



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

# **Strategic Plan**

**2021–2025**

## Mission Statement

The Middle East Studies Association (MESA) is a non-profit association that fosters the study of the Middle East, promotes high standards of scholarship and teaching, and encourages public understanding of the region and its peoples through programs, publications and services that enhance education, further intellectual exchange, recognize professional distinction, and defend academic freedom in accordance with its status as a 501(c)(3) scientific, educational, literary, and charitable organization.

## Vision Statement

The strength of MESA lies in its dual commitment to scholarship and advocacy. MESA fosters and disseminates inclusive scholarship, intellectual exchange beyond borders, and pedagogy about the Middle East and North Africa. MESA advocates for academic freedom. It is committed to supporting struggles against racism and anti-Blackness. It opposes anti-Muslim racism, anti-Semitism, and all forms of discrimination based on gender and sexuality. This vision of MESA's role will guide the implementation of the Strategic Plan over the coming five years.

## Background and Plan of Action

The Strategic Planning Committee was constituted by the Board of Directors (BoD) in November 2019 to develop a plan with goals and objectives to guide the BoD and the Secretariat over the next five years. These goals serve as guidelines for MESA's leadership as it carries out the association's mission in a changing environment concerning research, pedagogy, employment, and threats to academic freedom and civil rights. MESA is committed to transparency and pluralism. This plan is an evolving document, and was circulated among MESA's affiliated organizations for feedback in December 2020. We continue to welcome input and comments from our members.



## Long-Term Goals

Guided by MESA's mission and its dual commitment to scholarship and advocacy, the Strategic Plan recommends that MESA's BoD pursue the following goals:

1. Further intellectual exchange in North America and globally
2. Advance research within and across disciplinary and regional boundaries
3. Support undergraduate and graduate students' professional and intellectual development
4. Encourage public understanding of, and reward public scholarship on, the region
5. Recognize the importance of academic freedom and contribute to its defense
6. Foster and promote anti-racism and anti-discrimination in MESA as an organization and in the Middle East as an academic field.
7. Preserve and enhance MESA's organizational independence and financial health



## Further Intellectual Exchange

### ***Ongoing Practices:***

1. Host an annual meeting which welcomes high-quality, diverse scholarship from a range of disciplines
2. Foster innovative and high-quality research through the publication of *International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES)* and *Review of Middle East Studies (RoMES)*
3. Actively maintain ties with scholars from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region through the Global Academy, and help Global Academy Fellows to network with one another and with the institutional partners gathered into regional clusters of universities
4. Serve as a clearinghouse for information about programs of study and academic events related to the MENA region
5. Maintain affiliations with other academic organizations focusing on the MENA region in the United States and globally

### ***Objectives:***

1. Collaborate with other area studies professional organizations to support transregional scholarly initiatives
2. Support the professional development of students and junior faculty through webinars and panels or other workshops and gatherings at the annual meeting
3. Apply for foundation funding to support innovative seminars that advance the field of MENA studies, and partner with grant-receiving centers, institutes, or affiliates
4. Create a welcoming meeting space for all attendees through the enactment of policies developed by the Anti-Sexual Harassment Committee (ASH)
5. Incorporate anti-racism and anti-discrimination practices in all areas of intellectual exchange



## Teaching, Pedagogy, and Student Support

### ***Ongoing Practices:***

1. Coordinate with MESA's Committee for Undergraduate Middle East Studies (CUMES)
2. Support the organization's Undergraduate Education Award
3. Facilitate the Undergraduate Research Workshop at the annual meeting
4. Devote space in *Issues in Middle East Studies* to essays on pedagogy
5. Recognize excellence in research by graduate students through the Malcolm H. Kerr Dissertation Awards
6. Support graduate student participation in MESA through travel fellowships for students, and sponsoring panels and workshops at the annual meeting to benefit graduate students
7. Recognize the importance of graduate students in the organization through the Student Director position on the MESA Board

### ***Objectives:***

1. Promote research on pedagogy through expanded publication opportunities in MESA outlets and encouraging papers and panels on pedagogy at the annual meeting
2. Connect and seek collaborative opportunities with the teaching and learning programs of other area studies and disciplinary associations
3. Share resources for undergraduate Middle East studies programs (creation of minors, certificates, program development, curriculum and assessment best practices)
4. Encourage the development of resources for pedagogical training, course design, instructional support, and professional development for graduate students in Middle East studies
5. Promote teaching and learning in MENA languages; seek opportunities for collaboration with centers and with language-specific professional associations



