Supporting Arabic Teachers in the Midwest: Northwestern University and Qatar Foundation International partner to support local Arabic Educators

*Teachers of Arabic in the Chicago Metropolitan area to meet and collaborate through expanded Arabic Teachers’ Council*

December 5, 2016, CHICAGO –– Qatar Foundation International (QFI) and Northwestern’s Middle East and North African Studies Program (MENA) are partnering to expand the Chicago Arabic Teachers’ Council. Since 2012, QFI has supported Arabic Teachers’ Councils in major metropolitan areas: Washington DC, Michigan, Los Angeles, Chicago and New York. The councils aim to strengthen local Arabic programs by providing a forum for Arabic teachers to network, collaborate, and share innovative approaches to teaching, as well as providing outreach and support to educators and their communities.

Arabic has been taught at Northwestern since 1970, when it was offered on a regular but limited basis. In 2012, the teaching of Arabic moved to the then newly created MENA program, where it has since grown dramatically. Northwestern’s MENA program now offers Modern Standard Arabic to the fifth year level, as well as dedicated courses in three regional dialects and media Arabic. The Arabic Teachers’ Councils further the shared goal of QFI and Northwestern MENA to strengthen and professionalize the field of Arabic language education by providing the needed support and opportunities for teachers of Arabic and their students.

“We are delighted to continue supporting the Chicago-area Arabic Teachers’ Council with a new partner, Northwestern University’s MENA Program.  The Council has been active since 2013, and our nationwide network has reached over 1100 members,” said QFI Executive Director Maggie Mitchell Salem. “We're proud of the existing ties to Northwestern University’s Doha, Qatar campus in Education City and look forward to extending our partnership to include Northwestern’s MENA program in Chicago. We look forward to collaborating with Northwestern University and to continuing the active teacher participation of the past three years with community-driven programs.”

The Chicago Arabic Teachers’ council is organized to serve the needs of K-16 Arabic language teachers and administrators throughout Chicago, including public, private, and religious school teachers. It aims to bridge the gap between K-12 teachers’ needs and those on the university level, creating a space and community within which Arabic teachers across primary, secondary, and university levels collaborate, reinvigorate their pedagogical practices, and forge partnerships across domains. The Council enables Arabic teachers to take ownership of and craft activity planning, and is focused on professional development, curricular enhancement, community outreach, and certification.

“Arabic is taught to more than 3,000 students in Chicago Public Schools, from Volta Elementary School on the north side to Lindblom Math and Science Academy High School on the south side, a remarkable achievement in itself. Add to that the many vibrant private schools and weekend programs where Arabic is taught and Chicago has one of the most dynamic, diverse, and substantial bodies of young Arabic learners in the country,” said Brian Edwards, Crown Professor in Middle East Studies, Director of Northwestern’s MENA Program and chair of the Chicago Arabic Teachers’ Council. “As a University program committed both to Arabic language education and public outreach to the Chicago area, MENA is thrilled to have been selected to host the Chicago Arabic Teachers’ Council,”

“Language is an area where misunderstanding flourishes, and educating young Chicagoans in this beautiful, complex, and widely used global language prepares our next generation for the challenges and opportunities of the next generation,” Edwards continued. “MENA is thrilled to work with the dedicated and talented teachers from CPS and Chicago’s private and weekend schools to help facilitate the best practices and dynamic new approaches to language instruction. Together we hope to think of Arabic education as reaching from Kindergarten through elementary and high school and beyond.”

The Chicago Arabic Teachers’ Council will also focus on expanding collaboration between student communities at the K-16 level, providing opportunities for Arabic language students to participate and benefit from the Teachers' Council, and communication with native speakers through video conferencing and digital media.

To learn more about QFI’s Arabic Teachers’ Councils, watch: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RdP\_Djqkd4M

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About Qatar Foundation International

Qatar Foundation International (QFI), LLC, is a U.S.-based member of Qatar Foundation (QF). QFI operates as both a grant-making organization, and a convener of thought leaders on issues related to global and international education, open education and education technologies as they intersect with the three core QFI programmatic areas: Arabic language and Arab culture, STE{A}M (STEM plus the Arts), and Youth Engagement.

QFI inspires meaningful connections to the Arab world by creating a global community of diverse learners and educators and connecting them through effective and collaborative learning environments —inside and outside the classroom.

Through our activities, QFI is committed to providing K-12 students in Qatar, the Americas, and the United Kingdom (UK) with the intellectual, communicative, and cultural competencies that will enable them to be engaged global citizens.

*Learn more at qfi.org*

About Northwestern MENA:

Northwestern University's [Middle East and North African Studies](https://www.facebook.com/MENA-Middle-East-and-North-African-Studies-at-Northwestern-University-1791811764424226/) program is committed to offering students and the community at large an in-depth understanding of the region that stretches from Morocco to the Gulf States and Iran, and from the Mediterranean into the Sahara and beyond.

Our award-winning faculty is drawn from the disciplines of anthropology, art history, comparative literature, history, political science, religion, film and media studies, among others.  It is comprised of teachers and scholars who study and write about this region from a variety of perspectives, with a particular focus on the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries.

Our curriculum at both the undergraduate and graduate levels are enhanced by weekly events—open to the entire community—which feature both scholars based at Northwestern and eminent visitors from a range of disciplines.