



## Teaching in a Time of Revolution at Mr. Jefferson’s University

WM. SCOTT HARROP

When Thomas Jefferson laid out his plan for the University of Virginia, his first two listed purposes for higher education were:

- 1) *“To form the statesmen, legislators, and judges, on whom public prosperity and individual happiness are so much to depend;”* and
- 2) *“To expound the principles and structure of government, (and) the laws which regulate the intercourse of nations...”*

In the same report, Jefferson gave special emphasis to the civic benefits of the interdisciplinary study of modern languages, cultures and history. As U.Va historian Phillip Bruce observed nine decades ago, Jefferson foresaw “that all the powerful nations would, in time, be drawn into more intimate relations with each other.” He recognized that familiarity with other languages and cultures would “equip the American mind with a more correct understanding of international dangers and responsibilities,” and practically turn “that knowledge to the international profit of his countrymen.”

Jefferson’s words speak to the inquiries of our field on multiple levels. The dramatic rebellions now unfolding across the Middle East show struggles for self-determination, for independence from imperialism and foreign interference, for universal human rights, of resistance to tyranny—and they all find profound echoes in Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence.

Just like the Americans of 1776, Middle Eastern rebels today have “*a decent respect to the opinions*” of a “*candid world*,” even as such struggles now extend from global editorial pages to the Internet, Facebook, Twitter, and al-Jazeera.

Nearly a half-century after penning the U.S. Declaration of Independence, Jefferson predicted that the world’s peoples would yet “*burst the chains*” and “*assume the blessings and security of self-government*.” And so they are.

Yet Jefferson’s record and writings also caution us about the prospects for “*the ball of liberty*.” He would recognize debates over whether a given culture’s development as yet comports with the responsibilities of democracy. Likewise, as Jefferson once consoled Lafayette amid the French

Teaching in a Time of Revolution ..... 1

Wm. Scott Harrop

Notes from the Chair ..... 2

Farzaneh Milani

“Letters from Your Muslim Aunt”: A Reading .... 3

An Evening with Mohja Kahf

Faculty Update ..... 3

Mehr Farooqi & Hanadi Al-Samman

U.Va-Yarmouk Summer Arabic Program ..... 4

Alumni News ..... 5

Calendar ..... 6

Upcoming Events

Featured Graduate ..... 6

Eva Malliarakis '10

2011 Spring Lecture Series ..... 7

Past and Upcoming Lecture Events

Contact MESALC..... 8

Revolution, the transition from autocracy to democracy “*was not a feather bed.*”

We are fortunate to be contemplating these unique Middle Eastern struggles for freedom, for independence, at the one university which can proudly claim a unique founding purpose for such study.

Jefferson’s favored prescription for liberty’s advance, for the demise of autocracy, was not force of empire, not imposition, not bloodshed, but education. “*Enlighten the people generally,*” Jefferson wrote in 1816, “*and tyranny and oppressions of body and mind will vanish like evil spirits at the dawn of day.*”

As his plans for higher education illuminate, Jefferson deemed it to be in the enlightened national interests of the United States for its citizens, and their diplomats especially, to learn the languages, values, and cultures of the nations with which we must deal.

By contrast, he warned, “*If a nation expects to*

*be ignorant & free in a state of civilization, ... it expects what never was & never will be.*”

Jefferson never lost faith in what he deemed to be education’s noble purpose, the advancement of liberty, at home and for the world. Near his own death, Jefferson’s eyes were fixed on the University of Virginia’s “*holy cause.*” In closing a last letter to James Madison, he wrote: “*if I remove beyond the reach of attentions to the University, ... it is a comfort to leave that institution under your care... to believe that you are engaged in vindicating to posterity the course we have pursued for preserving to them, in all their purity, the blessings of self-government.*”

To Jefferson’s revolutionary “*holy cause,*” we teach - we serve - at his University.



