

CENTER FOR ARABIC STUDY ABROAD

FINAL REPORT OF THE FULL-YEAR PROGRAM

6/2009-5/2010

**HIGHER LANGUAGE INSTITUTE
THE UNIVERSITY OF DAMASCUS**

**DR. WAEL BARAKAT
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

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Acknowledgements

I would like to start by thanking the outgoing CASA Director Professor Mahmoud Al-Batal for his extraordinary efforts in opening the CASA program in Damascus and for his continued support. In addition, I would like to welcome and thank the new CASA Director Dr. Martha Schute-Nafeh and to express how much all of the CASA staff looks forward to working with her in the future. I would also like to thank the Dean of the Higher Language Institute, Professor Nawaf Makhlouf, and Vice Dean Professor Ghasan Al-Sayed for their endless support of the CASA Damascus program, and the Director of the English Language Department, Professor Wadhah Al-Khatib for introducing the students to aspects of life in Damascus. I would also like to personally thank Dr. Makhlouf for supporting me as the executive director and his availability in resolving academic and administrative difficulties. I would also like to thank the President of Damascus University, Professor Wael Al-Mu`allah for his support and interest in the progress and success of the program in its second year.

I would also like to express my deep appreciation and gratitude to the CASA faculty. You embraced the program and gave the students your all so that they could realize their dreams. I would like to thank in particular Mr Shadi Al-Hayouk for his outstanding efforts in coordinating various aspects of the program with a smile, as well as Ms. Kholoud Sakbani for her tireless efforts during the summer semester, Ms. Rana Nasr for teaching both the fall and spring semesters, and finally Ms. Ghada Hussen for her great efforts and excellent teaching throughout the year. I would also like to thank the administrative program coordinator Mr. Ebrahim Al-Karmi, for doing an outstanding job facilitating and easing faculty and student needs.

I would also like to thank and express my appreciation to the very able Selina Keilani who coordinated and responded to all of the Damascus program's needs and questions.

Finally, I would like to express my immense gratitude and thanks to the CASA Damascus students. You proved yourselves to be able and open students. You worked with the program with great patience and willingness. We are impressed by your commitment, desire, and ability to achieve great success.

Administration and Teaching Staff

For the academic year 2009-2010, Dr. Wael Barakat, Head of the Arabic Language Department at the University of Damascus, served as executive director, and Ebrahim Al-Karmi in the capacity of administrative program coordinator. The CASA teaching faculty was selected from among the best teachers among faculty at the Arabic Language Department at the Higher Language Institute. (See appendix I.)

The CASA Fellows

This year there were 13 CASA I full-year fellows, 1 CASA I fall and spring fellow, 2 CASA I spring fellows. In the fall there were 12 CASA I fellows due to the withdrawal of two students. They came from the following universities: the University of Washington, Brigham Young University, Yale University, Georgetown University, Harvard University, Emory University, New York University, Middlebury College, Tufts University, The University of Texas, The University of Chicago, Brown University, and Western Kentucky University.

Preliminary planning

Preparations for student arrival began in April 2009. These preparations included but were not limited to generating orientation materials and scheduling classes and classrooms. Further preparations included organizing student trips, creating a cultural program of lectures and events, and finding possible apartments and short term accommodation. During this time Mr. Al-Karmi was in contact with students to answer questions and resolve various student needs before their arrival.

Student Arrival

Students arrived in Damascus on June 4, 2009. A representative from the Public Relations Department of Damascus University met students at the airport to assist them with the immigration process. In addition, Mr. Al-Karmi met some students at the airport with a chartered bus which took them to their destinations. The following day he took students around the city; they bought cell phones and found ATMs. The following day he aided students in finding apartments. Finding apartments that worked for students' needs and budgets took a week. A representative from UD took the students to the immigration office and helped them begin residency applications and made sure that the students' presence was legal. In preparation for this, Mr. Al-Karmi helped students to prepare the necessary paperwork beforehand.

