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**Developing Intercultural Communicative Competence in the  
Arabic Curriculum:  
A Survey of Learners at Beginner Level**

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**Developing Intercultural Communicative Competence  
In the Arabic Curriculum:  
A Survey of Learners at the Beginner Level**

**by**

**Muna Saeeda Rehman, B.A.**

**Thesis**

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## **Dedication**

*To Ammi.*

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## **Abstract**

### **Developing Intercultural Communicative Competence**

#### **In the Arabic Curriculum:**

#### **A Survey of Learners at the Beginner Level**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

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In recent years Foreign Language Education (FLE) researchers and instructors have become increasingly interested in devising theoretical frameworks and pedagogical materials that prepare learners for the realities of today's globalized world. Current FLE research suggests that equipping learners with intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is the best approach to achieve this goal. As a result of this, administrators and instructors of foreign language programs are reassessing their curricula to ensure that the cultural content is effective and sufficient for enabling learners to successfully function in a culturally diverse world. This thesis aims to reassess the cultural component of the beginner Arabic curriculum at the University of Texas at Austin by serving two objectives. The first objective is to present the results of a survey that examines the impact of the cultural content in the current beginner Arabic course at the

University of Texas at Austin on learners' ICC development. The second objective is to incorporate these results in a pedagogical framework to further enhance the development of ICC in the beginner Arabic classroom setting

The results were gathered from two student surveys, conducted at the beginning and end of the academic year, and from follow-up interviews administered half way through the study's duration. The findings indicate that the majority of Arabic learners at the beginner level are predisposed with good general knowledge and positive perceptions with regard to the Arab world, suggesting that they are primed to develop ICC before commencing their study of Arabic. In addition to this, the findings show that the current Arabic curriculum did help to further develop ICC in learners to a certain extent. However, there are some areas for improvement, mainly regarding the organization and selection of topics. These observations were taken into consideration in designing the pedagogical framework that presents learning outcomes specific to the beginner Arabic curriculum. The intention is that such a framework will align curricular goals that will in turn result in learners becoming informed global citizens of the world.

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## **Chapter I: Introduction and Study Objectives**

### **I.1 INTRODUCTION**

Recent developments in the field of Foreign Language Education (FLE) have stressed the importance of equipping learners with cultural skills and knowledge in preparation for today's increasingly globalized world. In 1996, the *American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages* (ACTFL) published a document titled *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* that proposed the need to reassess the goals for teaching foreign languages in the United States in preparation for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The document emphasized the role of culture in developing transferrable skills, a lasting learning outcome: “*Even if students never speak the language after leaving the school, for a lifetime they will retain cross-cultural skills and knowledge, the insight, and the access to a world beyond traditional borders*” (24).

Similarly, the *Modern Language Association* (MLA) published a report in 2007 that redefined the role of foreign language programs in higher education institutions in the context of the post-September 11<sup>th</sup> globalized world. The report underscored the fact that, in order for our society to become less ethnocentric and more connected with the global community, foreign language programs need to equip learners with intercultural communicative competence or “*translingual and transcultural competence*”, i.e. the ability to operate in more than one language and culture (1).

Developing intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in Arabic learners has become increasingly relevant in recent years for several reasons. First of all, following the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, mainstream discourse has amplified negative preconceived notions and stereotypes toward Arabic speaking peoples and cultures in the United States (Wingfield, 2006). Moreover, the shortage of “Arabic-competent citizens” in the United States (Allen, 2007) post September 11<sup>th</sup> has led to several new Arabic language programs being created at the secondary and post-secondary levels and previously established Arabic language programs witnessing record highs in enrollment (ACTFL, 2010; Al-Batal, 2007). Thus, 21<sup>st</sup> century Arabic language learners are not just found in select elite higher education institutions but in a variety of educational settings and have more varied orientations towards the Arab world than ever before.

Finally, although Arabic language programs are witnessing record high enrollments, the results of an MLA survey show that the attrition rates are quite similar to those recorded by Belnap in 1987, i.e. several students do not continue their language studies after completing their first year (2007). Therefore, the largest and most diverse demographic of Arabic learners are in beginner level Arabic courses and this accentuates the need to facilitate the development of ICC starting at this level.