Photo Courtesy of Jack Mellott

Dear friends and colleagues,

In his *History of the University of Virginia* (1920), Philip Alexander Bruce describes Mr. Jefferson’s vision for his “*academical village*” as a truly international and cosmopolitan place: “*His inquisitive eyes looked abroad unerringly for the best in the practical or intellectual life of every foreign land in order to employ it for the betterment of his own.*” Remarkably, of the original seven professors teaching on the first day of classes at U.Va in 1825, five were foreign citizens and two were foreign-born.

Nearly two centuries later, in these exhilarating times we know as the Arab Spring, the movement for freedom and democracy has become transnational. From the Green Movement in Iran, to the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia, to the subsequent awe-inspiring uprisings in Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Yemen, Syria, and beyond—each of these revolutions has been energized and emboldened by the others’ strength. Even demonstrators in Wisconsin have cited the influence of Middle Eastern revolutions on the strength and

persistence of their protests. Mr. Jefferson foresaw, writing in 1818, “*that all the powerful nations would, in time, be drawn into more intimate relations with each other,*” and made it an early and consistent priority for our University to “*equip the American mind with a more correct understanding*” of that deep global interconnectedness. As foreign languages and area studies were a central focus of the founding father’s vision for U.Va, the Department of Middle Eastern and South Asian Languages and Cultures today proudly reflects those ideals in its multiple realms of diversity: geographical, cultural, linguistic, religious, racial, and in terms of gender.

There are numerous areas of strength within MESALC, but to highlight two in particular: first, we take great pride in the number of prize-winning translators housed in our department, whose work bridges cultural and linguistic divides on a daily basis. Second, even though not based on any scientific study, I believe MESALC is unique in the country in terms of its large number of scholars doing cutting-edge research in women’s and gender issues in a cross-cultural context. As the Arab Spring continues to reverberate around the globe, MESALC has provided an interdisciplinary and forward-thinking forum for a university population eager to learn more about and engage with the region. Our speaker series on “*Discovering the Muslim World*” has featured a wide variety of renowned scholars, addressing a host of issues of key contemporary relevance within literature, politics, and history. I am proud to reflect on our Department’s pivotal and ongoing role in providing a forum for illuminating dialogue and inquisitive discussion about the Middle East and South Asia. I believe Mr. Jefferson would have been equally proud.

FARZANEH MILANI

# “Letters from Your Muslim Aunty” POETRY AND PROSE READING

February 7<sup>th</sup> - Guest Speaker **Mohja Kahf**

We were delighted to have **Mohja Kahf** as our first MESALC speaker of the year! She is an associate professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Arkansas and one of the most influential Arab-American poets of our time. Her poems have been projected on the facade of the New York Public Library by an installation artist and published in more conventional venues such as *Mizna*, *Banipal*, *Paris Review*, *Tiferet: A Journal of Literature and Spirituality*, and *Atlanta Review*, as well as in anthologies such as *Language for a New Century: Contemporary Poetry from the Middle East, Asia, and Beyond*. Throughout a career that spans almost two decades and in her scholarly and creative work, such as



*Western Representations of the Muslim Woman*, *E-mails from Scheherazad*, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, as well as her *Washington Post* article “Spare me the Sermon on Muslim Women,” and the *New York Times* article “She Carries Weapons: They Are Called Words,” Kahf portrays Muslim women who insist on defying old orientalist stereotypes of passivity and silence. They parade in her texts in all of their glory, and yes, not from behind the veil, but with their veils to shatter common beliefs and conventions, acquiring voice and agency as they insist on representing themselves. Indeed, in her poetry, Muslim and Arab men and women regain their humanity and profess a pride in their unique heritage, while insistently contributing to the American narrative and belonging to the national fabric that unites all of us.

