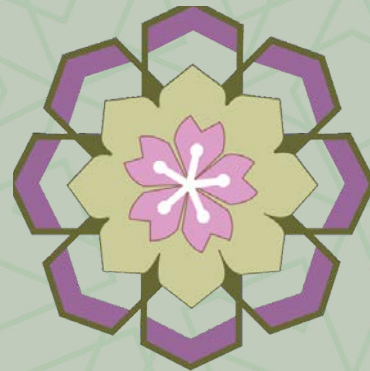


Bi-annual Newsletter of the Middle East Studies Association

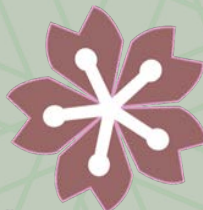
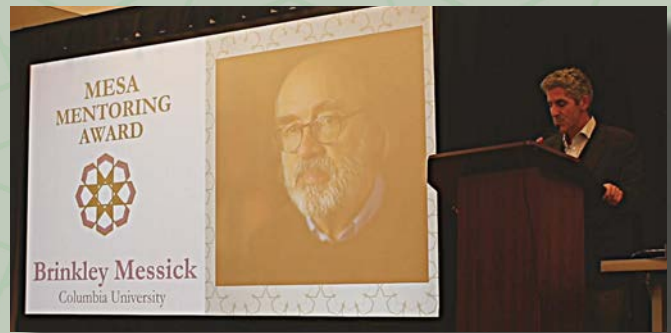
ISSUES IN MIDDLE EAST STUDIES

Vol 47 Issue 2

Fall 2025



Moments from MESA 2025



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Issues in Middle East Studies is the biannual newsletter (spring, fall) of the Middle East Studies Association of North America, Inc. and is a benefit of membership. Hard copies are available to members upon request; postage will be collected for those residing outside the United States.

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ABOUT MESA

The Middle East Studies Association (MESA) is a private, non-profit, learned society that brings together scholars, educators and those interested in the study of the region from all over the world. From its inception in 1966 with 51 founding members, MESA has increased its membership into the thousands and now serves as an umbrella organization for dozens of institutional members and affiliated organizations. The association is a constituent society of the American Council of Learned Societies, the National Council of Area Studies Associations, and a member of the National Humanities Alliance.

As part of its goal to advance learning, facilitate communication and promote cooperation, MESA sponsors an annual meeting that is a leading international forum for scholarship, intellectual exchange and pedagogical innovation. It is responsible for the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, the premiere journal on the region, the *MESA Review of Middle East Studies* and *Issues in Middle East Studies*, a biannual newsletter. An awards program recognizes scholarly achievement, service to the profession, undergraduate education, and exemplary student mentoring. MESA is governed by a nine-member Board of Directors elected by the membership.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Jeffrey D. Reger

MESA initiated three major projects over this past year.

The first was strategic litigation in response to the new administration's violation of the First Amendment and of academic freedom by targeting protesters on campuses across the country for their protected free speech.

As we conclude 2025, I am grateful first and foremost to our members. This year has felt remarkably long. As MESA Past President Ash Bâli has written in these pages over the last year, we have sought to meet the moment, and to support our members. In addition to our main task of organizing the Annual Meeting, as well as supporting the efforts of our Board and our dozens of committees, MESA initiated three major projects over this past year.

The first was strategic litigation in response to the new administration's violation of the First Amendment and of academic freedom by targeting protesters on campuses across the country for their protected free speech. MESA's participation in *AAUP v Rubio* was crucial to establishing standing on behalf of all plaintiffs, a key hurdle in litigation. MESA was found by the court to have both associational standing on behalf of our members, and organizational standing, due to the harms to our organization. We cannot thank our witnesses and our legal team at the Knight First Amendment Institute in partnership with Sher Tremonte LLP enough. We look forward to the remedy to be proposed by the court in the new year, after the case was decided in September in our favor (see page 9).

The second was a new, two-year grant from the Open Society Foundations. The grant will both fund the continued work of the MESA Global Academy (see page 18) and a new MESA staff position.



Dr. Julie Ellison joins MESA as our new Academic Autonomy Program Manager. Dr. Ellison was previously the Associate Director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Arizona, where she helped to convene the Consortium of Middle East National Resource Centers. She holds a Ph.D. in Near Eastern Studies from the University of Arizona, and brings a broad and deep network of contacts at institutions across the country. In addition, Julie had been a graduate student worker for MESA at the annual meeting and at our Tucson office. We are glad to welcome her to our team!

Julie Ellison will staff the newly formed Committee on Academic Autonomy, which proactively advocates for the field and for its institutions as the engines of knowledge production (see page 15). She will also staff the mid-year virtual research workshop (see page 5). This new, potentially biannual initiative is in response to increased barriers to participation for our colleagues overseas in particular. We plan to hold the inaugural virtual workshop in early June 2026.

The third major project was the development of a new strategic plan, which we are proud to include here, and which will govern our strategic objectives over the next five years. Please see page 7.

MESA's committees have remained very active, including of course the Committee on Academic Freedom, and in particular its North America wing. We are so appreciative of the work of both wings, and we would like to acknowledge the incredible service of Dr. Laurie Brand, who has completed her final term as CAF Chair (please see page 17). We welcome Dr. Judith Tucker as the new chair of CAF.

Two other committees should also be noted here: The Precarity Committee has been reactivated and organized a special session and a workshop at the 2025 annual meeting. The Publications Committee has remained active, assisting with the simultaneous transition of new journal editors for both *IJMES* and for *RoMES* this past summer.

Turning to continuing work: I must highlight the accomplishments of the Academic Freedom Initiative, and the remarkable work of the research leads and co-chairs of the Task Force on Civil and Human Rights, Drs. Lara Deeb and Darryl Li, who have been tirelessly supported by Dr. Bâli as well. Throughout this past year, the AFI and the Task Force have created extensive public resources, from Know Your Rights webinars to Frequently Asked Question guides addressing crises affecting our members and the broader field. We have also published the first AFI report "Discriminating Against Dissent: The Weaponization of Civil Rights Law to Repress Campus Speech on Palestine." The report is primarily based on just one of the AFI datasets, all of which we will be putting on a standalone website in spring 2026, with more reports to come.

The rest of the staff of the Secretariat has continued in place, which has been a remarkably helpful source of continuity and support. I must thank Sara Palmer, Calliandra Hermanson, and Donia Khraishi each for their myriad efforts throughout this past year on their projects as well. I am proud to lead this efficient team of colleagues at the Secretariat, without whom none of the association's work would be possible.

I would also like to thank the Secretariat's hosts at Georgetown University's Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, which celebrated its 50th anniversary this year.

Finally, I must thank my fellow officers Ash Bâli and President Ussama Makdisi, for their exceptional efforts over this past year. Ussama ably stepped in to preside over the annual meeting at the last moment, due to the untimely passing of Ash's father on the eve of MESA 2025. Ash, who became Past President at the end of this last annual meeting, has been an incredibly energetic and responsive president over the last two years. We are so fortunate for her unflagging commitment to MESA and to our colleagues across the field. I am thankful for her dynamism and camaraderie, as we faced so many challenges together. We look forward to her presidential address, deferred next year to Boston at MESA 2026.

The second was a new, two-year grant from the Open Society Foundations.

The third major project was the development of a new strategic plan

MESA's First Virtual Research Workshop

June 2-4, 2026

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

All are invited to submit proposals for the First Virtual Research Workshop held by MESA online. Proposals should relate to MESA's mission of scholarship and advocacy primarily concerning the region of the Middle East (including Southwest Asia, the Arab world, and North Africa) from the seventh century to today, though not at the exclusion of earlier time periods. Other areas of Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas—including diaspora communities—are also included as part of the study of the transnational dimensions of the societies of the Middle East in an interdisciplinary and comparative context.

Note: The 60th MESA Annual Meeting will be held in person in Boston, MA on November 21-24, 2026. This is a separate submission process.

To see the entire call for proposals, go [here](#). Questions about the call for proposals are always welcome. Please email virtualworkshop@mesana.org.

Category of proposals:

Individual paper abstracts: One abstract to be placed on a session by the Committee if accepted. Selected individual abstracts will be combined with other similar proposals to create put-together panels.

Criteria for acceptance of paper proposals:

Proposals will be reviewed on the basis of the following three criteria:

Contribution to the field.

Does the proposal indicate clearly the contribution that the author(s) aim to make in their discipline(s)? This contribution may involve a novel approach, original source material, an intriguing argument or finding, or (in the case of pre-organized panels and roundtables) a gathering of experts to examine an important subject.

Source material.

Does the proposal indicate clearly the source material that the author(s) draw on? This may take the form of archival collections, published or unpublished texts, datasets, interviews, ethnographic observations, pedagogical interventions, experiments, or other forms of evidence.

Findings.

Does the proposal indicate clearly the original conclusions that the author(s) have drawn? Because space in the proposal is limited, conclusions might include general insights combined with one or two specific instances that illustrate the texture of the presentation being proposed for the workshop.

Artificial Intelligence Policy:

MESA prohibits the use of artificial intelligence (AI), except for refining your own text, such as through spelling or grammar checks. Authors are responsible for their own submissions. Use of AI beyond these guidelines is grounds for rejection. MESA is currently developing a more detailed policy on the use of artificial intelligence, based on the principles of accountability, transparency, and academic integrity.

Important Dates:

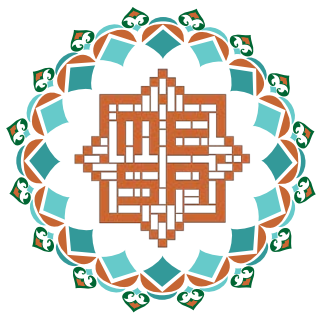
Submission Deadline: All submissions must be submitted by 11:59 AM (Noon), Eastern Standard Time, on Friday, January 9, 2026.

Decision Letters: The review committee plans to send out decision letters by email on or before February 27, 2026.

Participation Confirmation: Participants whose proposals are accepted must confirm participation by March 30, 2026.

Submissions:

Please see the full list of procedures and the link to the submission form on [MESA's website](#).



Don't forget to renew your Membership for 2026!

MESA continues to fortify its capacities in the defense of academic freedom and to enhance our preparedness to defend our students, our colleagues and our field of study. We seek to preserve speech and associational rights on campuses.

Continue to be a part of this academic community by renewing your membership. Your participation is important and our influence strengthens with a robust membership.

A Reminder when renewing your membership

PROVIDE KEY DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

FOR STATISTICAL AND PLANNING PURPOSES

To understand and best serve our membership, MESA's Board of Directors and relevant board-constituted committees would like to have the most up-to-date demographic data.

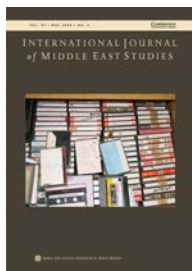
Who is MESA?

You may always of course opt out of having your name or profile appear in the Membership Directory (now located inside myMESA), but your member record provides important data for statistical and planning purposes. **Any demographic data shared with MESA committees is anonymized and confidential.**

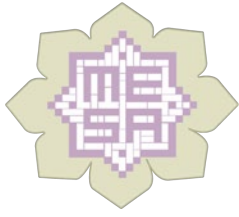
For those in the membership directory, it is also important to maintain your membership profile so that you can be found as an expert in your field through the Find-A-Member search function. This searchable database is used by editors of journals, programs, and others in the field.

Thank you for allowing us to capture a current picture of the state of the field (membership by discipline, area of focus, and so forth), which requires up-to-date data in myMESA. Simply provide any changes to your contact information, research interests, and other details when logged into myMESA.

SELECT THE DELIVERY OPTIONS FOR IJMES AND IMES



Please be reminded to select the delivery method — digital only or digital and print — for both the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and *Issues in Middle East Studies*. The default selection is digital. If you have already renewed, you can view your delivery method in myMESA under “My Membership” (in the Membership tab).



MESA's Strategic Plan

2025-2029

The Board of Directors developed an updated strategic plan with goals and objectives to guide the Board and the Secretariat over the next five years. These goals serve as guidelines for MESA's leadership as it carries out the association's mission in a changing environment concerning research, pedagogy, employment, and threats to academic freedom and civil rights. MESA is committed to transparency and pluralism. This plan is an evolving document, and we continue to welcome input and comments from our members.

The new plan includes the following four areas.

Membership services and support

MESA is committed to expanding services and support for our membership, with a particular emphasis on the needs of graduate students and precarious fellows at a challenging time for our field. We hope to undertake initiatives that will promote the retention of our membership and help them navigate a context of increasing structural precarity

Academic freedom, advocacy, and coalition-building

MESA will continue to develop its leadership role in defending academic freedom as the higher education sector comes under increasing pressures. In particular, our new Academic Freedom Initiative provides us with a unique opportunity to gather granular information that can be leveraged to offer partners concrete data for organizing new advocacy efforts and addressing increasing structural precarity across academia in the changing political environment.

Communications strategy

MESA is committed to raising awareness of its many activities as an Association and reaching a broader audience, though these goals will be balanced with attention to managing reputational risk that may come with heightened visibility.

Financial planning and institutionalized development

In order to ensure MESA's continued independence from external political pressures, MESA will professionalize and institutionalize its fundraising and development practices to include outreach to higher-capacity donors and a more systematized approach to advancement and outreach generally.

Each of the four areas provides objectives and additional details in fulfilling those objectives. The entire strategic plan is posted on MESA's website, and can be seen [here](#).

Recent Report by MESA and AAUP

Discriminating Against Dissent: The Weaponization of Civil Rights Law to Repress Campus Speech on Palestine

Weaponized allegations of antisemitism driven by pro-Israel groups have been central to attacks on campus speech—including the Trump administration’s brazen war on higher education—over the past two years, according to a [new report](#) jointly published by MESA and AAUP.

The report, “Discriminating Against Dissent: The Weaponization of Civil Rights Law to Repress Campus Speech on Palestine,” is the first systematic empirical study of government investigations and private lawsuits against US colleges and universities alleging antisemitism under Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

“The findings in this report underscore how the Civil Rights Act of 1964—which passed in response to years of nonviolent civil disobedience against racial injustice—is being cynically misused to squash political dissent and speech that advocates for the human rights of Palestinians,” said AAUP General Counsel Veena Dubal. “This is a perverse outcome.”

The report documents the surge in investigations since October 7, 2023, with more opened in the last two months of 2023 (25) than in all previous years combined (24). Investigations broke record numbers in 2024 (39) and are on track to do so again in 2025 (with 38 as of September 30).

Most investigations are prompted by complaints received from the public, including people who have no relationship with the schools under investigation. All but one of the 102 antisemitism complaint letters analyzed focus on speech critical of Israel; of these, 80 percent describe speech critical of Israel or Zionism with no reference to Jews or Judaism as antisemitism; 50 percent of the complaints consist solely of such criticism.

“Our members, because of their expertise on the region, have long borne the brunt of allegations that falsely equate criticism of Israel with antisemitism,” said MESA President Ashî Bâli. “Complaints like these penalize scholars for teaching basic facts about the region.”

The explosion in antisemitism investigations has been largely driven by a handful of pro-Israel and right-wing organizations; such groups were involved in 78 percent of complaints leading to investigations.

