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Introduction

The Middle East Studies Center (MESC) at The American University in Cairo values interdisciplinary study and draws from the humanities and social sciences to examine the Middle East as a historical, sociological, political and economic formation.

The center's strategic location in Cairo, a city with a rich cultural heritage, allows instructors to bridge the gap between the lecture hall and the social world. This location brings together scholars, artists and activists from the Middle East and beyond.

The Middle East Studies Center emphasizes the liberal arts education provided by the University. It provides students with academic credentials and firsthand knowledge to pursue careers in academia, diplomacy and the nonprofit sector, as well as business, finance, public relations, journalism and cultural affairs.

This handbook serves as a reference tool for students enrolled in the program

General Program Requirements

Ten courses are required for the Master of Arts (MA) degree for students who choose to take comprehensive exams, while eight courses are required for students choosing to write a thesis.

For more detailed information on thesis and comprehensive exam guidelines, refer to pages 9 - 13.

The following two courses are required for all students:

MEST 5201 - A Critical Introduction to Middle East Studies (3 credit hours)

MEST 5202 - Interdisciplinary Seminar in Middle East Studies (3 credit hours)

Students must also choose three of the following courses:

An approved 400 or 500-level course in modern Arabic literature

<u>ARIC 5133</u>	Islamic Institutions
<u>ARIC 5135</u>	Selected Topics in Middle Eastern History, 600-1800 AD: "History from Below"
<u>ARIC 5137</u>	International Trade 1000 - 1700: Egypt and the Mediterranean - Red Sea Trade
<u>ARIC 5231 \ HIST 5222</u>	Seminar on the Nineteenth-Century Middle East
<u>ARIC 5232 \ HIST 5223</u>	Seminar on the Twentieth-Century Middle East
<u>ECON 5252</u>	Economic Development in Middle East Countries
<u>MEST 4301</u>	Special Topics in Middle East Studies
<u>GWST 5101 \ ECLT 5101</u>	Visual, Literary, and Critical Approaches to Gender in MENA
<u>LAW 5205</u>	Islamic Law Reform
<u>POLS 5235</u>	Middle East Politics
<u>SOC/ANTH 5290</u>	Middle Eastern Societies and Cultures
<u>PPAD 5151</u>	Issues in International Security

Elective Courses

The remaining courses (**five** for those taking **comprehensive exams** and **three** for those choosing **to write a thesis**) may be selected from 400 or 500-level courses related to the Middle East in the following fields: anthropology/sociology, Arabic studies, economics, gender and women's studies, history, law, Middle East studies and political science. No more than two 400-level courses may be counted toward the degree and only one course originally at the 400 level but for which requirements are added to raise it to the 500-level may be taken. Students must consult with their adviser to ensure an adequate coverage of social science and history.

Thesis

Students who choose to write a thesis must register for MEST 5298 Research Methods (3 credit hours) in their third semester and MEST 5299 Thesis (noncredit) in their fourth semester of study. MEST 5298 will prepare students to write thesis proposals and provide a forum for presentation and feedback. MEST 5299 consists of individual work on the thesis and meetings with the thesis adviser.

MEST 5299-02 is designed for those students who are registering for the thesis beyond two semesters. Students registered for MEST 5299-02 pay the equivalent of one credit hour.

Comprehensive Examinations

Students who choose the comprehensive examinations track are required to take two additional courses and will register for MEST 5288 Comprehensives (noncredit) in their final semester in the program. MEST 5288 consists of individual work on comprehensive examinations and meetings with members of the student's comprehensive exams committee.

Advising

Students are strongly encouraged to consult the MESC director before the registration periods during each semester in order to ensure that all requirements are being adequately followed. Advising and registration periods are outlined in each year's academic calendar, which can be found here:

[https://documents.aucegypt.edu/Docs/students_Registrar/Academic Calendar AY22-23 \(Feb 22, 2022\).pdf](https://documents.aucegypt.edu/Docs/students_Registrar/Academic%20Calendar%20AY22-23%20(Feb%2022,%202022).pdf)

Sample Course Plans

This sample course plan is intended as a demonstration of a typical schedule for a full-time MESC master's student. The schedule listed below only serves as a guide, not a requirement. The schedule does not include Arabic-language courses that a student may need to take in order to reach the proficiency level required by the program. Students should take note of when particular courses, especially the three core courses required by the program, are offered in order to ensure that they are able to plan effectively to meet the program's course requirements.

