NEAR EASTERN LANGUAGES AND CIVILIZATIONS

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The major in Near Eastern Languages & Civilizations is an interdisciplinary liberal arts major. Students acquire language proficiency and skills in critical analysis in order to study the long-lived and rich civilizations of the Near East, ranging from ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, to the medieval Near East and classical Islam, to contemporary civilization represented by modern Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, and Turkish.

We study the Near East for its own intrinsic literary, historic, and artistic achievements as well as its cultural and historical legacies. In addition, close engagement with the written and visual traditions of this complex region expands our ability to decipher developments and challenges in our modern world. Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations majors go on to careers in government, public policy, international finance, and academia, and the major provides a strong foundation for post-graduate study in foreign service, law, medicine, and education.

Languages offered by the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations include Akkadian, Arabic, Armenian, Egyptian, Hebrew, Ottoman Turkish, Persian, Syriac, and Turkish. Students must complete a departmental placement examination before they can enroll in language courses offered by the department during a term, year, or summer abroad.

REQUIREMENTS OF THE MAJOR

There are two pathways to the major. Each requires twelve term courses, one of which is the senior requirement (see below). Working with the director of undergraduate studies (DUS), students develop coherent programs of study in one of two concentrations.

Language and Civilization concentration This concentration is appropriate for students who wish to focus in depth on a particular language and/or civilization, such as ancient Egypt or Mesopotamia; the classical Near East or medieval Islam; or modern Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, or Turkish. Richly contextualized through study of literature, religion, visual arts, archaeology, and political and social history, this pathway gives students the opportunity to explore Near Eastern civilization through in-depth study of languages and texts in their original languages.

Requirements include: six term courses in one or two Near Eastern languages; one NELC Foundations course; four NELC electives, chosen in consultation with the DUS (no more than two may be counted from other departments/program); and the senior project (see below).

Languages, Civilization, and Culture concentration This concentration is appropriate for students who wish to study Near Eastern languages and civilizations more broadly. It provides students flexibility to study the Near East in its historical and cultural breadth, and to explore its rich and long-lived civilizations and cultures comparatively. Working
with the DUS, students in this concentration take a range of classes and design their
course of study in line with their interests, which might prioritize multiple languages or
focus on Near Eastern literature, history, religion, art and archaeology, or philosophy.

Requirements include: four term courses in NELC languages; two NELC Foundations
courses; five NELC electives, including one on the ancient Near East, one on the
medieval Near East, and one on the modern Middle East, chosen in consultation with
the DUS (no more than three may be counted from other departments/programs);
and the senior essay (see below).

NELC majors are also encouraged to take related courses in other departments and
programs to complement their interests and round out their intellectual formation.
These typically include courses in Anthropology, Archaeology, Classics, History,
History of Art, History of Science, Medicine and Public Health, Judaic Studies,
Comparative Literature, Philosophy, and Religious Studies. Above all, complementary
courses should be chosen according to the student’s interests, ideally in consultation
with the DUS or other faculty advisor. Such courses, including Residential College
Seminars, may be approved at the discretion of the DUS toward the electives
requirement for the major if they include substantial Near Eastern content and are
relevant to the student’s overall program of study.

SENIOR REQUIREMENT
The senior requirement is an opportunity for students to design and execute an
independent research project, bringing to bear the intellectual curiosity as well as
philological and analytic skills the student has honed during their time at Yale. It is also
a chance to be mentored by a Yale faculty member who serves as advisor to the project,
which typically culminates in an essay of about 25–35 pages (one-semester project) or
35–55 pages (year-long project). Conversations about the senior project should begin
with the DUS in the fall of junior year, especially if the student plans to undertake
summer research travel.

In certain circumstances and only with advanced written agreement of the instructor
and the DUS, a research paper for an upper-level seminar may be developed and
expanded to satisfy the senior requirement. In such cases, the project should constitute
work substantially beyond the requirements of the seminar paper.

Each year the DUS provides majors with resources, guidelines, and a list of deadlines
for both the one-semester and year-long senior project.

REQUIREMENTS OF THE MAJOR
Prerequisites None

Number of courses 12 term courses (including the senior project)

Distribution of courses Language and Civilization concentration – 6 term courses of
up to 2 Near Eastern languages; 1 Foundations course; and 4 electives; Languages,
Civilization, and Cultures concentration – 4 term courses of 1 or more Near Eastern
language courses; 2 Foundations courses; 5 NELC electives to include 1 ancient, 1
medieval, and 1 modern
Senior requirement  Senior project, enrollment in NELC 492 and/or 493, or in an upper-level department seminar

The major in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations is for students interested in any period or geographic area of the Near East. Students acquire a solid foundation in languages and in textual and critical analysis of literature, history, and religion to study the highly complex civilizations of one of the most politically and culturally significant regions of the globe. Small classes, hands-on learning with primary sources, and considerable flexibility characterize students’ experience in the major.

Interested first-year students are encouraged to consult the director of undergraduate studies (DUS) or an instructor in their prospective area as early as possible in the fall, to clarify their interests and to plan the best course of study for their interests and ambitions. Majors often obtain unique museum, archaeological, or linguistic experience at Yale or abroad, for which advance planning is crucial.