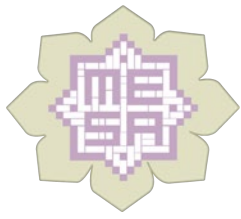
The rise in antisemitism investigations coincided with a sharp decrease in investigations for racial harassment against African Americans, Native Americans, and other federally recognized racial minorities. Between October 7, 2023, and the end of 2024, the Biden administration opened more antisemitism probes against colleges and universities (65) than for all other types of racial harassment combined (38). While racial harassment complaints against all schools dipped by 6 percent from FY 2023 to FY 2024, the number of investigations actually opened dropped by 18 percent. The Trump administration has ceased racial harassment investigations altogether, part of its broader dismantling of the Department of Education.

Federal antisemitism investigations in the final year of the Biden administration pressured over twenty schools to accept deals in which they agreed to sweeping policy changes such as handing over extensive data on internal antisemitism complaints—including the names of accusers and accused.

The report also analyzes the twenty-eight Title VI antisemitism lawsuits filed to date by pro-Israel groups against universities in federal courts. Although no case has yet resulted in a final judgment for plaintiffs, some have resulted in settlements implementing even more draconian policy changes than government investigations.

Finally, the report analyzes the work of the Trump administration’s multi-agency Task Force to Combat Antisemitism, including its pretextual use of antisemitism allegations to cut federal funding to universities and the coercive agreements it has extracted from Columbia and Brown Universities. The report also describes the backgrounds and agendas of key players in the Trump administration’s war on higher education.

To print a copy, go [here](#).



AAUP v. Rubio

In Landmark Ruling, Federal Court says Trump Administration Violated First Amendment by Deporting Foreign Citizens for Pro-Palestinian Advocacy

BOSTON (September 30, 2025)—Judge William G. Young of the U.S. District Court for the District of Massachusetts today ruled in the lawsuit filed by the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) and others that the Trump administration’s policy of arresting, detaining, and deporting noncitizen students and faculty members for their pro-Palestinian advocacy violates the First Amendment. The ruling comes after a two-week trial in the case brought by the Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University, partnering with Sher Tremonte LLP, on behalf of MESA and the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). It was the first major trial of President Trump’s second term.

Filed in March, the lawsuit alleged that the Trump administration’s “ideological deportation” policy violates the First Amendment and is unconstitutional. The nine-day trial in July that included the testimony of 15 witnesses forced the disclosure of a wealth of new details about the policy and its devastating effects on campuses nationwide.

In today’s ruling, Judge Young wrote, “This case—perhaps the most important ever to fall within the jurisdiction of this district court—squarely presents the issue whether non-citizens lawfully present here in [the] United States actually have the same free speech rights as the rest of us. The Court answers this Constitutional question unequivocally ‘yes, they do.’ ‘No law’ means ‘no law.’ The First Amendment does not draw President Trump’s invidious distinction and it is not to be found in our history or jurisprudence.”

The following can be attributed to **Ash Bâli, president of MESA**:

“We deeply appreciate the court’s principled ruling. The Trump Administration’s actions have grievously harmed our colleagues, by treating protected free speech and freedom of association as deportable offenses. Our ability to meet, as a scholarly association, and to discuss critical topics of our field, have been directly diminished by the chilling effect of the government’s ideological deportations. The attack on the constitutionally protected rights of our members and conference attendees is unconscionable, and must be redressed.”

The following can be attributed to **Jameel Jaffer, executive director at the Knight First Amendment Institute**:

“This is a historic ruling that should have immediate implications for the Trump administration’s policies. If the First Amendment means anything, it means the government can’t imprison people simply because it disagrees with their political views. We welcome the court’s reaffirmation of this basic idea, which is foundational to our democracy.”

The following can be attributed to **Todd Wolfson, president of the American Association of University Professors**:

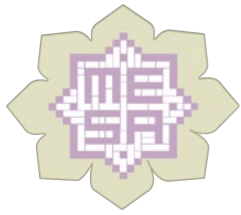
“The Trump administration’s attempt to deport students for their political views is an assault on the Constitution and a betrayal of American values. This trial exposed their true aim: to intimidate and silence anyone who dares oppose them. If we fail to fight back, Trump’s thought police won’t stop at pro-Palestinian voices—they will come for anyone who speaks out. Defending democracy means standing up now—loudly, visibly, and together.”

See the full press release at <https://mesana.org/news/2025/09/30/mesa-aup-and-knight-institute-lawsuit-ruling>.

In addition to the AAUP and MESA, plaintiffs include AAUP chapters at Harvard, Rutgers, and NYU. The associations’ members include tens of thousands of faculty and students across the country.

Having found that the policy violates the First Amendment, the court will turn to the question of relief in the coming weeks.

Lawyers on the case include Ramya Krishnan, Jameel Jaffer, Alex Abdo, Scott Wilkens, Carrie DeCell, Xiangnong (George) Wang, Talya Nevins, Jackson Busch, and Stephany Kim of the Knight First Amendment Institute; Ahilan Arulanantham; Michael Tremonte, Noam Biale, Alexandra Conlon, and Courtney Gans of Sher Tremonte; and Edwina Clarke and David Zimmer for Zimmer, Citron & Clarke.



Recent Statements and Letters from MESA's Board of Directors

The MESA Board has released several statements and letters in recent months. Members are sent email announcements when a statement or letter is released. The full text of each statement follows the list below.

Overview

June 16, 2025	Advisory on Travel Ban and Annual Meeting Accommodations from the MESA Board of Directors and the Task Force on Civil and Human Rights
June 26, 2025	MESA Board Joint Letter with CAF to University of Utah
Sept 22, 2025	MESA Joint Statement of the Board, TFCHR, and CAF concerning Travel Bans
Sept 23, 2025	MESA-AAUP Joint Letter Concerning H-1B Visa Petitions
Nov 25, 2025	MESA Board Statement concerning the detention of Dr. Vahid Abdeni



JOINT STATEMENT WITH TFCHR Advisory on Travel Ban and Annual Meeting Accommodations

16 June 2025

We write in the wake of the latest iteration of the Trump administration's travel ban announced on June 4, 2025. The new policy restricts entry into the United States (with various exceptions and to varying extents) by nationals of Afghanistan, Burundi, Chad, Republic of the Congo, Cuba, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Haiti, Iran, Laos, Libya, Myanmar, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Togo, Turkmenistan, Venezuela, and Yemen.

MESA condemns this measure, and the manner in which it restricts travel to the United States on the basis of national origin. MESA, along with partners and colleagues, filed a legal challenge against the 2017 Muslim Travel Ban, and is currently exploring options for legal action against this one.

MESA is committed to supporting our members and annual meeting attendees prohibited by the new Trump administration travel ban from attending the MESA 2025 Annual Meeting.

To that end, MESA will facilitate the participation of conference presenters from the countries included in the travel ban by

allowing them to participate remotely. The MESA Secretariat will be in touch soon with affected presenters to make all necessary accommodations.

We understand that in-person meetings may present obstacles to participation for additional members outside the U.S. as well, and we will continue to think creatively about how MESA can facilitate participation. We will be providing international travel guidance for participants attending from countries that are not included in the ban. Presenters who are ultimately unable to obtain a visa to attend the conference, due to circumstances outside of their control, should contact meeting@mesana.org.

Fully hybrid meetings regrettably are unaffordable due to the exorbitant rates charged for labor and technology to create the necessary audio-visual capacity at our scale. Because MESA annual meetings are planned several years in advance and involve a substantial financial obligation to the meeting venue in the form of a legally binding contract, we also cannot switch from an in-person to a virtual format. The success of an in-person meeting depends on meeting in person to the greatest extent possible.

We are, in addition, planning to experiment with a new model for hosting a mid-year virtual research forum. This forum would provide an additional opportunity for MESA members to present their scholarship and join roundtable discussions from around the globe.

Finally, we have looked to venues outside the U.S. as we plan for our next open meeting year, which is 2027.

We are pleased to announce that the 2027 Annual Meeting will take place in Toronto, Canada.

As always, the MESA Board of Directors and TFCHR reaffirm our commitment to our membership, to continue to act as a resource in their defense, and to do all that we can to facilitate the exchange of ideas and knowledge production in our field.



JOINT LETTER WITH CAF Concerning University of Utah's Agreement with Ariel University

26 June 2025

Dear President Randall and Provost Montoya,

We write on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) to express our grave concern regarding the University of Utah's signing on 19 May 2025 of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Ariel University, located in the illegal Israeli settlement of Ariel in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. The University of Utah has become the first American academic institution to sign a major

formal cooperation deal with Ariel University, the establishment of which also constituted a violation of international law. To enter this agreement in violation of international law and against the backdrop of months of intensified Israeli violence against and repression of Palestinian universities in the West Bank and its devastating destruction of all the institutions of higher learning in Gaza, killing hundreds of faculty and staff as well as thousands of students is particularly egregious.

Founded in 1966, MESA promotes scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. As the preeminent organization in the field, the Association publishes the prestigious *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 2,800 members worldwide. Our organization 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 outside of North America.

Established in 1982 and chartered as a full university in 2012—an act that was opposed by the Council of Presidents of Israeli Universities—Ariel University has been the target of periodic calls for its boycott because of its location in the occupied West Bank. Indeed, a letter from Jewish faculty at the University of Utah opposing the partnership with Ariel makes this very argument. Despite this controversial history, according to the *Jerusalem Post's* reporting, President Randall and Ariel University president Prof. Ehud Grossman signed a five-year memorandum of understanding which puts in place a framework for joint research projects, student and faculty exchanges, shared academic conferences, and the shared use of teaching materials and scientific publications. The agreement was apparently brokered with the assistance of Israel Bachar, Consul-General of Israel in Los Angeles, who is reported to have asserted that the memorandum “marks a new chapter in academic cooperation between Israel and the United States.” Mark Lewis, a spokesperson for Ariel University, wrote in an email to *Inside Higher Ed* that although Ariel had “signed several smaller MOUs with U.S. universities, none of those partners had the international standing that the University of Utah brings. In that sense, this is our first truly ‘major’ American agreement in Judea and Samaria” [sic.]

This MOU has elicited significant criticism from your faculty. In addition to the objections of Jewish faculty members noted above, University of Utah faculty have criticized the fact that the university administration failed to consult them over such a controversial step. They also contend that the conclusion of this agreement violates the Utah Board of Higher Education's Resolution on Freedom of Expression, which requires “institutional neutrality”: “Institutions, as governmental

entities, or employees acting in their official capacities as representatives of the institution must refrain from taking public positions on political, social, or unsettled issues that do not directly relate to the institution's mission, role, or pedagogical objectives.” It also runs counter to your university's own Guideline G1-007C, which states that “university employees acting on behalf of the university, including leaders acting on behalf of their units, may not take a position on behalf of the university or a university unit on political, social, or cultural controversies, public debates, or flashpoint moments.” While the university's statement in response to criticisms of the MOU claims that concluding such an accord does not violate institutional neutrality, Israeli Consul-General Bachar indicated quite the opposite when he praised both universities for their “brave” engagement at a time when “campuses are being taken over by protesters in keffiyehs calling for a Palestinian state ‘from the river to the sea.’”

We feel compelled to remind you that Israel's settlements on the West Bank constitute a violation of international law. In its 19 July 2024 Advisory Opinion, the International Court of Justice affirmed that Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories are illegal. In a report issued in February 2018, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights concluded, further, that investing in or otherwise conducting business with entities operating in illegal settlements on the West Bank is itself inconsistent with international law and constitutes complicity in war crimes. Several of the most prominent international human rights organizations have also reached the same conclusion, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. It is worth recalling in this regard that Article 49(6) of the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949) specifically forbids an occupying power from transferring its own citizens into occupied territory, while Article 55 of the Hague Regulations (1907) prohibits creating permanent changes in an occupied territory that are not intended to benefit its population, in this case, the Palestinians of the West Bank. Ariel's faculty and students are prime users of the “Trans-Samaria Road,” a four-lane highway built on confiscated Palestinian land. Palestinians, including those whose land was confiscated to build this highway, are prohibited from using major portions of that road. West Bank Palestinians, moreover, are absent from the faculty and student body of Ariel. Indeed, Palestinians who live in the vicinity of Ariel are not allowed to enter the settlement, let alone the university.

Also critically important is the historical context: the long-standing practice of violence against the Palestinian higher education sector by the Israeli military and armed Israeli settlers. MESA's Committee on Academic Freedom has issued numerous letters on this

issue, including those dated 13 April 2021; 21 July 2021; 8 February 2022; 26 May 2022; 22 November 2023 and 25 January 2024. Violence by Israeli soldiers and settlers has dramatically intensified since 7 October 2023. According to the Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Education and Higher Education, between 7 October 2023 and 29 April 2025, 35 students in the West Bank were killed by the Israeli military, 189 students were seriously injured and more than 370 were arrested and illegally detained. The Palestinian Prisoners Society (PPS) estimates that since 7 October 2023, 17,000 Palestinians in the West Bank have been arrested and more than 10,000 Palestinians from the West Bank are currently held in Israeli prisons, among whom are hundreds of faculty members, researchers, university students and staff. Most of these detainees are held under administrative detention, i.e., without charge or trial. According to the Student Affairs office at one of the West Bank's premier institutions of higher education, Birzeit University, 153 of its students are currently being held by occupation forces in prisons the dreadful conditions of which have drawn growing criticism from human and civil rights groups.

The University of Utah's relationship with an Israeli institution located in an illegal settlement in the occupied West Bank, manifested in this memorandum of understanding, thus makes the university complicit in these horrendous practices and violations of international law. There is nothing neutral about the position your university has taken.

As an occupying authority, Israel's targeting of Palestinian educational institutions through incursions, raids, attacks and abductions of students and faculty constitute violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, relating to the protection of civilians in times of war. Israel's obstruction of education is also a clear violation of the right to education enshrined in Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and Article 13 of the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). The right to education is binding in all circumstances and is to be protected in all situations, including during crises and emergencies resulting from civil strife and war. Israel is a party to the UDHR and a signatory to the ICESCR and is therefore obligated to uphold them.

Higher education should embody the spirit of freedom of inquiry and exchange. Such exchange cannot occur at an institution of higher learning built in violation of international law, complicit in ongoing human rights violations, and serving exclusively only one portion of the population under the control of a state whose current war against the Palestinians of Gaza has been labelled by the International Court

of Justice as plausibly a genocide and whose political, economic, social, educational, and cultural policies toward the Palestinians of the West Bank are regarded by the United Nations, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Israel's own human rights organization B'Tselem as constituting apartheid. We call upon you in the strongest of terms to revoke this shameful MOU.



JOINT STATEMENT WITH CAF AND TASK FORCE

Concerning Travel Bans

22 September 2025

We write to follow-up on our June 16 Advisory concerning the latest iteration of the Trump administration's travel bans, which were first announced on June 4, 2025. Since that time, the government has imposed an additional travel ban on those traveling on a Palestinian Authority passport and all persons applying for visitor visas from Gaza. As we wrote in our earlier advisory, we decry and condemn in the strongest possible terms these measures, which use national origin as a loose proxy for race and religion, and advance discriminatory goals in restricting travel to the U.S. We are particularly dismayed at the gratuitous cruelty with which the government has canceled visas for medical evacuees from Gaza, including Palestinian children scheduled to travel to the United States for reconstructive surgeries to address catastrophic injuries they have sustained as a consequence of Israeli attacks.

