October 24, 2008, marked a major milestone in Arab and American history, with profound significance for community members in New Jersey and, potentially, the whole nation. On this day, Governor Jon Corzine signed into law the Arab Heritage Commission, making this executive order the first ever of its kind in the United States. Its inception here is fitting, since New Jersey is home to the second largest population of Arabs in the nation next to Michigan. The Arab American Forum, a local organization, alongside leaders from the Arab-American community in New Jersey, spearheaded the efforts to have the commission enacted into law. Credit is also due to Governor Corzine’s vision, for he has embraced Arab accomplishments and their contributions to American society, by providing them with a platform from which to celebrate their presence in our wonderfully diverse state.

The Commission consists of twenty-five members, sixteen of which are members of the Arab-American community in New Jersey, while the remainder are state officials. Mr Hany Mawla Esq., a distinguished attorney and also adjunct professor at CMES and graduate of Rutgers, has been appointed by Governor Corzine as the chair of the Commission. The Commission will ensure that Arab-American culture, history and heritage will be integrated in the core curriculum of high schools statewide. This will have a tremendous effect in honoring the presence of the community in New Jersey and defeating the negative stereotypes that have intensified since September 11th, 2001.
The Center for Middle Eastern Studies aims to be an active contributor in the implementation of a statewide program of study that will focus on incorporating the Arab-American experience in classes at all public schools. The Center also looks forward to collaborating with the commission in organizing events at Rutgers and throughout the state, especially during the month of April, which has now been designated by the State of New Jersey as “Arab Heritage Month”. There is hope that the bold and innovative step that Governor Corzine has taken will be replicated by states across the nation, and then adopted at the federal level.

Interview with Mr. Hany Mawla Esq. on His Role as the CMES Community Liaison and His Recent Appointment as the Chairman of the Arab Heritage Commission

Why was the Community Advisory Committee formed?

The committee was formed to provide the community with a way of formalizing its commitment to the university and to CMES and not to simply provide funds to the university without more involvement. Most of the donors to CMES are professionals and successful in their own right. Many are also proud New Jerseyans who are either Rutgers graduates or affiliated with Rutgers in some way, either because their children attend the university or because they have some other connection to it. People of such commitment to their professions, family and the university, want to see CMES succeed in its mission. The Community Advisory Committee was the logical answer to this need.

What role will the Committee play in relation to CMES?

The Committee’s role is to serve as a liaison between the community at large and the university. The Committee serves at the pleasure of the university and CMES and thus is charged with assisting CMES in fulfilling its goals and spreading its fame. The Committee also sees itself as serving the community in an unofficial fiduciary role to assure the growth of the program regardless of the donors and regardless of CMES’s management.
What are the main expectations of the Middle Eastern Community from Rutgers and CMES?

CMES will become a world class institution commensurate with the reputation of Rutgers to attract the best faculty instructing in Arab studies, the Islamic heritage and the study of the Middle East. A world class program of this kind is needed at Rutgers which boasts a significant student base with interest in the courses provided by CMES. Given the international, national and statewide dialogue that we are now having about Islam and the Middle East, now is the time to develop a world class program with world class talent, and even a world class reference library on these subjects at Rutgers.

What concrete step have been or are being taken to strengthen the relationship between CMES and the community?

The formation of the Committee, in and of itself, represents the first concrete step to formalize the community’s relationship with the university and vice versa. Rutgers and CMES have made it clear that by engaging the community in this ambitious project, the relationship is not just limited to a financial one, but rather a deeper interaction. The university has engaged the community in developing strategies to grow CMES physically by consulting the community in locating a building worthy of CMES and inviting to students and faculty. And, the university and CMES, through its new and dynamic Director and Administrators, has sought and obtained community input on events programming, which, by the way, are not only intended to serve students, but the community as well.

What do you hope the Arab Heritage Commission will achieve during its first year, and what are the long-term goals?

Based on the Executive Order signed by Governor Corzine creating this historic Commission, the charge of the Commission is broad and important. Indeed, the Commission is tasked on a general level with recognizing, studying and sharing Arab heritage, culture and history, but it is also given the specific duties of collaborating with various important State agencies to develop content and curriculum guides for New Jersey’s students and to assure that members of the public also are positively exposed to the heritage of Arab Americans.

