Overview

Today’s Middle East is home to dynamic social movements, fluid identities, and shifting prospects for durable peace. The Elliott School’s Master of Arts in Middle East Studies program (MES) draws its student body and faculty from a large cross-section of academic and professional backgrounds—from the disciplines of anthropology, history, and political science, to the private sector and the halls of government. This diversity of theoretical approaches and lived experience promotes a synthesis of critical scholarly inquiry and pragmatic problem-solving aimed at addressing the pressing issues confronting the contemporary Middle East. Through an emphasis on regional language acquisition, in-country study, and skills courses ranging from “International Crisis Diplomacy” and “Speechwriting” to “Ethics in International Affairs,” the MES program equips graduates with the knowledge and skills they need to achieve their professional and intellectual goals.

Is this program for you?

The MES program offers students a rigorous scholastic experience and excellent access to the vast array of policy centers, research institutions, think tanks, and non-governmental institutions that call Washington, DC, home. Our courses are held in the evenings—providing flexibility for working professionals as well as students pursuing daytime internships. MES students design their own unique courses of study to develop a specialization in an existing field, such as conflict resolution, U.S. foreign policy, or international law—or to create a portfolio of coursework and research projects that focuses on a field they design for themselves, such as gender and public health or technology and development. The 40-credit Master of Arts program culminates with a ‘capstone’ experience—a policy-based research project designed to turn students into producers (as opposed to consumers) of original research. The capstone is typically a small-group project that addresses a discrete policy issue; financial assistance is available on a competitive basis to assist students in conducting overseas research.

Curriculum

The MES program curriculum is designed to give students a firm foundation in interdisciplinary approaches to the study of the Middle East, while also allowing for in-depth focus on a specific substantive area. Students design their own unique courses of study to develop a specialization in an existing field, such as conflict resolution, U.S. foreign policy, or international law—or to create a portfolio of coursework and research projects that focuses on a field they design for themselves, such as gender and public health or technology and development. The 40-credit Master of Arts program culminates with a ‘capstone’ experience—a policy-based research project designed to turn students into producers (as opposed to consumers) of original research. The capstone is typically a small-group project that addresses a discrete policy issue; financial assistance is available on a competitive basis to assist students in conducting overseas research.

Faculty

The Middle East Studies program’s greatest asset is its core faculty, which includes a diverse group of scholars with extensive experience living, working, and researching in the Middle East. Some of our core faculty include:
Marc Lynch (Ph.D., Cornell University): A prolific and highly-syndicated blogger and political commentator, Professor Lynch is an expert on new media and Islamist movements, and teaches courses on international relations of the Middle East.

Nathan Brown (Ph.D., Princeton University): Professor Brown’s research has garnered numerous awards from prestigious funding agencies, including Fulbright, Carnegie, and the United States Institute of Peace; he has extensive expertise on constitutional law, and teaches courses on comparative politics of the Middle East.

Ilana Feldman (Ph.D., University of Michigan): Professor Feldman has done extensive ethnographic and archival research in Gaza, the West Bank, and Cairo, and is the recent recipient of a highly-prestigious National Science Foundation grant; she teaches courses on culture, citizenship and displacement, and human rights.

Edward “Skip” Gnehm (Ambassador, retired): Professor Gnehm has had a long and distinguished career as a U.S. diplomat, serving in Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen; he teaches courses on U.S. foreign policy, contemporary Saudi Arabia, and professional skills courses related to the conduct of U.S. diplomacy overseas.

In addition to our core faculty, the university’s location in downtown Washington, DC, makes it a hub for visiting and adjunct faculty drawn from the ranks of policymakers, foreign officials, retired U.S. diplomats, and internationally renowned policy experts.

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

The majority of MES students study abroad at some point during the program to undertake intensive language study, volunteer with a regional NGO through the Aramex-GW Student Fund, or conduct research for their capstone projects. The MES program has formal relationships with The American University of Beirut, The American University in Cairo, and Bogazici University in Istanbul, where students can earn up to ten credits toward their degree. Students participating in the Aramex-GW Student program have worked for local NGOs in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and the West Bank, while MES students have conducted capstone-related research in Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, Turkey, and the West Bank.

THE INSTITUTE FOR MIDDLE EAST STUDIES

The Middle East Studies program is housed within GW’s Institute of Middle East Studies (IMES), which hosts a number of initiatives that offer students access to a wide range of events—including conferences, book launches, and speaker series. These include the Middle East Policy Forum, which addresses contemporary events in the region through discussion panels featuring policymakers, government officials, activists, and scholars; the Title VI outreach program, which targets K-12 educators, journalists, and veterans; and the Project on Middle East Political Science, an initiative aimed at increasing links between academicians, foreign-policy decision-makers, and the general public. IMES is one of only 20 Title VI National Resource Centers for the Middle East.

ABOUT THE ELLIOTT SCHOOL

The George Washington University’s Elliott School of International Affairs is one of the world’s leading schools of international affairs. Located in the heart of Washington, DC, its mission is to educate the next generation of international leaders, conduct research that advances understanding of important global issues, and engage the policy community in the United States and around the world. In the January/February 2012 issue of Foreign Policy, the Elliott School’s undergraduate and master’s programs were ranked among the top ten international affairs programs in the United States by the Teaching, Research, and International Policy (TRIP) survey.