Sample Course Plan for Thesis Track

First Fall Semester

MEST 5201 - A Critical Introduction to Middle East Studies
ARIC 5133 - Islamic Institutions
Elective Course

First Spring Semester

MEST 5202 - Interdisciplinary Seminar in Middle East Studies
POLS 5235 - Middle East Politics
Elective Course

Second Fall Semester

MEST 5298 - Research Methods
SOC/ANTH 5290 - Middle Eastern Societies and Cultures
Elective Course

Second Spring Semester

MEST 5299 - Thesis

Sample Course Plan for Comprehensives Track

First Fall Semester

MEST 5201 - A Critical Introduction to Middle East Studies

ARIC 5133 - Islamic Institutions

Elective Course

First Spring Semester

MEST 5202 - Interdisciplinary Seminar in Middle East Studies

POLS 5235 - Middle East Politics

Elective Course

Second Fall Semester

SOC/ANTH 5290 - Middle Eastern Societies and Cultures

Elective Course

Elective Course

Second Spring Semester

MEST 5288 - Comprehensives

Elective Course

Language Proficiency Requirements

General Guidelines

Each student in the Middle East studies MA program is required to demonstrate a proficiency in Modern Standard Arabic. This proficiency is intended to assist and prepare students to conduct research through the use of Arabic sources when necessary. Students must pass the language exam before embarking on either the thesis or comprehensive exam track. The required level of proficiency to obtain an MA in Middle East studies is equivalent to a level of 2.5 out of 5 on the U.S. Foreign Service Institute exam.

Obtaining Proficiency

In order to reach the proficiency required by the program, it is recommended that students have reached a level of Arabic equivalent to that which would be reached by taking ALNG 1103 Arabic at AUC. Unless students have already reached this required level of proficiency, it is recommended that they either register for courses the University to prepare for the proficiency exam or study through any other Arabic institution in Egypt or with a private tutor.

Students who wish to take their Arabic courses at AUC are encouraged to sit for an Arabic **placement test** before the beginning of the program. The placement test is administered by the Arabic Language Institute at AUC. Students who wish to take the placement exam should make arrangements through the secretary of the Arabic Language unit (ALNG), Monica Nabil. To make arrangements, students may either email Monica Nabil at *monica_nabil@aucegypt.edu* or pass by the ALNG office in Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Bin Abdulaziz Alsaud Hall, room 1012.

Taking the Exam

Once students are prepared to take the **proficiency exam**, they can make arrangements by contacting Monica Nabil through the same methods mentioned above. The proficiency exam is composed of several sections. The first section is focused on essay writing whereby students will be required to write approximately two pages, and the second section is focused on vocabulary. The remaining sections include grammar and short readings.

Please click [**here**](#) to view the exam dates, available seats and when to reserve for the accessible exam.

Thesis Guidelines

An MA thesis demonstrates the capacity for academic innovation and rigorous research on primary sources. Students in the Middle East studies graduate program are strongly encouraged to give adequate thought to their thesis topic prior to their second year of study. It is also recommended that students discuss their ideas with professors and the MESC director as early as possible in order to ensure that they are sufficiently prepared to work seriously on their topic at the beginning of their second year.

As stated previously in the course requirements page, students writing an MA thesis will register in MEST 5298 in their third semester and MEST 5299 in their fourth semester of study. MEST 5298 will prepare students to write thesis proposals and provide a forum for presentation and feedback. MEST 5299 consists of individual work on the thesis and meetings with the thesis adviser.

*** Please note the following:**

- MEST 5298 does not count as one of the eight required courses.
- MEST 5299-01 is a noncredit course in terms of academic load, but is calculated as three credits in terms of payment.
- MEST 5299-02 is designated for students who are registering for the thesis beyond two semesters. Students pay the equivalent of one credit hour.

Selection of Committee and Submission of an Abstract

Students are required to assemble a thesis reading committee and submit a thesis abstract.

The committee consists of three faculty members from at least two different departments.

Students must ensure that committee members, particularly the adviser, will be available to ensure the continuity of research and writing.

Students must also submit to their adviser a two to three-page abstract. This abstract must specify the research problem and include a summary of the state of the literature, the theoretical framework, the methodologies and a bibliography. The abstract and all relevant forms must be submitted to and approved by the MESC secretariat.

Writing a Proposal

Students will prepare a formal thesis proposal of 10 to 15 pages. This must be submitted by the end of the 10th week of the semester when students begin the thesis process. A thesis proposal contains the following elements:

- Cover Page
- Title page (with space for readers' approvals)
- Introduction/statement of the thesis questions (one or two pages)
- Chapter outline (one page)
- Review of the literature (two or three pages)
- Sources and methodology (two or three pages)
- Bibliography
- Tentative timetable for research and writing (one page)

Steps for Creating the Thesis Proposal

In undergoing the following steps, please be attentive to the need for revision and adaptation in consultation with the adviser. They should aim for innovative work that is clear and accessible to specialists outside of their field.