HANADI AL-SAMMAN

## Faculty News MEHR FAROOQI & HANADI AL-SAMMAN



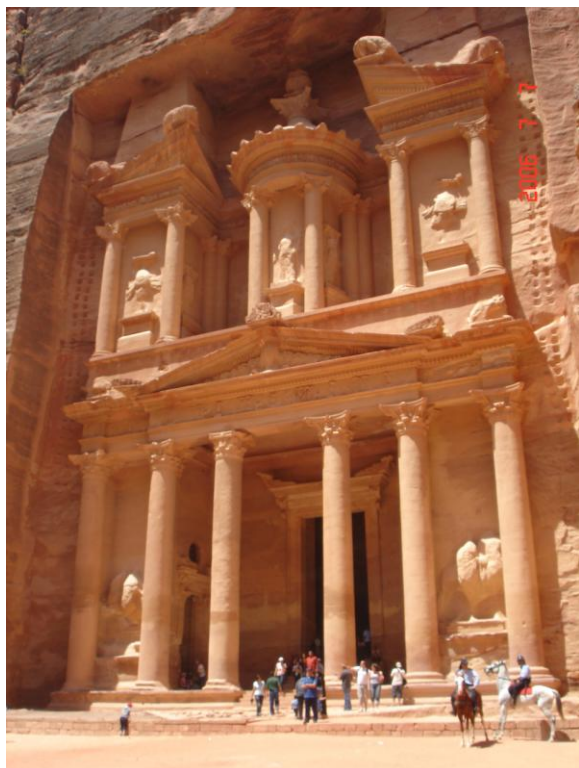
**Mehr Farooqi**, assistant professor of Urdu and South Asian Studies, is currently a Fellow at the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities. She is finishing work on her book manuscript tentatively titled “Vernacular Modernities: Urdu, Islam, and Postcoloniality in the Thought of Muhammad Hasan Askari.” Farooqi is also presenting a paper on Askari at this year’s American Association of Asian Studies Conference in Honolulu, Hawaii. She is the organizer of an interdisciplinary symposium, “The Literary City of South Asia,” to be held at the University of Virginia this fall. Noted Hindi writer and literary critic Alok Rai of Delhi University will be a key presenter at the event. Farooqi’s two-volume anthology, *The Oxford Anthology of Modern Urdu Literature*, has recently been released in a paperback edition.



**Hanadi Al-Samman**, assistant professor of Arabic Language and Literature, has several forthcoming articles of interest, among those “Remapping Arab Narrative and Sexual Desire in Salwa al-Neimi’s *The Proof of the Honey*” in the *Journal of Arabic Literature* and “North American Muslim Women’s Movements and the Politics of Islamic Feminine Hermeneutics” in *Mapping Arab Women’s Movements*. She has a book review in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society* entitled “Beyond Islamicate and Modern Sexualities: A Review of *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations Across Temporal Geographies of Desire*.” Recently, she could be heard on *HearSay* with Cathy Lewis on National Public Radio and *With Good Reason* of the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities with Jack G. Shaheen. In January of 2011, Al-Samman was a guest lecturer at Columbia University, speaking on “Remapping Arab Narrative and Sexual Desire in an Age of Comparative Consumption.” She has recently received the University of Virginia Summer Stipend Grant. In March 2011, Al-Samman was invited to the Virginia Festival of the Book as a moderator and organizer for a panel entitled “Muslim Women: Perceptions and Self-Perceptions.” Other panelists included Farzaneh Milani, Aziz Sachedina, Anne Rasmussen of the College of William and Mary, and Naeema Abdulgawad of Mary Baldwin College. Despite early morning scheduling, the event drew about 120 attendees and was one of the highest rated panels in the 2011 Virginia Festival of the Book.

# U.Va-Yarmouk Summer Arabic Program

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The University of Virginia-Yarmouk University Summer Arabic Program is an intensive, eight-week study in Modern Standard Arabic language and culture for undergraduate and graduate students, truly in a class of its own when it comes to long-standing and wide-reaching global partnerships between institutions of higher learning. The Program was founded by Mohammed Sawaie, Professor of Arabic in the Department of MESALC, and has been in operation since 1984.

The Program is held at Yarmouk University in Irbid, Jordan, a large research institution in a city of approximately 500,000 inhabitants located about 60 miles northwest of the capital Amman. Courses strike a balance between all language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In addition to Modern Standard Arabic, all students take a course in Jordanian dialect and conversation. Higher levels also include a special course in Media Arabic, focusing on radio, TV, newspapers, and magazines. Instructors are members of the Yarmouk University faculty.