So, to answer your question, we will, based upon the priorities that the Commission chooses to address first, be organizing the Commission in such a fashion where Commission members will be tasked with specific duties to act as liaisons with State and private groups to find out what materials these groups have regarding Arab Americans and what can be provided through the Commission to assure that Arab Americans and their heritage are fairly represented and portrayed in all segments of society. Once we know what exists in terms of information and capabilities in both the private and public sector, then the Commission will be able to proceed to provide more direct and specific input and assistance to these groups and coordinate programming that ensures that the Arab American voice is a positive part of the cultural diversity that already exists in New Jersey.

How do you envision CMES contributing to fulfilling the aims of the Arab Heritage Commission?

CMES is an indispensable partner in the Commission’s charge. The reasons for this are several. Rutgers, and particularly CMES, enjoys the special privilege of not only being one of the premier academic institutions for the study of the Middle East and Arab culture, it also has what is perhaps the largest and most diverse student body, which has been and continues to enroll in courses provided by the university and CMES on the Middle East, its peoples, religions and cultures. What better partner for the Commission to have to both borrow from as a State entity possessing some of the best faculty in the country, and to also work with to ensure that the heritage of Arab-Americans is properly shared with students in our universities. The popularity of the courses provided by CMES among Rutgers students of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, the prominence of the faculty affiliated with CMES from several departments such as Political Science, Religion, History, AMESALL, Sociology, Women’s Studies and Art History, and the extra-curricular programming that has been provided by CMES to the Rutgers community and members of the public through its series of distinguished lectures, makes it a logical and natural partner for this Commission. I have no doubt that the Commission will welcome the opportunity to work with a world class State institution such as Rutgers.
Message from the Director, Dr. Jawid Mojaddedi

During the last three months, we have witnessed the beginnings of a major step forward for Middle Eastern Studies at Rutgers, in the creation of the Department of African, Middle Eastern and South Asian Languages and Literatures (AMESALL). Chaired by Professor Richard Serrano of Comparative Literature, a longtime affiliate of CMES who specializes in Arabic literature, this new department is designed to ensure that the teaching of Middle Eastern languages, as well as other “Less commonly taught languages”, will be of the highest quality. To this end, AMESALL has already held a workshop on recent developments in language pedagogy, and a search is underway for the first ever tenure line in Arabic literature at Rutgers. AMESALL is not only situated in close proximity to the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, across the hallway on the third floor of the B Wing of Lucy Stone Hall with many shared rooms, but it is operating in close collaboration with CMES. This is the perfect time to elucidate the nature of the relationship.

As most readers will be aware, the Middle Eastern Studies major requires 16 credits to consist of language courses. The Persian and Turkish language courses have been provided by CMES, while the Arabic courses have historically been provided by Africana Studies. AMESALL now manages all the language and literature courses for these three Middle Eastern languages. With the addition of a language coordinator and the first ever tenure-track professor of Arabic literature later this year, as well as training workshops on language instruction, AMESALL promises to enhance the courses in Middle Eastern languages and literatures at Rutgers to the highest international standards.

![Diagram of the major and departments]

Although language courses represent a large chunk of the major in Middle Eastern Studies, the remainder of the 34 credits necessary are obtained through “content” courses, meaning courses on the history, politics, religions and societies of the Middle East (see diagram above). CMES will therefore continue to manage the major in Middle Eastern Studies and also provide a wide range of content courses for our ever-increasing numbers of students, to supplement those courses already provided by departments, such as Religion, Political Science, History, and now also Sociology (Prof. Salime) and Art History (Prof. Kahlaoui).

CMES therefore continues to play the most significant lead role at Rutgers in the provision of courses about the Middle East.

The transfer of language-teaching faculty and their courses to AMESALL not only guarantees the longevity of the Middle Eastern language classes at Rutgers through state support for the new department, but it will also allow CMES to focus on new areas. Therefore, as most of you will already have noticed, CMES has been expanding its outreach and events activities. Ms Aretha Oliver Crayton, the Administrator of CMES, Ms Shehnaz Abdeljaber, the Outreach Coordinator of CMES,
Their involvement was a powerful reminder of why the role of CMES at Rutgers is so important. Among the interviews I have given this semester, the most memorable was for the show “Talk it Out” on Dandana TV (still available at YouTube and the CMES Facebook page). I was accompanied by Ms. Abdeljaber and four of our students, and during the interview, when we talked about the uniqueness of Rutgers, I was reminded of how fortunate we are to have such a diverse and dynamic student body, all deeply interested in the Middle East, and fully appreciative of the support received from our generous donors in this time of financial uncertainty. Now, more than ever, with a new incoming administration and the first ever Arab Heritage Commission in the nation established here in New Jersey, we have the chance to bring about meaningful change with your continued support. All of us at CMES would like to give you our very best wishes for the Holiday Season, and we look forward to hearing from you and seeing you at our events next year.

and Ms. Bahareh Sehatzadeh, our Publicity Officer, have already been working very hard on this dimension of CMES activities. Reports on all the main events held in Fall 2008 are included in this newsletter, as are announcements of the events already planned for Spring 2009, which include performances by Haale (February 7th), the Axis of Evil comedians (March 25th), and the biggest ever conference on Iran to be held in New Jersey in living memory (February 7-8th; funded by a UISFL Grant from the Department of Education).

