

# STRATEGIC PLAN

March 1, 2005

## Mission Statement

1. To promote understanding of the Middle East through teaching, research, and community outreach.

The Middle East is on many minds these days, and there is a dramatic need for improved understanding of these subjects. Yet even before the current War on Terrorism, understanding these subjects was a priority for North Carolina and the United States. Our ever-expanding connections with Muslim societies--through migration, trade, investment, and cultural flows--demanded that we re-think old assumptions and explore new realities.

2. To explore and promote cross-regional approaches to Middle Eastern studies.

Carolina is well known for this innovative approach to the study of the Middle East. As Islamic ideas and movements circulate across regions, it is increasingly important to avoid geographic blinders. To pick an example from current headlines: If al-Qa'ida terrorists move from Saudi Arabia or Yemen to Pakistan or Malaysia, must Middle East studies stop studying them?

## Strategic Priorities for the Next Five Years

1. Expand the concentration in Middle East Studies within the Curriculum in International and Area Studies through increased course offerings (Years 1-5).

The Middle East concentration, founded three years ago, offers only an average number of courses, as compared with the other area studies concentrations within the Curriculum in International and Area Studies. Given student interest in this region, and the region's importance in public policy, this number should be larger. One challenge is the number of faculty teaching in this area; another challenge is a function of Carolina's success: our faculty's prominence often takes them away from the classroom through research grants and fellowships.

2. Build the Carolina Center for the Study of the Middle East and Muslim Civilizations with staffing equivalent to the other area studies centers on campus. (Year 2)

This Center, founded in 2002, has already gained prominence among Middle East specialists for its cross-regional perspective. It organizes

dozens of colloquia and cultural events for students and the community each year, and serves as a clearinghouse for more than one hundred events on the Middle East and Muslim Civilizations. In addition, it generates internal and external funding applications and is active in the planning for the new Global Education Center, which is due to open in 2006. To assist the Center in applying for external funds, and to put its operations on a firm administrative footing, the Center has received a half-time teaching release for the director and a one course release for the full-time associate director, with staff support from the Carolina Asia Center. This level of staffing emulates the other area studies centers on campus and is preparing the Center for its place in the new Global Education Center.

### 3. Broadening course offerings and building infrastructure through application for external funding (Years 1-5).

University resources for instruction and research-support can be augmented and leveraged through external funding sources. We will pursue several such sources: a Title VI grant from the U.S. Department of Education to establish an undergraduate-level National Resource Center in Middle East Studies (Fall 2005); a private foundation grant to support a research group on "The Middle East and Beyond: Cross-Regional Approaches to Middle East Studies" (growing out of the longstanding Carolina Seminar on Comparative Islamic Studies); a private foundation grant to support the Muslim Networks Consortium, of which Carolina is a charter member; and private donations, for which purpose the Center will continue to work closely with University development officers.

### 4. Integrating Study Abroad into the concentration (Years 1-5).

The Center encourages students to participate in Study Abroad and will work to offer a number of opportunities for both beginning and advanced students who wish to study in the region. We have two priorities. First, we actively support the [UNC Summer in Jordan](#) study abroad program, a program led by UNC faculty members designed to introduce undergraduates to the peoples and cultures of the Middle East. Second, with the assistance of the Study Abroad Office, we will identify additional study abroad programs to meet more specific and academic needs of the students who are seeking more advanced study. To this end, we are especially eager to pursue a wide range of collaborative possibilities with the American University in Cairo, the Bosphorus University in Istanbul, the University of Jordan in Amman, and other campuses with which UNC has already established strong institutional and personal ties.

### 5. Strengthening the concentration's course offerings through course-development grants (Years 1-5).

Ongoing course-development grant competitions will offer incentives for faculty to develop new courses that fit the goals of the Middle East concentration, especially on regions that are not extensively covered (Islam in Europe, for example); to revise existing courses to correspond as fully as possible to these goals; and to revive infrequently taught courses.

6. Strengthening of the concentration's core-course faculty through the hiring of a junior-level Middle East historian with a specialization in the study of North Africa and a familiarity with cross-regional perspectives (Year 1).