## **1.2 STUDY OBJECTIVES**

There are two primary aims of this study: 1) to investigate the development of ICC in learners enrolled in beginner Arabic courses at the University of Texas at Austin over the course of an academic year, 2) to devise a curricular framework that is best suited

to achieve ICC-oriented goals in the beginner Arabic classroom setting. Specifically, the following research questions are addressed in this study:

1. What do learners know about Arab culture when they commence their study of Arabic and what is the source of this knowledge?
2. What are their attitudes towards Arab culture when they commence their study of Arabic and what shaped these attitudes?
3. How does a year of formal study influence learners' knowledge and attitudes as they relate to Arab culture? What changes can we observe at the end of that year?
4. How do learners perceive the cultural exposure they have received in their Arabic course? How has it impacted their development of ICC?
5. How can the current curricula and teaching methods be improved to enhance the development of ICC in the beginner Arabic learners?

### **1.3 METHODOLOGY**

In order to answer these questions, data was obtained from two student surveys; the first survey was administered to participants at the beginning of the Fall 2013 semester and the second survey at the end of the Spring 2014 semester. The surveys mainly focused on assessing learners' knowledge of Arab culture, and their attitudes towards various cultural aspects. The researcher analyzed the results of the two surveys to infer how cultural component in beginner Arabic curriculum facilitated the development of ICC in learners.

In addition to the surveys, the researcher conducted individual follow-up interviews with a number of study participants at the beginning of the Spring 2014 semester. These interviews primarily sought to elicit perspectives on the cultural component in their beginner Arabic course as well as responses that could further expound the observable trends in the data from the surveys.

The participants in this study were students enrolled in beginner Arabic courses at the University of Texas at Austin during the 2013-2014 academic year. Students who identified themselves as being of Arab heritage were excluded from the study. This exclusion was thought to be necessary as factors such as having Arabic speaking family members and/or time spent in the Arab world might have informed their experiences relating to Arab culture before they commenced their study of Arabic.



## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 CULTURE IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM: A BRIEF OVERVIEW**

#### **2.1.1 DEFINING CULTURE**

The first extensive discussions about the role of culture in the foreign language classroom emerged during the 1960s when the United States became more involved internationally and so the number of Americans working and studying abroad increased substantially (Heusinkveld, 1997). As the United States' interests and presence abroad has only continued to grow since then, frameworks and methods to teach culture are constantly evolving to best cater to the needs of learners.

Prior to the 1960s, teaching culture in the foreign language classroom basically meant reading “the great literary masterpieces of the target culture” (Allen, 1985). However, ever since teaching culture became a primary interest in foreign language education, many researchers and pedagogues sought to define it so that language teachers and learners alike could conceptualize it. In 1968, Brooks proposed a definition of culture centered on the idea of the individual; his definition reads: “*the individual’s role in the unending kaleidoscope of life situations of every kind and rules and models for attitude and conduct in them*” (210). Shortly thereafter, Lado proposed a definition that put more emphasis on the collective by stating that culture is a “structured system of patterned behaviors” (1971). Later on, the concept of culture came to have two meanings in FLE, “Olympian culture” (art, literature and music) and “Hearthstone culture” (beliefs,

behaviors and values), more popularly referred to as “Big C” culture and “little c” culture (Brooks, 1971). In the late 1970s, scholars adopted a different approach to incorporating culture in the foreign language classroom. Instead of proposing vague abstract definitions of culture as a concept, they devised lists of cultural themes to facilitate its inclusion in the classroom (Lafayette 1975; Nostrand 1978).

The emergence of the proficiency movement in the late 1980s resulted in ACTFL including culture in its provisional guideline hereby making it “the fifth skill” (Garza 2010). Despite the fact that the guidelines for culture were later removed for not being as well formulated as those for the other four skills, FLE researchers continued to affirm its integration in the proficiency-based language curriculum. In 1987, Omaggio presented organizing principles for the proficiency-oriented classroom that emphasized that learners must practice the language in “a range of contexts” and perform “a range of functions” that are found in the target culture. Furthermore, she stressed the fact that *“cultural understanding must be promoted in various ways so that students are prepared to understand, accept, and live harmoniously in the target language community”* (79).

In more recent times, theories about teaching culture have deviated from the notion of emulating the target culture community. Kramersch (1993) proposes that the goal of teaching culture in the foreign language classroom should be for learners to find their “third culture”. She argues that finding such a culture allows learners to see how their native culture and the target culture intersect. In addition to this, having a “third culture” allows one to become aware of how different contexts and perspectives are in

each culture (235). Hence, teaching culture is not just about learners' imitating practices in the target culture but also about acquiring skills to analyze culture as a concept and the role it plays in shaping their lives and the lives of others.

