

**Middle  
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Association**

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July 14, 2008

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Your Excellencies,

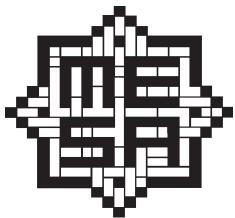
I write on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) of the Middle East Studies Association of North America to express our deep concern about the delay of the Egyptian Ministry of Higher Education in replying to a US Fulbright Commission recommendation for a grant to an American graduate student and the rejection of that recommendation without a clearly stated reason.

The Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, the Association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has more than 2800 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

We understand that there is a formal agreement or a protocol which regulates relations between the US Fulbright Commission and Egypt. Our intent is not to question its contents. Our goal is, rather, to draw your attention to the need for greater transparency regarding the research topics the Egyptian Ministry of Higher Education deems appropriate for Fulbright scholars and about how quickly it will reply to recommendations made by the US Fulbright Commission. It is in the best interests of both the US and Egypt that US students and scholars learn about Egyptian society, culture, and politics. It is also in the best interests of both countries that students and scholars be encouraged to study Arabic through extended stays in Egypt.

Because the application process for grants like the Fulbright is so long and time-consuming, it is essential that those involved in its administration act quickly. Students and scholars must apply for such research fellowships a full year before it is to take effect. When they are notified that their application has met with favor, they need time to arrange for all the practical details that a prolonged absence requires. And if the application does not meet with favor, they need time to make alternative arrangements.

The most recent case, involving an American graduate student from the University of Arizona, is especially problematic. First, the refusal came so late that the student was unable to arrange for an alternative research opportunity. Second, the reason given for the refusal was not clear.



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page 2/Re: Delays to US Fulbright Commission grantees

As this case and others like it become better known, there will be two immediate consequences neither of which is desirable. First, US students and scholars will increasingly turn away from attempting to study Egypt. Second, they will decide to seek funding opportunities that are more reliable than those offered by the Fulbright Commission. Not only will scholarship in the US suffer, but so too will scholarship in Egypt. Indeed, the whole purpose of the Fulbright program risks being thwarted by the continuation of these practices.

With all due respect and prompted by the high regard in which we hold the cultural and scholarly traditions of Egypt, we urge the Egyptian Ministry of Higher Education to implement clear and objective standards for judging research projects and to communicate them to the US Fulbright Commission. We also urge the Ministry to respond quickly and efficiently to the recommendations submitted by the US Fulbright Commission.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely yours,

Amy Newhall  
Executive Director  
MESA

cc:

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