

# NEAR EASTERN LANGUAGES AND CIVILIZATIONS

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The major in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations (NELC) explores the history and cultural traditions of the ancient, classical, and modern Middle East, including northeast Africa. Students acquire proficiency in languages and skills for interpreting literature, art, and material culture from ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia; late antiquity and Classical Islam; or the contemporary moment, explored through the modern languages of Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, and Turkish. Inherently interdisciplinary, the program emphasizes analytic and reflective learning.

While the Near East is studied for its own intrinsic literary, historic, and artistic interest, as well as its cultural and historical legacies, study of a world distant in time and space also can open new ways of understanding our own. NELC majors go on to careers in government, foreign service, international finance, museums and collections, law, education, consulting, and even medicine and public health. The major also provides a strong foundation for graduate study and academic research.

**Languages offered include:** Modern Arabic, Modern Hebrew, Modern Persian, and Modern Turkish (including Ottoman Turkish); Classical Arabic and Classical Persian; Biblical Hebrew and ancient Assyrian & Babylonian, Egyptian, Old Persian, Syriac, and Sumerian. Students with experience in any of the modern languages must take a placement test at the beginning of the fall term. See the department website or the Center for Language Study for details.

All modern languages, as well as ancient Assyrian & Babylonian, Egyptian, and Biblical Hebrew are offered in multi-year sequences and can be taken to fulfill the Yale College foreign language requirement. The department also offers Advanced Language Certificates in Modern Arabic, Modern Hebrew, and Modern Turkish; Ancient Egyptian; and an interdisciplinary certificate in Persian and Iranian Studies. Many majors undertake intensive language study abroad during the summers, and the language faculty advises students on recommended programs.

## COURSE NUMBERING

Courses numbered NELC 0010–0990 are first-year seminars, with enrollments capped at 18. Courses in the NELC 1000–1999 range are introductory lecture courses, and NELC 2000–2999 are seminars with enrollment capped at 18. These courses have no prerequisites and are designed for students of any background or major. Courses designated NELC 3000–3990 are more challenging and typically meet once a week. Numbers in the NELC 4000–4999 designate courses offered by visiting scholars or are courses related to the senior project.

## REQUIREMENTS OF THE MAJOR

See [Links](#) to the attributes indicating courses approved for Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations major requirements.

The major requires twelve term courses, including the senior requirement. Working with the director of undergraduate studies (DUS), students develop coherent programs of study in one of two concentrations.

**Near Eastern Languages & Civilizations Concentration (Depth)** This concentration is 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* Near Eastern culture through research conducted in modern Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, or Turkish. Contextualized through the study of literature, religion, art, archaeology, and history, this concentration enables students to study a civilization of the Near East intensively through in-depth study of one or two Near Eastern languages and written texts in their original languages.

**Requirements to earn the depth concentration** are 6 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/programs); and the senior project (see below).

**Near Eastern Languages, Civilizations, and Culture Concentration (Breadth)** This concentration is suitable for students wishing to study the languages and civilizations of the Near East *more broadly*. It provides flexibility to study the Near East in its historical and cultural breadth, and to explore its long-lived civilizations over time or comparatively. Students in this concentration take a range of classes and, in consultation with the DUS, design their course of study according to their specific interests. Recent examples include ancient Near Eastern literature, philosophy in medieval Islam, memory and nostalgia in novels of a Soviet emigre to (the modern state of) Israel.

**Requirements to earn the breadth concentration** are four term courses in Near Eastern 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; and the senior project (see below).

Near Eastern Languages and Civilization majors are 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, Comparative Literature, Islamic Studies, Jewish Studies, History, History of Art, History of Science, Medicine and Public Health, Philosophy, and Religious Studies. Above all, complementary courses should be chosen according to the interests of the student and in consultation with the DUS or faculty adviser. If courses outside the department include substantial Near Eastern content and are relevant to the student's overall program of study, they may be approved at the discretion of the DUS toward the elective requirement for the major. No more than two courses taken from outside the department can be counted toward fulfilling the major.

**Credit/D/Fail** No more than one course taken Cr/D/Fail can be applied toward the requirements of the major.

**Outside credit** Courses taken at another institution or during an approved summer or term-time study abroad program may count toward the major requirements with DUS approval. A maximum of two outside credits is allowed.

**SENIOR REQUIREMENT**

The senior requirement is an opportunity for students to design and execute an independent research project, bringing to bear their intellectual curiosity as well as philological and analytic skills honed during their time at Yale. It is also a chance to be mentored by a member of the faculty who serves as adviser to the project, which typically culminates in an essay of about 25-35 pages (one-semester project) or 45-55 pages (year-long project). Conversations about the senior project should begin with the DUS no later than early spring of junior year, especially if the student plans to undertake summer research travel. Students register for NELC 4920 and/or 4930.

In rare occasions 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 must constitute work substantially beyond the requirements of the seminar paper.

Each year the DUS provides majors with resources, guidelines, and, for juniors and seniors, a timetable of deadlines for both the one-semester and year-long senior project. Seniors present their respective projects in a senior showcase event in April.

**SUMMARY OF MAJOR REQUIREMENTS**

**Prerequisites** None

**Number of courses** 12 term courses (including the senior requirement)

**Distribution of courses** *Near Eastern Languages & Civilizations concentration (Depth)*— 6 term courses in 1 or 2 Near Eastern languages; 1 Foundations course; and 4 electives; Senior requirement *Near Eastern Languages, Civilizations, and Culture concentration (Breadth)*—4 term courses of 1 or more Near Eastern languages; 2 Foundations courses; 5 NELC electives to include 1 ancient, 1 medieval, and 1 modern

**Senior requirement** NELC 4920 and/or NELC 4930