Orientation

The orientation was two days long. The first day was the official opening on Wednesday June 10, 2009 at the Higher Language Institute at the University of Damascus. The Head of the Arabic Language Department, Professor Barakat, gave the first speech and expressed his joy in having Damascus host the CASA program, and wished the students a successful year. Afterwards, the students were taken on a tour of the facilities and then had the opportunity to meet each other over snacks. Then, Mr. Shadi Al-Hayouk spoke with them about the structure and administration of the program, student expectations, and student responsibilities. In addition, Professor Al-Khatib gave a presentation in which he advised the students on adapting to life in Syria.

The following day students met with the CASA faculty and obtained course materials. The teachers explained the structure of the summer semester and gave out the course syllabi.

The Academic Program

This year, the Damascus CASA program was comprised of three academic semesters.

Summer Semester

For the summer semester, students studied two main subjects: Syrian Colloquial Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). Each subject was given nine contact hours each week with a total of 18 contact hours a week. In addition to class hours students took part in the *Mishwar and Dardasha* activity (see appendix II) for two hours a week. Classes were taught on Sunday through Thursday. In addition, each of the three teachers was available for four hours a week for office hours.

Syrian Colloquial Arabic Course

The goal of the summer colloquial program was to develop students' proficiency in contemporary Syrian colloquial in both speaking and listening so that students could communicate with people in various situations (from daily life to personal needs.) This course also sought to develop cultural literacy and involve the students in Arab and Syrian cultural practices. By the end of the summer, the students were able to negotiate most daily situations with little to no MSA and to use a number of expressions and sayings in their proper context. To achieve this end, the CASA faculty looked for texts and materials that would meet the needs of students and their demands. Ms. Sakbani, Mr. Al-Hayouk, and Ms. Hussein took on the task of revising and updating the Syrian Colloquial textbook "*Shaamiyyaat.*" The book contains an introduction and eight chapters. Each chapter contains video segments and a number of audio segments that activate new vocabulary items and expressions. Each chapter contains various situations and creates circumstances that require the student to activate and employ material in an interactive manner.

In addition, the course instructor Ms. Hussein used a number of authentic listening and video texts that reinforced and expanded class activities. These included films, songs, parts of television series, and interviews from Syrian television.

Modern Standard Arabic Course

The goal of the MSA summer course was to develop students' proficiency in all four language skills. Taking into consideration the students' high proficiency upon joining the CASA program, this course sought to further develop their ability to produce cohesive extended language in speaking and writing and to improve accuracy and speed in reading and listening.

In addition to the language goals, the course sought to expose students to contemporary Syrian cultural discourse. This was intended to give students the tools to negotiate their environment and further integrate them into Syrian society.

As with the dialect book, there was a need for an MSA text. From among internet, newspapers, and magazines sources, Ms. Sakbani and Mr. Al-Hayouk selected contemporary Syrian written and listening texts, compiled them under various topic headings, and developed activities and questions built on the texts selected. These activities varied with regard to their particular language application, structure, and style. Each unit takes on a topic of importance in Syrian society and is comprised of at least one reading text and a listening text which approaches the matter from different points of view. At the end of each unit, students were expected to demonstrate active knowledge of the material by giving a presentation or facilitating a class discussion. The unit subjects were: social realities, Syrian traditions, Syrian youth, and literary life. Students read a Syrian novel over the course of the summer that addressed a number of social, cultural, and historical issues.

In addition, the course instructor, Ms. Sakbani used a number of authentic listening and video texts to expand class content. These included films, songs, parts of television series, and interviews on Syrian television. (See appendix II.)

Novel

As an integral part of the MSA course, students read a novel, and one day per week was set aside for discussion of the text, together with a focus on the language of the book. The novel was chosen with the aim of introducing students to cultural issues in Syrian society, and historical factors that have played a role in shaping Syrian culture today. This type of extensive reading for pleasure complements the other reading strategies that students developed throughout the year.

Summer Cultural Program

Mishwaar wa Dardasha

Mishwaar wa Dardasha was a program intended to acquaint students with local Syrians, give them a chance to become familiar with various sites in the city, and provide an opportunity to practice speaking in different situations.

The program chose a number of sites in and around the old city and sent the students in small groups with a Syrian graduate student who accompanied them. The Syrian student was expected to talk a little bit about the site and pass out written information. After visiting a given site, the groups would often go to a coffee shop to sit and talk with each other and the Syrian student. (See appendix III.)

