

STATEMENT  
FOR THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES ON

The Higher Education Act, Title VI  
and the  
Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act, Section 102(b)(6),  
International Education and Foreign Language Studies

On Behalf of the  
Middle East Studies Association and the Middle East National Resource Centers\*

**Madame Chairwoman and Members of the Committee:**

My name is Amy Newhall and I am Executive Director of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA), Acting Director of the University of Arizona's Center for Middle Eastern Studies (a Title VI National Resource Center) and a faculty member in the U of A's Department of Near Eastern Studies. I am pleased to have the opportunity to present the views of the Middle Eastern studies community on the Higher Education Act, Title VI and the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act, Section 102(b)(6), commonly known as Fulbright-Hays. The Middle East Studies Association (MESA) is a private, non-profit, non-political learned society that brings together scholars, educators and those interested in the study of the region from all over the world. It has a membership of more than 2,600 and now serves as an umbrella organization for more than sixty institutional members and thirty-nine affiliated organizations. Seventeen Middle East studies centers are designated National Resource Centers (NRCs) during the 2003-2006 Title VI grant cycle.

I would like to thank the members of the committee for the opportunity to provide them with this information and with our perspective.

**What do you view as the purpose of the Department of Education's Title VI and Fulbright Hays program(s)?**

The purposes of the Title VI and Fulbright-Hays programs are complementary and interlinked: They aim to stimulate and encourage public interest in obtaining knowledge about different areas of the world and learning the languages of those areas. The programs target audiences from K-12 (through Fulbright K-12 teacher's group study abroad programs and Title VI NRC outreach programs to K-12 teachers) to post-graduate students. They expand our knowledge of the areas by supporting research, and they foster personal and intellectual ties between peoples by encouraging collaboration and the exchange of ideas.

Their purposes are further to establish a framework and an articulated system for people contemplating careers using area specific knowledge and language capabilities to identify career paths and an institutional structure in which to pursue them. Support for NRCs ensures that coherent and concentrated programs will be available to students in a wide range of disciplinary areas and applied programs. Title VI and Fulbright ensure robust career trajectories which in turn build national capacities in skills and knowledge that are

essential to the well-being and progress of the nation: employers in any sector or specialty can find the experts or highly trained professionals they need. Thus there is a predictable pipeline for the next generation of teachers and experts.

From the point of view of the Middle East NRCs these programs have been essential in coalescing miniscule and fragmented enclaves of expertise into critical densities of faculty, programs, and resources in business, diplomacy, security, scholarship, outreach, and international understanding. Title VI funding goes to the heart of high-quality education: a broad-based curriculum cutting across disciplines and professional schools; a state-of-the-art language instruction program that combines sound pedagogy with innovative techniques; a strong library collection that supports teaching and research at all levels; an intellectually vibrant and culturally creative academic setting that brings students closer to the heartbeat of the region and of the scholarship on it; a teaching staff with opportunities to develop professionally and give students first-rate training; fellowship support to attract outstanding students; a network of academic linkages that opens for students more enriching training and career options; outreach that helps make our children and public better informed. The overall, long-term outcome is superior programs that produce well-trained specialists and serve the region and the nation.

#### **What are the program(s)' strengths, weaknesses, and criticisms?**

##### ***Strengths:***

Competition for grant funding has ensured that there are proper incentives in place for centers to maintain high standards. Competition also has rendered the system flexible and responsive to changes in federal priorities within very short time frames. For example, the introduction of federal emphases on infusing area expertise into applied programs like business, law, and public policy resulted in new courses and new hires within those programs; the shift to prioritizing oral competency in language acquisition (see below) has encouraged the development of new pedagogies, materials and evaluation methods.

NRC status carries significant prestige which adds value to the modest levels of actual award funding. This makes it possible for centers to leverage resources, positions and support for students from university administrations. The results of a preliminary survey suggest that over the last two or three grant cycles NRC seed money has led to nineteen tenured or tenure-eligible positions in Middle East studies and thirty three contract positions. One center reports: "because of the increase in Title VI funding, in the past four years, our Center has doubled the size of our Arabic language faculty from two full-time professors to four" in order to cope with increased enrollment. "This level of expansion in an academic program would not be feasible without Title VI funding." Students also have benefited from the leveraging power of Title VI. Of the twelve Middle East centers for which I have information, five report that their institutions provide tuition waivers to all Middle East FLAS recipients and four institutions provide some tuition waivers. These positions and waivers represent significant institutional contributions and demonstrate the power of Title VI.

