ibrahim Awad, Center for Migration and Refugee Studies
Ibrahim Elnur, Department of Political Science
Kamal El Ekhnawy, Department of Arabic Language Instruction (ALI)
Malak Rouchdy, Department of Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology and Egyptology
Nelly Hanna, Department of Arab and Islamic Civilizations
Location and Facilities

Campus
AUC New Cairo, which accommodates 5,500 full-time students and 1,500 faculty and staff members, is technologically advanced, environmentally sensitive and designed to be accessible for people with disabilities. Offering state-of-the-art resources to students and faculty members from around the world, it weaves Egyptian urban and architectural traditions into a modern campus, and provides a wide range of facilities, from modern classrooms and libraries to food services and a medical center.

The historic AUC Tahrir Square serves as a landmark and cultural oasis in the heart of Cairo. A gathering place for lovers of literature, theatre, art and academics, the campus includes a two-story AUC bookstore, a café overlooking Tahrir Square and two permanent exhibition spaces. Ewart Memorial Hall and Oriental Hall serve as the prime downtown destination for a range of conferences, lectures, seminars and public events held by the University.

Libraries
At the heart of the New Cairo campus, the Main Library houses the largest English-language collection in the region, as well as physical and electronic collections in Arabic and other languages. The Rare Books and Special Collections Library supports research and teaching in the arts, culture and society of Egypt and the Middle East.

Student housing
The American University in Cairo offers on-campus residence facilities, located at AUC New Cairo, is a state-of-the-art facility. AUC also provides assistance for off-campus residence.

Alumni
The opportunities that the center and Cairo offer help students prepare for work in different subject areas and professions. The MESC alumni enter academia, diplomacy, the nonprofit sector, business, finance, public relations, journalism, cultural affairs and more.
Munehiro Anzawa ’11
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
Second Secretary (Political and Cultural Affairs), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan

How did MESC help your career path?
“Because I was able to gain comprehensive knowledge on the Middle East from AUC, I joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. In fact, the interdisciplinary research and knowledge that I learned about the Middle East helps me to analyze the region from a diplomatic perspective. I would say there is nowhere better than AUC to pursue studies on this region. I hope to go back to Cairo for my next assignment and see your center again.”

Cally Walker ’14
United Kingdom
Research Officer at the Economic and Social Research Council

How did MESC help your career path?
“I work on commissioning research on international development. The work is challenging, and I enjoy it very much. I think in terms of an MA from AUC, a lot of employers do find it interesting, and think that spending quality time learning and doing research in an Arab country is important.”

Hend Eltaweel ’16
Cairo, Egypt
Regional Program Assistant, MENA – International Organization for Migration (IOM) – UN Affiliate

How did MESC help your career path?
“Due to this fascinating interdisciplinary experience, I found myself able to engage in thought-provoking discussions centered on issues pertaining to the Middle East. It was these skills and this knowledge that increased my potential and qualified me to apply for serious positions at esteemed organizations.”

What advice would you give to current students at MESC?
“Try to embrace the experience and don’t be afraid or shy away from class discussions. Read, read and read. Listen to different perspectives before formulating any subjective judgment. Rest assured that mere black and white rarely ever exists in social sciences. You have not learned anything until you can see the nuances.”