About

The Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization (NELC) was founded by Prof. Farhat Ziadeh, who was born in Ramallah, Palestine, and received his B.A. from the American University of Beirut in 1937, and graduated from the University of London in 1940 with an LL.B. He became a tenured professor at Princeton University. In 1966, Ziadeh was invited to come to the University of Washington to develop a new program in Near Eastern studies. As he was building this new program, Ziadeh published Lawyers: The Rule of Law and Liberalism in Modern Egypt in 1968. A mere four years after his arrival at the UW, in 1970, Ziadeh had transformed the small Near Eastern studies program into a new department at the University named the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization and was appointed its first departmental chair.

Mission Statement

The Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization (NELC) is devoted to the study of the principal cultures and languages of the Near and Middle East, including Central Eurasia. NELC explores the contemporary cultural diversity of the region, its ancient and medieval roots, and its relevance to modern civilizations. Our graduates acquire the knowledge and practical skills that prepare them to succeed in a variety of careers, including academia, diplomacy, technology, and business.
NELC offers BA and MA degree programs that investigate major literary and cultural traditions of the Near East and Central Asia. Arabic, Persian, Tajik, Turkish (Modern and Ottoman), and Central Asian Turkic (such as Uzbek, Kazak, Kyrgyz, and Uygur) are the languages of the most significant manifestations of Islamic civilization. Hebrew and Aramaic are languages of the Bible and are central to Judaism and Jewish culture. A rich and vast heritage from other ancient Near Eastern cultures is explored through the study of languages and literatures such as Egyptian (Hieroglyphic, Coptic), Akkadian, Ugaritic, Phoenician, and Syriac. Undergraduates can select from degree options concentrating in Languages and Civilization; Culture and Civilization; Comparative Islamic Studies; and Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Studies.

NELC serves a broad spectrum of undergraduates, including those with plans to acquire specific linguistic and cultural proficiencies and those simply interested in the histories and cultures of these regions. NELC graduates have pursued further study in the humanities or social sciences, professional degree programs in law or medicine, employment with governmental or non-governmental organizations, and other careers. Our department participates actively in exchange programs, sending UW students for language and cultural study and research to a variety of locations—from North Africa to the Middle East, and across Central Asia—and training many students from institutions overseas.
Outreach

Annual events include the Farhat J. Ziadeh Distinguished Lectureship in Arab and Islamic Studies and the Hooshang Afrassiabi Distinguished Lectureship in Persian and Iranian Studies. Additional lectures and cultural presentations are supported by the Turkish Studies Endowment, the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East Fund, the Ravani Endowment, and the Friends of Persian Studies Fund.

NELC faculty participate in the annual World Languages Day at the UW, an event that introduces high school students to language study at the University. NELC values its close communication with the Middle East Student Commission, the Persian Circle, and other student interest groups through programs and cultural activities that are presented throughout the year.
Scholarship

NELC faculty are engaged in a wide variety of individual research endeavors with emphases including post-colonial theory, intercultural exchange, literature as performance, gender theory, literary dynamics in exilic or diaspora communities, children’s literature, linguistics, legal theory, and comparative religion. Departmental research on Jewish, Christian, and Islamic literatures and cultures is characterized by the study of these, not as isolated entities, but rather, as integral to wider Near Eastern cultural developments. Faculty in NELC have been leaders in numerous national and international team research projects.
More about NELC

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