One of the Program's primary goals is to immerse participants from U.Va and other major national institutions in the Arabic language and their learning community in Jordan. To promote this, students are housed in Yarmouk University facilities for the duration of their stay. Irbid is an ideal setting for rich cultural immersion, given its proximity to important historical and archaeological sites such as Amman, Jerash, the Dead Sea, the Jordan Valley, Petra, and Aqaba, and to neighboring countries in the region. Participants have ample opportunities to visit these and other places of interest during two Program-sponsored educational excursions, on weekends, during the mid-session break, or at the end of the Program.

For over 26 years, the U.Va-Yarmouk Program has played a vital part in not only providing students with a comprehensive, dynamic, and fast-paced immersion in Arabic, but igniting lifelong passions, nourishing global perspectives, and sustaining careers in a variety of fields associated with Middle Eastern Studies.

In these times where sustained and informed dialogue between the US and the Middle East is especially crucial, the U.Va-Yarmouk Program is a legacy the Department of Middle Eastern and South Asian Languages and Cultures is proud of, and one whose longevity, pioneering status, and excellence deserve University-wide recognition.



# MESALC Alumni News

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## Madeline Kristoff

Boren Fellow in Ramallah and MA candidate in International Peace and Conflict Resolution at American University School of International Service

Madeline Kristoff is currently on the Boren Fellowship in Ramallah, West Bank. Boren Fellowships provide up to \$30,000 to U.S. graduate students to add an important international and language component to their graduate education through specialization in area study, language study, or increased language proficiency. The Fellowships are funded by the National Security Education Program (NSEP), which focuses on geographic areas, languages, and fields of study deemed critical to U.S. national security.

During her ten months in Ramallah, Madeline has studied Arabic, both MSA and colloquial, at Birzeit University, through the Palestine and Arabic Studies (PAS) program, and conducted research for her MA thesis, evaluating EUPOL COPPS (European Union Police Mission Coordinating Office for Palestinian Police Support). She will graduate from American University School of International Service with her MA in International Peace and Conflict Resolution after returning from her time in the West Bank.

## Shayan Ghajar

InsideIRAN project of The Century Foundation and National Security Network

Shayan Ghajar writes about current events in Iran based on news sites in Persian from within Iran. The site also maintains contacts in Iran to obtain firsthand perspectives on current events. The readership includes numerous policymakers in Congress, members of branches of the government concerned with security and defense, and many European Parliamentarians.

Shayan states, "I would not have had the opportunity to secure this job without the Farsi language training provided by Professor Korangy and Professor Hajibashi. Additionally, the courses provided in the program on the modern history of Iran and the Middle East were essential to understanding the current political dynamic as well, which greatly enhanced my ability to obtain this job."

As a result, Shayan has been working at InsideIRAN for over a year now, and has had the opportunity to meet many leaders and activists within Iran's Green Movement.

"It has been incredibly enriching and an amazing adventure," Shayan says. "It would have been impossible without the excellent academic preparation provided by MESALC."

## Yasmina Mrabet

MA candidate at George Mason University's School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution

Yasmina Mrabet recently joined a consultancy firm called Kommon Denominator. Founded by Dr. Alma Abdulhadi Jadallah in 1996, Kommon Denominator (KD) is an award-winning woman-owned firm dedicated to helping our government, corporate, and community clients successfully navigate conflict and cultural challenges by transcending limited practices and identifying untapped opportunities. The firm approaches this work in a collaborative way, increasing clients' understanding and capacity for authentically and creatively fulfilling their most important needs, aspirations, and interests.

The KD team brings broad and complementary expertise in the areas of conflict prevention and mitigation, organizational leadership and development, training and education, monitoring and evaluation, capacity building, and public participatory process.

Their cultural competency includes North America, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, and their language abilities include English, Arabic, and French.

Yasmina says, "The interdisciplinary nature of the MESALC department gave me a wider and more nuanced lens through which I could learn and understand the Middle East. The courses I took with Dr. Hanadi Al-Samman have inspired me to write my Master's thesis on the experiences of Arab Muslim women attending American universities."

