

New Middle Eastern studies minor will offer opportunities for students, the community

Marlena Chertock
Design Editor

Sophomore Laura Tucker has lived in Saudi Arabia since her family moved there in 2002 for her father's job at a petroleum company. As an international studies major at Elon University, Tucker plans on pursuing her interest in the region of the Middle East. But Tucker and other students don't yet have the option to minor in Middle Eastern Studies at Elon.

"Other than the main religion courses or broad global and history courses, there's not many really focused and specific courses dedicated to Middle Eastern studies," Tucker said.

The Middle Eastern studies minor has been in the works since 2007. The curriculum review board is in the process of evaluating the program, said professor Brian Digre, international studies program coordinator.

"I feel confident that both programs will be available in the fall," Digre said.

Creating a minor

There were several steps to get to this point. Digre traveled to Jordan, Israel and Egypt in the summer of 2008 on a six-week Fulbright-Hays seminar. The seminar allowed 10 U.S. professors to explore study abroad opportunities in the Middle East and enhance curriculum development at their universities, Digre said.

Digre also applied for a grant from the U.S. Department of Education Undergraduate International Studies in Foreign Language Program to help fund the establishment of the minor.

Elon provided matching funds for much of the grant,

which allowed Elon to support faculty who wanted to develop new courses in the Middle East, to enhance library resources on the Middle East and study abroad programs and to hire a full-time Arabic professor.

For two years, the grant paid more than half of Arabic professor Shereen Elgamal's salary. But now, Elon has made the position full-time and pays her salary, Digre said.

The department of foreign languages is exploring the introduction of elementary Hebrew courses for the minor.

Introductory modern standard Hebrew will be offered in the fall and introductory II in the spring, according to Scott Windham, department chair of Foreign Languages. The courses will be taught by a part-time professor.

"If enrollments are good, we will continue to offer more courses," Windham said. "At some point, we might perceive a need for a permanent position in Hebrew, although that process could take many years."

Students already showing interest

Many students in the international studies major have already expressed interest in the region. Several students have asked for Digre's approval of each course individually to count for the unofficial Middle Eastern concentration. Tucker has taken this route.

The Arabic Language Organization was created by students as a result of increasing interest in the language and region, according to Elgamal and many students have expressed interest in studying abroad in the region, Digre said.

There are several study

abroad programs in place that will be related to the minor or concentration. There is a program at the American University of Cairo, Egypt, Council on International Education Exchange in Jordan and the University of Haifa, Israel that was just offered this year.

Broadening experiences and views

The classes will offer students opportunities to learn more about cultures and regions they are not familiar with and that are not well-known, Tucker said.

Arab culture and the Middle East have been stereotyped, intentionally or not, by people, governments and the media, Tucker said.

It will be beneficial for students to form their own opinions from truths rather than statements they hear, she said.

"You see students living in Israel, Jordan and Egypt for a semester and coming back," Elgamal said. "These experiences are very important to campus. Instead of watching on television, they come back with experiences they encountered, actual people they interacted with. It's a different outlook on things when you hear things from someone who was there."

Tucker would agree. Living in Saudi Arabia helped shape her opinions and the way she views life and people, she said.

The minor will offer valuable career opportunities, according to Digre, as learning Arabic is important for careers today.

The outside community will also learn more about the region, Digre said.

The minor will bring in



PHOTO SUBMITTED
Brian Digre stands with Mohammad, his SUV driver, in the sand dunes of Qatar in 2008.

extracurricular activities, speakers and visiting professors, according to Elgamal. The awareness and knowledge would automatically spread, she said.

The minor is more important in light of the recent protests in several Arab countries,

according to Tucker.

The prevalent and powerful stereotype of Islam and that every practicing Muslim is a terrorist needs to be combated, she said.

"Knowledge is power," Tucker said. "And without it we'll go on believing and continuing whatever we hear."

Interdisciplinary coursework

The minor will include courses in religious studies, political science, philosophy, history, literature and art history. Some courses that will not be included in the catalog but will count toward the minor or concentration will be found under General Studies.

The interdisciplinary nature of the minor encourages students to look at an area from different perspectives and appreciate the region and the region's diversity, Digre said.

Two Options

The proposed Middle Eastern studies minor will offer two different options for students:

- **International studies major concentration in the Middle East:** International studies majors must choose a regional concentration, currently one of four regions: Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. The major requires 44 semester credit hours to be completed, study abroad and foreign language proficiency.
- **Middle Eastern studies minor:** The minor, open to all majors, will be 20 semester credit hours.

Belk embraces digital age with technological innovations

Ashley Fahey
Copy Editor

From the introduction of the Kindles last semester to the transcription of library archives to an online format, Belk Library is beginning to embrace the digital age.