### **2.1.2 Teaching culture**

A considerable amount of literature has been published on learning goals and objectives to teach culture effectively. Although each interpretation of these learning goals and objectives is slightly different, they all share the same core idea, i.e. that the learner must not only acquire knowledge of big C culture and small c culture but also acquire sociolinguistic knowledge and process skills to develop cultural understanding.

In 1978, Lafayette argued that if the goal in a foreign language classroom is to achieve cross-cultural understanding, then instructors must integrate culture in language as much as possible. In order to facilitate such integration, he proposed thirteen learning goals for teaching culture that include knowledge of "high" culture and popular culture. In addition to this, he stressed the use of research and organizational skills to acquire such knowledge. Moreover, he suggested that presenting cultural topics within thematic language units, integrating culture in the four major skills, and using cultural information such as cultural connotations when introducing new vocabulary are all effective teaching methods for promoting cross-cultural understanding in the classroom.

In the same vein, a few years later, Galloway (1984) proposed a curricular framework for achieving cultural understanding in the classroom. In this framework, she listed four types of understanding, i.e. convention, connotation, conditioning and

comprehension. Each understanding is centered upon the idea of students employing process skills such as analyzing, examining, hypothesizing when learning sociolinguistic and factual content about the target culture.

A broader perspective towards achieving cross-cultural understanding in the classroom was adopted by Seelye (1993) who developed six teaching goals for intercultural communication. These goals included but were not limited to ideas such as developing an interest in the target culture, understanding that an individual's behaviors are influenced by their society and shaped by cultural conventions, researching the culture and eliciting information from a variety of sources,

Additionally, to ensure that teachers are integrating the learning of culture and language in the classroom, Crawford-Lange and Lange (1984) composed a checklist of questions that instructors may ask themselves when preparing class activities. This checklist is comprised of questions such as: "*Does this activity make culture a requirement?*" and "*Does it consider culture as a changing variable rather than a static entity?*". Thus, by the mid-1980s it became widely accepted that the integration of culture in the foreign language classroom is essential and must be represented in the curriculum if the learning goal is to develop intercultural and cross-cultural understanding.

Regarding the materials to introduce culture in the classroom, everything from authentic literary texts to vocabulary to videos has been used in the classroom. As mentioned previously, reading authentic literary texts has traditionally been the main source of exposure to culture in the classroom (Allen, 1985). Galloway (1992) admits that foreign language learners may misunderstand several aspects of an authentic text

but such misunderstandings can be avoided if instructors plan for pre-reading and post reading tasks that enable the process of cultural discovery. In 2000, Scott & Huntington conducted an experiment in introductory French classes that proved that reading an authentic French poem enabled the exploration of cultural themes. However, Spinelli (1982) mentioned that reading is a rather passive activity and therefore may not be ideal for introducing culture in the communicative classroom; so she presented the idea of integrating culture in vocabulary as an effective teaching method that is applicable even at the beginner level.

Recent studies such as Bush (2007) and Barnes-Karol & Broner (2010) further build upon this idea of using vocabulary items to introduce culture by proposing the integration of images that are from the target culture for vocabulary activation. Similarly, using authentic videos such as commercials were proposed as being an effective method to integrate culture and helping beginner learners “cross over the sea” (Wildner-Bassett 1990). Not only have authentic videos proven to be effective for cultural learning, videos that were specifically tailored for a beginner level curriculum were also reported to facilitate learners noticing of cultural beliefs and behaviors, i.e. “little c” culture (Herron 1999).

## **2.2 INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE (ICC)**

In view of all that has been mentioned so far, teaching culture in the foreign language classroom has undoubtedly become a far-reaching educational goal .The theoretical frameworks and materials reviewed in the previous section all indicate that

integrating culture in the classroom results in learners developing a cultural understanding. This idea has been further explored by proponents of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), a theory that represents the new phase in the overall focus on culture in FLE.