We noted in June that MESA was exploring options to pursue a legal challenge against these new travel bans, as we did against the 2017 Muslim Travel Ban. Due to the 2018 U.S. Supreme Court opinion in *Trump v. Hawaii* that upheld the 2017 travel ban, we have determined for the moment that there is no clear path for litigation, based on conversations with partner organizations focused on civil rights and immigrants' rights. We continue to believe that the Supreme Court decision in that case was profoundly misguided, distorting constitutional protections against racial and religious discrimination—allowing the administration to impose arbitrary restrictions, unfairly targeting Muslim and Middle Eastern communities, by pretextually invoking “national security.” Like the 2017 Muslim Travel Ban, so too the travel bans imposed in 2025 harm our members by disrupting travel, research, scholarship, educational opportunities, and the free exchange of ideas with those based in the countries directly affected by the ban.

The travel bans have upended applications for admission to U.S. universities at the

undergraduate and graduate levels from affected countries. They have also had an adverse effect on the continuing education of international students already enrolled in U.S. degree programs who traveled outside of the U.S. over the summer. In the last academic year, the State Department reportedly issued over 5,700 F-1 and J-1 visas to foreign students and researchers from countries now affected by the travel ban. Of these, more than half were visas issued to citizens of Iran and Myanmar. The loss of a substantial number of Iranian students and scholars, now barred from study and research in the U.S., is keenly felt by MESA members.

Beyond the travel bans, the summer brought more unwelcome news when the Trump administration directed all consulates to suspend student visa processing while introducing new criteria for vetting applications based on social media usage. Thousands of students were left in limbo, with those who had secured visa interviews finding their appointments canceled. Even after visa processing resumed, backlogs and slow operations have left untold numbers of international students admitted to colleges and universities in the U.S. unable to obtain visas in time for the start of the academic year. For an additional cohort of students, the ongoing immigration crackdowns in the U.S. and the revocation of some students' visas last year have led to second thoughts about American higher education. The predictable consequence has been substantial declines in international student enrollments across the U.S. at the beginning of this academic year.

Overall, the travel bans issued by the Trump administration this year are concentrated on the Middle East, North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, and in the case of the MENA region the six countries directly impacted account for nearly half the population of the region. Moreover, because the MENA region and the Muslim world are disproportionately targeted by travel restrictions, the bans themselves and their political repercussions have harmed study, research, and scholarship in our field by impeding scholarly exchanges and exacerbating tensions that make access to field sites and archives that much more difficult.

MESA remains committed to preserving our collegial and academic networks with students and scholars now excluded from the U.S. We recognize that the citizens of countries and regions affected by these travel restrictions have in many cases already suffered enormous violence and dispossession as a consequence of U.S. policies, including financial and military assistance to belligerents across a range of conflicts in the MENA region as well as the Trump administration's ongoing support for Israel's genocide against Palestinians in Gaza.

The Middle East studies academic community has both a professional and an ethical responsibility to defend the rights of our students and colleagues who are now being harmed by arbitrary and discriminatory bans on their travel. We will continue to explore all avenues to support affected students and colleagues, including by voicing our opposition to these bans, documenting their adverse impact on our scholarly networks, and developing innovative means of continuing scholarly exchanges with affected communities. We are currently in the planning phase to convene a virtual research workshop in 2026 using online platforms to maintain our transnational scholarly networks. We hope all MESA members will join us in this experiment in virtual gathering, while we continue to work to see these travel bans reversed and our intellectual community restored.



JOINT LETTER WITH AAUP

Concerning H-1B Visa Petitions

23 September 2025

Dear AAUP and recent MESA Members:

On Friday, September 19, 2025, the White House published a new Presidential Proclamation that imposes a \$100,000 fee on employers filing H-1B petitions and restricts the entry of H-1B visa holders unless the underlying petition is accompanied or supplemented by a payment of \$100,000. We write to share information for members who are H-1B visa holders or are contemplating applications for an H-1B visa. This information has been produced in consultation with immigration attorneys at the law firm Van Der Hout Immigration and Nationality Law, LLP. Please note that subsequent events may change the legal landscape. Litigation has commenced and more litigation may follow.

The effective date for the visa changes was Sunday, September 21, 2025, at 12:01 am EDT. The order does not provide details regarding implementation or how fees are to be paid. While the proclamation on its face appeared to target H-1B workers outside the U.S. and those currently applying for H-1B visas, subsequent guidance from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) indicated that the proclamation does not apply to petitions submitted prior to September 21, 2025 or to current H-1B visa holders. Similar guidance appeared to be issued by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). That being said, international travel in H-1B status may nonetheless pose a risk until the pattern of

implementation and enforcement of the terms of the proclamation becomes clearer.

We realize that many of our members working on an H-1B visa were already worried about travel across borders after the chaos occasioned by visa revocations last spring. We understand that the Presidential Proclamation will only serve to enhance anxieties about international travel. For those H-1B visa holders who feel concerned and are currently in the U.S., it may be prudent to hold off on travel until there is greater clarity on how CBP is handling re-entry for H-1B visa holders in practice.

The proclamation also provides that:

Within 30 days of the next H-1B lottery (i.e., March 2026), the Secretary of State, the Attorney General, the Secretary of Labor, and the Secretary of Homeland Security shall jointly submit a recommendation to the President as to whether renewing or extending the restriction on reentry is in the best interest of the U.S.

The Secretary of State shall issue guidance to prevent the “misuse” of B visas by beneficiaries of approved H-1B petitions who have start dates prior to 10/1/26

The Secretary of Labor shall initiate rulemaking to revise the prevailing wage levels and to prioritize the admission of high-skilled and high-paid nonimmigrants. No proposed rule has been published to date.

The general information provided above is not intended as legal advice and is subject to change. Please consult with immigration counsel for specific legal advice about your case.

For those planning to apply for an H-1B visa, the new conditions announced in the Presidential Proclamation are devastating, particularly for those applying to academic positions given the incredible financial burden now placed on prospective employers and/or visa applicants. This burden may be all but insurmountable for many colleagues and their institutions. We intend to support our members through all available avenues as international students and scholars navigate the ever-changing and chaotic immigration landscape.

The AAUP and MESA stand with all our members—regardless of their immigration status—during this confusing and scary time. We are monitoring developments. We will provide updates as they become available.

In solidarity,

Veena Dubal, JD, PhD
General Counsel
American Association of University Professors (AAUP)

Ash Bâli, JD, PhD
President
Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA)



BOARD STATEMENT

Concerning the Detention of Dr. Vahid Abedini

25 November 2025

The Middle East Studies Association (MESA) was disturbed to learn of the detention of Dr. Vahid Abedini, the Farzaneh Family Assistant Professor of Iranian Studies at the University of Oklahoma (OU). Dr. Abedini was detained on November 22 by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) before boarding a flight to attend the MESA Annual Meeting in Washington, DC.

Dr. Abedini is a political scientist working in the U.S. under an H-1B visa. He earned his Ph.D. in Political Science from Florida International University and served as a Visiting Assistant Professor at the University of Arkansas prior to his employment at OU, where he currently teaches.

MESA remains deeply concerned about the circumstances of the detention of Dr. Abedini, a MESA member.

Update: Dr. Abedini has been released from detention.

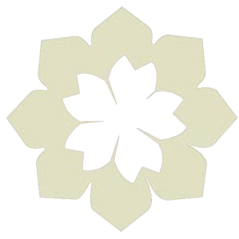


Trump Administration Concedes That MESA May Engage With Sanctioned U.N. Official Response is a victory for the right of Americans to speak with and hear from international experts about issues of global importance, Knight Institute says

17 December 2025—In response to a letter sent by the Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University, the Treasury Department last week confirmed that a scholarly organization—the Middle East Studies Association (MESA)—may hold an event with U.N. Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese even though she has been sanctioned by the government. The letter, which the Treasury Department characterized as “interpretive guidance,” makes clear that hosting a speech by Albanese, asking her questions, and sharing research and scholarship with her are “not prohibited” under U.S. sanctions law.

The Treasury Department response confirms that MESA and its members may go forward with its event with Albanese without fear of penalty, and that the U.S. government cannot use its economic sanctions authority to suppress the cross-border exchange of information and ideas.

To read the press statement and the Treasury Department’s letter, go [here](#).



Recent Activity from MESA's Task Force on Civil and Human Rights

MESA's Task Force on Civil and Human Rights (TFCHR) advocates for civil and human rights on multiple fronts, including litigation, policy guidance, and research and resources to support our members.

New Resources: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Four documents from the Know Your Rights seminars held in Spring 2025

MESA's TFCHR offered a series of Know Your Rights webinars in Spring 2025 addressing members' concerns about changing immigration policies and enforcement actions under the Trump administration. We received a wide range of questions that were addressed during these webinars. We have developed these materials in the hope that they might provide useful resources for our members addressing frequently asked questions (FAQs). To print a copy, follow the link (or see <https://mesana.org/advocacy/task-force-on-civil-and-human-rights>).

FAQs on Immigration or Law Enforcement Officers Accessing Campus

FAQs on Visa-Related Issues for Non-Citizens, including Green Card Holders

FAQs on Teaching

FAQs on Travel-Related Issues for Students and Scholars

Disclaimer: MESA cannot and does not provide legal advice or resources and nothing in this memorandum should be construed as legal advice. The basic information in this memo, drawn from trustworthy public sources, is, instead, designed to be a starting point for better understanding distinctions between different visa categories and to determine whether you or your students might need to consult an immigration attorney.

Academic Freedom Initiative (AFI)

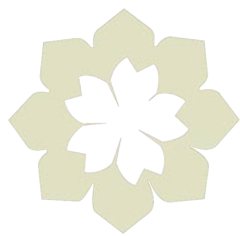
The AFI is a project to identify and track trends regarding academic freedom and repression on campuses across North America. As we face continual threats of censorship, and repression, MESA is committed to defending academic freedom and free speech tenaciously, to document the range of experiences affecting our membership and our field, to encourage campuses to protect their communities, and to provide anticipatory support to all affected. AFI will launch a centralized, publicly accessible website in 2026. Until then, information is located in the **MESA Advocacy Resource Center**.

A new report by MESA and AAUP, *Discriminating Against Dissent: The Weaponization of Civil Rights Law to Repress Campus Speech on Palestine* mapping the weaponization of antisemitism claims to repress campus speech was released in November. See page 8 of this newsletter for a summary. To print a copy, go **here**.

Task Force on Civil and Human Rights (TFCHR)

Lara Deeb, Co-Chair Scripps College
Darryl Li, Co-Chair University of Chicago
Jason Brownlee University of Texas at Austin
Anthony Alessandrini Kingsborough Comm Coll, CUNY
Mohammad Fadel University of Toronto
Maryam Jamshidi University of Colorado, Boulder

Lori Allen
Judith Tucker Georgetown University
Zachary Lockman New York University
Aslı Bâli Yale Law School *ex officio*
Ussama Makdisi UC Berkeley *ex-officio*
Jeffrey Reger MESA Executive Director *ex officio*



Announcing the Committee on Academic Autonomy

The Committee on Academic Autonomy (CAA) was established in the summer of 2025 to advocate proactively for the field of Middle East studies and its centers and program.

Currently, the committee is surveying and collecting data from Middle East studies centers and programs to ensure that MESA is serving the needs of these key institutions of knowledge production.

The committee will focus on promoting Middle East studies as an interdisciplinary field of academic expertise, with particular attention to the centers, programs, and departments that house many of our members.

MESA is especially concerned about the potential impact of funding and budget cuts. The CAA can issue letters at the request of impacted programs or centers to ensure that Middle East studies is supported at institutions of higher education. In doing so, the CAA will also highlight the benefits that such centers bring through their many functions, from research to events and community outreach.

The CAA addressed its first letter on September 5, 2025, to the University of Oregon concerning potential layoffs of Arabic, Middle East Studies, Judaic Studies and Islamic studies faculty. (The University of Oregon responded to the call of MESA and others and instead promised to reduce expenses elsewhere.)

The CAA will also focus on improving the understanding of what Middle East studies centers and programs do, through social media that highlights the diverse array of research and resources supported by such institutions.

In line with the new MESA strategic plan for 2025-2029, the CAA will raise awareness of the institutions that shape and structure the field across multiple social media platforms. As an example, the committee seeks to reach a broader audience via short-form video on Instagram reels and TikTok.

By doing so, the CAA aims to showcase the importance of Middle East studies and its component institutions, as well as the faculty, staff, and students that comprise them.

Please follow us on our social media platforms, including LinkedIn and BlueSky, as we launch the work of the committee throughout the coming year.

And please contact Academic Autonomy Program Manager Julie Ellison (julie@mesana.org) if you have any suggestions or questions about these new projects.

Committee on Academic Autonomy (CAA)

Aslı Bâli, Chair Yale Law School *ex officio*
Hosam Aboul-Ela University of Houston
Nadia Abu El-Haj Columbia University
Fida Adely Georgetown University
Beth Baron CUNY Graduate Center
Rosie Bsheer Harvard University

Akram F. Khater North Carolina State University
Marc Lynch George Washington University
Ussama Makdisi UC Berkeley *ex officio*
Jeffrey Reger MESA Executive Director *ex officio*
Julie Ellison, Academic Autonomy Program Manager



Recent Activity from MESA's Committee on Academic Freedom

CAF comprises two sub-committees: MENA (Middle East and North Africa) and NA (North America). The mission of CAF is to address violations by protesting them at the highest government and diplomatic levels of the country where the violation occurs. If you learn of human rights or academic freedom violations please email the committee at caf@mesana.org.

Below are summaries of letters sent to heads of state, other high-ranking officials, or educational officials in response to an issue of academic freedom. The country listed represents the country receiving the letter. To view the full content of the letter, please see MESA's website (mesana.org).

27 May 2025 (US)

Letter to George Washington University protesting the administration's actions against graduating senior Cecilia Culver because of remarks she made about Palestine during her commencement address.

20 June 2025 (US)

Letter to San José State University regarding the termination of Professor Sang Hea Kil.

23 June 2025 (Palestine)

Letter to protest the intensification of Israel's assaults on the education sector in the occupied West Bank.

30 June 2025 (Iran)

Letter expressing alarm regarding the imminent risk of execution of Ahmadreza Djalali, Iranian-Swedish scholar on death row in Iran.

21 July 2025 (US)

Letter to Georgetown University protesting its statements and actions with regard to Professor Jonathan Brown.

25 July 2025 (US)

Letter to the University of California expressing concern about its prohibition of boycotts by student governments and other university entities

4 August 2025 (US)

Letter to the City University of New York protesting the non-reappointment of four adjunct faculty members and the suspension of a student.

4 August 2025 (US)

Letter to Harvard University concerning the cancellation of a special issue of *Harvard Educational Review* on education and Palestine.

8 August 2025 (US)

Letter to the administration of Occidental College about disciplinary proceedings against students accused of participating in protest activity.

11 August 2025 (Turkey)

Letter regarding the reinstatement of Presidential Authority to Appoint University Rectors in Defiance of Constitutional Court Ruling.