Language Exchange

The CASA program searched for Syrian students interested in doing a language exchange with American students. The program selected the most viable students to work with the CASA fellows and introduced the two groups to each other. The Syrian students worked with the fellows on their 'Aammiyya homework and with general conversation. Many of the friendships that developed as a result of this exchange continued throughout the academic year.

Fall Semester

The fall semester was comprised of three courses: reading and vocabulary building (MSA), listening and speaking (MSA), and colloquial. Each section was an hour and a half each day, four days a week with Tuesday as a preparation day at home. In addition, each of the three teachers was available for office hours seven hours a week.

Modern Standard Arabic

Reading and Vocabulary Building

The goal of this course was to develop students' ability to read original texts with little to no dictionary support. The course sought to develop reading skills and strategies in handling various types of texts and reading situations: long texts, quick reading, finding main ideas, and close reading. It also sought to further develop and strengthen skills that students had previously developed: guessing from context, roots, and patterns.

Another goal of this course was to build a larger vocabulary. By the end of the course, students were expected to be able to choose appropriate and accurate words, synonyms and antonyms with consideration to context, style, and meaning. The students were able to do this in varied settings and with a variety of subjects.

The course was built out of various types of texts selected by the instructor Mr. Al-Hayouk, who consulted the students regarding their personal preferences and goals in this regard. Texts included examples of contemporary texts, classical texts, contemporary cultural criticism and thought, and the modern Arab novel. The goal of these texts was to take the course content beyond Syria and engage the student in larger Arabic discourse.

Listening and Speaking

By the end of the listening course, the students were able to understand the main ideas of varied listening texts: news reports, interviews, and discussions. The students were expected to be able to understand the main idea with both familiar and unfamiliar subject matter.

In speaking, the students were expected to negotiate a range of situations: from debates with other students to giving presentations. The course required them to express abstract ideas with an eye to word selection, style, and nuance.

For the course material Ms. Hussein selected listening texts from sources ranging from the Internet to Arab satellite.

Individual Directed Readings

Each week students met for an hour with an individual instructor to discuss texts (novels, essays, philosophical treatises, etc.) chosen by the students and CASA faculty. The goal of this was to give students the opportunity to further cover materials of interest to them and strengthen their reading skills and strategies. The student and teacher read a selection of texts and then met to discuss various aspects of the material, main idea and details, grammar, style, and cohesive devices. (See appendix I.)

Syrian Colloquial Arabic

The goal of the fall colloquial program was to develop students' proficiency in contemporary Syrian colloquial in both speech and listening. The goal was to move beyond daily situations studied in the summer program and have students understand and produce Damascene colloquial that moves into the expression of abstractions and cultural nuances.

All course materials in the fall were authentic and chosen by the instructor Ms. Nasr in consultation with Ms. Hussein who taught the course in previous years. The main texts were two contemporary television series called "It's Hard to Cry" and "Another Rainy Day". These series are in Syrian colloquial and deal with a number of current issues in Syrian society: women, sexual harassment, marriage, plural marriage, and the aged, among others. In addition, the course used a number of sketches and segments taken from Syrian television.

Spring Semester

In the spring, students were required to take the mandatory advanced writing course and three elective courses. They were strongly encouraged to take the colloquial course as one of these electives. Each course met for three hours per week and the writing course featured an individual 30-minute weekly meeting with the instructor for each student.

Writing and Stylistics

The goal of the writing course was to develop students' writing skills in order to help them write in long, well formed paragraphs and use different writing styles such as descriptions, comparisons, formal and informal letters, argumentative discourse, and book reviews. By the end of the course, students were expected to be able to write with correct grammar, accurate vocabulary selection, connectors, expressions, and style. A subsidiary goal of the course was to increase students' typing speed in Arabic.

The course was built around two types of writing: directed writing and free writing. The course finished up with a large final writing project. The goal of the final writing project was to have students write a sustained academic piece on a topic related to the student's own field of specialization.

Elective Courses

These courses were put together according to students' interests expressed in surveys given in the late fall. Professors for these elective courses were selected from the CASA faculty and from the larger university faculty community. (See appendix II.)

Internships

At the beginning of the Spring semester some of the students asked if they may help in various institutions in Damascus, such as a local orphanage, a radio station, and a local magazine office, with the goal of using their language skills in a real life situation. This was organized, and students were able to substitute this experience for one of their elective courses, with the condition that they regularly report on their progress.