Students considering a major with a concentration in any of the languages taught by the department are encouraged to begin language study as early as possible, especially if their plans include study abroad.

Particularly suitable for first-year students seeking to learn more about the Near East are First-Year Seminars and NELC Foundations courses.

First-year seminars
NELC 001, Egypt and Northeast Africa: A Multidisciplinary Approach

NELC Foundations courses
NELC 104, Art and Visual Culture in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia
NELC 128, From Gilgamesh to Persepolis: Introduction to Near Eastern Literatures
NELC 156, Classics of the Arabic-Islamic World
NELC 319, Religion and Politics in the Ancient Near East

Beginning Arabic study at Yale
The beginning two-semester course sequence, ARBC 110 and ARBC 120, carries three course credits for the year. Students learn the fundamentals of grammar of modern standard Arabic, an official language of the United Nations, and develop skills in reading and listening comprehension and in writing.

Students interested in continued study of modern standard Arabic follow the beginning sequence with ARBC 130, ARBC 140 (Intermediate), and ARBC 150, ARBC 151 (Advanced). Students interested in studying classical Arabic follow the beginning sequence with ARBC 136 and 146.

Any student considering the NELC major with a focus on Arabic or any major with an Arabic language component should consult with the coordinator of the Arabic program (sarab.alani@yale.edu) or the DUS at the beginning of the fall semester. Students with prior knowledge of Arabic may be eligible for placement in advanced courses.
Beginning Hebrew study at Yale

The beginning two-semester course sequence, HEBR 110 and HEBR 120, carries three course credits for the year and is followed by HEBR 130, HEBR 140 (Intermediate) and an advanced course such as HEBR 160. Students considering the NELC major with a focus on Hebrew or any major with a Hebrew language component should consult with the coordinator of the Hebrew program (shiri.goren@yale.edu) or the DUS at the beginning of the fall semester. Students with prior knowledge of modern or biblical Hebrew may be eligible for placement in advanced courses.

Other Near Eastern Languages

Beginning courses in Akkadian, Egyptian, Ottoman Turkish, Persian, and Turkish are open to first-year students. Please contact the DUS with any questions or concerns.

Placement examinations in Arabic and Hebrew are held before the start of the fall term. Placement examinations are also available in Persian and Turkish; interested students should contact the language coordinators or the DUS for information. See also the Center for Language Study website for general information about language placement.

CERTIFICATE OF ADVANCED LANGUAGE STUDY

The Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations offers a Certificate of Advanced Language Study in Arabic, Hebrew, and Turkish. A certificate adviser, typically the director of undergraduate studies (DUS), advises students on the certification process and certifies to the University Registrar’s Office that students have completed the stated requirements before the end of eight terms of study. The Certificate of Advanced Language Study, once certified, is listed on the student’s transcript.

REQUIREMENTS

Students seeking to earn the certificate are required to take four courses beyond the L4 level in their chosen language, at least two of which must be Yale courses designated as L5. All courses must be taken for a letter grade, and students must achieve a grade of B or above. With the approval of the adviser, one advanced non-L5 Yale course, conducted in the target language, such as an independent study course, a graduate seminar, or an advanced seminar may count toward certification requirements.

The certificate adviser may allow one “language across the curriculum” (LxC) course, which ordinarily is an advanced seminar with an additional weekly discussion section in the target language, to count toward the certification requirements. The certificate adviser may also approve the substitution of up to two credits earned during study abroad and taught in the target language to count toward the certificate requirements. If the adviser approves courses taken outside of Yale for inclusion in the certificate requirements, students must take the necessary steps to ensure that those courses appear on their transcripts.

Credit/D/Fail No courses taken Credit/D/Fail may be counted toward the requirements of the certificate.

Students are invited to complete the Declaration of Candidacy for a Certificate Form using this Qualtrics Survey. Once completed, the form sends notification emails to the
certificate adviser(s) and to the Yale University Registrar’s Office so that the student’s Degree Audit can be updated with the Certificate of Advanced Language Study.

FACULTY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF NEAR EASTERN LANGUAGES AND CIVILIZATIONS

Professors  John Darnell, Benjamin Foster, Eckart Frahm, Dimitri Gutas (Emeritus), Bentley Layton (Emeritus), Nadine Moeller, Shawkat Toorawa, Kevin Van Bladel, Harvey Weiss

Senior Lectors and Senior Lecturers  Sarab Al Ani, Muhammad Aziz, Jonas Elbousty, Shiri Goren, Randa Muhammed, Dina Roginsky, Farkhondeh Shayesteh, Kathryn Slanski, Orit Yeret

Lectors and Lecturers  Ozgen Felek, Agnete Lassen, Gregory Marouard, Klaus Wagensonner, Ezgi Yalcin, Lingxin Zhang

View All NELC Courses View Akkadian Courses View Arabic Courses View Armenian Courses View Egyptian Courses View Hebrew Courses View Persian Courses View Turkish Courses View Ottoman Courses