Although other frameworks have been presented for the development of ICC in the foreign language classroom throughout the years (Fantini 2000), this study draws its theoretical framework from Byram's seminal work (1997) on this subject. In broad terms, ICC is centered on the idea of developing knowledge and skills that allow an individual to discover and negotiate meanings in the target culture and become more aware of one's attitudes towards the target culture and their own culture (Byram, 1997). Acquiring such knowledge and skills in turn results in having more positive attitudes towards the target culture, practicing culturally appropriate behavior and lastly, knowing oneself at a deeper level (Allen 2013). To synthesize its many definitions, ICC could be defined as an individual's ability to understand another culture in relation to their own native culture (J.M Bennett et al 2003; Byram 1997; Fantini 2000). Thus, a person who has developed ICC can critically analyze and explore a foreign culture and their own native culture making them more capable of functioning in a variety of cultural contexts and environments.

The origins of Byram's ICC framework can be traced back to the concept of "communicative competence" as presented by Hymes in his work on first language acquisition and communication among native speakers (1972). Hymes maintained that the process of acquiring language was more complex than producing utterances that

consisted of lexical items and grammatical structures. He also emphasized the importance of sociolinguistic competence in language acquisition, laying the fundamental groundwork for communicative language teaching (CLT).

In 1986, van Ek formally introduced Hymes' theories of communicative and sociolinguistic competences to FLE by incorporating them in his monumental work on the implementation of CLT in the foreign language classroom. In this work, he presented a teaching framework for equipping learners with "communicative ability" that uphold the native speaker as a model for communicative and sociolinguistic competences (van Ek, 1986: 36).

However, Byram (1997) rejects the native speaker as a model for communicative and sociolinguistic competence and incorporates Kramsch's (1993) concept of the intercultural "third place" in his ICC framework for FLE. Thus, in his framework, he presents five interrelated dimensions of "knowing" or *savoir* that are attributed to the "intercultural speaker". The intercultural speaker's five dimensions of "knowing" are briefly summarized below:

- 1) Attitudes towards the self and the other: an intercultural speaker has "attitudes of curiosity and openness" (34); they are willing to question position, beliefs and behaviors in their own culture and are capable of relativizing their perceptions and positions about themselves and other cultures. The ability to perform such actions is a prerequisite for having the skills to interpret and relate one's native culture and the target culture.

- 2) Knowledge of the self and the other: an intercultural speaker has knowledge about social groups, cultures, and interactions amongst individuals and groups in their own native culture and the target culture (35). Acquiring such knowledge can also be described as a “journey of self-discovery” in that when an intercultural speaker learns about an aspect in the target culture they discover the equivalent in their own native culture (Vanderheijden, 2010: 35). Applying skills of discovery and interaction facilitates such a discovery.
- 3) Skills of interpreting and relating: an intercultural speaker has the skills to identify, analyze and make connections between different aspects of one or more culture. One’s ability to perform such actions depends on their existing knowledge of the culture(s) (37).
- 4) Skills of discovery and interaction: an intercultural speaker has the skills to identify “significant phenomena” in the target culture and infer “their meanings and connotations, and their relationships to other phenomena” (38).
- 5) Critical cultural awareness and political education: an intercultural speaker has the ability to critically evaluate and analyze “on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one’s own and other cultures and countries” (53).



### **2.3 CULTURE IN THE ARABIC CLASSROOM**

Thirty years ago, culture was often found in the periphery of an Arabic language curriculum as developing grammatical competence dominated most Arabic curricula across the nation (Al-Batal, 1988). However, when communicative and proficiency-based teaching paradigms of the late 1970s and early 1980s began to influence the field of TAFL, many teachers began to realize the dire need to incorporate culture—as a crucial component of communication-- in the Arabic classroom.

In her pioneering work on teaching Arab culture to American students, Harb (1978) emphasizes that the knowledge of the target culture is the key to effective communication in any target language. Therefore, she presents a framework for teaching Arab culture that uses the thematic approach originally presented in Nostrand (1966) so that American students learning the Arabic language and culture can “explain why the natives speak and act the way they do” (11). She identifies the following three cultural value themes in Lebanese society: the family, the clan and knowledge. Moreover, she supplements these cultural themes with a list of behavioral norms that are “difficult for Americans to understand” (55). She chose these behavior norms based on the results of interviews with native Lebanese living the United States and a questionnaire administered to Americans students that travelled to the Arab world. These norms included social interactions, transportation, the concept of time, appearance, eating and drinking. Although Harb’s work was exceptional in that it presented a thorough framework that organized cultural goals for teaching Arab culture, it solely focused on

mainstream Lebanese culture and therefore, did not adequately cover the varied and diverse sub-cultures of the Arab world.