15 September 2025 (US)

Letter to the Claremont Colleges library condemning the censorship of the title and abstract of Professor Bilal Nasir's scheduled lecture in the Claremont Discourse series.
Response received Sept 19

17 September 2025 (Canada)

Letter to Canadian officials urging an immediate intervention to expedite

the visa and study permit applications of Palestinian scholars who have secured academic placements at Canadian universities but remain trapped in Gaza. **Response received Oct 1**

19 September 2025 (US)

Letter to UC Berkeley regarding the university's submission to the Department of Education of 160 names of persons associated with allegations of antisemitism.

25 September 2025 (Iran)

Letter regarding information about the whereabouts and circumstances of Dr. Ahmadreza Djalali.

29 September 2025 (US)

Letter to the University of Kentucky regarding the suspension of Professor Ramsi Woodcock for his statements about Palestine. **Response received Oct 1**

3 October 2025 (US)

Letter to Northwestern University expressing concern about its flawed compulsory anti-bias training and its threats against students who refuse to complete it

3 November 2025 (US)

Letter to the Chancellor of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, denounc-

Recognizing Laurie Brand for exemplary service as CAF Chair



Laurie Brand
CAF Chair, 2007-25

Since 1990, CAF has been intervening on issues of academic freedom infringements, and Laurie Brand has served as chair for most of the cases addressed by CAF. She stepped in to take on the role from Joe Stork after the 2006 Annual Meeting, having previously serving CAF as MESA President, Board Member, and Vice-Chair.

Her leadership has been instrumental. In her first year, CAF split into two wings (CAF-MENA, CAF-NA) to address the growing number of cases in North America. During Laurie's tenure as chair, CAF has intervened on 550 cases, yet her devotion to defending academic freedom and the impact she has made cannot be quantified.

With heartfelt wishes, undying appreciation, and great admiration, we honor outgoing CAF Chair Laurie Brand.

ing the suspension pending termination of Professor Tamar Shirinian. **Response received Nov 4**

7 November 2025 (Iran)

Letter to Iranian authorities regarding arrests and harassment of independent scholars.

12 November 2025 (France)

Letter jointly issued by BRISMES, DAVO, SeSaMO and MESA regarding the cancellation of the symposium "Palestine and Europe" organized by the Chair of Contemporary History of the Arab World at the Collège de France and the CAREP (Arab Center for Research and Political Studies).

20 November 2025 (Canada)

Letter regarding the detention at the Canadian border of Emeritus Professor Richard Falk.

2 December 2025 (Canada)

Letter to the University of Guelph expressing concern at its last-minute cancellation of the People's Conference for Palestinian Solidarity.

8 December 2025 (US)

Letter expressing concern about the decision of UMass Amherst to pause, and then cancel, a search under way for a tenure-track assistant professor of the history of the modern Middle East, and to launch, in fall 2025, an entirely new search for the same position.

8 December 2025 (US)

Letter to the administration of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, to express concern about its decision to pause and then cancel a search for a historian of the modern Middle East.

15 December 2025 (US)

Letter to the University of California, Berkeley, expressing concern about the suspension of Lecturer Peyrin Kao for allegedly engaging in Palestine advocacy that violates university policy.

16 December 2026 (US)

Letter to the University of Arkansas regarding the removal of Professor Shirin Saeidi as director of the King Fahd Center for Middle East Studies.

Committee on Academic Freedom

Judith Tucker (CAF Chair)
Georgetown University

Ussama Makdisi (MESA President)
UC Berkeley

MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA (CAF-MENA)

Miriam Lowi (Chair)
The College of New Jersey

Rana Barakat
Birzeit University

Amahl Bishara (Board)
Tufts University

Catherine Duryea
St. John's University

Dyala Hamzah
University of Montréal

Manal A. Jamal
James Madison University

Marc Owen Jones
Hamed bin-Khalifa University

Nahid Siamdoust
University of Texas at Austin

NORTH AMERICA (CAF-NA)

Zachary Lockman (Chair)
New York University

Ziad Abu-Rish
Bard College

Rosie Bsheer (Board)
Harvard University

Jennifer Derr
UC Santa Cruz

Mona El-Ghobashy
New York University

Nina Farnia
Albany Law School

Maryam Jamshidi
University of Colorado Law School

Vickie Langohr
College of the Holy Cross

Pete W. Moore
Case Western Reserve

Jacob Mundy
Colgate College

Leila Pourtavaf
York University

Mira Sucharov
Carleton University

Email caf@mesana.org with information on academic infringements that you would like considered.



The MESA Global Academy

The MESA Global Academy supports displaced scholars from MENA. It harnesses the strengths of MESA's institutional and individual members to bolster the careers of researchers whose academic trajectories have been adversely affected by developments in their home countries. We provide research grants, scholarly connections, and opportunities for our fellows to share their research with colleagues in ways that enrich the field of Middle East studies as a whole. Please visit our website <https://mesaglobalacademy.org/> for more information.

Our spring programming included a workshop given by our alumni on “Living and Working in Canada”. We also partnered with the American Academy of Religion (AAR)’s Amy Defibaugh and Santiago Slabodsky for an online panel in AAR’s Annual Online Meeting in June 2025. It was chaired by Judith Tucker, who serves on the MESA Global Academy Committee and featured presentations by several of our fellows—Evren Altınkaş, Dina Hadad, Wesam, and Sayed Hassan Akhlaq.

After having received a record number of applications for the 2025-26 academic year, the Global Academy Committee selected 17 new fellows and 25 continuing fellows. Our 2025-26 cohort is originally from Afghanistan, Iran, Palestine, Sudan, and Turkey.

We welcomed the fellows with a virtual meeting and a series of professional development workshops in early Fall. Global Academy Committee members led workshops on the academic job application process, non-traditional academic career paths, conference presentations, and teaching strategies. We also started our publishing workshop series with a two-part workshop with Carole Sargent, Director of the Office of Scholarly Publications at Georgetown University. We continued with a peer-led publishing session with the participation of our fellows. Nijmeh Ali, Sayed Hassan Akhlaq, and Utku Balaban shared their experiences publishing a book manuscript, an edited volume, and online articles.

This year our mentorship program has grown to include 17 new scholars, who generously devote time to mentoring fellows. We held a mentor meeting in September to discuss the best strategies to help our fellows.

The MESA Annual Meeting in November hosted a variety of MESA Global Academy activities. First, we held our reception with the participation of fellows, mentors, partners, friends, and the members of the Global Academy Committee. Secondly, we collaborated with the Library of Congress. Our fellows participated in tours of the African and Middle Eastern Reading Room, met with the Library’s Near East specialists and learned about the research tools, processes, and fellowship opportunities. Our fellows also enjoyed a curated display of highlights from the collection and a reception given to MESA members.

The MESA Annual Meeting also included two sessions featuring our fellows. A roundtable was chaired by Samer Shehata from the University of Oklahoma and a panel was made possible through the collaboration of the Arab Political Science Network. Fellows Razan Ghazzawi and Bashir Mobasher joined our partners to share their experiences and research and engaged in comparative discussion of the region. The panel was chaired by Kevan Harris from UCLA. The presentations of our fellows Fateh Saiedi, Bahman Khodadadi, Lutforahman Saeed, and Azima Majeed generated a lively discussion and provided insights into the region. Other fellows and alumni presented on their own sessions at the conference.

In November, partnering with the Georgetown’s Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, and the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, our fellow Ahmed Qabaha gave a talk that was chaired by Elliot Colla. Yale University’s Council on the Middle East also hosted a book launch for our alumnus Sayed Akhlaq’s co-edited new book *Exiled Scholars in Western Academia: Refugees or Intellectuals?* (Palgrave Macmillan Cham).

MESA 2025 Photos

In the most recent issue of the *Arab Studies Journal*, working with Owain Lawson, our fellows Dina Haddad and Nadia Al-Sakkaf shared their observations on the contemporary seismic shifts in the Middle East, with an introduction by Diana B. Greenwald. We are also working with Nadim Bawalsa and the *Journal of Palestine Studies* on a MESA Global Academy fellows roundtable with an introduction by Mezna Qato. Other collaborations with *RoMES* and the *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* are also ongoing.

Along with Sayed Akhlaq's co-edited book mentioned above, Utku Balaban's book *Industrial Islamism: How Authoritarian Movements Mobilize Workers* (University of California Press) was also published this year. Bahman Khodadi's book *On Theocratic Criminal Law: The Rule of Religion and Punishment in Iran* (Oxford University Press) is also out this year. Leyla Tajer's book, *The Emergence of Intellectual Sufism in Southeast Asia: Hamzah Fanşūrī in Context* (Lexington Books) will be published in 2026. Please see our website for a detailed list of other fellows' most recent publications (<https://mesaglobalacademy.org/publications/>).

We are continuing with our Monthly Coffee Hour, a virtual gathering space for current and alumni fellows to share experiences, and find solidarity among peers. We will launch psycho-social workshops in 2026 and organize many virtual talks, panels, and events, working with our partners at Georgetown University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Syracuse University, UCLA, Kings College London, UC San Diego, and more. We thank our partners at universities, centers, and departments, individual scholars and staff, as well as our donors who support the Global Academy with their time and resources. We couldn't do our work without you!

To join our email list to be kept informed of events, publications, and other news, contact Program Manager Ceren Abi at ceren@mesana.org



Photos (top to bottom):

On the way to the Library of Congress to attend sessions and the reception for MESA members;

GA scholars and mentors meet up at the Global Academy Reception;

GA session on the Persianate World;

GA session with Arab Political Science Network.

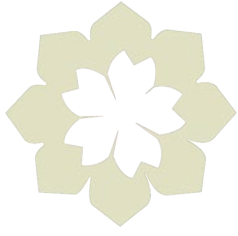
Photos courtesy of Ceren Abi



**MESA Global
Academy Committee**

Beth Baron, Chair CUNY
Aslı Bali Yale Law School
Aslı Iğsız New York University
Mimi Kirk Georgetown University

Judith Tucker Georgetown University
Jessica Winegar Georgetown University
Jeffrey Reger MESA *ex officio*
Ceren Abi, Program Manager



Committee on Undergraduate Middle East Studies (CUMES)

CUMES is a forum within MESA for sharing best practices in teaching and learning. CUMES sponsors panels at the MESA Annual Meeting on pedagogy, curriculum development, technology in the classroom, international study and other aspects of teaching and learning.

This year's MESA showed also a growing interest in pedagogy and teaching, how we fundamentally communicate our ideas to our students, who are for most of us, our primary audience. MESA hosted no fewer than 9 pedagogy sessions, four of which were CUMES sponsored and our annual Undergraduate Research Workshop which has been running since 2014.

CUMES was honored to have a robust showing of pedagogical panels and undergraduate student work at MESA this year. We hosted a workshop and poster session for 14 undergraduates onsite and one joining virtually due to visa regulations. We also **awarded the inaugural Jeffrey A. VanDenBerg Undergraduate Research Award** to Amal Shaqo from the University of Guelph for her work on "Protracted Hosting in Jordan: Policy, Identity, and the Gaza Effect." Her work explored the challenges in Jordan as a long-term host country that provided analysis and policy suggestions.

The CUMES-sponsored sessions had an unexpected gaming theme, as we came together in four different configurations to listen to our colleagues' unique ways they incorporate games in order to help students accept the burden of learning in a world where skill sets are changing, knowledge gaps increasing, and pressures on faculty feel like they are at an all-time high.

Digital Reimaginings of Middle Eastern Studies I and III brought scholars together to explore the pedagogical and scholarly intersections of digital technologies and Middle East studies. The first, organized by Ali Asgar Alibhai, evaluated the digital worlds constructed in various video games from player, observer, and consultant points of view. In the second, organized by Michael Ernst, panelists explored the roles of Virtual Reality and Extended Reality

as ways to stimulate engagement in fields as diverse as history, politics, and psychology.

In a roundtable, panelists showcased a broad range of gamification techniques and strategies for the Middle East studies and general education classrooms. These strategies included "gamifying" a syllabus in a modified form of contract grading that offers students pathways to completion and skills/knowledge building, various forms of in class debates and scenarios to help students internalize the complexities of decision making, whether it was a general education class debating whether the UAE should send humans or robots to Mars and the social, cultural, and political implications of that, or experiences that ask students to role play in ways to explore human choice, agency, and contingency. Pairing these with Sara Ababneh's framework-informed critical reflection journaling provided attendees with ways to track and assess learning over the duration of a course.

In a professional development workshop, Heather Kearney, Sotirios Dimitriadis, and Cynthia Metcalf led a session *Reacting to the Past on 1920s Syria* which asked participants to role play various factions and parties in the period between the 1919 Syrian National Congress and the creation of the Mandate. The goal of the debrief is to explain the reality and ask students to consider how/why their reacting scenario might not have aligned with the historical past and what they nonetheless learned from this.

We are looking forward to connecting with more students in 2026! If you want to get involved with CUMES, the Undergraduate Workshop, or to learn more about either, please email us at CUMES@mesana.org.

Committee on Undergraduate Middle East Studies

Victoria Hightower, Chair University of North Georgia
Awad Awad University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
Kristi Barnwell University of Illinois Springfield
Alex Boodrookas Metropolitan State University of Denver
Heather Kearney Westmont College

Matteo Legrenzi Ca' Foscari, University of Venice
Jane Murphy Colorado College
Sahar Razavi California State University Sacramento
Carole Woodall U of Colorado, Colorado Springs



Publications Committee

MESA 2025 Roundtable

At MESA 2025, the Publications Committee once again offered the roundtable *Publishing in a MESA Journal* for members to learn from the editors about *IfMES* and *RoMES*, the publishing process, and what makes for a successful submission. Please see the information from the editors on current projects and calls for submissions.

Meeting of Middle East Studies Journal Editors

The Committee also sponsors a meeting for editors of Middle East studies journals to share ideas and discuss current issues. The discussion of AI policies, and the impact of AI to academia was of particular interest. There is interest in having further contact throughout the year to provide mutual support.

All MESA Publications are available digitally

Login to your myMESA account, select the MESA Publications button to access PDF versions of *IMES* and links to searchable issues of *IfMES* and *RoMES*. To receive email alerts when a new issue is published, register a Cambridge Core account and select “My Alerts”.

Publications Committee

Jessica Winegar, Chair Northwestern University
Senem Aslan Bates College
Lara Deeb Scripps College
Heather Ferguson Claremont McKenna College

Farshad Sonboldel UC San Diego
Hoda Yousef Denison University
Sara Palmer MESA



Introducing **Transregional Middle Easts series**

a new series from the University of Utah Press and the U of U Middle East Center

We seek innovative approaches that situate the specificities of the Middle East within global, comparative, and connective frameworks, addressing topics such as diasporas, mobility, and the flow of ideas, as well as issues related to disease, environmental change, and technological exchange.