Out of our past events this fall, the two which were most memorable for me personally were the Unity Iftar and the tribute to the late Mahmoud Darwish, and this is because of the large number of students involved in both events. Several students helped in serving meals and clearing up on the evening in September when CMES provided Iftar to more than 350 students, and more than twenty students took part in the presentations and recitations of poetry (in Arabic as well as English) in honor of Darwish.

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All of us at CMES would like to give you our very best wishes for the Holiday Season, and we look forward to hearing from you and seeing you at our events next year.

**Arab-Americans and Civil Liberties**

On October 16th, Dr. Hussein Ibish, the Executive Director of the Hala Salaam Maksoud Foundation for Arab-American Leadership and Senior Fellow at the American Task Force on Palestine, came to Rutgers to talk about Arab-Americans and civil liberties. This lecture was convened by CMES as part of the Human Rights lecture series at Rutgers in the 2008-9 Academic Year, to mark the 60th anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights. Dr. Ibish is the ideal person to discuss this important issue related to human rights inside America, as he has already written many major studies on this topic and has made thousands of appearances on radio and television to discuss it.

Dr. Ibish discussed the controversial Patriot Act, pointing out what have proven to be the most problematic clauses for Arab-Americans, namely those which established the authority to carry out secret searches and demand that holders of records provide information without notifying the individual citizens concerned. He also questioned the whole premise that giving up civil liberties leads to greater security, citing the lack of any prosecutions based on information gathered in these ways, even though claims are often made that this lack is due to the successful thwarting of potential attacks before they could have been made.

The Patriot Act was reauthorized in 2006, even though this seemed unlikely to happen before the 7/7/2005 attacks in London sparked fears of homegrown suicide bombers. These horrific attacks had the most unfortunate consequence of encouraging certain members of the Senate Homeland Security Committee to see the Arab-American community as the source of a threat rather than as partners. The future of such policies under the new Obama administration will no doubt be interesting to witness in the coming years.

After the lecture by Dr. Ibish, the audience were given a brief introduction to the Arab Heritage Commission by Ms. Engy Abdelkader Esq. of Legal Services of New Jersey, who served as a member of the steering committee for the enactment of the Commission. She spoke on the importance of the commission and the impact it will have on American society and the Arab community. For more on the Commission, see the front page of this newsletter.
Mehregan 1387 and Professor Behzad Ranjbaran’s Persian Trilogy

On October 3rd, 2008, the Center hosted its Mehregan dinner and lecture, by Professor Behzad Ranjbaran of the Juilliard School. Ranjbaran is the most celebrated contemporary Iranian composer of symphonic music. His music has been performed by orchestras across the world and he has won numerous prestigious prizes, such as the Rudolf Nissim Award for his violin concerto from the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), and the Charles Ives Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. A performance in August 2008 of his The Persian Trilogy by the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, together with master naqqal Morshed Torabi, demonstrated his interest in drawing on his Persian heritage for his compositions.

The Persian Trilogy is a collection of three orchestral works that were inspired by stories from Ferdowsi’s Shahnамeh. Professor Ranjbaran talked about his childhood fascination with the Shahnамeh, which started when his mother won an illustrated copy of this work as a prize in a competition in Tehran. His childhood fascination was further enhanced by the stories he heard about the Simorgh, which was popularly believed to live on Mount Alborz, overlooking his native Tehran. He regards The Persian Trilogy as the culmination of his four-decade-long personal journey, which was sparked by these first exposures to the Shahnамeh.

Professor Ranjbaran continued his lecture by commenting on selected scenes which he displayed for the audience from the video recording of a ballet performance of the third and longest part of The Persian Trilogy, namely “The Blood of Seyavash”.

The company of ballet dancers in London had performed the famous “Khun-e Seyavash” story of the Shahnамeh to Ranjbaran’s music, and wearing Persian-inspired costumes. Dramatic scenes included the attempted seduction of Seyavash by his step-mother Queen Sudabeh shortly after his reunion with his father, King Kavus, and the subsequent trial by fire which proved her guilt.

