

FALL 2024

Annual Newsletter

we're so glad you're here!

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**HIGHLIGHT OF THE YEAR****We have a new DIRECTOR!**

Dear CSAMES affiliates, students, and friends,

Welcome back to a new year at CSAMES!

Since stepping into my new role at the Center in August, I've been working closely with Associate Director Angela Williams, Outreach Coordinator Maha Chahine, and the whole CSAMES team to plan an exciting year of events. We are still building out our programs for the year, but our calendar already includes talks by Bayan Abusneineh (Ohio State University), Moroccan novelist Yassin Adnan, Abigail Balbale (NYU), Tarek El-Ariss (Dartmouth), Hassan Elhag (Center for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies, Doha), Huda Fakhreddine

(University of Pennsylvania), Laura Goffman (UIUC), Samuel Llano (University of Manchester), Nathaniel Mathews (SUNY Binghamton), and Marwa Shalaby (University of Wisconsin). We are also working to revive the CSAMES film series, with plans in the works to screen recent films from Morocco, Iran and Israel/Palestine. Please keep an eye on the CSAMES website, where we will be adding new events over the coming months. And please don't hesitate to reach out to me if you have any ideas for events that you would like to organize through the Center.

As you might have heard by now, big changes are afoot at the Center. With support from IGI, the Office of the Provost, and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the Center has recently created a new role to promote South Asian studies on our campus. On August 16, Rini Mehta (Comparative & World Literature and Religion) was officially appointed as the Center's first Faculty Director for South Asian Studies. You can read more about the new South Asian studies initiative on the Center's website.

I'm excited to work with all of you and look forward to seeing you at future CSAMES events. For now, I wish you a happy start to the new academic year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eric Calderwood".

**Eric Calderwood,
CSAMES Director**

NOTE FROM FACULTY DIRECTOR OF South Asian Studies

"I am excited to join CSAMES as the first faculty director of South Asian Studies; I look forward to creating an exciting slate of programs and events for the coming five years. One of the projects begun this year is South Asian Languages, Images, and Data Lab (SALIDLab, [link](#)), which will work as an overarching structure for various computational and critical research. South Asian Studies has a full calendar of events this year. We have introduced Friday Talks @11 ([link](#)), with four scheduled talks in Fall '24 and Spring '25, a comics drawing workshop by an award-winning artist on November 6, the Tagore Festival on December 7, and an India Studies Lecture in Spring."



Rini Bhattacharya Mehta,
Faculty Director,
Center for South Asian Studies



New Team Member Alert!

CSAMES OFFICE SUPPORT SPECIALIST MEET SAM

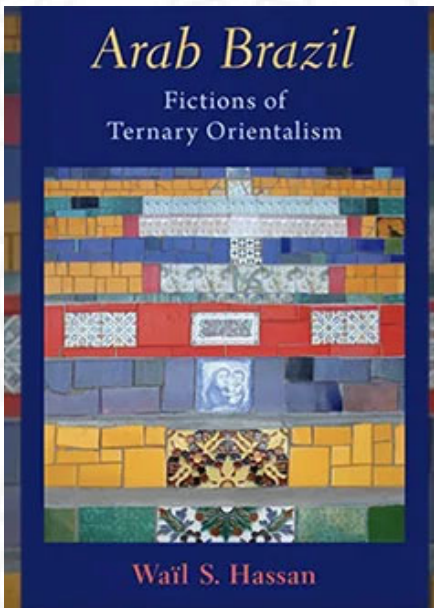
Sam, a longtime Champaign resident since elementary school, graduated from the University of Illinois with a degree in industrial design. After college, he opened Caffè Bene on campus, which he ran for 10 years before selling it to spend more time with his newborn daughter. In his free time, he enjoys playing basketball at the ARC and traveling to visit family and friends.

Welcome to the team!

Achievements

Professor Wail S. Hassan publishes new book on Arab Brazil

Until recently, Arab-Brazilian relations have been largely invisible to area studies and comparative literature scholarship. *Arab Brazil: Fictions of Ternary Orientalism* (Oxford University Press, 2024) is the first book of its kind to highlight the representation of Arab and Muslim immigrants in a century of Brazilian literature and popular culture, from the 1920s to the present, revealing anxieties and contradictions in the country's ideologies of national identity.