Final Exam

In the late spring, students took two exams: a written exam and an ILR. The written exam in the spring was the same as the CASA entrance exam. The ILR was done by a certified tester using SKYPE. (See appendix IV for students' scores).

Challenges and Solutions

1. The University of Damascus helped students obtain residency by going through the official procedures. Due to the efforts of the CASA administrative coordinator and the Damascus University Department of Public Relations, this process was much faster this year, with all students obtaining residency within the first three months of their stay.
2. In the second year of the program, students were on a tight budget and often complained about the limited CASA stipend. This year, the stipend was increased, and students were able to cope more easily.

Program Evaluation and Enhancement

Program Evaluation

At the end the summer and fall semesters, Mr. Al-Hayouk organized individual and group meetings with all of the students to elicit feedback that covered all aspects of the program.

For the summer session, students wanted to see some changes in the MSA texts. They wanted to see more texts that led to conversations, argument, and differing points of view. In regards to the colloquial text, the students made it clear that they liked the book because it presents them with information that was important to them at the beginning of their stay in Syria. They did however ask for adjustments in the length and design of some exercises.

For the Colloquial course, the students asked for more effective activation of the course content by way of speaking situations and conversations in class.

We found that shortening the listening texts length helped students learn more than with longer texts. We were able to get students to learn more by activating vocabulary taken from the texts and using them in speaking situations in class.

In the fall, students complained about the traditional style of some of the University professors and CASA replaced them.

Enhancement

In the spring semester, one of CASA's permanent full-time instructors, Ms. Ghada Hussein, was sent for training at the University of Texas of Austin, where she taught in the Arabic program and continued to develop her teaching skills.

At the end of the summer semester, Professor Al-Batal visited the program. He met with the students as a group and individually to discuss the program, and later with the teachers to discuss the program's philosophy, pedagogy and other related issues. He also worked with them individually on teaching strategies particular to their class.

In the spring semester, Dr. Al-Batal and Dr. Schulte-Nafeh visited the program. Dr. Schulte-Nafeh became acquainted with the CASA students and faculty and held meetings with the teachers to discuss her vision for the future of the program.

Like last year, this year CASA students took a language pledge and agreed to speak only Arabic while on campus. Students were very committed and followed through on this also while not on campus.

Appendix I
Teaching Staff

1. Full-time Teachers in The Higher Language Institute:

<u>Name of Teacher</u>	<u>Courses Taught</u>
Ghada Hussein BA in Arabic Literature University of Damascus	Syrian Colloquial Arabic Listening and Comprehension Reading
Khulood Sakbani Diploma in Arabic Literature University of Damascus	Modern Standard Arabic
Shadi Al-Hayouk MA in Teaching Arabic Language BA in Arabic Literature University of Damascus	Reading and Vocabulary Modern Standard Arabic Advanced Writing The Novel Grammar Speech Reading
Rana Naser BA. In Arabic literature	Syrian colloquial Arabic Reading

2. Part-Time Teachers in The Higher Language Institute:

<u>Courses Taught</u>	<u>Name of Teacher</u>
Modern Arabic Literature	Dr. Khaled Al-Hussen PhD in Modern Arabic Literature
History and Thought	Dr. Suliman Daher PhD. in Philosophy
Grammar	Dr. Shawqi Al-Ma'ari PhD in Arabic Language Mr. Shadi Al-Hayouk
Media	Dr. Suliman Fandi PhD. In Media

Appendix II Courses Taught

Summer Semester Courses

Syrian Colloquial Arabic	Ms. Ghada Hussein
Modern Arabic (Listening, Reading)	Ms. Khoulod Sakbani
The Syrian novel	Mr. Shadi Al-Hayouk

Fall Semester Courses

Syrian Colloquial Arabic	Ms. Rana Naser
Standard Arabic (Listening)	Ms. Ghada Hussen
Standard Arabic (Reading, Vocabulary Building)	Mr. Shadi Al-Hayouk

