

**Middle East Studies Association
of North America, Inc.**

Strategic Plan

2025-2029

Mission Statement

The Middle East Studies Association (MESA) is a non-profit association that fosters the study of the Middle East, promotes high standards of scholarship and teaching, and encourages public understanding of the region and its peoples through programs, publications and services that enhance education, further intellectual exchange, recognize professional distinction, and defend academic freedom in accordance with its status as a 501(c)(3) scientific, educational, literary, and charitable organization.

Vision Statement

The strength of MESA lies in its dual commitment to scholarship and advocacy. MESA fosters, sustains, and disseminates scholarship, intellectual exchange beyond borders, and pedagogy. MESA advocates for academic freedom as well as the civil and human rights of scholars and students in the field of Middle East studies. MESA is proud to serve as an association that gives voice to the value of studying the Middle East in its global context, opposes all forms of discrimination, and defends the mission of higher education in both North America and in the Middle East, Southwest Asia, the Arab World and North Africa (MENA/SWANA) region.

Description

The Middle East Studies Association 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. MESA is primarily concerned with the study 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.

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 a biannual newsletter, *Issues in Middle East Studies*. An awards program recognizes scholarly achievement, service to the profession, and exemplary student mentoring. MESA is governed by a nine-member Board of Directors elected by the membership. The MESA Secretariat is overseen by the Executive Director and comprised of five full-time staff who administer the day-to-day operations of the association.

Member 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.

Areas of programming we intend to initiate or expand include:

- Organizing a grant-writing workshop;
- Organizing a biennial virtual midyear research workshop;
- Creating a “Learning & Development” section online with resources for graduate students and precarious members;
- Organizing cross-association panels with sister associations on attacks on academic freedom and current threats in the higher education environment;
- Expanding Know Your Rights offerings for members in ways responsive to the current threat environment;
- Surveying members to develop an understanding of members’ needs, as well as experiences of sexual harassment and/or discrimination at the annual meeting.

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.

Play a leadership role in defending academic freedom by creating and convening a network of allied memberships:

- Create programming to share models of academic freedom work from MESA, especially the work of the Committee on Academic Freedom and the Task Force on Civil and Human Rights.
- Demonstrate how the issues we tackle relate to challenges faced by other associations and fields to counteract the siloing of Middle East studies.
- Identify opportunities for strategic litigation in defense of our field and our members.

Develop a strategy to proactively make the affirmative case for the value of knowledge production in our field:

- Establish a new committee, the Committee on Academic Autonomy, to support the key institutions of knowledge production in Middle East studies.
- Craft a broadly appealing, positive, public intellectual campaign in defense of higher education in the humanities and social sciences and scholarship generally, and the value of expertise on the Middle East in particular.

Include precarity in our organizing on related issues:

- Organize a Board-sponsored panel at the Annual Meeting on structural precarity and academic freedom, with participation by precarious scholars in the field.
- Develop additional programming on precarity and academic freedom in collaboration with peer scholarly associations.

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.

MESA is committed to pursuing engagement with an array of constituencies including:

- Our membership;
- Sister scholarly associations;
- Other partner organizations, particularly in the areas of academic freedom, civil rights and support for displaced scholars; and
- Broader publics interested in the MENA/SWANA region.

Strategies to broaden the reach of MESA's work:

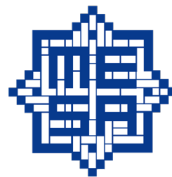
- Amplify awards and advocacy committees;
- Conduct regular webinars;
- Boost social media presence; and
- Offer media training for officers and spokespersons.

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.

Potential tasks will include:

- Seeking foundation funding for specific projects;
- Developing fundraising materials;
- Offering a menu of donation opportunities;
- Conducting outreach to higher-capacity individual donors with an interest in the region;
- Creating periodic personalized outreach campaigns;
- Developing MESA swag or other creative mechanisms to encourage donations.



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