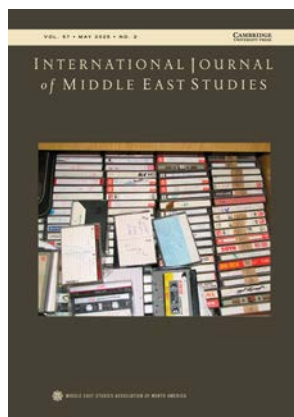
Series Editor: Michael Christopher Low



THE UNIVERSITY OF
UTAH PRESS



MIDDLE EAST CENTER
THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH



International Journal of Middle East Studies

Lara Deeb & Heather Ferguson, Co-Editors

This is our first *IMES* column and we represent several “firsts” as *IJMES* editors: We are the first co-editors of the journal, the first editors from a liberal arts college environment, and Lara is the first anthropologist to serve as editor (yes, ever!).



Lara Deeb

We began our term on July 1 and want to express our gratitude to Joel Gorden for his dedication to ensuring that *IJMES* has published the best possible scholarship in our field for six years—a period that included COVID, national and global upheavals, and the genocide of Palestinians in Gaza. Joel’s ethical engagement with *IJMES* authors was extraordinary, and he mentored many people through the process of publication. As the new co-editors, we promise to build on his commitment to furthering Middle East studies scholarship during this time of risk and precarity.

Our focus since July has been on two things. We created an editorial team that reflects our shared commitment to multiple disciplines and interdisciplinarity, to geographic and institutional diversity, and to innovative research—a team that will work with us to shape the journal’s content. We also systematized a process for this collaborative work within an admittedly difficult academic publishing landscape and in national and global contexts of constant war. We met our book review and editorial board members in person for the first time at the MESA Annual Meeting in November 2025. The vibrant intellectual exchange our editorial team had during our working lunch reinforced the role *IJMES* has always played, and will continue to play, in framing the narrative for the field of Middle East studies. It was especially important for all of us to come together as intellectual comrades to think about directions for the journal during this time of bloodshed and repression.



Heather Ferguson

Our field has always been a site of contention over the role of “expertise” in contexts of colonial and imperial violence, but the breadth and intensity of that violence these past two years has been stunning. We have been bearing witness, grieving, and raging alongside all of you. The Israeli genocide of Palestinians and attacks on Lebanon, Iran, Syria, and Yemen; and the genocide of Sudanese carried out by the UAE-armed RSF—these horrors are on our minds, as they are on yours. As scholars located in the U.S., we have also been navigating the authoritarian turn here, a reality where Palestine has become the crucible through which the federal government, higher education administrators, governing boards and trustees, and well-organized groups acting in defense of Israeli state and military actions have honed the tools of repression they deploy against students, faculty, and staff.

Given these conditions, it is not unreasonable to wonder how *IJMES*, and academic publishing in general, matter right now. As you read this piece, no doubt many of you are thinking, why dedicate time and energy to academic publishing in the midst of these multifaceted horrors?

We see the journal as a space where scholars can shape narratives about the region, archive past and present moments so that they become part of the historical record, and insist on research attentive to the often-uneven power dynamics in our broader field.

Whether working in contemporary or prior eras, and whatever inter/disciplinary tools we employ, we—scholars of the region—are best situated to shape the narrative about it. Plus, more pragmatically, the academy continues to demand publications as a means towards tenure, promotion, post-promotion review, and even landing positions in an increasingly competitive academic market. We owe it to our colleagues and students to do the work required to bring scholarship into print. We are paying it forward, and when you get the inevitable peer review request in your inbox, we hope that you will do so as well.

We recognize the legacy of *IJMES*, honor those who have volunteered their labor in the past and invite all of you to help us collectively produce what Middle East studies IS as a field. We hope that together, as readers, reviewers, and authors, we will be conscious of the power dynamics within our various disciplines and how those translate into the publication process. One step Cambridge University Press has recently taken towards equity in publishing is making all research articles published in *IJMES* “Gold Open Access,” which means that future *IJMES* research articles will be published open access whether or not the author’s institution provides the funding to do so. For our part, we will remain attentive to how various hegemonic norms—such as English-language publications for a field with such global import and participation or the outsized role that certain institutions of higher education have historically played—continue to shape our shared field. Together, we will work to shape not only the content of *IJMES* but also the possible futures for our broader field of Middle East studies.

To submit articles to IJMES, please use the ScholarOne portal. For questions or queries to the co-editors or associate editor, use editors.ijmes@gmail.com.



Review of Middle East Studies

Hoda Yousef, Editor

Dear MESA Colleagues,

RoMES exists to serve us—the practitioners of Middle East studies. Our mission is to help all of us understand the changing landscape of our field, to introduce us to exciting innovations in scholarship and teaching, and to support the development of underrepresented scholars and areas of study. We want to be the place where you discover what’s happening in Middle East studies—whether it is new methodological approaches, pedagogical innovations, field reports, or thoughtful reflections on where our disciplines are headed.



Hoda Yousef

I’m happy to share that *RoMES* has published three issues this calendar year, with a fourth on the way. These issues highlight the amazing work of some of MESA’s Global Academy Scholars, explore archives in Egypt, feature interviews with preservationists in the region, and much more.

Looking ahead, we have some exciting issues in the works, particularly around the issues of academic freedom in the Middle East and a retrospective on the remarkable work of MESA’s Committee on Academic Freedom.

I also want to encourage everyone to check out the call for a special issue on Digital Humanities in Middle East Studies with guest editor Laila Shereen Sakr (see page 25). The deadline for abstracts—January 12th, 2026—is fast approaching. Feel free to contact me or our managing editor at romes@mesana.org if you have any questions.

RoMES belongs to all of us. Let’s make it a vibrant space for conversation, innovation, and community. Thank you, and I look forward to working with many of you in the years ahead.

Call for Contributions: Digital Humanities in Middle East Studies

The *Review of Middle East Studies* (RoMES) invites contributions to an upcoming special issue, *Digital Humanities in Middle East Studies*. In light of the growing impact of technology on the study of language, history, and culture, this special issue aims to chart the current and emerging contours of digital humanities in Middle East studies. We are delighted to have Laila Shereen Sakr (University of California, Santa Barbara) as guest editor for this issue.

We welcome submissions from across the diverse landscape of digital humanities work in Middle East studies, including but not limited to: computational and AI methods (such as text mining, data visualization, natural language processing (NLP), LLMs and generative models applied to regional sources); algorithmic empire and digital colonialism, militarized AI and the political economy of tech, Middle Eastern futures and futurity, social media and digital public spheres; critical approaches to data ethics, privacy, and algorithmic accountability; feminist and decolonial perspectives; digital archives and libraries; mapping and spatial humanities; as well as media, arts, and cultural digital humanities.

This issue will focus on contributions demonstrating the unique opportunities and distinct challenges that emerge when the linguistic, cultural, and archival work of Middle East studies meets digital technology. This issue aims to provide theoretical grounding and guidance for scholars interested in developing digital humanities projects for their research or teaching while fostering broader conversations about the future of Middle Eastern studies in the digital age.

Contributions may take several forms:

- DH Interventions- Explorations of how digital humanities reshapes our understanding of key questions in Middle East Studies - what new intellectual terrain does DH open up, and what are the stakes of these shifts for the field?
- State of the Field Reflections- Analytical pieces that survey current trends, assess methodological approaches, or provide frameworks for understanding digital humanities within Middle East studies. These pieces may trace key conversations, collaborations, and areas of innovation across languages, regions, or disciplines.
- Pedagogical Applications- Articles focusing on the use of digital humanities projects in Middle East studies classrooms and/or course design, and getting started guides.
- Project Showcases- Examinations of how digital humanities projects generate new historical, cultural, or linguistic insights, emphasizing their broader implications for the field.

We recognize digital humanities work's innovative and collaborative nature and welcome co-authored submissions and interdisciplinary approaches.

Timeline

- Abstract Deadline: Jan 12, 2026
- Full Manuscript Submission for Invited Contributions: May 15, 2026
- Peer-Review Process: Summer through early fall of 2026
- Final Revised Manuscripts Due: November 2026
- Target Publication Date: Spring 2027

Submission Guidelines

Please email abstracts to romes@mesana.org by January 12, 2026. Abstracts should be 350-500 words and include:

- Proposed title
- Author name(s) and affiliation(s)
- Brief description of the proposed contribution
- How it fits within the special issue themes

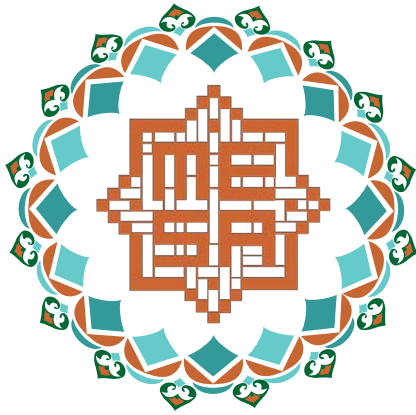
If you have questions about the scope of the issue, potential contributions, or the submission process, please contact: **Review of Middle East Studies Editorial Team** romes@mesana.org.

Hoda Yousef, Editor
Laila Shereen Sakr, Guest Editor
Laila Hussein Moustafa, Associate Editor

MESA's Institutional Members

We recognize the following organizations as 2025 institutional members of MESA. Our institutional members share with MESA a commitment to recognizing excellence in the field, encouraging the growth and vibrancy of all the different disciplines within Middle East studies, and defending the rights of scholars and academics around the world.

Aga Khan University, Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations
American University in Cairo
American University of Beirut, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs
Arab Center Washington DC (ACW)
Arab Council for the Social Sciences
Boston College
Brown University, Center for Middle East Studies
Columbia University, Middle East Institute
Cornell University, Department of Near Eastern Studies
Council of American Overseas Research Centers
George Washington University, Institute for Middle East Studies
Georgetown University, Center for Contemporary Arab Studies
Georgetown University, Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies
Georgetown University, Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding
Harvard University, Center for Middle Eastern Studies
ILEX Foundation
McGill University, Institute of Islamic Studies
New York University, Hagop Kevorkian Center for Near Eastern Studies
North Carolina Consortium for Middle East Studies
Northwestern University, Program of Middle East and North African Studies
Ohio State University, Middle East Studies Center
Penn State University, Department of History
Portland State University, Middle East Studies Center
Princeton University, Department of Near Eastern Studies
Simon Fraser University
Stanford University, Sohaib and Sara Abbasi Program in Islamic Studies
Syracuse University, Middle Eastern Studies Program
University of Arizona, Center for Middle Eastern Studies
University of Arkansas, King Fahd Center for Middle East Studies
University of California, Berkeley, Center for Middle Eastern Studies
University of California, Los Angeles, Center for Near Eastern Studies
University of California, Santa Barbara, Center for Middle East Studies
University of Chicago, Center for Middle Eastern Studies
University of Houston, Arab-American Educational Foundation Center for Arab Studies
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Center for South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies
University of Maryland, Roshan Institute for Persian Studies
University of Massachusetts Amherst
University of Michigan, Center for Middle Eastern & North African Studies
University of Pennsylvania, Middle East Center
University of Southern California, Department of Middle East Studies
University of Texas at Austin, Center for Middle Eastern Studies
University of Toronto, Department of Near & Middle Eastern Civilizations
University of Utah, Middle East Center
University of Virginia, Department of Middle Eastern & South Asian Languages & Cultures
University of Washington, Seattle, Middle East Center
University of Wisconsin, Madison, Middle East Studies Program
Vanderbilt University
Yale University, Council on Middle East Studies



MESA 2026

60th Annual Meeting

November 21-24

Boston, MA

The 2026 MESA Annual Meeting will be held at the historic Hilton Boston Park Plaza in the Back Bay near the Boston Common and the Public Gardens. The location offers numerous options for dining and shopping plus the attractive rate of \$209/night. More information is forthcoming but note the dates of the Call for Papers and that organizers can place Calls for Participation on MESA's website.

2026 is the 60th anniversary of MESA!

Let's mark the occasion!

Founded in 1966 by 51 members, MESA has grown to over 2,500 members—reflecting the tremendous growth in the field of Middle East studies over the past 60 years.

MESA now boasts more scholarly, programmatic, and demographic diversity than ever before.

We bring together scholars and practitioners from all over the world through our annual meetings, our workshops, the Global Academy, and our publications—the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, the *Review of Middle East Studies*, and this very newsletter (*Issues in Middle East Studies*).

We advocate for the field and its scholars both in the academy and beyond.

We have come a long way since the meeting in New York in the fall of 1966 when those founding members decided to create a Middle East Studies Association.

Our Diamond Anniversary is an opportunity for us to reflect on the history that led to the Association as we know it today, and to celebrate MESA's accomplishments over the years.

We are seeking ideas for what to reflect on, what to celebrate, and how!

Send any and all thoughts to us at 60th@mesana.org

Jessica Winegar
Chair, MESA 60th Anniversary Committee

Tentative Schedule of Events

Saturday, November 21

3:00-7:00pm	Book exhibit
3:30-5:30pm	Panel session I
6:00-8:00pm	Panel session II

Sunday, November 22

9:00am-6:00pm	Book exhibit
8:30-10:30am	Panel session III
11:00am-1:00pm	Panel session IV
1:30-3:30pm	Panel session V
4:00-6:00pm	Panel session VI
6:30-8:30pm	Presidential address & awards ceremony
8:30-10:30pm	MESA Reception

Monday, November 23

9:00am-6:00pm	Book exhibit
8:30-10:30am	Panel session VII
11:00am-1:00pm	Panel session VIII
1:30-3:30pm	Panel session IX
4:00-6:00pm	Panel session X
6:15-7:45pm	Members meeting
9:00pm-1:00am	Dance party

Tuesday, November 24

8:00am-12:00pm	Book exhibit
8:30-10:30am	Panel session XI
11:00am-1:00pm	Panel session XII
1:30-3:30pm	Panel session XIII

MESA 2026 Call for Papers

60th MESA Annual Meeting

November 21-24, 2026

Boston MA

January 12-February 17, 2026

<https://mesana.org/annual-meeting/call-for-papers>

MESA members are invited to propose papers and sessions related to MESA's mission of scholarship and advocacy during the Call for Papers submission window of January 12-February 17, 2026 (closes at Noon on Tuesday, February 17). MESA is primarily concerned with the area encompassing Iran, Turkey, Afghanistan, Israel, Pakistan, and the countries of the Arab World (and their diasporas) from the seventh century to modern times. Other regions, including Spain, Southeastern Europe, China and the former Soviet Union, also are included for the periods in which their territories were parts of the Middle Eastern empires or were under the influence of Middle Eastern civilization.

Questions about the call for papers and the proposal submission process are always welcome.
Please email meeting@mesana.org.

Categories of proposals for the 2026 MESA Annual Conference:

Three categories of proposals may be submitted to the Program Committee for review through myMESA:

1. **Pre-organized panels:** Four to six papers on a common subject. Paper presentations are typically 15-20 minutes long, and based on a written paper with a title shared with fellow participants in advance. An overall panel description must be submitted by the organizer(s). **No three-person panel proposals will be considered.**
2. **Pre-organized roundtables:** Five to eight presentations on a common subject. Roundtable interventions are shorter, typically 5-10 minutes, and intended to start a discussion with greater audience participation and conversation among the roundtable participants. No pre-written paper is expected to be shared in advance. An overall roundtable description must be submitted by the organizer(s).
3. **Individual paper abstracts:** One abstract to be placed on a panel by the Program Committee if accepted. Selected individual abstracts will be combined with other similar proposals to create put-together panels. In addition, two categories of proposals may be submitted directly to meeting@mesana.org for review.
4. **Special sessions** on urgent issues of relevance to numerous MESA members (this category is very limited); proposals for this category are due April 1.
5. **Professional development workshops** (also limited); proposals for this category are due May 1.