Spring Semester Courses

Advanced Writing	Mr. Shadi Al-Hayouk
History and Thought	Dr. Suliman Daher
Media	Dr. Sulieman Fandi
Modern Literature	Dr. Khaled Al-Hussen
Grammar	Dr. Shawqi Al-Ma'ari Mr. Shadi Al-Hayouk
Syrian Colloquial Arabic	Ms. Rana Naser
Speech	Mr. Shadi Al-Hayouk

Appendix III
The Cultural Program

The cultural component of the academic program has always been an integral part of the CASA programs. CASA Damascus employed three Syrian students (Lara Dahdal, Weam Junaidi, and Rana Saqer) to introduce students to the host culture and to help them interact with Syrians through *Mishwar Wa Dardasha* that took place in the Summer Semester on Thursdays in many parts of Damascus. In these outings, the students were divided into three groups.

The places visited were:

Place	Date
Omayyad Mosque and Salah Al-Dean Grave	June 18, 2009
National Museum	June 25, 2009
Sarouja Old Market	July 9, 2009
Al-Azem Palace	July 16, 2009
Al-Tekkiya Al-Suleimaniya	July 23, 2009
Asaad Basha Inn	July 30, 2009
Al-Nouri Hospital (Historical site)	July 6, 2009

The CASA program organized many trips to various places around Syria, a list of which follows:

- **Friday, July 3, 2009:** trip to Sednaya and Maalula in the north of Damascus.
- **Friday, August 7, 2009:** trip to the Syrian coasts and mountains including: Kasab, and Wadi Qandil(Qandil Valley)
- **Friday, October 30, 2009:** trip to Bosra, a historic city in the south of Damascus.
- **Saturday, November 21, 2009:** trip to Zabadani and Bloudane, a summer resort in the northwest of Damascus.
- **Friday, April 9, 2010:** trip to Tadmor (Palmera), in the Syrian Desert.

Also, the CASA administrative coordinator provided the fellows with a schedule of cultural activities every week to encourage them to participate in those activities. Teachers were encouraged to give assignments based on tasks outside of class.

The language exchange program that started during the Summer Semester resulted in friendships between CASA fellows and their Syrian peers. This exchange program was helpful for CASA fellows to improve their Syrian Colloquial Arabic and introduced them to Syrian customs, families, and community.

Lecture Series

During the Fall Semester, CASA fellows participated in periodic lectures that focused on Syrian culture and society. The topics of the lectures were related to the topics they took in CASA classes. The following is a complete list of these lectures:

Lecturer	Topic
Mr. Bassam Al-Qadi	The Reality of Syrian Women
Dr. Samer Ismael	Modern Political Thought
Mrs. Samar Yazbek	Discussion on her novel “ Smell of Cinnamon”
Dr. Abd Al-Karim Freej	Art in Syria
Dr. Nael Hanoon	Historic discoveries in east of Syria

Activities

During the second year of CASA in Damascus, both the teachers and the fellows attended many cultural activities outside The University of Damascus including: cultural lectures in the cultural centers around Damascus, movies, music concerts, and interviews with many Syrian actors. CASA also organized some small outings such as:

- **Student-lead Debate:** The CASA students met with students from another Arabic Language program to debate issues surrounding the Modern Arabic Literary Text.
- **Thursday, May 18, 2009:** Dinner in Al-Khawali Restaurant.

Appendix IV

CASA Full-Year students 2009-2010 Entrance & Exit scores

Fellows	Entrance	Exit
Fellow #1	54.37	61.25
Fellow #2	69.87	90.25
Fellow #3	85.12	90.87
Fellow #4	78.60	87.63
Fellow #5	72.39	89
Fellow #6	77.89	86.63
Fellow #7	62.05	89.75
Fellow #8	69.37	90.5
Fellow #9	69.52	86
Fellow #10	70.78	IC
Fellow #11	75.22	IC
Fellow #12	66.86	87.37
Fellow #13	61.30	80.12

***IC indicates the fellow did not complete the exit exam**

CASA Full-Year students 2009-2010

Oral Interview Scores

Fellows	OPI-2009	ILR-2010
Fellow #1	1+	2+
Fellow #2	2+	3+
Fellow #3	2	4-
Fellow #4	2-	3+
Fellow #5	2+	3H
Fellow #6	2+	3+
Fellow #7	1+	3
Fellow #8	2	3H+
Fellow #9	2-	3
Fellow #10	2	3
Fellow #11	2	3-
Fellow #12	2	2H+
Fellow #13	2-	3

Appendix V

CASA 2009-2010 Student Biographies

Rodrigo Adem is currently a PhD student at the University of Chicago in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, majoring in Islamic Thought. He studies early Islamic sectarianism. Previously he has studied Arabic at Qasid in Amman, Jordan as well as Cairo, Egypt.

