Master of Arabic program alum David Cross, Class of 2017

Khadidja, a Master of Arabic program alumna, highlighted the importance of having access to original Arabic sources. She explained how important reading is in acquiring the language—more so than simply practicing classroom exercises or introducing new vocabulary. She emphasized the importance of Arabic proficiency for students interested in the Middle East and for those in intelligence, military or law enforcement in the region.

"I have used the Middlebury Library's Arabic collections extensively over the years, whether for research projects, writing a paper or preparing for an oral exam. The Middlebury Library has been a great resource for me and I have always appreciated the breadth and depth of the collections and the quality of the staff."

Katrina Spencer, Middlebury College Librarian
The Middlebury College Library was an inseparable part of my study of Arabic, and its Arabic resources played a fundamental role in my acquisition of language and cultural proficiency. I was a student in the Arabic School in Vermont in 1999, 2004, and 2006, and I worked there as a graduate intern in 2007. Later I enrolled in the Master’s in Arabic program in Middlebury at Mills College in the year 2014 and graduated in 2017. Access to authentic resources in Arabic was very useful to me since much of their information was unobtainable in other languages. Even if translations are available in English, some details do not translate precisely because of the absence of exact synonyms in the language to which they are translated. Reading is considered among the most important ways of acquiring a language—not only via the practice of previously studied linguistic features but also through the discovery of new vocabulary and information. Reading Arabic texts in their original language gives learners an additional opportunity for language immersion since each text consists of a semiotic system the meanings of whose expressions depend on the linguistic relations between them and on the cultural contexts connected to the author and the writing. The ability to do research in Arabic is considered of great importance for students who wish to study or work in the Middle East, as well as for those interested in national security, law enforcement, the military, or intelligence agencies.

As a Middlebury student, I used many books in Arabic from the library as well as articles in Arabic from professional online journals for my research. Resources in Arabic are plentiful in Middlebury’s library and include various literary genres such as novels, short stories, poetry, theater and literary criticism. There are also non-literary resources in different areas such as, linguistics, history, political science, and language learning. It was very helpful to be able to complete electronic searches using the Arabic script rather than depending on the translation of Arabic titles or their transliteration in English letters as is the case in many other academic libraries. There were also many resources on teaching and learning Arabic—something that gave students in the teaching classes opportunities to find materials based on various learning methodologies. Despite the principle focus on teaching formal Arabic at Middlebury, there are also books for learning dialects and a plethora of videos and novels with samples of dialects appropriate for advanced learners. These resources are very important due to the necessity of knowing both colloquial and formal language in order to obtain superior proficiency in Arabic—a condition that reflects the role of diglossia in Arabic and the importance of knowing colloquial variants for those living in Arab countries.

The Middlebury Library transported many of its books in Arabic from Vermont to the library of Mills College in California—the site of the Arabic School in the summer—in preparation for the summer program. Also useful was the sharing of resources between the Mills College library, Olin, and the libraries of other local universities such as the University of California at Berkeley and Stanford University.

Currently I work as an associate professor at Charleston Southern University in South Carolina where I teach Arabic language and Spanish language and literature. In addition to classes at the beginning and intermediate levels, last year I designed and taught two classes at the advanced level as well as a minor in Arabic. The first graduate with a minor in Arabic graduated in May 2018 and there is an increasing number of students in the first and second years of Arabic study.

In addition to teaching, I volunteer as a translator between English, Arabic, and Spanish for the program “Tarjimly” on Facebook. I also research different topics in the areas of comparative literature, linguistics, and anthropology. In recent years, I have published three articles on the autobiographies of slaves in Central America and I hope to continue my research in this field. Arabic was useful in this context, given its function as a lingua franca among Muslim slaves in nineteenth-century America. In addition, it is useful as a means of communication with Arab immigrants and refugees in the current century. In the age of globalization there needs to be an awareness of cultural and linguistic diversity and the Middlebury College library system plays an important role in preparing a new generation of leaders.