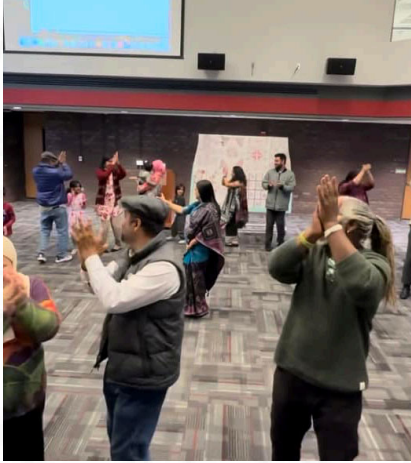


Model Arab League

Our students excelled at the Model Arab League Conference, earning the Best Delegation award from the Social Committee. Their efforts in drafting resolutions and debates demonstrated teamwork & diplomatic skill. This recognition reflects their dedication to global affairs. Awad Awad, Director of the Salam MENA Cultural Center and CSAMES Outreach Coordinator Maha Chahine led the team.



Campus and Community Outreach



WGPP WORKSHOP: NAKSHI AND DHAMAIL DANCE

On March 6th, CSAMES and WGPP Program hosted a lively celebration of Bangladeshi culture at the Levis Center. The event featured a Nakshi Kantha Workshop, participants learned the art of traditional Bangladeshi hand-stitching, followed by an energetic Dhamail Dance performance. The evening brought together the Bangladesh Institute of Performing Arts and the Bangladeshi Ladies Club, offering a vibrant showcase of Bangladesh's rich cultural traditions.

MUSIC OF THE MIDDLE EAST

CSAMES hosted "Music of the Middle East," featuring renowned musician Suzanne Osman. The event offered an engaging, hands-on experience where attendees were introduced to traditional Middle Eastern instruments. Suzanne led a session on the history and unique sounds of the instruments, allowing the audience to try playing them. The interactive workshop brought the rich musical traditions of the region to life, giving participants a chance to connect with the music on a deeper level.



ARAB AMERICAN HERITAGE CONFERENCE



April is Arab American Heritage month in the United States, and to commemorate this, CSAMES hosted its first Arab American Heritage Conference on April 5. This event brought together leading history and literature scholars, and poet/authors to expound upon Arab Americans' experiences and identities. Pictured, from back left: Nouri Gana, Professor of Comparative Literature at UCLA; Author Susan Muaddi Darraj; Akram Khater, Director of the Khayrallah Center for Lebanese Diaspora Studies and Professor of History at North Carolina State University; CSAMES Associate Director Angela Williams; CSAMES Director Wail Hassan; front: Author Mohja Kahj; CSAMES Outreach Coordinator Maha Chahine. Speaker not pictured: Therí Pickens, Professor of English at Bates College

TURKISH EVENTS

The Turkish language program in collaboration with the Yunus Emre Institute organized a series of online events focused on Turkish culture. Dr. Ayşe Özcan led the initiative which has increased visibility and excitement around the Turkish program. Pictured: Hatice Özdemir Tulun, Turkish food blogger and Portakal Ağacı Studio Founder.



LECTURE AT PEORIA

Michael Singh of the Washington Institute addressed the Peoria Area World Affairs Council (PAWAC) on September 14, 2023. He spoke on Syria and US relations in the region, among other topics. Partnership with PAWAC is supported by the U.S. Department of Education Title VI grant. Pictured, from left: Richwoods High School (Peoria) student Theresa Bartelme, PAWAC Executive Director Angela Weck, Michael Singh, and PAWAC member Don Samford.



ONE STATE REALITY

Michael Barnett, Professor of International Affairs and Political Science at the George Washington University, delivered a lecture on his recent book *The One State Reality: What is Israel/Palestine?*





K-14 Teacher Outreach

Thanks to the U.S. Department of Education Title VI grant, we have been able to greatly expand our outreach to K-12 and community college educators. In the past year, these efforts included a joint teacher workshop with the Center for African Studies titled “The Living Sahara: New Horizons in Teaching Africa and the Middle East”; partnership with the Midwest Institute for International/Intercultural Education to support Middle East content at community college professional development conferences; and grants to K-14 educators to participate in educational tours of the MENA region.

In Fall 2024, we formed our first Teacher Advisory Committee comprised of five teachers from Unit 4 Schools. Out of this collaboration, CSAMES presented at professional development sessions for Unit 116 and Unit 4 and will be assisting teachers with specific curriculum needs.

Educators looking for resources or assistance can now complete the online Request for Classroom Support and Resources Form on the CSAMES website: <https://forms.illinois.edu/sec/597903313>

Morocco Trip

Maha Chahine and Angela Williams joined the Global Exploration for Educators Organization (GEEO) for their tour of Morocco along with U.S. teachers and other global travelers in June. CSAMES will collaborate with the Center for African Studies for a similar trip in June 2025 to Morocco. There will also be a trip to Turkey. For information on future teacher trips, contact Maha at chahine2@illinois.edu.