One of the most memorable scenes for many in the audience was that depicting Seyavash’s love for Princess Farangis, the daughter of King Afrasyab, who by this time had adopted him after his self-imposed exile from his own father King Kavus’s domain. With sensitivity to Persian traditions of self-sacrificing etiquette, the ballet dancers were directed to perform in such a way that each step by Farangis down a flight of stairs is anticipated by the besotted Seyavash, who then stretches his hand for her to step on as she descends, so that her feet never touch the ground.

After his lecture, Professor Ranjbaran took questions from the audience. An important point that was clarified is that, while the Persian Trilogy does not include Iranian instruments, this is what makes it all the more effective in sharing Persian heritage as widely as possible. This is because it enables the performance of the Shahnамeh by all orchestras across the globe through the symphonic music composed by Ranjbaran. His composition in the international language of music can be read and performed by all accomplished orchestras, without being limited to those who have prior knowledge of Persian or Iranian music.
The 2008 Unity Iftar and Lecture on Muslims in America since 9/11 by Professor Amaney A. Jamal

More than three hundred students and community members gathered in the Busch MPR to celebrate side by side and to discuss issues of importance to Middle Eastern students on a night of faith and food, namely the third annual Unity Iftar organized by the Center for Middle Eastern Studies. This year the event was also co-sponsored by the office of the Busch Campus Dean and the Anne I. Morgan Fund, and it benefited from support from Hany Mawla, Esq., John Soueid, Douglass' Halal Pizza and Grill, Efes Restaurant, and Sahara Cafe.

Though the event was centered around the iftar or fast-breaking dinner which takes place at sunset every night of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, the diversity of faith in the crowd was evident. "This event is open to students of all faiths; we bring a speaker to inform students and encourage interfaith dialog," said Shehnaz Abdeljaber '12, one of the main organizers of this event. "We got a positive response to this event after the first Unity Iftar; members of the community and students have expressed the need for such an event, and they are glad that we are now holding annually such an event focusing on community issues and unity."

From left to right: Jawid Mojaddedi, Hamid Abdeljaber, Amaney Jamal.

This year’s Unity Iftar culminated in the speech of Professor Amaney Jamal from the Political Science Department of Princeton University. She delivered a lecture on pivotal issues pertaining to the portrayal of Muslims and Middle Easterners in the media, and general attitudes towards them based on polls that have been made. Islam is, for instance, the most negatively perceived religion by far in the United States.

Jamal also spoke about the presidential candidates and their relations to Muslim Americans: "Any mention of terrorism is linked in John McCain's campaign to some mention of Islam—meanwhile Muslims seek to endorse Barack Obama, because they see him as hope for the future, but Obama has been distancing himself from the Muslim community." Jamal further expressed her disdain with the current culture of fear and intolerance, "Anti-Muslim rhetoric has become a measure of your degree of patriotism," she said. In such a context it is not difficult to see why politicians would be worried about the unpopularity of Muslims rubbing off on themselves.

Maaz Enver 2012, Junior and Co-President of the newly unified Rutgers University Muslim Student Association, expressed his views from an Islamic perspective. "The average person does not distinguish radical Islam with the real Islam Americans are practicing. It’s a negative stereotype Muslims everywhere have had to struggle with." Enver added, "People have been taking culture and politics and mixing them and presenting it as Islam, sometimes you watch the news and it hurts—you feel helpless. Muslims feel the need to define themselves more than ever. We need to go out of our way to counteract the many misconceptions that are out there."

by Pablo Albilal
A Tribute To Mahmoud Darwish

The Center for Middle Eastern Studies and the Department of African, Middle Eastern and South Asian Languages and Literatures collaborated to commemorate the achievements of the late Mahmoud Darwish, with an event that honored his life, poetry and activism, while also highlighting the continuity of Palestinian literature as resistance. Not only Rutgers professors but also their students recited Darwish’s poetry in both Arabic and English, putting to use the valuable language skills they have acquired through courses at CMES. The evening included short lectures by Professors Abdeljaber, Soueid and Ennaji, on Darwish’s life, poetic style, and political views. The evening also showcased a musical tribute to the late poet, in the form of a performance on the oud by Professor Alsiadi.