As a student working on a thesis, you should follow the steps below:

1. Propose a research focus. What are your research questions? What do you want to find out, and why does it matter? Include a minimum of relevant background information.
2. What period do you want to study and why?
3. Review previous literature on the subject. What have scholars already published on the subject of your research? Make sure to cover languages other than English to the extent possible. How does your research fit in with what has already been done? What gaps does your research fill?
4. What primary sources are you going to use? How will they help you address your research question(s)? What theoretical approach will you use?
5. Outline your chapters. Designate the headings and briefly sketch, in one or two sentences, what your main chapters will be.
6. List all works referred to in previous sections and anything else that is relevant and/or interesting in a bibliography.
7. In planning your research timetable, allow for contingencies in your schedule as well as in your adviser's schedule. Remember to leave time for things to go wrong, for public holidays, and for your readers and adviser to do what they need to do. Remember that how long they will take to return something to you depends, among other things, on the stage of the semester during which they receive your work.

The thesis committee members, in consultation with the MESC director, will approve the proposal and provide feedback to the student.

*Students are encouraged to use their proposals to apply for research grants that will cover their research expenses. For more information, refer to page

Final Draft of the Thesis

The final draft is produced over the fourth semester of study, and students should plan a research time frame in consultation with their thesis adviser.

The thesis adviser will read the thesis and make recommendations for revisions. When the advisor deems it acceptable, the other readers will read the thesis. At that point, the adviser and student, in consultation with the MESC secretariat, will schedule an oral defense of the thesis and inform the MESC secretariat of the date.

The defense begins with the student's 10-minute presentation on the thesis. Each committee member will then ask the student questions. Immediately following the oral defense, the committee will convene to assess the thesis. Each committee member will submit a written evaluation explaining his or her decision to accept or reject the work. In some cases, the committee members might ask students to incorporate further corrections or enhancements to the thesis before they agree to sign. The MESC director will meet with the committee in the case of disagreement in order to reach a final decision. Once a decision is reached, committee members will sign the thesis defense form and thesis signature page.

Students must submit the approved and defended final version of the thesis to the MESC director two weeks prior to the deadline for submitting the thesis to the dean's office. The thesis must be submitted on time for the degree to be conferred.

Two copies of the thesis must be submitted to the MESC secretariat: one loose copy for library use and one bound copy for the Middle East Studies Center. The thesis signature page is approved by the MESC director and is sent to the dean of graduate studies for approval, along with the library copy.

For AUC's general thesis requirements, click here:

<https://www.aucegypt.edu/academics/graduate-studies/thesis-preparation-and-submission>

Institutional Review Board Approval (IRB)

Students writing a thesis should be aware that all research involving human subjects must gain approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) before any research can begin. All research conducted by AUC faculty, students and staff requires IRB approval, even if the research is conducted outside of Egypt. IRB applications can be found and submitted through AUC's online submission system, which can be accessed here: <http://www.aucegypt.edu/academics/grad/Pages/IRBFAQ.aspx>

What Needs to be Included in an IRB Proposal

1. **IRB Online Application Form.** This can be accessed from the IRB website mentioned above. All applicants must fill out the questionnaire completely, without deleting or skipping any questions. All required attachments must be attached to the online application form.
2. **Informed Consent Form.** The IRB requires use of the official AUC Informed Consent Form, which can be found in both English and Arabic under the IRB Policies and Forms section of the online submission website.
3. **Surveys or Questionnaires.** If the student research requires the use of surveys or questionnaires, these must also be submitted as attachments to the IRB application. If the surveys or questionnaires will be conducted in Arabic, the IRB also requires that students submit their proposed Arabic translations.
4. **Interviews.** If the research involves interviews, answers to the following questions must be submitted to the IRB:
 - a. Will the interviews be taped? If so, will it be on audiotape or only videotape?
 - b. Where will the tapes be kept?
 - c. For how long will the tapes be kept?
 - d. Who will have access to the tapes?
5. **The student's name and department** must be listed at the top of the IRB proposal.

* For the most up-to-date information on IRB guidelines, click here:

<https://www.aucegypt.edu/research/institutional-review-board>

Comprehensive Examination Guidelines

As stated previously in the course requirements, students who choose the comprehensives track are required to take two additional elective courses and should register for MEST 5288 in their final semester.

The comprehensive examination option is designed to afford students the opportunity to closely engage three sets of literature in Middle East studies, as well as providing preparation for further study at the doctoral level.

Students following the comprehensive examinations track are expected to build on course work by thoroughly and rigorously engaging in broader substantial literature from three of the following disciplines: history, anthropology, sociology, comparative literature, political science, economics, law and gender studies.