Systematic and thorough evaluation procedures have ensured that funds are being used for their intended purposes. They have also served a very important protective function in

an era of politicization. Qualified peer review committees have protected the process and the programs from partisan politics. Additional layers of university review further ensure that neither faculty nor curricula are subjected to fluctuating political litmus tests.

Title VI has had a positive effect by promoting inter-disciplinary dialogue and encouraging universities to transcend departmental segmentation. The resulting programs are models of how to structure effective and rich undergraduate and graduate interdisciplinary curricula. Many professional programs now provide the opportunity to integrate a specialization in Middle East area studies, for example, in Public Policy, Law, Public Health, Journalism, Business, Information and Library Science.

FLAS fellowship funding and Fulbright awards make it possible for students to take on the rigorous and time-consuming challenge of attaining high levels of proficiency in Middle Eastern Languages. FLAS fellowships help institutions attract the best students. Fulbright grants supporting graduate study abroad are instrumental in the creation of new knowledge about the region and the matriculation of new scholars and teachers.

Another major strength of the Title VI program is its emphasis on outreach. Middle East NRCs serve the larger university community (for example, by creating joint courses or programs with other departments to internationalize the university's learning environment); local communities (by creating free public lecture series or art exhibitions); and the nation (by organizing national conferences, publishing materials for general readership). In the aftermath of 9/11, Middle East NRC capacity and experience made it possible to organize almost instantly informational sessions and presentations for the public. Hundreds of lectures, public forums, and media events kept the public informed and provided venues where questions could be answered and analyses debated.

Because of Title VI, NRCs devote a great deal of time and resources to teacher training for K-12. Universities would not support such activities on their own. Schools of Education are focused on pedagogical training rather than on content, while area studies centers can become focused exclusively on teaching and research. Outreach to K-12 teachers is a critical part of the effort to increase the nation's understanding of the Middle East and attract future students.

***Weaknesses:***

The weakness of the Title VI FLAS Fellowship program is that demand for awards far exceeds the supply. Capable students drop out because they cannot afford to continue, or even start the necessary long years of training. A further glaring weakness is that FLAS is not available to undergraduate students. It makes more sense to start the study of less commonly taught languages early. However, simply making FLAS available to undergraduates without expanding the program might accelerate the careers of a few but exacerbate the overall shortage of support.

The success of the Title VI program is due to the congruence of national interests and the broader interests dictated by scholarship and research. If this mutual common interest is not maintained and preserved, the programs will suffer and our national capacity will be

diminished. The Middle East studies community wishes to express concern that “open inquiry, reasoned engagement, intellectual rigor and responsibility to the world are now at risk in a post-9/11 era of belligerence and increased politicization.” (Cohen and Kennedy, 2002.)

***Criticisms:***

*Level of Oral Language Proficiency:*

Tremendous progress has been made in the teaching of the big four Middle Eastern languages (Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, Turkish). Arabic provides a special challenge because of its variant forms, from widely differing dialects to classical and modern written forms. Responding to the greater focus on spoken Arabic, faculty developed new teaching materials, including the *Al-Kitaab* textbook series which are now the most widely used textbooks among NRC (16 of 17) and nonNRC Arabic programs. Emphasis is decidedly on speaking and listening in volume 1. The second edition includes even more Egyptian Arabic. The series was developed by faculty trained at NRC institutions and who are employed at NRC institutions. In Persian, a new textbook developed through a cooperative effort of faculty at two NRCs is solid proof that the Persian-teaching community is very serious about spoken language; in this textbook, colloquial Persian is introduced from the start and taught simultaneously with the standard written language. There has been similar progress in Turkish, with increased access to audio and video. Many teachers use mass media in their classes, as exemplified by *Turkish Tutor*, an online program based on a Turkish soap opera. Sevgili Murat (a feature-length film produced by the NMELRC at BYU) gives 1st- and 2nd-year Turkish students access to contextualized and level-appropriate spoken Turkish. Hebrew teachers have always emphasized speaking skills. Increased numbers of courses in dialects are offered now through NRCs, including Egyptian, Levantine, Gulf and Moroccan Arabic.