In keeping with the theme of Palestinian poetry as resistance, CMES invited Remi Kanazi, the editor of the newly published volume *Poets for Palestine*. This collection of poetry was written by various artists of different backgrounds and opens appropriately with a poem by Darwish. Kanazi also gave a spoken word performance of some of his own work, giving the audience a fresh taste of poetry as resistance in the contemporary styles of today. It was a successful event that brought together the Rutgers campus community as well as others from the surrounding area, including Professor Ikram Masmoudi from the University of Delaware, to celebrate a much-loved and unforgettable icon of the Arab world and the wider literary world, Mahmoud Darwish.

The Center for Middle Eastern Studies is pleased to announce the conference

**“THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION: THIRTY YEARS”**

**FEBRUARY 7-8, 2009**

Trayes Hall, Douglass Student Center
100 George St
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-1412

Confirmed Speakers:
- Ervand Abrahamian (CUNY)
- Reza H. Akbari (Freedom House)
- Ali Banuazizi (Boston College)
- Janet Bauer (Trinity College)
- Kambiz Behi (Harvard University)
- Mehdi Bozorgmehr (CUNY)
- Peter Chelkowski (New York University)
- Rasmus Christian Elling (University of Copenhagen)
- Mustafa El-Labbad (East Center for Regional and Strategic Studies, Cairo)
- Mark Gould (Haverford College)
- Kevan Harris (Johns Hopkins University)
- Fatemeh Keshavarz (Washington University in St Louis)
- Alireza Korangy (University of Virginia)
- Mehrdad Mashayekhi (Georgetown University)
- Valentine M. Moghadam (Purdue University)
- Sina M. Mossayeb (Columbia University)
- Negin Nabavi (Montclair State University)
- Trita Parsi (NIAC)
- Babak Rahimi (University of California, San Diego)
- George Sanikidze (Tbilisi State University)
- Kjetil Selvik (University of Oslo)
- Marek Smurzynski (The Jagiellonian University, Cracow)
- Güneş Murat Tezcür (Loyola University Chicago)
- Radwan Ziadeh (Harvard University)

This conference is made possible by a UISFL grant from the US Dept of Education.

For more information please visit our website at [http://mideast.rutgers.edu](http://mideast.rutgers.edu).
Faculty Development Workshop: The Iranian Cultural Sphere

On Friday October 3rd, 2008, the Center for Middle Eastern Studies sponsored a faculty development workshop as part of its ongoing efforts to internationalize undergraduate education at Rutgers. The subject of the workshop was “The Iranian Cultural Sphere,” a topic of great interest to faculty both within the newly formed Department of African, Middle Eastern, and South Asian Languages and Literatures, and also among the greater body of Rutgers faculty. The subjects discussed were “Magic Kings: The Symbolic Representation of the Ruler in Ancient and Medieval Near Eastern Art” (Michael Barry, Princeton University and the Metropolitan Museum of Art), “Persian Poetry from the Late Thirteenth Century to the Mid-Nineteenth Century: One of the Poetic Literatures of India” (Janet Walker, Rutgers University), “Shrines, Oral History, and Identity in Badakhshan” (Jo-Ann Gross, The College of New Jersey), and “Searching for Freedom: Black Slave Manumission Petitions in the Iranian Persian Gulf (1852-1910)” (Niambi Cacchioli, Rutgers University). Roughly twenty present, former, and future members of the Rutgers faculty participated in the workshop, which was well-received. The workshop was fully funded by the US Department of Education through a Title VIa UISFL grant.

K-12 Workshop: Iran in the Classroom

On Thursday, October 23rd, 2008, the Rutgers Center for Historical Analysis hosted and co-sponsored a public outreach program coordinated by the Center for Middle Eastern Studies as part of its Rutgers Institute for High School Teachers. The speakers included Farah Ramazanzadeh (University of Utah), who talked about “Heritage Language Loss in the Public Education System”, Paul Sprachman (Rutgers University), who discussed “Teaching the Persian Alphabet to Rutgers Undergraduates”, Tom Ricks (University of Pennsylvania), who covered “Iran in World History”, Toby Jones (Rutgers University), who introduced the participants to “A Fifth Column for Iran? Shiites in the Persian Gulf”, and Mahmood Karimi-Hakak (Siena College), who recounted his experience of being “Exiled to Freedom: A Memoir of Censorship in Iran”. The program was attended by fifteen public school teachers from all over New Jersey. As with the faculty development workshop, this event was funded by the Title VIa UISFL grant from the US Department of Education.
Special Thanks to our Donors

We at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies would like to thank all of our supporters during the last two years for their donations and pledges, acknowledging in particular the following major supporters:

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New CMES Courses for Spring 2009

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