Reflecting on her time here, Yasmina says, "I received an incredible education at the University of Virginia, and my experiences as a student were overwhelmingly positive. The academic rigor at U.VA, along with encouragement and inspiration from my professors, taught me the importance of maintaining high standards for myself and putting in the effort necessary to meet those standards--this lesson is the reason I have reached my current position at Kommon Denominator, where I am (quite literally) embarking on the career of my dreams."

## Brendan Raedy

Public Affairs Specialist at the U.S. Department of State in the Bureau of Public Affairs, Office of Public Liaison

In April, Brendan is scheduled to host a group of 15 to 20 University of Virginia students at the Department of State, to be briefed by a member of the policy planning staff.

Brendan says, "One of the things I value most from my time with the MESALC department was my broad exposure to a diverse student body and faculty that provided me not only with an expansive conceptual and academic exposure to the region, but also the cultural and interpersonal skills needed to work cooperatively with individuals from the Middle East and North Africa as well as South and Central Asia."

# Calendar of Upcoming Lectures and Events

## April 22

5 - 6:30pm “How Iranians Got Their Names: The Introduction of Family Names in 1925 and Its Consequences”

Professor Houchang Chehabi  
International Relations and History  
Boston University

Monroe 130

## April 27

5:30 - 7pm “Latest Works”

Professor Hashim Sarkis  
Landscape Architecture and Urbanism in Muslim Societies  
Harvard University

Campbell Hall 158

## May 2

3 - 5:00pm Lecture with Elif Shafak

World-renowned novelist Elif Shafak visits the University of Virginia to read from and discuss her recently translated book, *Black Milk*.

Organized by Turkic Connections & MESALC.  
Free and open to the public. No Registration Required!

Venue TBA



## May 22

1:15pm MESALC Diploma  
Ceremony & Graduation Luncheon  
Location: Shea House

Luncheon to follow the MESALC Diploma Ceremony. Please **RSVP by April 29**.

**Congratulations Graduates!**

## FEATURED GRADUATE Eva Malliarakis

Notes from MESALC MA Graduate Fall '10

It is seldom that we find an institution capable of providing a well-rounded experience, offering a wide selection of area studies and languages accompanied by exceptional faculty and students. The University of Virginia continues in its path of academic excellence as it welcomes a new graduate program for Middle Eastern and South Asian Languages and Cultures.

Compared to other institutions who offer advanced degrees in similar area studies, U.Va provides students a chance to tailor their studies according to their specific interests and career goals. The MESALC program gives students a chance to explore an area in depth while also maintaining a wide scope on issues related to their studies. Throughout my studies in the MESALC program, I was able to receive one-on-one attention from faculty as well as participate with fellow classmates. The MESALC faculty truly makes this program stand apart from all others. Their dedication to their students, academic credentials, and experience is overwhelming. I am very thankful to all the faculty and staff who have made the MESALC MA program possible.

Without this program, my career possibilities would be much fewer. Having been through this program, I feel more prepared and better equipped for my career in the intelligence community. There is no doubt that U.Va and the Charlottesville community will continue to grow, and I hope to be a permanent part of that community some day. I am proud to have been a part of the MA MESALC program and a Cavalier. Go Hoos!

# Spring 2011 Lecture Series      **DISCOVERING THE MUSLIM WORLD**

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February 7<sup>th</sup>, 5 – 6:00pm Nau Hall 101

*“Letters from Your Muslim Aunty: Poetry  
and Prose Reading”*

Mohja Kahf, Associate Professor of  
Comparative Literature



February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 3:30 – 5pm Monroe Hall 130

*“Jerusalem, Mecca, and Qom: The Politics of  
Identity and Religious Peacebuilding”*

Roy Hange, Mennonite Pastor and Instructor



March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3:30 – 5pm Cabell Hall 311

*“The Tribal Modern: Race, Class, and Gender  
in Qatar”*

Miriam Cooke, Professor of Arabic and Arabic  
Cultures  
Duke University



March 16, 3:30 – 5pm Cabell Hall 311

*“The Genus of Sex: How Jins became Sex  
in Iran”*

Afsaneh Najmabadi, Professor of History and  
Studies of Women, Gender, and Sexuality  
Harvard University

