

# **Middle East Studies Program**

## **Strategic Plan**

**May 2008**

### **Mission**

In the tradition of liberal arts education at Grand Valley State University, our mission is to introduce students, members of the campus community and of Western Michigan communities to the “heritage, problems and perspectives” of Middle Eastern cultures, thus helping them to better understand their own culture.

### **Vision**

The Middle East Studies program and minor will use an interdisciplinary approach to achieve the objectives of liberal education. Students will be encouraged to examine and analyze a variety of regional cultures in order to appreciate cultural diversity. They will be provided with the skills necessary to undertake graduate studies or relevant employment following graduation. We will initiate opportunities for students to apply their skills on the campus and in the local, national and international communities.

### **Values**

We Value

- Appreciation for human diversity and respect for all cultures.
- The interdisciplinary approach to learning
- Excellence in teaching rooted in interaction among faculty, students, and members of the community.
- The application of knowledge to serve the community
- Excellence in research, especially that which grows out of faculty-student collaboration

### **Program Overview:**

The MES program and minor were approved in 1997, with three objectives in mind: to acquaint our students with this critical region of the world, to interest them in studying it further, and to provide them with the knowledge and skills necessary to pursue their interests in education and employment related to the Middle East after graduating from GVSU, to inform the university community about differing aspects of Middle Eastern cultures and ongoing developments there, to provide outreach on the Middle East to the local communities of Western Michigan, including churches, schools, and other civic groups.

A number of faculty from diverse disciplines have assisted with the implementation of the program goals since its foundation. The program counts only one-third each of three faculty members as officially dedicated to MES, for the remainder, the program uses existing courses from various units. MES has opted to run only a few of its own courses. These include a very popular introductory course, MES 201 (5 sections/annum) and two sections of MES 399, which prepare students for participation in the annual Model Arab League simulations and in the Egypt study-abroad program. This is in part a result of the difficulty in obtaining additional faculty members assigned exclusively to the program. Rather, we have decided to allow students minoring in MES to take both core courses and electives in a number of different disciplines. We have successfully lobbied units to introduce courses specifically focusing on the Middle East, courses which our students can take to satisfy minor requirements. To date, such courses have been developed and taught in anthropology, art, geography, history, honors, modern languages, liberal studies, and philosophy.

We have established a number of projects to enhance the quality of student learning on the Middle East. These include the annual Michigan and National Model Arab League simulations, which have attracted increasing numbers of students in recent years (21 in 2006 & 2007; 30 in 2008). The Egypt study-abroad program has continued to enroll well since its inaugural year, 2000 (17 students 2006; 12 students 2008). We have also supported two additional programs in Jordan (language, archaeology), which although not directly the responsibility of MES have maintained close liaison with the program. We have also helped to establish an exchange program for MES students with Middle East Technical University in Ankara, Turkey. We have supported also the creation of student clubs, the Muslim Students Association and the Arab Culture Club. The ACC has been immensely successful with its annual Arab Culture Week in March. Regular orders for books, videos and DVDs focusing on the Middle East have substantially expanded printed and visual materials available to our students and faculty. We have also set up a website to provide access to program information and links to relevant sites.

Our offerings to the campus community have been numerous, timely and well attended. We have drawn audiences from students, faculty, staff and members of the local community. Our activities have been largely well received and have garnered appropriate media attention. Questions related to things Middle Eastern now routinely get relayed either to the director or via the new Area Studies Center office in Lake Ontario Hall.

We have been especially active in the area of outreach. We have established a liaison with the Arab-American Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS) in Dearborn, Michigan, and each year faculty representing MES have been providing workshops in schools and churches not only on topics related to the Arab world and Islam, but also on broader Middle Eastern subjects.

## **Strategic Goals & Objectives:**

1. **Expand the MES Program and Revise its curriculum:** (Linked to CoIS Goals 3 and 4)

### **Action Steps**

- a. Submit proposal to revise the program and expand its offerings.
- b. Increase learning options, including offering two tracks and more optional courses.
- c. Maintain Study abroad options.
- d. Add more faculty, including a tenure-track line in Arabic and Political Science.

2. **Increase enrollment and promote students' participation in program activities** (Linked to CoIS Goals 1 and 6)

### **Action Steps**

- a. Prepare a list of potential employers, possible benefits of having a minor in Middle East Studies.
- b. Expand offerings through a structured revision of minor requirements. Giving students more options (e.g. two tracks that might appeal to students' varying interests) will help increase our student body.
- c. Maintain and increase opportunities for student/student and faculty/student interaction and collaboration (e.g. encourage working with student groups on campus, support faculty/student research collaboration, etc).

3. **Maintain and increase program's events, outreach, and visibility** (Linked to CoIS Goal 1, 2, 3 & 5)

### **Action Steps**

- a. Continue to organize a variety of educational events on campus
- b. Seek permanent funding to turn Middle East Film Festival into an annual event.
- c. Continue to do community outreach through talks or workshops.

4. **Increase program's visibility outside GVSU:** (Linked to CoIS Goal 4)

**Action Steps**

- a. Encourage director and faculty to attend and present at national and international conferences.
- b. Continue to participate in the National Model Arab League.
- c. Seek funding that is specifically earmarked for faculty development.
- d. Seek funding to encourage our students to participate in Study Abroad opportunities.