Trans-Sahara Conference

“The Living Sahara: New Horizons on Teaching Africa and the Middle East” was the first collaboration between CSAMES and the Center for African Studies around the theme of Trans-Sahara. The speakers were Soulemame Bachir Diagne, Director of the Institute of African Studies at Columbia University; Debora Heard, Doctoral Candidate at the University of Chicago; Shayla L. Monroe, Postdoctoral Fellow at Harvard University and Elizabeth Matsushita, Visiting Assistant Professor at Reed College.



Teacher Grantees



Twelve K-12 educators predominantly from Illinois received grants to participate in educational tours to the Middle East and North Africa. Below are a couple of their comments.

"I feel very honored to have been awarded with this grant which allowed me to immerse in the rich culture and history of Morocco. Being part of this trip has positively impacted my outlook on life and teaching philosophy. I am excited to share my experiences with my students throughout this school year and the years to come. During this experience, I learned more about the organization, traditions and diverse population that make up this gem of a country. In addition to partaking in the recreational activities and developing relationships with the locals, it was a pleasure to be surrounded by inspiring and passionate women such as Maha and Angela. Their leadership and commitment to learning and understanding the different ways of living is contagious. They took advantage of every chance they had to learn and share their knowledge with me and the rest of the group; from basic Arab words and dance moves, to the intricacies of Moroccan society. This is a trip that everyone should make if they have the opportunity. The people, the food, and the views are all worth it. Thank you so much again for making this possible!"

Arabia Patio, French and Spanish Teacher at West Chicago Community High School

"The trip was wonderful and I appreciated your support so much. Traveling really strengthens your teaching; you teach in a totally different way once you've experienced something for yourself.

Laura West, K-12 Gifted and Talented Teacher in Hot Springs School District, AR



"Thanks to the UIUC grant, I was able to experience the beautiful country of Morocco firsthand. The religions, the cultures, the sights, sounds, and smells were all new and exciting! when we visited a nomadic Amazigh family near Merzouga in the Sahara Desert, I was able to see into the lives of a family considerably different from mine. I was able to break bread, literally, with a young child who offered me a piece of his Madfouna—a stuffed flatbread that was baked fresh in a fire pit in the sand by his mother. Food is a universal language. Food is love."

—Amber Nicols, Band Director, Pinkneyville Community High School, IL





Meet our FLAS Fellows

SUMMER UNDERGRADUATE

BREILLE ROSS: ARABIC THROUGH SILMW UIUC

HEDAYA HASSANIEN : ARABIC IN EGYPT

GRACE DENTON: ARABIC IN MOROCCO

KHADIJA BARRO: TURKISH IN ISTANBUL

SUMMER GRADUATE

ASMAA ELSAYED: ARABIC IN EGYPT

AMY WERKHEISER: AT UIUC

KARIPEK ASENA: ARABIC IN ISTANBUL

MATHEW HEINRICK: ARABIC AT UIUC

Academic Year 24-25

UNDERGRADUATE

NAREEN ADOGAN, CIVIL & ENVIRONMENTAL ENGR. STUDYING ARABIC

WITTER BAILEY, GLOBAL STUDIES STUDYING TURKISH

LORIAN TADROS, POLITICAL SCIENCE STUDYING ARABIC

GRADUATE

ELIZABETH CODER, EPOL STUDYING ARABIC

SARAH KISHTA, COMMUNITY HEALTH STUDYING HEBREW

NADIA DERVISH, EPOL STUDYING TURKISH.

BRENNAN DELL, LINGUISTIC STUDYING TURKISH

ASENA KARIPEK SOCIOLOGY STUDYING ARABIC.

WORD FROM OUR MA ALUMNUS

Mahade Hasan

"My time at the Center for South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies (CSAMES) at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) was one of profound academic growth and personal enrichment. I completed an MA in Middle Eastern Studies from January 2023 to June 2024 with a CGPA of 3.91 out of 4.0. Throughout this period, I worked as a Graduate Research Assistant (GRA) under the invaluable guidance of Angela Williams, the Associate Director of CSAMES, whose support and mentorship greatly shaped my journey. Angela was more than an advisor; she was a constant source of encouragement, always willing to go the extra mile to ensure I thrived both academically and professionally. I feel deeply grateful for her kindness, insight, and friendship.