Students will select a faculty examiner from each discipline, one of whom will serve as the committee chair. In consultation with these committee members, students will develop a bibliography that comprises the literature they seek to study. The form listing the three advisors must be submitted to the MESC secretariat according to the relevant deadlines.

Before the examination, each committee member will submit three questions to the committee chair. The chair is responsible for ensuring that the questions comprise a range of Middle East studies scholarship. Once the department is notified that the committee has set a date for the exam, the department will reserve a room with a computer for the student. Students will take the written comprehensive exam in a single, three-hour session and answer one question from each discipline. After the exam is complete, MESC will send the student's answers via email to the committee chair. The relevant committee member will grade each answer and submit the grade to the committee chair. The minimum passing grade for exams is a B.

After a student passes the written exam, the committee and the student will convene for an oral exam. The oral exam is a general discussion and an opportunity for students to clarify and expand upon their written answers.

Following the oral exam, the chair will convene with the committee to compile a final grade for the written exam, assess the student's oral performance, and award a final grade of Pass with Honors, Pass, or Fail.

Students who do not pass the oral exam may be required to retake the exam at the committee's discretion. A student who fails a comprehensive exam may retake the exam the following semester, but must maintain their disciplinary focus and faculty advisers.

Research and Conference Grants

It is extremely important that students are aware of their opportunity to receive funding for research or delivering conference papers. All full-time graduate students at AUC are eligible to apply for research and conference grants.

Those who have just graduated and intend to present the results of their MA thesis at a recognized professional conference may also apply.

A graduate student is only allowed one conference grant per year, and preference is given to those who have not received a grant in the previous year.

Conference Grants

Conference grants are awarded for delivering papers at recognized professional conferences. More information about conference grants, as well as the conference grant application and deadlines, can be found here:

<https://www.aucegypt.edu/academics/graduate-studies/guidelines>

Research Grants

Research grants are awarded to cover supplies, services and cost of data, which must be purchased from external sources. Research grants also assist with publishing expenses such as the costs of reprints, page charges and preparation publishing. More information about research grants, as well as the research grants application and deadlines, can be found here:

<https://www.aucegypt.edu/academics/graduate-studies/support-grants>

Contact

For any further inquiries about research or conference grants, students may either contact the department chair or the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies.

For general and fellowship inquiries: Grad@aucegypt.edu

Fellowships and Financial Aid

Students should be aware of the various opportunities available to students for funding their studies in the Middle East studies program. The University offers a variety of institutional and non-institutional fellowships for graduate students, as well as opportunities to receive financial aid.

Fellowships

More than 30 different fellowships are offered to graduate students at AUC. Each fellowship is subject to its own individual criteria for eligibility and deadlines. For the most updated information regarding fellowships at AUC students are encouraged to visit <http://www.aucegypt.edu/admissions/fellowships> or visit the Office of Graduate Student Services, next to Bassily Auditorium.

Financial Aid

Financial aid is granted to cover a percentage of tuition to assist graduate students with demonstrated financial need in order to continue their studies at AUC. Financial aid grants will be determined according to student or family financial resources, as appropriate, within University budget limitations. Students may apply for financial aid by picking up an application from the Student Service Center or by filling in the online request for financial aid.

Further information about the financial aid process and deadlines may be found here:
<https://www.aucegypt.edu/admissions/financial-affairs/financial-aid>

Work-Study Program

The Office of Student Financial Affairs, in collaboration with AUC's Career Center, provide students with the opportunity to gain on-campus work experience and develop skills while earning some money through the Work-Study Program. All enrolled graduate students are eligible for the program and can be compensated by a maximum of a 15 percent reduction in tuition. For more information, click here:

<https://careercenter.aucegypt.edu/students/work-study>

Middle East Studies Center Facilities

The Middle East Studies Center is located on the second floor of Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Bin Abdulaziz Alsaud Hall. The center has a large conference room (Room 2175) where lectures and student gatherings are frequently held. A small reading room (Room 2174) is also available to students as a space for quiet study and includes a selection of theses written by former Middle East studies students.

In order to access the Middle East Studies Center at AUC New Cairo:

1. Enter under the arch at the far end of Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Bin Abdulaziz Alsaud Hall (shown as number 10 on the map below) that is directly across from the ramp of the Administration Building (shown as number 11 below).
2. As you are walking down the small hallway under the arch enter the first set of doors to your left.
3. Take either the elevator or the stairs up to the second floor of the building.
4. Once on the second floor, if using the stairs turn left. If using the elevator, turn right and walk down the hallway past the bathrooms.
5. Turn right at the end of the hallway, and you will be facing the Middle East Studies Center.