## Academic Freedom Advocacy

### *Ongoing Practices:*

1. Advocate through letter writing for the protection of academic freedom in North America and the Middle East, North Africa, and Gulf region
2. Publicize the work of the Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) to the MESA membership and the broader academic and rights communities through the annual academic freedom award and annual meeting panels
3. Advise the board regarding sites or instances of particular concern for possible board action or statements
4. Coordinate with the Task Force on Civil and Human Rights (TFCHR) in seeking to protect institutions and scholars whose academic freedom is threatened in North America
5. Compile and provide resource materials for students, faculty, and administrators to address emerging challenges to academic freedom
6. Provide advice to other associations seeking to address academic freedom issues
7. Join, where appropriate and with board approval, with other associations in academic freedom petitions, letters, and campaigns

### *Objectives:*

1. Identify ways to further publicize the academic freedom cases adopted
2. Engage in more systematic follow-up on cases about which CAF has written to note changes to or continuation of their circumstances
3. Further develop ties with academic freedom (or similar) committees in other academic associations in North America
4. Offer assistance, when appropriate, to Middle East studies associations based outside the United States seeking to establish academic freedom committees
5. Coordinate outreach and identification of scholars with the MESA Global Academy



## Promoting Anti-Racism and Anti-Discrimination

MESA is committed to the struggles against racism, anti-Blackness, discrimination and the systemic and systematic prejudices directed against people of different identities and backgrounds. This means actively encouraging within our organization the participation of communities of color including Black, Native American, Indigenous, Latinx, and ethnic minorities as well as of people of different genders and LGBTQ2+ communities. Our commitment entails promoting research and teaching on the experiences of Black communities and other racialized minorities in the MENA region, on the historical and contemporary connections between the Middle East and other regions with an emphasis on Africa, and on themes, categories, and discourses regarding race and colorism in the MENA region.

MESA's centering of anti-racism and anti-discrimination work aims to move beyond increasingly ambiguous terms like "diversity" and "inclusion" by actively advancing, implementing, and institutionalizing processes within MESA that can help dismantle racist and discriminatory practices embedded in academia. This work extends to all the various marginalized histories, languages, and social groups of the Middle East and North Africa, and the variety of academic disciplines we use to study them.

### *Ongoing Practices:*

1. Continue consulting, as requested, with HBCUs and MSIs on the establishment of programs and centers of Middle East studies
2. Continue support, as requested, to the Middle East Outreach Council to develop programs and materials that reach K–12 schools with significant Black, Latinx, Native American and Indigenous student bodies
3. Charge the MESA Program Committee with ensuring that the Annual Meeting covers diverse topics that speak to geographic linkages and marginalized groups, a greater emphasis on African communities and issues relating to transnational networks between Africa, the Americas, and the Middle East, and a broad range of presenters of diverse backgrounds in accordance with the goals described above
4. Build on previous outreach to sister academic professional membership associations to develop joint activities



## Promoting Anti-Racism and Anti-Discrimination cont

### **Objectives:**

1. Establish a committee charged with further articulating and implementing these goals. The committee is encouraged to consider developing some of the following proposals in addition to others it may recommend.
2. Coordinate with *IJMES* and *RoMES* editorial staffs and boards to develop plans for inclusion of diverse topics and authors in their pages
3. Work with CUMES to encourage the recruitment of undergraduate students from underrepresented minorities to study the Middle East and attend the MESA Annual Meeting
4. Develop a fellowship program for the annual meeting to encourage attendance of historically underrepresented groups of students and scholars in Middle East studies
5. Support panels, webinars, and resource lists on teaching about marginalized communities in the Middle East
6. Develop a book prize or a best article prize for scholarship on issues of race and color in the MENA region and the connections between the Middle East and Africa



# MESA's Organizational Independence and Financial Stability

## *Ongoing practices:*

1. Support the reorganization and the transition of MESA's Secretariat to Washington, DC
2. Ensure that the Secretariat maintains a stable and independent working environment by continuing our productive relationship with the Institute for Middle East Studies at George Washington University's Elliot School for International Affairs
3. Secure the independence of the Secretariat's work.
4. Consult with and support BoD committees such as the MESA Global Academy, ASH, CAF, TFCHR, Committee on Precarity and Adjunctification, and Committee on Anti-Racism and Anti-Discrimination (CAA) on new projects and the expansion of MESA's commitments

## *Objectives:*

1. Reassess the office space needs of MESA's Secretariat in light of the reorganization of its staff and its move to the DC area
2. Set priorities for MESA fundraising in an environment restricted by the economic downturn caused by COVID-19
3. Task the Development Committee with developing a long-term fundraising strategy in consultation with the BoD
4. Approach foundations for programmatic funding of new initiatives, and clear potential approaches by the Global Academy to new funders





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