

# Middle Eastern Studies

## Department of Political Science

### Kansas State University

The study of Middle Eastern affairs and politics has a lively presence at K-State. In addition to numerous courses offered, K-State professors are engaged in high-impact scholarly research that tackles a range of developments in the Middle East. Our faculty consistently shares their expertise on this important region with the residents of Kansas and the nation as a whole through public lectures and media interviews. In addition, Kansas State University's Department of Political Science regularly invites prominent scholars on Middle Eastern affairs to campus to share their insight on the region with students, faculty and the public. As a result, a vibrant intellectual community interested in Middle Eastern politics has developed both on the campus and in the community.



KSU's Department of Political Science rests at the center of this activity. The department regularly offers courses on the Comparative Politics of the Middle East, International Relations of the Middle East, and Political Islam for juniors, seniors, and graduate students. These popular classes are taught by Assistant Professor Sabri Ciftci, a well-known scholar on Middle Eastern affairs. Dr. Ciftci also offers a PhD level course on the Middle East and US Security that is always in high demand. These courses have generated considerable interest from students across campus, attracting young scholars from disparate fields of study such as Education, Business, and Engineering. Given the importance that Middle Eastern issues will have on the world scene for the foreseeable future, it should be apparent that the Department of Political Science's Middle Eastern courses fit well with KSU's vision to be a Top 50 public research university by 2025. It is only with knowledge of critical global regions such as the Middle East that we will meet the 2025 goal of developing "...a highly skilled and educated citizenry necessary to advancing the well-being of Kansas, the nation, and the international community."



Of course, cutting edge research informs the instruction of all of these courses and makes them timely and relevant. As the primary political scientist engaged in research on Middle Eastern issues, Dr. Ciftci has published on a range of important issues in some of the discipline's most prestigious journals. He has, for example, recently published research on the relationship between Islam and

democracy, Islamist movements, political institutions in the Middle East, and individual political behavior in the aftermath of the Arab spring. His work has appeared in the top ranked journal in the subfield of comparative politics, *Comparative Political Studies*, and in one of the leading general political science journals, *Political Research Quarterly*. His scholarship has also appeared in notable region specific journals, such as the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. Importantly, his research has gained the attention of policymakers, with the best example being some his published work in both Turkish and English on Turkish foreign policy. Some of Dr. Ciftci's PhD students are also expanding our knowledge of important topics in Middle Eastern politics. For example, one is currently studying the impact of Islamist ideology on US foreign policy choices, while another is examining the potential reasons that we see



large differences in military expenditures across the Arab world. Dr. Ciftci and a number of PhD students also frequently present at professional conferences across the US and the globe, such as the Middle East Studies Association and the American Political Science Association meetings.

KSU students and faculty are not only making significant contributions to scholarship on the Middle East, they draw inspiration from noted academics who visit campus. For example, in spring 2013 the Director of Institute of Turkish Studies met with students and faculty and gave a well-received public presentation. In fall 2013, a widely known and distinguished scholar of Middle East politics, Dr. Mark Tessler, will give a talk at KSU. Dr. Tessler is Vice Provost for International Affairs and the Samuel J. Eldersveld Collegiate Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Michigan. Among a number of accolades, Dr. Tessler is well known as the principal investigator of the widely used Arab Barometer surveys. We anticipate that a number of other prominent scholars on the Middle Eastern affairs will visit KSU in the coming years. The sum total of all of this activity meshes seamlessly with the KSU 2025 goal of creating "...a culture of excellence that results in flourishing, sustainable, and widely recognized research... that benefits society as a whole." KSU faculty and students who study Middle Eastern politics are not only well on their way to meeting this goal, in many ways they have already met it.



Activity on Middle Eastern issues of course extends beyond the Political Science department on the K-State campus. Well over 300 students from Middle Eastern countries currently study at KSU, and they share information about Middle Eastern cultures and experiences through student organizations like the Egyptian Student Association, the Saudi Club, and the Muslim Student

Association. These organizations sponsor public talks, open houses, and a range of other activities. In spring 2013, for example, the Egyptian Student Association organized a public seminar on democratization in the Arab world. The Muslim Student Association also frequently sponsors open forums on topical issues and the Saudi Club hosts a mini-festival annually to introduce Saudi Arabian culture to K-Staters and the community.



KSU is thus an excellent place to study and to build knowledge on Middle Eastern affairs. It boasts a vibrant intellectual community focused on Middle Eastern issues, which includes faculty members, students, visiting scholars, and interested members of the Manhattan community. Although many individuals have helped to foster the dynamic environment for the study of Middle Eastern at KSU, perhaps the greatest debt is owed to one man – Dr.

Michael Wadie Suleiman. A KSU faculty member for over forty years and a leading scholar of Arab and Arab-American issues, Dr. Suleiman's passion was the advancement of the study of Arab and Middle Eastern issues at Kansas State University. He gave his life's work to this passion, and the fact that he succeeded is evident across the KSU campus. Perhaps the most visible mark of his legacy can be found in the Suleiman Chair housed in the Department of Political Science. Although the Suleiman Chair currently sits empty, it has been designed to honor a prominent scholar on Middle Eastern studies and to help to support a wide variety of activities on Middle East studies at KSU such as talks and workshops.

Not surprisingly, plans have been laid to add to the Suleiman Chair endowment and to fill the chair, all with the goal of further advancing the study of Middle Eastern issues at KSU. Such study not only has a rich history at this land-grant university in the American Midwest, it continues to thrive both in the Political Science Department and throughout KSU and the Manhattan community.