"Belk Library is looking at several technology innovations right now, all of which provide users quick, easy access to library info and resources," said Lynne Bisko, a non-print librarian at Belk. "We hope that technology will improve the visitor's experience and make it easier to find and use library resources when and where they're needed."

Some of the innovations Belk will introduce include a mobile website for the library, a mobile version of the catalog and increased usage of Quick Response, or QR codes, Bisko said. QR codes, according to the Elon University website, consist of "a matrix barcode, often referred to as a 2D barcode, that when read by a smartphone or a cell phone with a camera, displays data or goes to a website."

Bisko said QR codes are currently being used to allow users to access the entire DVD database of Belk. They will expand to post QR codes on copiers, Pharos printing stations and the DocSend station.

"In the future, we hope to offer a text message IM service, and to find additional uses for QR codes," Bisko said.

The six Kindles Belk purchased last semester are being used regularly by students, faculty and library visitors.

"We think the program has been very successful," said Shannon Tennant, a catalog librarian. "Kindles have been checked out by faculty, staff, students,

all of the community has been using them. We have a variety of titles and genres available to appeal to as many people as possible."

Tennant said the Kindles are checked out constantly and, so far, there have been no major problems with the rental program.

"The only problem, which isn't even much of one, is that Belk Library has second generation Kindles, and now that the third generation Kindle has been introduced, it is hard to find updates for the second generation," Tennant said. "But what we are looking to do now is to expand on titles offered on the Belk Kindles."

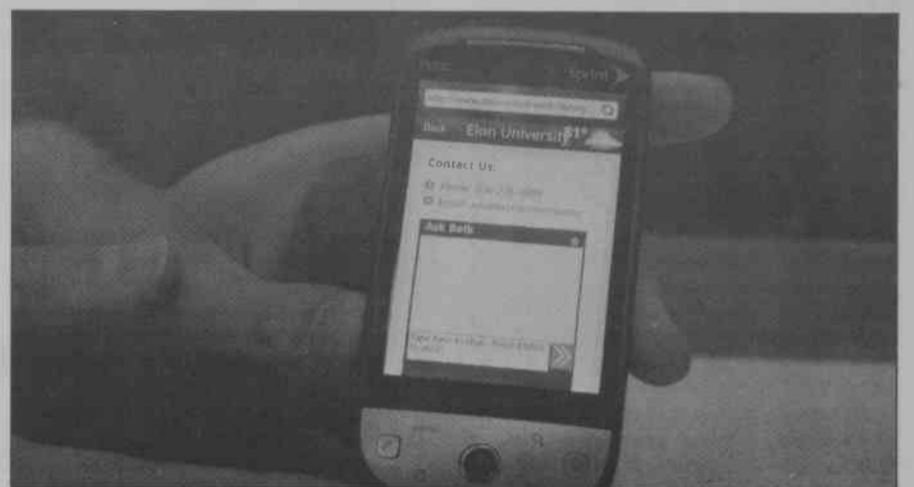
Even archiving at Elon is becoming a part of the digital world.

"I think for libraries and archives to remain relevant, online archiving is important," said Katie Nash, archivist and special collections librarian. "Specifically in the archives community, making collections available online is a luxury and necessity all at the same time."

Nash said Belk Library is using a program called Content Digital Management, or ContentDM, which is a database that stores and makes digital content accessible and organized in one place.

"Before ContentDM, we had separate websites with digital content and separate library catalog records," Nash said. "We hope to put all of the Thomas Jefferson Carret Essays in ContentDM, as well as embark on a large project to get the honors theses digitalized and available in Content DM."

One of the biggest issues with the evolution of technology in everyday society is the fear that print materials,



JULIA SAYERS | Staff Photographer

Belk Library continues to advance in technology and plans to introduce a text message IM service.

such as books, will become obsolete in years to come. But while Belk is expanding its digital and technological means, print material will still be relevant, Bisko said.

"We'll certainly see fewer purchases of physical materials, and we've noticed that already in the library," Bisko said. "However, many unresolved issues still exist related to copyright, access, quality and preservation. Plus, I think most students and faculty still prefer printed materials, especially when doing research."

The archives will also retain their original form, as there is a particular need to see certain archives in person as opposed to a digital format.

"Sometimes it is necessary to come to the physical location of where the item is housed because the digital copy is not sufficient," Nash said. "Just because there is a digital copy online does not

mean that people no longer come to a physical space of an archive."

Other advances that Belk Library has made over the past few years include blogging, widgets, instant messaging, podcasts and an increased social media presence, such as Facebook and Twitter.

Additionally, in the past 10 years, Tennant said the computer systems have changed three times.

But a desire to keep up with the times by developing technology comes with a cost.

"One of the conflicts we've faced is, of course, money," Bisko said.

According to her and Tennant, the university and library's budgets have been tightened as a result of the recent economic conditions.

"Luckily, many of the technological innovations don't cost a lot of money and can end up saving the library a lot of money in the long run," Tennant said.