



Arabic Language Summer Institute: Paving the way for intensive language learning

On June 1, the Arabic Flagship Program, in conjunction with Middle Eastern Studies, launched the first ever Arabic Language Summer Institute on the University of Texas campus. The ten-week program, developed with funding from the Language Flagship Program and the College of Liberal Arts, offered an intensive Arabic language and culture program for beginner, intermediate, and advanced students of Arabic. To fulfill this objective, the Institute combined instruction in standard and colloquial Arabic to provide students with academic credit equivalent to one full year of learning. In addition to Arabic language and content courses, the Summer Institute also provided daily conversation hours, cultural events, a student lounge, a resident advisor to provide tutoring, tuition support, and student housing.

Daily dardasha, or conversation hours, were an integral component of the program, aimed at enhancing the development of spoken skills in Arabic, both standard and colloquial. During conversation hours, students met with their instructor to discuss a variety of topics ranging from politics and social issues to poetry, music, travel, cuisine, and upcoming weekend plans. Students developed their colloquial Arabic through a focus on Arabic media and current events by watching Al-Jazeera newscasts, and by participating in group discussions. The Arabic Language Summer Institute also featured a cultural program, complete with lectures, weekly Arabic films, hands-on workshops, and guest speakers. Lecture topics were diverse and included titles such as "Introduction to Arabic Dialects," "Internet and Blogging in the Arab World," "Identity and Immigration," and "A Palestinian Wedding: From A to Z." With the rigorous study (seven hours of class time and a minimum of three hours of homework each night), it was essential that the program integrate cultural events to give students a break from the books. Organized events for students were varied and included a boat excursion to view the Austin bats, an Arabic cooking demonstration, an interactive musical performance by UT's Middle Eastern Ensemble, and calligraphy lectures by local Iraqi artist Mr. Muhanned Knaiwi. Summer Institute student Kelsey Balaban, a junior who completed First-Year Arabic during the program, was grateful for the inclusion of student cultural events in the rigorous curriculum. "The cultural activities the Flagship Program incorporated into the Summer Institute—from the films to Dr. Mohammad Mohammad's lectures, to the cooking, dancing, and calligraphy sessions—definitely enriched my introduction to Arabic," shared Balaban when asked about her experience this summer. "I'm grateful for all the hard work that made this first summer possible, and I wholeheartedly recommend the Summer Institute to anyone ready to plunge into Arabic. It's worth it!" she summed up.

Several key goals were achieved this summer, with the most remarkable being the high-level scores students received on their end-of-term Oral Proficiency Interviews (OPIs), developed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). Forty students participated in the OPI testing, with nineteen of them scoring in the Advanced category on the ACTFL scale. "We are exceptionally proud of our students' performance on the OPI test, as their outstanding scores clearly emphasize their individual achievement in accelerated language learning, showcasing the success of the Summer Institute," explained Dr. Mohammad Mohammad, Director of the Arabic Language Summer Institute.

The Arabic Flagship Program and Middle Eastern Studies look forward to hosting a second cohort of talented students during the summer of 2010.