Distinguishing between panels and roundtables

- Panels consist of longer, formal presentations, followed by comments on and questions about the presented research papers. Time remaining after the presentations may be used for a short question-and-answer period.
- Roundtables consist of shorter, and less formal, initial presentations by the participants, followed by extensive back-and-forth conversation and discussion among the roundtable participants and the audience. Most of the time will be taken up by questions and answers.
- Roundtable rooms are typically smaller and **do not** have screens for slideshows or other accompanying visual presentations.
- All panel rooms **have screens** to present slideshows. Most paper presenters have accompanying visuals.
- Roundtable presentations do not have titles.
- Papers on panels do have titles.
- Pre-organized panels have the highest chance of acceptance. Roundtables have the second-highest chance of acceptance. Individual abstracts have the lowest acceptance rate.
- The MESA Secretariat in consultation with the Program Committee may change the type of session in clear cases of confusion.

New Board Members



Board Member Amahl Bishara Tufts University
Board Member Rosie Bsheer Harvard University
Student Board Member Samar Al-Saleh New York University

MESA Elections

MESA election participation is on par with or better than comparable scholarly societies, yet our level of turnout means that an individual's vote has substantial importance. Your vote in our elections very much matters! Thank you for helping set the direction of your association by casting your vote.

Board of Directors Election Statistics, 2017-2025*

Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Total Membership at Election	2634	2230	2675	2621	2611	2324	2703	1689	2462
Eligible Members (F & S)	2584	2172	2604	2550	2538	2256	2609	1648	2376
Valid ballots	427	565	504	550	513	698	574	487	539
% of voting membership	16.52	26.00	19.35	21.57	20.21	30.94	22.0	29.55	22.69

* President-Elect is elected in even-numbered years. Students are elected for two-year terms in odd-numbered years.



MESA 2026 Calls for Participation by Organizers

MESA provides an opportunity for session organizers to find others to join them in preorganizing a session through an open call for participation.
Please note that this is NOT the way to submit to the Call for Papers.

For the form to have your call listed & to view the open calls for participation:

<https://mesana.org/annual-meeting/call-for-participation>

The session organizer and session participants must then submit their proposals in myMESA following the directions to MESA's Call for Papers by the deadline of February 17, 2026.

Contributions

For the period May 16-December 15, 2025, a total of **\$18,350** in contributions from individuals was received for MESA funds. *We gratefully thank the generosity of the following donors.*

Discretionary Funds

MESA General Fund (including the *Stitch of Hope* campaign)

Sara Ababneh	Paul M. Cobb •	Valerie J. Hoffman	Melissa Melpignano	Logan Sherrill
Hala Abdou	Ahmad Dallal •	Robert Hoffman	Maya Mikdashi	Kim Shively
Hania Abou Al-Shamat	Rochelle Anne Davis	Leila O. Hudson •	Penelope Mitchell	Amy Singer
Fida Adely	Lara Deeb •	Besan Jaber	Daryoush Mohammad	Indigo Soncourt
Maya Aghasi	Ferda Nur Demirci	Wilson Chacko Jacob	Poor	Lucia Sorbera •
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Nasser Al Saqri	Teddi Dols	Robin Jones	Yasmin Moll	Tara Stephan
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Jan Altaner	Shirine Elbahawi	Christophe Katrib	Lauren Osborne	Andrea Stumpf
Nehal Amer	Ahmed Elbenni •	Kimberly B. Katz	Elle Palmer	Mariam Taher
Betty S. Anderson	Scott Erich	Arang Keshavarzian	Alejandro I. Paz	Masato Tanaka
Kyle Anderson	Leila Farsakh	Heba Khalil •	Elizabeth Perego	Inger Tangborn
Lisa Anderson	Dina Fergani	Noor-Aiman Khan	Kristin M. Peterson-	Eric Taylor
Kaveh Askari	Heather Ferguson •	Ilham Khuri-Makdisi	Ishaq •	Sean Tomlinson
Sa'ed Atshan	Assil Frayha	Charles Kurzman •	Heather Porter Abu	Eve Troutt Powell ■
Hana Attia	Razan Ghazzawi	Vickie Langohr	Deiab	Peter Valenti
Merve Aydin	Ghayde Ghraawi	Owain Lawson	Reda Rafei	Trisha Van Wagner
Hina Azam	Humza Azam Gondal	Daniel Lefkowitz	Jeffrey Reger •	Joan Weeks
Fatima Bahja	Gideon Gordon	Matteo Legrenzi	Mario M. Ruiz	Anna Wessels
Hannah Barker	Benan Grams	Mark LeVine	Shirin Saeidi	Alex Winder
Monique Baxter	William E. Granara ★	Peter Limbrick	Nina Safran	Jessica Winegar ■
Soha Bayoumi	Melyssa Haffaf	Margaret Litvin	Abigail Schoenfeld	G. Carole Woodall
Amashi Bishara	Richard Harrod	Matthew MacLean •	Hannah Schwadron	Hoda Yousef
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Advocacy Funds

Academic Freedom

Kristin M. Peterson-Ishaq •

Global Academy

Nancy Gallagher ★

Annual Meeting Support Funds

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Charles Kurzman ◆

Ann M. Lesch ◆

Elias G. Saba •

Awards Funds

MESA Mentoring Award

Nancy Gallagher ★

Fatema Mernissi Book award

Nancy Gallagher ◆

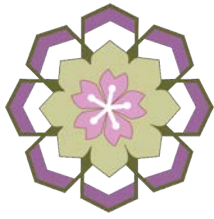
Nikkie Keddie Book Award

Rudi Matthee •

Malcolm H. Kerr Dissertation Award

Kenneth Perkins ■

- at least \$100
- at least \$250
- ◆ at least \$500
- ★ at least \$1000
- ✱ at least \$5000



The 2025 MESA Awards Ceremony

Honoring excellence in Middle East studies

MESA thanks the following review committees

2025 MESA Book Awards Committee

Peter Wien, Chair (University of Maryland, College Park)
Hanadi Al-Samman (University of Virginia)
Eric Lob (Florida International University)
Jessica M. Marglin (University of Southern California)
Sima Shakhsari (University of Minnesota, Twin Cities)
Nükhet Varlık (Rutgers University - Newark)

2025 Roger Owen Book Awards Committee

Aaron Jakes, Chair (University of Chicago)
Waleed Hazbun (University of Alabama)
Natasha Iskander (New York University)

2025 Malcolm H. Kerr Dissertation Award Committee in the Humanities

Faisal Husain, Chair (Pennsylvania State University)
Samaneh Oladi (Virginia Commonwealth University)
Jeff Sacks (UC Riverside)
Kendra Salois (American University)

2025 Malcolm H. Kerr Dissertation Award Committee in the Social Sciences

Nicola Pratt, Chair (University of Warwick)
Max Ajl (Ghent University)
Laura Frances Goffman (U of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign)
Serra Hakyemez (University of Minnesota)

2025 Graduate Student Paper Prize Committee

Elias Saba, Chair (Grinnell College)
Xiaoyue Li (Tulane University)
Sareh Afshar (Princeton University)

2025 Academic Freedom Award

The MESA Academic Freedom Award was established in 2001. It is presented on appropriate occasions in recognition of sustained contributions in support of academic freedom in the Middle East and North Africa, and/or in North America. The following is the text of the presentation made by CAF Chair Laurie Brand.

The Emergency Committee for Universities in Gaza

On the 20th of May, 2024, over 150 Palestinian academics and staff from Al-Azhar University, the Islamic University of Gaza, and Al-Aqsa University—which, together serve nearly 80% of post-secondary students in Gaza—issued a statement affirming their existence and collective determination to resume teaching and study in Gaza at their own institutions, and to coordinate recovery and maintain academic continuity despite the destruction of the higher education sector by Israeli military forces. **The Emergency Committee** plays a vital coordinating and advocacy role by supporting the efforts and helping to articulate the prioritized needs of these universities to sustain their operations under such difficult conditions. Nearly 11,000 students have been enrolled in remote courses. While the Committee does not itself provide this instruction, it is deeply engaged in ensuring the broader ecosystem—technological, financial, and institutional—remains functional and visible to the outside world. The Committee is currently hosted by Friends of Birzeit University (Fobzu).

The Isnad Programme

The **Isnad Programme** was initiated by the Emergency Committee of Universities in Gaza, and launched by Taawon (The Welfare Association) to help Palestinian universities sustain their academic mission, support faculty and staff members, and preserve the core pillars of the educational process. The project aims to secure scholarships that allow students, otherwise unable, to pay their tuition fees, thus enabling Gazan students to access remote learning opportunities. The funding is channeled directly into these universities enabling them to pay part of their staff's salaries and keep the educational process going without interruption. Through this support, approximately 4,600 students have been able to resume their learning, and around 1,300 students have graduated.

2025 Jere L. Bacharach Service Award

The MESA Service Award was established in 1996 and was first awarded at MESA's 1997 annual meeting. In 2004 the award was named for Jere L. Bacharach in honor of his extraordinary service to MESA, many of her sister societies, and the field overall. The award recognizes the contributions of individuals through their outstanding service to MESA or the profession.



Sherene Seikaly, University of California, Santa Barbara

This year's MESA Jere L. Bacharach award is given to Sherene Seikaly, in recognition of her exceptional service to the field of Middle East studies. Professor Seikaly is an associate professor of history at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) where she also serves as the Director of the Center for Middle East Studies. At UCSB CMES, she has been instrumental to the development of related programs and events, particularly by expanding the graduate student program and related funding. Dr. Seikaly also served as director of the Middle East Studies Center at the American University in Cairo earlier in her career, where

she was similarly key to developing the center's programming.

In addition to her leadership of Middle East studies centers, Dr. Seikaly is co-editor of the *Journal of Palestine Studies*, a co-founder and co-editor of *Jadaliyya*, and previously served as editor of the *Arab Studies Journal*. Furthermore, Dr. Seikaly has made significant contributions to building the field of Palestine studies, through the New Directions in Palestine Studies events and as coeditor of the book series of the same name through the University of California Press. She is also a coeditor of the modern Middle East book series at Stanford University Press, and an editorial member of the *American Historical Review*. Editing can be a particularly thankless form of labor in academia, but Dr. Seikaly is consistently and deeply committed to the behind-the-scenes work of refining and publishing the writing of early career scholars, especially those for whom English is not their first language. Moreover, she has trained and inspired a new generation of editors and writers who continue this ethic of generosity.

Her service to Palestine studies goes beyond publishing and is also exemplified by her stalwart membership on the board of the Palestinian American Research Center (PARC), a MESA affiliate. Dr. Seikaly, who continues to develop and present her own cutting-edge research, brings a broad knowledge of the current research of many Palestinian scholars to PARC's work. Her service to PARC exemplifies how she generously devotes her time to the unglamorous work of organization building and to field building. In addition to PARC, there are numerous networks and initiatives that Dr. Seikaly has participated in, from the Palestinian Feminist Collective to the Political Economy Project and the Black Feminist Think Tank. This is to say nothing of the less visible and more informal networks of advocacy as a principled defender of the rights of scholars and students across the field.

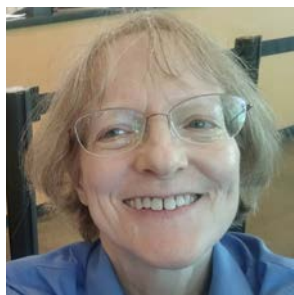
This leads, last but not least, to Dr. Seikaly's numerous contributions to MESA. Professor Seikaly's service to MESA has been wide-ranging. She has served on MESA Committee on Academic Freedom's Middle East and North Africa (CAF-MENA) section for many years, and her colleagues admire her dedication, unfailing professionalism, and responsiveness in her work on the committee, as well as the tenaciousness and energy she brings to researching and writing letters in support of our colleagues facing repression and academic freedom violations in the MENA region. Dr. Seikaly served as a Board Member from 2018 to 2020, and previously served on MESA's nominating committee. Her election to these roles is a testament to her scholarly reputation and the respect of her colleagues in the field. In particular, as a MESA Board member, it should be noted that she played key roles on MESA committees addressing issues of precarity, as well as racism and racial discrimination, in the field of Middle East studies at a critical time.

Dr. Seikaly's remarkable career already exemplifies the kinds of leadership and service to MESA and the profession that this award is intended to honor. While her scholarly achievements are validated with grants, fellowships, awards, and other forms of recognition, she also has an extraordinary record of professional service that is less visible. Professor Seikaly expends enormous energy and time supporting others to achieve their own successes and she creates spaces and institutions for others to thrive. She is a role model of intellectual generosity and a tireless leader in collaborative initiatives that have given rise to new organizations and networks, and to ground-breaking venues for publication across a variety of platforms.

This award is therefore enthusiastically given to Dr. Seikaly in recognition of her extensive and devoted service to the field of Middle East studies.

2025 MESA Mentoring Award

The MESA Mentoring Award was established in 1995 and was first awarded at MESA's 1996 annual meeting. The award recognizes exceptional contributions retired faculty have made to the education and training of others.



Jane Hathaway, Ohio University

Over a career spanning more than three decades, Professor Hathaway has not only produced a body of scholarship that has redefined our understanding of the Ottoman Empire, particularly Egypt and its peripheries, but she has also profoundly shaped the field of Middle East studies through her extraordinary and consistent commitment to mentoring graduate students, junior colleagues, and early-career faculty both within and far beyond her home institution.

Despite her prolific scholarly output and teaching responsibilities, Professor Hathaway has always carved out time to invest in her students, offering mentorship that is as rigorous as it is empathetic, as intellectually demanding as it is personally supportive.

Many note that Professor Hathaway made herself available to them at every juncture of their careers: guiding them through the difficult terrain of graduate study, aiding them with fellowship and job applications, helping them revise their dissertations, providing crucial emotional and practical support during personal crises, and continuing to offer letters, references, and detailed feedback years after graduation. These are not isolated cases, but a consistent pattern.

Her commitment often began even before students entered graduate school. One advisee recounted how, when he reached out to Professor Hathaway as a prospective student, uncertain about applying to graduate programs in Ottoman studies, she responded within hours, offering advice, encouragement, and connecting him with her current students. That gesture, which she repeated with others, marked the beginning of what would become a deeply supportive and intellectually rich mentorship.

Her pedagogical style is marked by high standards and painstaking attention to detail. Numerous students describe receiving dissertation chapters returned fully annotated—addressing everything from structure and argumentation to grammar and punctuation. For students whose first language was not English or who struggled with writing due to learning disabilities, this level of attention was transformative.

Importantly, Professor Hathaway's support extended to those for whom she was not the primary advisor. Time and again, students for whom she was a second reader, or even outside their committee entirely, describe how she created opportunities for learning—organizing independent studies, advising them on historiography, and teaching them how to position their work within broader scholarly debates. She also regularly opened her home to graduate students, fostering an inclusive intellectual community that offered warmth, collegiality, and guidance to international and domestic students alike.