Also, I am indebted to my colleagues and other mentors at CSAMES who enhanced my experience in countless ways. Maha, the outreach coordinator, was a supportive senior colleague who not only guided me through numerous tasks but also made me feel at home within the center. Maha and I often shared conversations about our families; she would ask about my mother, and I would ask about hers. Her mother even gifted me a hat as a token of love, a gesture I deeply cherish. Additionally, the former director of CSAMES, Professor Wail S. Hassan, was instrumental in helping me navigate my academic journey from day one, meticulously advising me on course selection and requirements. Their mentorship and companionship fostered an environment of academic excellence and warmth, a combination I deeply miss as I embark on my PhD at UCLA.

I recently began my PhD in Islamic Studies at the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures at UCLA this fall. UCLA offers an extraordinary environment for academic and intellectual growth, providing me with countless opportunities to expand my knowledge. While the initial workload and reading demands are intense, I am thoroughly enjoying the challenge and excited about what lies ahead in my academic journey here.

The office space at CSAMES brought together individuals from different centers, forging strong ties among faculty and students. Particularly memorable was my connection with Dr. Maimouna Barro, Associate Director of the Center for African Studies (CAS), and Dr. Adeyinka Alasade, or Inka, an energetic friend and colleague whose enthusiasm brightened every room. I will always cherish the day I recited poetry at the MENA center hosted by CAS, an event that Inka personally invited me to. This day stands out as a special moment, reflecting the strong bonds and a shared love for cultural engagement.

As I applied for PhD programs across the US top schools, Angela's recommendation was invaluable. Her words and genuine appreciation for my efforts moved me deeply and contributed significantly to my acceptance into UCLA. My departure from UIUC was marked by a heartfelt farewell from my colleagues and friends, leaving me with lasting memories of their warmth and celebration of my success. Their support and encouragement made me feel as if I left a small but meaningful legacy at CSAMES.

Reflecting on my days at CSAMES, I am profoundly grateful to Allah, my advisors, and all my colleagues and friends who made my journey there so memorable. Their collective kindness and guidance have greatly contributed to my academic and personal development, creating a cherished chapter of my life at UIUC."

we're so proud of you, Mahade!

SUCCESS STORY OF OUR MA ALUMNA

Sahar B. Amini

Congratulations to CSAMES alumna Sahar Amini who graduated in 2024 the Middle Eastern Studies program! Her research was focused on Shi'a rituals and thought in the Middle East and diaspora. She investigated contemporary Shi'ism employing media and text-based analysis, guided by an epistemological framework rooted in the complex adaptive systems theory. Sahar recently presented at the Middle East Studies Association annual conference, giving a talk titled "A Shift in Shia Discourse: Political Necessities and Sectarian Dynamics".

we're so proud of you, Sahar!



MEET OUR **CURRENT** CSAMES GRADUATE ASSISTANTS 2024-25



Muskan Khowaja

Meet Muskan, our Graduate Assistant at CSAMES! Rising from Karachi, Pakistan, she's a Master's student in Advertising at UIUC with expertise in creativity and storytelling. From crafting impactful campaigns to managing our newsletter, she brings vibrant energy and fresh ideas to the center. She's passionate about bridging cultures and sparking connections, get ready for more engaging updates, courtesy of her skills!



Parya Jangjou

Meet Parya, our Graduate Assistant at CSAMES! International student from Iran, she is now a Ph.D. student in Global Studies in Education at UIUC. With a passion for education and cultural exchange, she's committed to fostering connections and advancing impactful initiatives. Whether she's contributing to research or supporting CSAMES projects, Parya's thoughtful approach and leadership shines through!

FLAS FELLOWSHIP

Applications are now open!

The Center for Asian and Middle Eastern Studies (CSAMES) administers academic year and summer Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Fellowships under a 2022–2026 grant from the U.S. Department of Education Title VI National Resource Centers (NRC) program. The Center administers FLAS fellowships for the study of Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, and Turkish for Summer 2025 and Academic Year 2025–2026.

APPLICATION DEADLINE: Friday, January 31, 2025

For further information or to apply, go to [FLAS Fellowships at Illinois](#)
Contact **Outreach Coordinator: Maha Chahine** at chahine2@illinois.edu

Call for Donations

We are grateful for the generous support of alumni and friends to provide a strong and dynamic educational mission. The programs focus and build upon events to further our academic community's awareness of and knowledge about the societies of South Asia and the Middle East. Our donors help us maintain existing programs and undertake new initiatives.

To make a gift, go to: <https://csames.illinois.edu/donate-csames>

You will be directed to the CSAMES giving page and then the University of Illinois Foundation's secure online giving site for your personal and credit card information. To clear all inputs and selections click "Start over."