Language instructors are encouraged to keep up with new materials and methods through language workshops sponsored by consortia of NRCs and Language Resource Centers (LRCs) every year. Regional workshops serve participants from NRCs who work across languages. Thus developments or materials made in Hebrew, for example, can inspire those in Persian.

We have some indication of the progress of the intensified emphases on spoken language: the Center for Arabic Study Abroad program (CASA), which draws its students primarily from NRC institutions, now includes an Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) on its qualifying examination. The change in OPI score (Interagency Language Roundtable, ILR scale) from 2001 to 2004 (four years) has been significant, rising from an average of 2 to 3.

*Middle East NRCs Discourage Students from Government and Military Service:*

This is directly contradicted by the evidence. In the spring of 2003 students of Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, and Turkish at 38 institutions, including 14 of 17 Middle East NRCs, were surveyed by the BYU National Middle East Language Resource Center about the career objectives that motivated their study of these languages. The majority of respondents were studying Arabic. Students responded to statements using a 5-point

Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree). The study recorded those who responded "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" to the career categories of: Higher Education, K-12 Teaching, Government, Military, Business, NGO, Other. (Preliminary results can be found at <http://nmeirc.org/survey/results/employment/>.)

Among all students of Arabic we find no significant statistical differences between the motivations of students at NRC institutions and non-NRC institutions. The picture is slightly different if we look solely at graduate students. There is a statistically modest variation indicating that more NRC graduate students look toward a career in the military or K-12 education than do their nonNRC counterparts. The preference for a career in government is virtually identical among NRCs and nonNRCs in the categories of "all students" and "graduate students." The Arabic data suggests that the career choices of students are not influenced by the NRC status or non-NRC status of the institution at which they study. The data also suggest that while interest in government careers is high among students of Arabic, the allure of a career in the military is less compelling for reasons that are extrinsic to students' educational settings.

**How would you define "success" for the program(s)? How would you determine if the program(s) are "successful" or "effective"?**

Success can be defined by the number of students proficient in the indicated languages, the depth of expertise created in students with a serious engagement in the region who go on to prominent positions in the government, private, media, and education sectors, and the strength of open dialogue between faculty, students, and the public. Success in outreach efforts can be determined by demonstrably sustained activities with long term partners and the response of those partners to outreach programs.

Centers vary in size and areas of strength and they have different levels of success to report. The example of one Middle East NRC demonstrates a very high level of success: a 2005 internal survey of career choices of 61 recent Middle East studies graduates (2002-2005) asked: "Does your employment utilize a less-commonly taught language and/or area expertise?" Of 34 US MA and PhD graduates, 85% responded in the affirmative, 62% of whom work in non-academic professions. Only 1 alumna (3%) responded in the negative. The 2005 survey revealed that recent MA graduates have had an impact on leadership in the media and the arts (22%), continued with graduate study (19%), joined U.S. Intelligence and Federal Government or Foreign Services (13%), and pursued careers in education (at elementary/ secondary/ higher levels and in administration, 11%), and NGO work (5%). The NRC impact on academia is most impressive: of 25 graduates who received PhD's between 2002 and 2005, 19 are employed in academia.

Since 9/11 Middle East area studies and language programs have witnessed a dramatic increase in the numbers of students applying to programs and taking courses. Preliminary data suggest that the number of undergraduate majors has increased by at least 50% and the number of students applying to MA programs nearly tripled. Enrollments in Arabic have increased at least 30% and some NRC institutions indicate more than 100% growth. The pressure on institutional structures has been heavy but perhaps the greatest success of

the Title VI program has been the quick action it has taken to increase funding for teaching of Middle Eastern languages. Because of the increase in Title VI funding, in the past four years, some NRCs have managed to increase the number of their Arabic language faculty and some have even hired language coordinators to ensure smooth and synchronized offerings. Without Title VI funding and the capacity it has fostered, such rapid expansion would not have been possible.