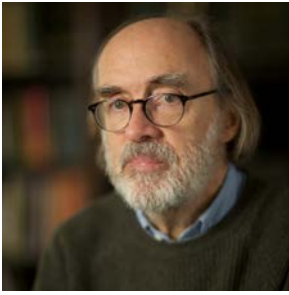
Professor Hathaway's mentorship is not limited to the classroom or dissertation committee. She has provided critical professional development, teaching her students how to navigate the job market, negotiate academic bureaucracies, prepare conference presentations, and write research grants. She has written countless recommendation letters—sometimes even continuing to write them decades after a student has graduated. One mentee outside of her home institution recalled how, as a newly appointed assistant professor in need of mentorship, Professor Hathaway was the only senior scholar who responded to her request. That gesture marked the beginning of an enduring relationship, one that included manuscript reviews, academic advice, letters of recommendation, and regular phone calls for nearly two decades.

What sets Professor Hathaway apart as a mentor is not only the quantity of time and care she invests in her mentees but also her willingness to engage with their ideas seriously and collaboratively. Her mentees recount conference panels she organized that brought together graduate students, junior faculty, and established scholars from across fields—a testament to her belief that the academy should be a place of intellectual exchange and mutual support, not competition. As one former mentee put it, "Jane taught me through example that academia should not be treated as a competition but as a collective enterprise."

That ethic of generosity, rigor, and collegiality is precisely what MESA's Mentorship Award seeks to honor. Professor Hathaway has mentored an entire generation of scholars—formally and informally—across multiple institutions and disciplines. Her legacy is not only found in her scholarly contributions, but in the dozens of scholars she has shaped, guided, and uplifted—many of whom now seek to emulate her mentorship style in their own careers.

For her exceptional and sustained contributions to the professional and personal development of her students, and for the values she has instilled in the next generation of scholars, it is an honor to recognize Dr. Jane Hathaway, who has throughout her career encouraged the very finest of Middle East studies scholarship by mentoring generations of scholars.

2025 MESA Mentoring Award



Brinkley Messick, Columbia University

Professor Messick, who passed away in August 2025, exemplified the highest ideals of scholarly mentorship, combining rigorous academic excellence with profound dedication to nurturing the next generation of anthropologists and Middle East studies scholars. His scholarship on textual culture, Islamic law, and historical anthropology has been profoundly influential. His groundbreaking works include *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society* (1993), which won MESA's Albert Hourani award. He mentored dozens of PhD students across his lengthy career, at both the University of Michigan and Columbia University, the impact of his mentoring has grown with their careers and in the advising work that those students take on for succeeding generations.

Former students described his steady encouragement as they faced the challenges of fieldwork, his close engagement as they developed their ideas, and his supportive enthusiasm for their work. They note that there was something truly unique, and in hindsight truly effective pedagogically about Professor Messick's mentoring style, as a radically democratic one, reflecting generosity and genuine curiosity and refraining from steering students in directions that he was personally interested in. Instead, he subtly and indirectly steered them toward their own interests.

Others note how Professor Messick welcomed students from outside the field to anthropology, helping them see how they could contribute to a field new to them, and thereby help shape a shared broader project of Middle East studies. He gave them, and other students, renewed energy and direction, making them see the potential of inchoate research ideas much more clearly than they did themselves. He expected and demanded serious work, and constantly reminded of the importance of remaining anchored in the ethnographic and textual material by conducting extensive and rigorous inquiries. He showed them how to bring projects to life, make them relevant to contemporary debates, and learn from and contribute to the theoretical debates, while at the same time continuing to focus on the particular and rich conditions of their research. With his gentle but steady support, Professor Messick helped students to find themselves as academics and intellectuals.

While deeply engaged in anthropological theories and methods, Professor Messick always invited his students to go beyond trends and to think in problem-oriented, interdisciplinary ways. Rather than take for granted the inherent significance of contemporary debates, he encouraged students to consider how they could first deepen their research, and then how they could contribute to those debates, by forging new analyses and questions.

Beyond advice and support, Professor Messick offered a model for how to be a scholar and teacher that many of his students seek to emulate as they pursue their own careers. The personal connection with his students was matched by his significant efforts to support intellectual environments where students and faculty could grow and thrive. Scholarly excellence requires strong institutional support and vibrant communities and Professor Messick dedicated time to creating and sustaining both. At the University of Michigan, where he taught from 1993-1997, he was a core member of the Doctoral Program in Anthropology and History and of the interdisciplinary research program, Comparative Studies in Social Transformation (CSST), tremendously vibrant intellectual spaces. At Columbia University, where he taught from 1997 until his retirement only months before he passed away, Professor Messick held numerous leadership roles. He was chair of the Anthropology Department from 2004-2011, director of the Middle East Institute from 2015-2024, and a co-founder, in 2010, of the Center for Palestine Studies (CPS), where he served as co-director from 2010-2015.

Professor Messick embodied the highest ideals of scholarly mentorship: combining rigorous academic excellence with deep personal investment in students' intellectual and professional development, creating institutional frameworks for emerging scholars, and demonstrating how scholarship can serve justice and human dignity. His passing represents an immeasurable loss to our field, but his legacy is evident in the countless students, colleagues, and institutions he nurtured throughout his distinguished career.

It is therefore an honor to recognize Professor Messick's legacy posthumously as an outstanding mentor and exemplary colleague who represented and encouraged the best in Middle East studies.

2025 Albert Hourani Book Award

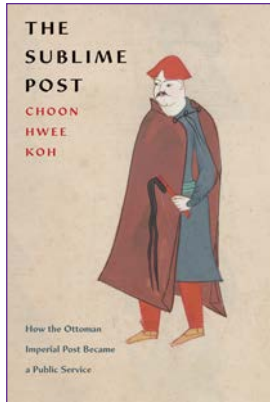
The Albert Hourani Book Award was established in 1991 to recognize outstanding publishing in Middle East studies. The award was named for Albert Hourani to recognize his long and distinguished career as teacher and mentor. The Albert Hourani Book Award recognizes a work that exemplifies scholarly excellence as well as clarity of presentation, in the tradition of Albert Hourani.

Winner

Sublime Post: How the Ottoman Imperial Post Became a Public Service

Yale University Press

Choon Hwee Koh, UCLA



The Sublime Post articulates a groundbreaking new framework for rethinking early modern Ottoman history. Drawing on extensive archival research, Koh reconstructs the imperial postal system and the intertwined labors of couriers, villagers, and officials to show how infrastructures of communication deepened governance by extending its reach. Advancing the concept of “thickening of governance,” the book reorients Ottoman historiography beyond prevailing paradigms, revealing how imperial authority and local participation were co-produced through the circulation of labor, information, and obligation. Grounded in empirical rigor and theoretical sophistication, it reframes the historical imagination of empire, well beyond the Ottoman case.

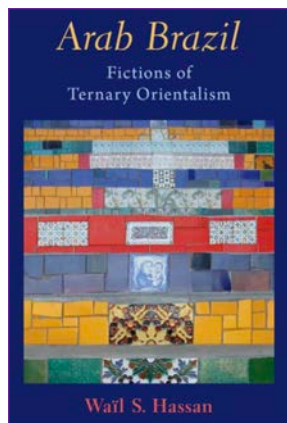


Honorable Mention

Arab Brazil: Fictions of Ternary Orientalism

Oxford University Press

Wail S. Hassan, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign



Based on an extensive analysis of Arab-Brazilian literary and cultural works since the twentieth century, this book makes a significant scholarly contribution to the understudied subject of South-South relations and transnational or interregional migration. Conceptually, the book shows the inherent contradictions in Brazilian national identity and ideology which simultaneously conceive of the Arab world as a site of both solidarity and otherness. While Brazilians commiserate with the Arab world’s colonial past, they also consider its Muslims to be distinct from Catholics. Consequently, and contrary to Western Orientalism’s binary configuration of us versus them, Brazilian Orientalism contains a ternary tendency to at once identify with and distinguish itself from the Arab world.



2025 Nikki Keddie Book Award

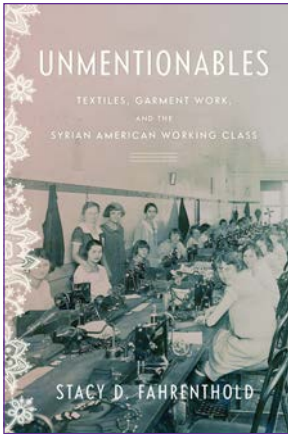
The Nikki Keddie Book Award was established in 2017 to recognize outstanding scholarly work in the area of religion, revolution, and/or society. The annual award was named for Nikki Keddie to recognize her long and distinguished career as a scholar and teacher.

Winner

Unmentionables: Textiles, Garment Work, and the Syrian American Working Class

Stanford University Press

Stacy D. Fahrenthold, UC Davis



“Unmentionable” in polite conversation were the undergarments produced in Syrian-American factories in the early twentieth century, but also the women and children who worked the sewing machines. Beautifully written, Stacy Fahrenthold’s book presents how they fought for their precarious labor rights and negotiated the relationship with their equally Syrian-American bosses who ran businesses on a trans-Atlantic scale. She weaves together economic, social, cultural, and gender history on a single thread, assigning a great deal of agency to Syrian immigrants, laying out their material culture and entrepreneurial acumen, and how they moved in deeply interconnected worlds of labor activism and global trade.

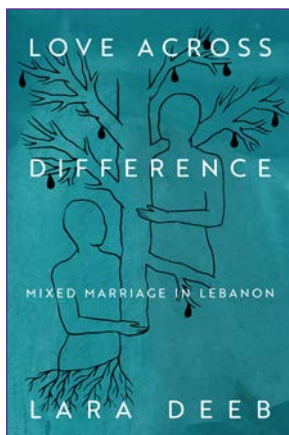


Honorable Mention

Love Across Difference: Mixed Marriage in Lebanon

Stanford University Press

Lara Deeb, Scripps College



A beautifully written ethnography of “mixed couples” in Lebanon, *Love Across Difference* complicates the scholarship on sectarianism by highlighting the role of heterosexual marriage in the social reproduction of sectarianism as a significant marker of social difference in Lebanon. Offering the possibility of a future wherein sect is not assumed to be unchanging, the book’s stories show that the everyday practices of mixed couples have the potential to eventually empty sect of its social power.



2025 Fatema Mernissi Book Award

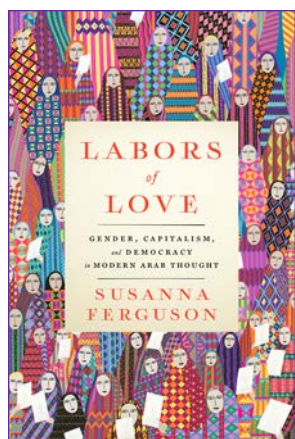
The Fatema Mernissi Book Award was established in 2017 to recognize outstanding scholarship in studies of gender, sexuality, and women's lived experience. The annual award was named for Fatema Mernissi to recognize her long and distinguished career as a scholar and as a public intellectual.

Winner

Labors of Love: Gender, Capitalism, and Democracy in Modern Arab Thought

Stanford University Press

Susanna Ferguson, Smith College



A nuanced book that extends the concept of *tarbiya*/childrearing beyond the female body demonstrating its importance for the construction of the nation and social subject from different lenses: Islamic, colonial, liberal, and personal. By meticulously tracing early women's writings and periodicals from the Arab Mashriq, Egypt, and the diaspora, Ferguson skillfully demonstrates the contradictory nature of women's childrearing labor as both sites of constraints/conservatism and power/liberation. In placing modern democratic politics, linear time, and capitalist social formations in direct conversations, *Labors of Love* is pioneering in striking local and global debates answering questions related to the perception of childrearing, women and family as being stumbling blocks for regimes around the world.



2025 Roger Owen Book Award

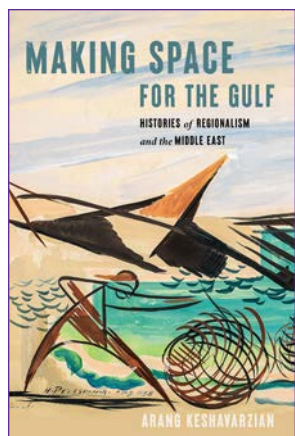
The Roger Owen Book Award, first given in 2011 and given in odd-numbered years, recognizes the very best in economics, economic history, or the political economy of the Middle East and North Africa scholarship.

Winner

Making Space for the Gulf: Histories of Regionalism and the Middle East

Stanford University Press

Arang Keshavarzian, New York University



Making Space for the Gulf simultaneously investigates the geopolitical, economic, and sociological crafting of the Persian Gulf as a region while situating those dynamics within global processes which have both shaped and been shaped by peoples, resources and politics of the Gulf. Transporting readers on journeys across the region and globe, Keshavarzian weaves together investigations that span from the stories of individuals and local communities to the destructive forces of global capitalism and great power rivalry. In this masterful work, he also demonstrates the continuing vitality of Middle East studies as an interdisciplinary approach to knowledge production while expanding its approaches and horizons in new directions.

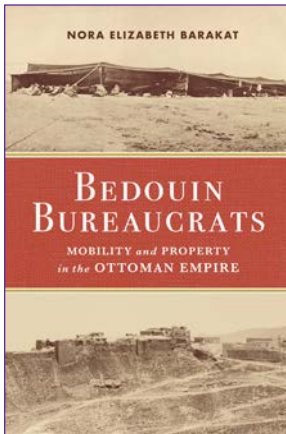


Honorable Mention

Bedouin Bureaucrats: Mobility and Property in the Ottoman Empire

Stanford University Press

Nora Barakat, Stanford University



In *Bedouin Bureaucrats: Mobility and Property in the Ottoman Empire*, Nora Barakat demonstrates that a careful view from the margins can upend the established knowledge of a field that takes the experience of a few privileged sites as a stand-in for the region as a whole. Written from years of meticulous archival research in Turkey, Jordan, and the United Kingdom, *Bedouin Bureaucrats* is an elegant and lucid testament to the power of rigorous, closely-situated social history to transform our understandings of large-scale historical transformations. By tracing across more than two centuries the complex engagements of mobile, pastoralist communities in the arid regions of southern Syria with the Ottoman state, Barakat is able to reframe the era of the Tanzimat not as a uniform unfolding of sedentarization and dispossession but rather as a negotiated process of producing state space in which the book's eponymous “Bedouin bureaucrats” played a crucial and enduring role.

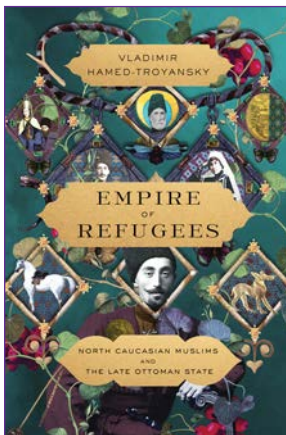


Honorable Mention

Empire of Refugees: North Caucasian Muslims and the Late Ottoman State

Stanford University Press

Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky, UC Santa Barbara



Carefully researched and powerfully written, Hamed-Troyansky's *Empire of Refugees: North Caucasian Muslims and the Late Ottoman State* is a novel and uniquely compelling history of the late Ottoman empire – one that places the state-management of the mass displacement of Muslim refugees at its center. His transnational history shows how the Ottoman empire, fraying at its edges, sought to shore up its imperial legitimacy by positioning itself as refuge for Muslims displaced by European expansion, but that its specific actions determined whether the refugee arrival would lead to the empire's consolidation of control over its contested borderlands or whether those areas would calve off. His work draws out the contradictions in Ottoman policy: a precursor to contemporary policies for refugee resettlement later codified through the League of Nations and then the United Nations, it also set the stage for the bloody population transfers and forced homogenization that would soon tear at the fabric of empire. With a history that is at once capacious and intimate, Hamed-Troyansky's reminds us how much state policy matters – for the refugees who are displaced and for the communities that receive them– but also for political futures and radical transformations they set in motion.



