Department of Near Eastern Languages & Civilization

Diversity Activities Summary

The Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization (NELC) is devoted to teaching and research concerning the principal cultures and languages of the Near and Middle East, including Central Asia, emphasizing not only their contemporary manifestations but also their ancient and medieval roots, and their significance within the history of world civilizations. Our language and thematic curricula investigate major literary and cultural traditions. Arabic, Persian, Tajik, Turkish (Modern and Ottoman), and Central Asian Turkic (such as Uzbek, Kazakh, Kirghiz, and Uighur) are the languages of the most significant manifestations of Islamic civilization. Hebrew and Aramaic are languages of the Bible, and central to Judaism and Jewish culture. A rich and vast heritage from other ancient Near Eastern cultures is explored through study of languages and literatures such as Egyptian (Hieroglyphic, Coptic), Akkadian, Ugaritic, Phoenician, and Syriac. Our curriculum reflects the faculty’s commitment to interdisciplinary research, historical and linguistic training, innovative pedagogical approaches to learning, and expanding awareness of and appreciation for non-Western cultures, past and present.

Because of the unusually wide range of cultures represented in our curriculum, spanning millennia and continents from Africa to Asia, the agenda of NELC is inherently multicultural and necessarily sensitive to the celebration of difference and the enhancement of understanding.

We continue to make targeted efforts to enhance the diversity of the department when opportunity avails:

- In our last faculty search, to fill the Arabic Lecturer position (winter 2002), we brought four candidates for on-campus interviews.
- We have sought minority recruitment fellowships when qualified persons from an underrepresented group applied to our M.A. program, and we have had some success at this
- The undergraduate major at present does not require application and therefore is open to all. NELC has participated in such activities as the GO-MAP program, World Language Day programs, and DAWG-DAZE exhibits, where we might make our degree programs known to a wider spectrum of potential students from diverse backgrounds and ethnicities.
- Our community outreach to heritage communities associated with our department has expanded in recent years. In the last two years we have organized advisory boards involving community representatives from the Persian, Turkish, Arab, and Jewish communities in the area. These advisory boards have taken leadership in helping us organize numerous public lectures and cultural events celebrating the diverse heritages represented in the Department’s curriculum.
Our current permanent and emeritus faculty includes representatives from the following ethnic heritages: American Jewish; Lithuanian; Palestinian; Iranian; and Turkish. Our current TA and other temporary teaching staff include: Coptic; Arab; Iranian; Israeli; Turkish; Uighur; Uzbek.

There are nine permanent faculty in NELC. The graduate student population in NELC over the last 10 years the average ratio has been 12% from underrepresented groups. For the decade as a whole this ratio for underrepresented groups represents an improvement over the previous ten-year period, where the ratio of underrepresented groups averaged 4%.