NRCs collect large amounts of data to track the success of the programs they organize. They keep track of the number of people who are served by their programs, including detailed data on enrollments in both language and non-language courses, the numbers of people attending conferences, lectures, and workshops, numbers and types of courses offered, and the number of majors and graduates in different areas. Some NRCs survey their students and end-users of their services. They often survey participants in events to get feedback. Students, as part of routine university evaluation processes, also fill out surveys of classes, instructors, or programs. Many programs test students at each stage in the language training process to determine how much their language skills have progressed. Some NRCs make an effort to track their alumni to see what sorts of fields they go into, and how successful they are.

Middle East NRCs have served and continue to serve as important sources for print and non-print media. After 9/11, faculty answered questions and provided background and analysis to many newspapers and journals, among them: *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Dallas Morning News*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Chicago Tribune*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Time Magazine*, *Newsweek*, news agencies such as AP, Reuters and UP, and many local newspapers. Non-print media also turned to faculty experts, for example: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, New England Cable News, ABC, BBC, CBS, CNN, NPR, PBS, VOA, and many local and foreign stations.

**Would you measure effectiveness differently for the various Department of Education Title VI and Fulbright Hays programs?**

Although the two programs are complimentary, they do operate in different ways and in different locations. Fulbright Hays and other teacher training programs should ideally be evaluated at key moments; when knowledge is acquired and when that knowledge is imparted.

**What data/information do you use to measure the effectiveness of this program(s)?**

Annual performance reports and grant applications require that both quantitative and qualitative measures are used. Some of quantitatively measured areas are: numbers and distribution of enrollments, numbers and distribution of activities (outreach, public education, workshops etc.); tracking student progress after graduation at each level; numbers, kinds, and distribution of publications and public dissemination of research; numbers of faculty and patterns of growth or decline, student progress in language learning (by exam).

Some of the qualitatively assessed areas are: internal and external reviews (of overall programs, departments, language programs); course evaluations from students;

evaluations from outreach partners; formal feedback after individual events; student progress in language learning (by interview).

The chart below shows one Middle East NRC’s system for evaluating their students’ language proficiency.

Student training evaluation plan based on quantifiable output and outcome, adapted 2003			
NRC/FLAS Activity	Output	Outcome	Data Sources
Undergraduate and graduate training programs	Enrollments; student evaluations; number of graduates	Production of scholars with LCTL proficiency and/or Middle East expertise	U Student Information System (SIS); Registrar; Schools and Department offices; Center listserves
Professional Internships	Number of interns	Practical training for students; contacts with potential employers	Tracked by Dept. Director of Graduate Studies; U Career Services
FLAS fellowships	Applicant numbers; award numbers; variety of schools, disciplines, and career plans	LCTL proficiency levels attained; area studies expertise; research in Mid. East	Tracked by Program Coordinator and U FLAS Coordinator; FLAS application forms
NYU and other Fellowship support	Applicant numbers; Award numbers	LCTL proficiency and/or Middle East expertise; travel to /research on M. East	U SIS; Schools and Department offices; Admissions and Fellowship Offices
Placement	Numbers of graduating students in employment or further training	Graduates with MES training in employment Or further training	U Career Services & Alumni Association; email and phone surveys

**What data/information do you think is necessary or should be used to measure effectiveness?**

As above: a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, in conjunction with site visits and regular reviews by all relevant institutional parties.

**How would you use the results of an evaluation?**

Evaluations have proved constructive and have lead to improvements in NRC programs, for example, the fostering the addition of specialist advisors, career counselors, language

program coordinators, internship opportunities, computer language lab facilities, formally organized conversation groups (with native speakers)

**How would you use the results of an evaluation?**

A carefully constructed, objective and fact-based evaluation or review by such a body as the National Academy of Sciences could be helpful in strengthening programs. It also might help improve public understanding of those programs.

**How do you view the role of the Department of Education's Title VI and Fulbright Hays programs as similar or different from the role of other related federal programs?**

Other federal programs are directed at producing area studies expertise for specific sectors of the government, the military, or security and intelligence agencies. Department of Education and Fulbright Hays programs do not direct or prescribe student future employment, rather they focus on expanding knowledge, teaching languages, promoting and improving education and broadening public understanding of the region.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide this information. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

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Georgetown University  
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University of Pennsylvania  
University of Texas  
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Yale University