The Middle East concentration requires students to take "Introduction to Islamic Civilization," a two-course series offered jointly by the History and Religious Studies departments (HIST 36-37/RELI 25-26). Only one semester of this series is required for the concentration. This series is offered every academic year, rotating among two faculty members, one in History (Professor Sarah Shields) and one in Religious Studies (Professors Carl Ernst). We recommend that a second historian be hired so that the course series can be shared more equally among the two departments. This hire would also contribute to the History department's goal of minimizing the number of regions covered only by a sole faculty member. Since the existing Middle East historian on campus specializes in the Levant, we propose that the new faculty member balance this focus with an emphasis on North Africa, the other "wing" of the Middle East. This specialization is additionally useful in contributing to the efforts to build African Studies at Carolina; Professor Julius Nyang'oro, chair of the Department of African and African American Studies and a member of Center, emphasizes the importance of this coverage for ongoing grant-application efforts in African Studies.

7. Accommodating the growth of the Arabic-language program through the hiring of a third faculty member in a tenure-track position (Year 1).

Enrollment numbers in first-year Arabic have risen dramatically over the past several years, to more than 60 students in Fall 2005, filling the second section of the introductory class that was opened several years ago. The two faculty members and one lecturer currently teaching Arabic, Professors Sahar Amer and Nadia Yaqub and Instructor Nasser Isleem, offer four years of the language, in addition to courses on Arabic literature and culture. As student demand for courses in this area continues to rise, an additional faculty member will allow us to offer more sections of Arabic and a wider array of non-language courses. This appointment can be made jointly with Asian Studies and another department, and might also be shared with Duke University, since Carolina and Duke have collaborated in Arabic language instruction in the past.

8. Building the concentration's course offerings in social science through the hiring of a junior-level Middle East expert with a specialization in Islamist movements and a familiarity with cross-regional perspectives (Year 2).

The Middle East concentration's course offerings lean somewhat towards the humanities, in large part because the primary teaching duties of the Center's social science faculty lie in disciplinary rather than regional subjects. This disciplinary focus is a strength, not a weakness, since it allows our social-science faculty to speak to broader disciplinary audiences. However, for curricular purposes, we consider it a priority to balance the course offerings with the hiring of a social scientist. We propose an emphasis on the single issue that is bringing massive public and scholarly attention to the region: the subject of Islamist movements. This issue area lies across many social-science disciplines, and the hire might be made in any social science department, possibly in conjunction with the Curriculum in International and Area Studies.

9. Building library holdings through the hiring of a Middle Eastern collections development librarian in collaboration with Duke University and North Carolina State University (Year 3), with ongoing funding for the further development of the Ellen-Fairbanks Collection of Middle Eastern and Islamic World Films (Years 1-5).

The University Library's Middle East collections are excellent for undergraduate instructional purposes, with considerable holdings in European languages, basic holdings in Arabic, and an unparalleled collection of documentary films on the Middle East and the Islamic world (the Ellen-Fairbanks Collection). However, to bring the Library to the graduate research level will require additional collecting in the languages of the Middle East, and this will require a librarian who specializes in these languages. Following the model of the South Asian bibliographer, who was hired jointly by UNC-CH, Duke, and NCSU, we propose a Middle East bibliographer who will serve all three campuses and develop complementary collections for each.

10. Filling gaps in the concentration's course offerings through five additional junior-level positions (Years 3-5).

We propose that the following fields ought to be covered more fully in order to build a concentration that fulfills Carolina's ambitions in this area. Each of these searches should emphasize candidates who are familiar with cross-regional perspectives.

(1) Islamic art history. The Department of Art has identified this position as a priority for its next growth hire. The position would build on the significant Islamic art holdings in the Art Library and the

Ackland Art Museum.

(2) Persian language and literature. The Department of Asian Studies currently offers two years of Persian language instruction through lecturers and adjunct faculty positions; raising the status of these positions to tenure-track faculty would build the University's commitment to this important language. In combination with a lecturer or adjunct faculty, this position would allow a third year of the language to be offered, giving students in the Middle East concentration a choice of languages for specialization (currently, only Arabic is taught through three years).

(3) Central Asian history. This position would promote linkages with Carolina's strengths in Eastern Europe/Eurasian studies.

(4) Middle Eastern media studies. This position could bridge the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Journalism; it might also take advantage of the Ellen-Fairbanks Bodman Collection of Middle East and Islamic World Films.

(5) Middle Eastern economic development. This position could bridge the College of Arts and Sciences and the Kenan/Flagler School of Business

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