2025 Malcolm H. Kerr Dissertation Awards

The MESA Dissertation Awards were established in 1982 to recognize exceptional achievement in research and writing for/of dissertations in Middle East studies. In 1984 the award was named for Malcolm H. Kerr to honor his significant contributions to the field. Awards are given in two categories: Social Sciences and Humanities.

Humanities Co-Winner

The Politics of Hygiene: Public Health and Urban Transformation in Late Ottoman Istanbul

Can Gümüş-İspir, Atatürk Institute for Modern Turkish History, Boğaziçi University

Supervised by Cengiz Kırli



In a masterful work of urban environmental history, Dr. Can Gümüş İspir traces how a fragmented, tradition-based approach to public health in Ottoman Istanbul transformed into a systematic, science driven framework at the turn of the twentieth century. Using an eclectic and creatively deployed source base, notably death registers called Vefeyât Defterleri, she argues that the novel “sanitary-bacteriological synthesis” in the Ottoman understanding of disease and hygiene emerged through contested negotiations across four critical domains: food, water, sewers, and burial practices. Her study deftly recasts the making of a modern Middle Eastern city, not through its grand boulevards and clock towers, but through its contested sewers, cemeteries, and water pipes.

Humanities Co-Winner

Nakba Ecologies: On Elemental Intifada in Colonized Palestine

Sherena Razek, Department of Modern Culture and Media, Brown University

Supervised by Ariella Aïsha Azoul



Dr. Sherena Razek reconceptualizes the Palestinian struggle for liberation as a profound ecological catastrophe. Mobilizing an evocative archive of Palestinian photography, film, poetry, and land-based artistic practices, she posits that Palestinian refusal of settler colonial extraction and elimination manifests as an “Elemental Intifada.” This Palestinian uprising, she demonstrates, emerges from the land itself across four critical domains: water, fire, earth, and air. Ultimately, her study reveals a liberation struggle waged in the very elements themselves—in the defiant thirst of a dying river, the haunting exposure of a wildfire, and the fugitive journey of smuggled soil.

Humanities Honorable Mention

Fakhr al-Din al-Razi’s (d. 606/1210) Book of the Hidden Secret and Its Reception

Lillian C. McCabe, Department of Religious Studies, Yale University

Supervised by Travis Zadeh



Dr. Lillian C. McCabe provides a biography of a single, misunderstood text: Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzī’s *Book of the Hidden Secret*. Through an exhaustive study of nearly eighty manuscript copies, she charts the remarkable journey of this grimoire on astral magic as it was read and translated from thirteenth-century Bukhara to eighteenth-century Cairo. McCabe demonstrates that the Hidden Secret was no marginal oddity but an influential classic, actively debated and adapted by elite Muslim scholars and sovereigns. Her work refines our view of the Islamic intellectual tradition, revealing the efforts of prominent scholars who did not reject magic completely, but sought to philosophically understand and master it.

Social Sciences Winner

Masha of the Periphery: Collective Labor and Property in Palestinian Liberation Struggle

Faiq Mari, Department of Architecture, ETH Zurich

Supervised by Philip Ursprung and Christian Schmid (internal) and Abdel Razzaq Takriti (external))



Faiq Mari's *Masha of the Periphery: Collective Labor and Property in Palestinian Liberation Struggle* is an exceptional and timely work that redefines understandings of collective labour, property and resistance in Palestine. Combining rigorous scholarship with lived engagement, Mari skillfully weaves together ethnography, historical reconstruction and theoretical analysis—linking contemporary cooperatives, revolutionary institutions of the 1960s–1990s, and the writings of Iraqi Marxist Hadi al-‘Alawi. Through this deeply original and methodologically versatile study, Mari reframes “the commons” through the Arabic masha‘, offering a powerful lens on anticolonial and anticapitalist struggle. Amid ongoing genocide and dispossession, this dissertation illuminates the enduring vitality of Palestinian collective life and liberation.

Social Sciences Honorable Mention

Rescaling Family and Intimacy via Indebtedness in the Soma Coal Basin

Ferda Nur Demirci Eryat, Department of Anthropology, University of Toronto

Supervised by Andrea Muehlebach and Firat Bozçalı



Ferda Nur Demirci Eryat's dissertation, *Rescaling Family and Intimacy via Indebtedness in the Soma Coal Basin*, offers an ethnographically rich and theoretically ambitious account of how states and miners construct and conceptualize monetary indebtedness as both moral and protective. In clear and engaging prose, Eryat demonstrates deep expertise in Turkish political economy, extractivism, and the anthropology of finance and gender. Situating Soma within Ottoman debt legacies, republican development, and neoliberal financialization, she highlights gendered dimensions of wage and household finance to reveal how indebtedness creates collectivities among miners. By skillfully interweaving archival research, theoretical analysis, and archival interviews and observations, Demirci reveals how the Turkish financial policies have produced economic value from gendered intimacies in Soma's mining community. This dissertation inspires new approaches for cross-disciplinary social science research that places gender and morality at the center of class and financial systems.

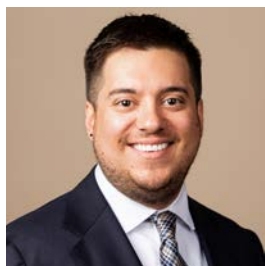
2025 Graduate Student Paper Prize

The MESA Graduate Student Paper Prize was established in 2004 and first given in 2005. The purpose of the award is to recognize the work of young scholars. The award is given to the paper that shows the best control of the subject matter and adept methodology, good use of sources and evidence, coherence and elegance of argument and good writing.

Winner

Sons, Families, Secrets: Queering Normative Kinship in Jordan

Johnathan Norris, Department of Anthropology, Boston College



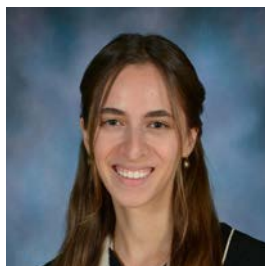
“Sons, Families, Secrets” offers rich ethnographic research on how some “heteronormative” Arab families become queered. Challenging assumptions in queer studies that heterosexual forms of kinship inevitably produce compulsory heterosexuality and categorically preclude queerness, it demonstrates how Jordanian sexually non-conforming kin remain affectively and materially connected with their natal families while they date, have sex, and participate in Amman’s queer communities. Theorizing “agonistic kin-work” as an affective mode of kin relationality, the author argues how agonism is employed to maintain one’s status with/in the family despite refusing the demands of filial obedience. The paper’s major contribution lies in revealing how kinship structures demonstrate flexibility and adaptability when material and

emotional bonds are strong enough to motivate accommodation and renegotiation. “Sons, Families, Secrets” diversifies queer experience by questioning the notion of coming out as freeing one’s “true self,” looking instead at the complex ways that identity is lived and performed in Jordan.

Honorable Mention

The Palestinian Sunbird: Analyzing the Bodily, Environmental, and Metaphysical Mobility of Resistance and Oppression in Palestine

Jenna Barhoush, Department of Anthropology, Columbia University



“The Palestinian Sunbird” makes a valuable contribution to Palestinian studies and settler colonial theory through its innovative analysis of mobility/immobility dialectics and the metaphor of the sunbird. The study shines by bringing together a focus on indigenous studies, issues of the environment, and technology. The multi-prong focus on the Gaza Sunbird paracycling team, the migratory patterns of the Palestinian sunbird, and the mobility of the Palestinian sunbird stamp highlight the important connection between anti-colonial resistance, (im) mobility, and the environment. In this way, the paper takes seriously how settler colonialism operates across species boundaries and extends to entire ecosystems.

Honorable Mention

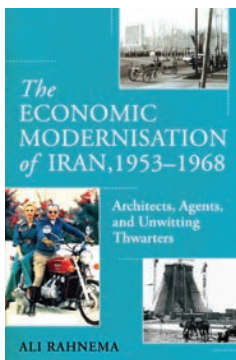
Drone Recirculations: Iran’s Reverse-Engineering Warfare

Soha Saghadzadeh, Film and Media Studies, UC Santa Barbara

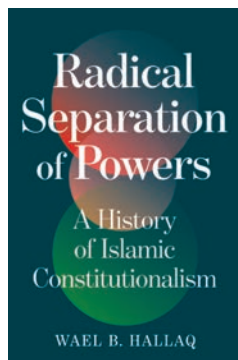


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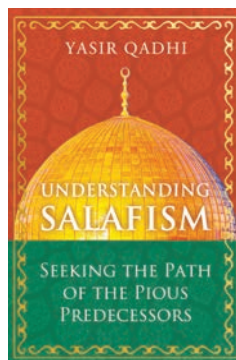
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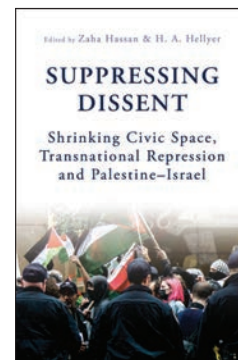
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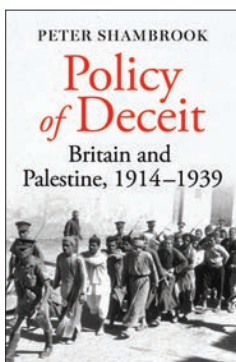
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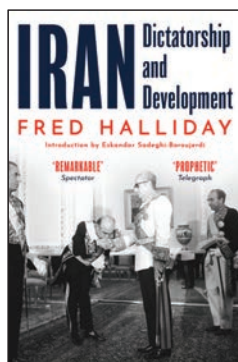
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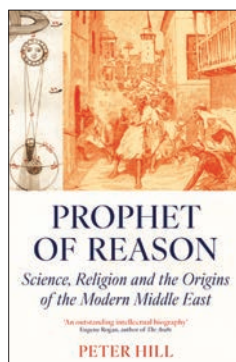
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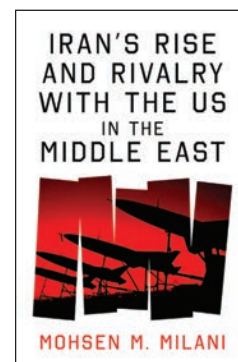
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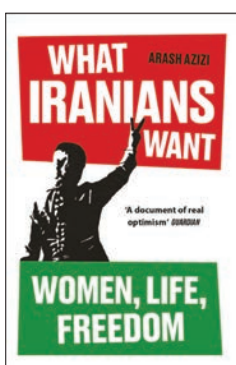
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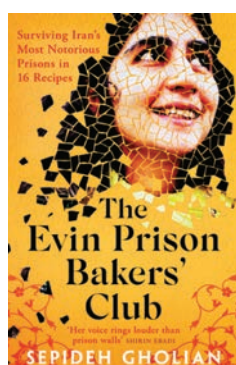
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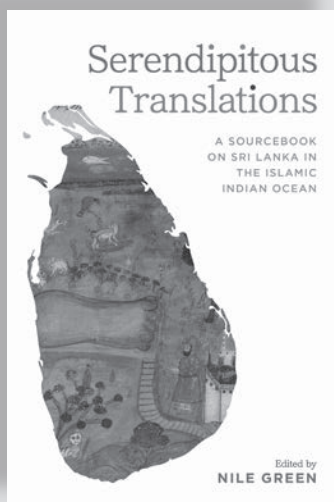
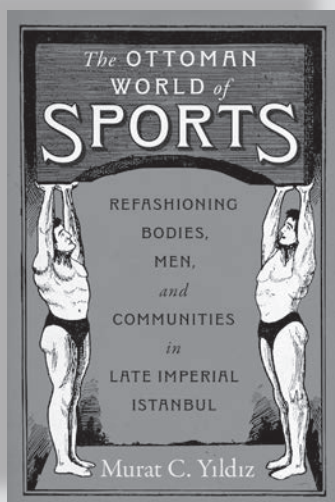
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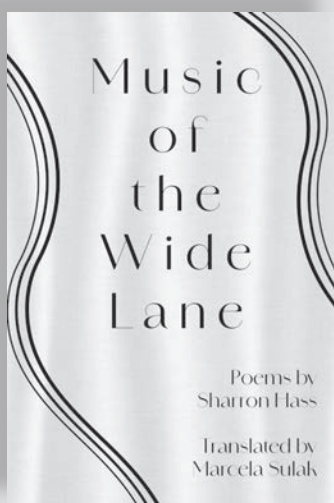
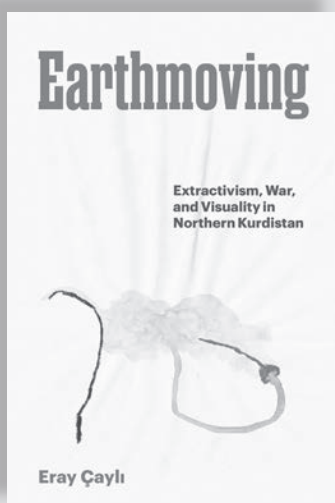




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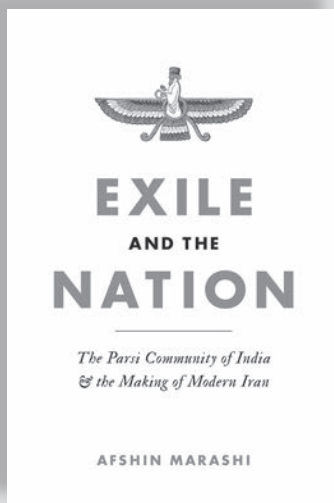
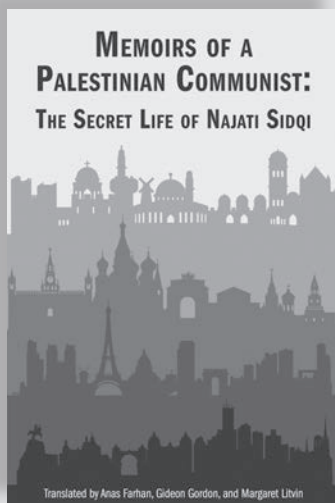
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February 17	Deadline to submit panel, roundtable, paper proposals for MESA 2026
April 30	Notification letters for acceptance to MESA 2026
May 15	Pre-registration deadline for MESA 2026 participants
June 2-4	MESA's First Virtual Workshop
June 30	Tentative program for MESA 2026 available in myMESA
August 1	Deadline for participants to request refund of pre-registration
September 15	Deadline to apply for Student and Precarity Travel Grants
October 23	Deadline for general attendee pre-registration for MESA 2026
November 21-24	MESA 2026—MESA's 60th Annual Meeting in Boston, MA

