



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

Headquarters & Secretariat

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Center for Contemporary Arab
Studies

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8 December 2025

Fouad Abd-El-Khalick
Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
University of Massachusetts, Amherst
provost@provost.umass.edu

Dean Lupe Davidson
Dean of the College of Humanities and Fine Arts
University of Massachusetts, Amherst
hfa@umass.edu

Dear Provost Abd-El-Khalick and Dean Davidson:

We write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our concern about the decision of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst (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. These actions by your administration terminated a search process that was well advanced, without any adequate explanation provided to the members of the search committee, the History Department or the UMass Amherst community. We believe that there is reason to suspect that your decisions in this regard may have violated proper university procedures and the principles of faculty governance, and they also raise concerns that political considerations may have been involved.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, the Association publishes the prestigious *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 2,800 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and outside of North America.

In fall 2024 the UMass Amherst History Department initiated a search for an assistant professor of modern Middle Eastern history. At the conclusion of the search process, an offer was made to a candidate who subsequently declined the offer. As we understand it, rather than proceeding to make an offer to the next-ranked finalist chosen by the search committee and approved by the department, the university notified the History Department that it was pausing



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the search. Repeated attempts by History Department faculty to elicit an explanation of this decision from the chair of the department and the administration failed to produce a satisfactory response.

In fall 2025 the university announced that it had cancelled the original search and was initiating an entirely new search, led by a new search committee. In a petition to Dean Davidson dated 25 October 2025 a significant number of department faculty, as well as graduate students and staff, protested this decision and called for the resumption of the original search and the extension of an offer to the next-ranked finalist, as is normally the case; as we understand it, they did not receive a response. Given the circumstances, we feel obliged to ask whether political considerations or other inappropriate factors may have played a part in these decisions; in any case, this way of proceeding raises concerns that a violation of the norms of faculty governance and hiring procedure may have taken place.

We call on the UMass Amherst administration to provide History Department members with a clear and supportable justification for its actions in this matter. We further call on the university to publicly reaffirm its commitment to conform to accepted norms of faculty governance and to the integrity of the hiring process.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ussama Makdisi', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Ussama Makdisi
MESA President
Professor, University of California, Berkeley

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Judith E. Tucker', written in a cursive style.

Judith E. Tucker
Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom
Professor Emerita, Georgetown University



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Cc

Dr. Anne F. Broadbridge
Professor and Chair, Department of History
University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Chancellor Javier Reyes
Chancellor, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Massachusetts Society of Professors – University of Massachusetts
Amherst

Farida Shaheed
United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education