Middle Eastern Student Center

Departmental Vision

Student diversity at the University of California, Riverside is a hallmark of this institution's excellence and success. The Middle Eastern student community will continue to grow and weave into the fabric that shapes the UCR experience. The MESC will play an increasingly important role in providing an avenue for Middle Eastern students to access and participate in campus life and activities. We wish to create opportunities that raise the community's awareness of Middle Eastern culture and history.

Working Mission

The Middle Eastern Student Center supports intellectual exchange, encourages the study of Middle Eastern culture and history, while promoting the advancement of higher education. The MESC fosters relationships to build inclusion, acceptance, and earnest communication with an emphasis on cultural diversity. We collectively pursue civic engagement and civil discourse as a means to promote mutual understanding. Within a changing campus climate we create alliances and engage meaningful conversations to meet the needs of the Middle Eastern student population at UCR.

MESC History and Founding Members

Fourteen UCR students took the lead in proposing the establishment of the Middle Eastern Student Center and sought start-up funds from the Student Services Committee for the 2013-2014 Academic Year. Seraj Abu-Seraj, Amal Ali, Lames Alkhams, Tina Maria Aoun, Heba Diab, Nancy Elsharkawy, Sebouh Kouyoumjian, Daniel Leserman, Farhan Muhammad Majid, Shadi Matar, Tina Matar, Mahfoud Saddi, Mariam Saleh, and Merima Tricic are the founding members of the MESC and the Middle Eastern Student Collaborative. These undergraduates, graduates, and now alumni of UCR created a space to provide support services for all students with ties to the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia. Their vision was to create a space that could also educate the campus population about the cultural richness and diversity of this geographic region.

UCR faculty members and staff members who assisted in this endeavor included: Dr. Feras Abou-Galala and Dr. David Crohn, two temporary program assistants, Lisa Toban and Mehedi Munna, in addition to program coordinator, Marcela Ramirez. All staff members were under the direction of Emilio J. Virata, Acting Assistant Dean of Students and his predecessor Alfredo Figueroa, Dean of Students. This collection of faculty and staff members worked with the Middle Eastern Student Collaborative for nearly four years. Their efforts in advising and organizing the students culminated in the establishment of the Middle Eastern Student Center and its founding Director, Marcela Ramirez.

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Highlander Link: https://highlanderlink.ucr.edu/organization/mesc
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/mescucr
Instagram: http://instagram.com/mescucr
Twitter: https://twitter.com/mescucr
You Tube: MESC UCR
**MESC Programs and Services**

**Middle Eastern Student Collaborative**
Registered campus clubs and organizations as well as individuals with interests or ties to the region are invited to join the Middle Eastern Student Collaborative. This coalition of students serves as the governing board for events and programs sponsored by the Middle Eastern Student Center. Selected programs serve a broad range of students and events are selected by overall consensus from the board. Everyone is welcome to join these meetings and propose ideas for collaborations with the MESC.

**MESC Film & Speaker Series**
Quarterly campus wide programs that include any of the following: film screenings, speakers or performances that focus on the complexities of identity within the Middle Eastern community. Featured guest speakers will include performers, the director or subject of the film, or a speaker’s panel who can host a discussion afterwards.

**Educational Workshops**
Educational Workshops and trainings are aimed at educating the UCR community about the varying historical, cultural, political, and religious dynamics that shape the Middle East. The Middle Eastern Student Center will accomplish this goal by providing the UCR community a wide variety of events which include but are not exclusive to; research forums, literary readings, historical displays, and cultural celebrations. By providing a wide range of educational programs, the MESC will raise awareness about the community while simultaneously offering the campus a new understanding of the cultural richness that exists within the Middle East.

**Club Organization Support & Leadership Training**
The goal of the MESC is to create an environment that fosters the growth and development of upcoming leaders through workshops and training sessions. These sessions will provide the tools necessary for open-minded discussion and healthy dialogue. Leadership qualities are instilled through bridging cultural ties, establishing common ground, problem solving skills, community involvement, and research.

**Individual Student Support, Advising and Referral**
Individual student support and advising are valuable to the work of the center. Each student will have the opportunity to access campus resources and receive referrals to appropriate departments. Students that identify within the Middle Eastern community may encounter negativity and discrimination even within a diverse student body. In the event of such incidents our staff is well qualified to provide appropriate referrals to respective departments and campus resources.

**Event Coordination and Collaborations**
Clubs and organizations or individual students involved with the MESC will have the opportunity to receive assistance with event coordination and program planning. The MESC can assist with events by collaborating with multiple departments and maximizing the use of UCR campus resources.

**Cultural Events and Celebrations**
Cultural events, celebrations and social gatherings that support community building are essential to the work of the MESC. A strong campus community requires that individuals interact with each other and honor their heritage, customs, and historical achievements.
2012 Survey Results: Statistical Evidence Supporting the MESC

In the spring of 2012, a Mini-Survey was carried out by the Student Affairs Research and Evaluation office, a division of Student Affairs, to ascertain the needs of the Middle Eastern community on the UCR campus. The survey was undertaken by a diverse and fairly representative group of 2980 students (17% of the undergraduate population), belonging to various colleges, class levels, genders and races/ethnicities. Students who affiliate themselves as Middle Eastern/White (M.E.) constitute a critical mass of 4.5% of the student body, broadly comparable to the African American/Black (A.A.) community (5.6%). An important dimension of student needs is their sense of belonging. As many as 17.4% of students state that they do not feel at home at UCR because their ethnic/racial group is underrepresented. To put this in perspective, the corresponding statistic for East Asians (E.A.) is 0.97%, Mexican American/Chicano/Puerto Rican (M.A.) is 1.98% and AA is 6.02%.

One reason for such a disparity may be that stereotypical/negative views, discrimination, and harassment of Middle Eastern students is widely prevalent at UCR campus. And in contrast to some other communities on campus who have centers to address their concerns, the M.E. community lacks any facility or institutions on campus, which can explicitly address their needs. This is supported by data about student experiences with respect to stereotypical comments from other students and faculty. For example, only 55.30% of Middle Easterners have never experienced stereotypical or negative views from faculty regarding their race/ethnicity. This figure is lower than other racial/ethnic groups at UCR. In particular, the corresponding statistic for the M.A. community is 75%. The negative stereotypes expressed towards M.E. students has been so deeply embedded in our society that even the faculty have subconsciously normalized these notions.

In fact, students also express stereotypical/negative views about Middle Easterners. Only 29.55% of Middle Easterners report that they have never expressed negative or stereotypical views from other students. The corresponding statistic for the M.A. community is 43.55%. A similar story emerges when questions on discrimination and harassment are asked. Middle Easterners are only 59.85% likely to never experience harassment or discrimination because of their race/ethnicity, whereas the corresponding statistic for other communities is much higher (for M.A. it is 79.49%). Questions about discrimination based on religion also follow a similar pattern; M.E. students are much more likely to witness harassment, discrimination and negative views about their religion, from both students and faculty.

This does not mean, however, that students do not realize the importance of addressing the critical needs of the M.E. community. When asked whether one would support the creation of a center to support the M.E. community, an overwhelming 72% support such a center. And the majority (51%) still support the center even if it means that resources must be reallocated from other needs and directed towards the creation of the center.

As a whole, the results yield clear evidence that there are particular needs of the M.E. community, such as the negative stereotypical views, the harassment and discrimination they face not just from students but even faculty, which need to be lucidly addressed. The majority of the students are in support of a center that will address such needs as well as provide a necessary sense of community.