March 30<sup>th</sup>, 5 – 6:30pm Nau Hall 211

*“A Reading from The Good Daughter: A  
Memoir of My Mother’s Hidden Life”*

Jasmin Darznik, Novelist and Professor of English  
Literature  
Washington and Lee University



April 13<sup>th</sup>, 3:30 – 5pm Maury 115

*“Islamic Feminism, Headed Where?”*

Margot Badran, Historian and Gender Studies  
Specialist  
Georgetown University



April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 5 – 6:30pm Monroe Hall 130

*“How Iranians Got Their Names: The  
Introduction of Family Names in 1925 and its  
Consequences”*

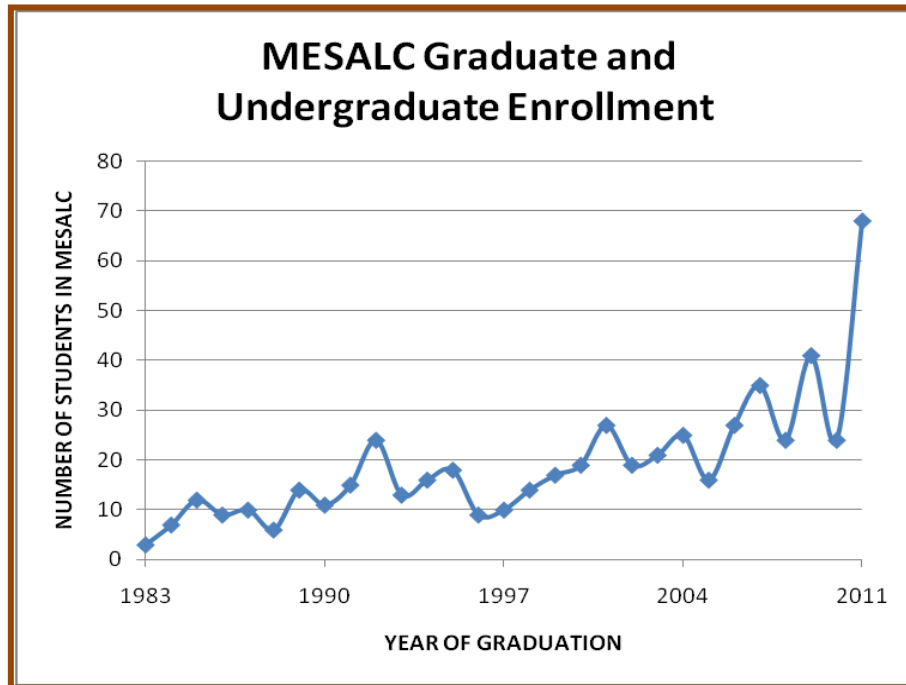
Houchang Chehabi, Professor of International  
Relations and History  
Boston University



April 27<sup>th</sup>, 5:30 – 7pm Campbell Hall 158

*“Latest Works”*

Hashim Sarkis, Professor of Landscape  
Architecture & Urbanism in Muslim Societies  
Harvard University

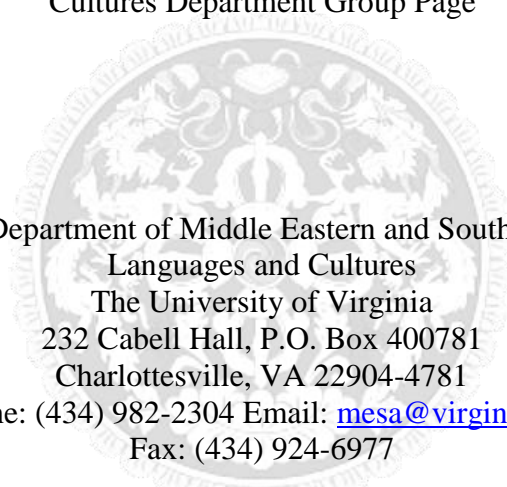


The chart above illustrates how the number of graduates and undergraduates (both majors and minors) in MESALC has dramatically increased over the years. (Prepared by Conan Carey)



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