Katherine Dunn completed her JD and MA in Arab Studies in May 2009 at Georgetown University, with a focus on refugee issues and international public interest law. Throughout her graduate studies, she interned with organizations in Beirut, Geneva, and Istanbul, as well as the Center for Applied Legal Studies at Georgetown. Katherine received her BA from Emory University in 2002 and was a Fulbright fellow in Fes, Morocco from 2002 to 2003. After improving her Arabic this year with CASA, she plans to work in the field of refugee advocacy and support.

Emilie Durand-Zuniga is currently an M.A. candidate in Arabic Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. In 2006, she graduated from Brigham Young University with a B.A. in Linguistics and Italian. She is interested in Semitic syntax and morphology, Arabic sociolinguistics, and Teaching Arabic as a Second Language. After completing CASA, she plans to go back to UT to complete her degree, and hopefully continue on with a PhD in Arabic linguistics and literature.

James Fallon graduated in 2009 from Middlebury College with a BA in political science. He has studied Arabic abroad in Morocco, Syria, and Oman, and has completed coursework on political science and history at the University of Paris I la Sorbonne in France. His interests include Middle Eastern politics and US foreign policy.

Reed Fry received his M.A. in May 2009 from Georgetown University's Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, where much of his research focused on the modern literature of the Arab World. He hopes to pursue a career in diplomacy.

Ketan Gajria graduated from Tufts University last year with a Bachelor's of Science in Psychology and then moved to Damascus where he has been studying Arabic at the IFPO Institute since June, 2008. An avid photographer, he has captured scenes from all over Syria as well as Jordan, Turkey, Morocco, Lebanon, and Egypt.

Peter Glanville is a doctoral student in Arabic Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. He is interested in Arabic syntax and phonology, as well as Arabic sociolinguistics. He became interested in Arabic after spending some time in the Middle East teaching English. After graduating in 2025 he hopes to teach Arabic and Arabic linguistics at a university in America or Britain.

Alexandra Gordon graduated this year with a BA in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations from Yale University, where she wrote her senior thesis on modern Arabic translation. Previously she has studied Arabic at the University of Yarmouk in Jordan. In future she plans to pursue Greco-Arabic studies in graduate school.

Graham Griffiths graduated from the University of Washington in 2008 with a B.A. in Philosophy and Economics. During his time at UW, he studied Arabic and spent six months at the American University in Cairo. He has spent the last few months interning with the Middle East Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. After completing CASA, he hopes to continue to pursue his interests in Arab political thought and political economy.

Bethany Kibler is an MA student at Harvard's Center for Middle Eastern Studies. Her research focuses on diaspora, refugee and immigrant communities in the Middle East and Europe. Prior to coming to Harvard, Bethany studied Comparative Literature and Philosophy at Pomona College. After completing CASA, Bethany will conduct fieldwork in Syria before returning to CMES.

Paul Love graduated with a BA in History and Religious Studies from Western Kentucky University in 2007. His research interests are Kharijites, Ibadism and Islamic Heresiology. After completing CASA, he hopes to enter a graduate program in Near Eastern Studies.

Alexander Ortiz graduated this year from Brown University with a BA in Comparative Literature: Translation and Middle East Studies. He spent a year abroad in Egypt studying Arabic. He is especially interested in contemporary and experimental Arabic literature, and plans to pursue a PhD in Comparative Literature after completing the CASA program.

Emily Pollokoff graduated this year from Emory University with a B.A. in Middle Eastern & South Asian Studies and Linguistics, with additional minor concentrations in Arabic and Hindi. She is interested in everything from bhakti poetry to Mauretanian rap, so is grateful for the opportunity to sort out all the curly scripts between them by focusing on Arabic for a year. After CASA, she hopes to pursue an advanced degree, begin a career in service and education, and finally learn how to cook a mean tagine.