A decade later, a curricular framework that consisted of a list of broader cultural objectives was presented in Al-Batal (1988) based on Lafayette's (1978) proficiency-oriented framework for teaching culture. In addition to the original eight objectives in Lafayette (1978) an objective was added about the Arabic learner's need to be aware of the diglossic nature of the Arabic language and being able to function in it (Al-Batal 1988: 445). The addition of this objective implied that regional cultural diversity in the Arab world is embodied in the regional dialects and not in the standard. Thus, this framework formally introduced the notion of sociolinguistic competence as it applies to teaching Arabic language and culture.

In 2007, Lampe developed cultural assessment guidelines for the ACTFL Arabic Testing Consensus Project. Since these provisional guidelines were devised to supplement the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) guidelines for assessing language ability at six proficiency levels<sup>1</sup>, they assess an individual's ability to express an understanding of the target culture in the target language. The preface to these guidelines specifically mentions that a "strong cultural understanding" is essential for reaching professional proficiency levels (ACTFL Superior and ILR 3). Moreover, it also mentions that "culturally inappropriate aspects that reflect gaps in understanding"

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<sup>1</sup> The levels range from 0 "no functional ability" to 5 "functionally equivalent to that of a highly educated native". The other levels are defined as the following: 1 "elementary proficiency", 2 "limited professional proficiency", 3 "general professional proficiency", and 4 "advanced professional proficiency".

characterize lower proficiency levels because of limitations in language abilities. Thus, these guidelines are best suited for assessing an individual's cultural proficiency as expressed in Arabic and therefore, can not be used to assess the degree of cultural understanding that learners at lower levels can demonstrate in their first language.

The first study to acknowledge the importance of students' needs and expectations regarding their learning experiences in Arabic courses was conducted by Belnap (1987). This study reported important findings about the profiles of learners enrolled in Arabic classes at 24 major universities in the United States and Canada and examined their needs and expectations for learning Arabic. Understanding literature and culture was ranked as the number one reason or motivation for learning Arabic, closely followed by travelling to the Arab world and speaking with Arabs. Similarly, in 2006, Husseinali investigated the motivations of learners enrolled in the beginner and intermediate Arabic classes at a major university. Motivations such as "converse with people", "learn other cultures", and "travel to Arab countries" had the highest percentages. Although both studies were conducted almost two decades apart and vary in scale, there are clearly some observable similarities in the results. They both indicate that Arabic learners prioritize developing communicative skills such as speaking the language and understanding the culture from the time they commence their Arabic studies.

In 2004, Abuhakema delved deeper into Arabic learners' perspectives on the teaching of Arab culture in their courses by examining their cultural needs and expectations. He assessed the cultural component of the Middlebury Intensive Summer

Arabic Language Program by gathering data from students from all five proficiency levels and the instructors that taught them. Overall, the results indicate that students expressed the need to incorporate more culture in the classroom, especially topics like social etiquette and politics. In addition to such needs, the students *also* expressed the need to learn about greetings and leave taking practices, dialectal differences, famous personalities and music (186). The most interesting observation made was that the students in the beginner class were the least satisfied with the cultural component and attributed this to the lack of culture in the curriculum. This compelled the researcher to ask the instructors for this level why they were not focusing on culture in their classroom. They simply said that they decided to avoid it altogether because they felt limited by the time constraint, specifying the challenge of the work needed to achieve gains in linguistic competence in the summer session (188). Indeed, time in the classroom is invaluable, however, investing quality time in a cultural discussion, or better yet in a task that infuses language and culture is by no means impeding the overarching goal of the course (Al-Batal, 1988 Abuhakema, 2004).

In a more recent study investigating learners' attitudes towards regional dialects in the study abroad context, Shiri (2013) suggests that the instruction of regional spoken dialects and culture in Arabic language curricula are two closely interrelated learning goals that must be integrated starting at the beginner level in stateside programs. The findings of the study show that Arabic learners have favorable attitudes towards learning regional dialects because of the cultural gains that follow it. These results further affirm those of other studies reviewed in this section by suggesting that a majority of Arabic

language learners have competence-oriented goals centered on the ideas of communication with other Arabic speakers and cultural awareness of the Arab world.

## **Chapter 3: A Survey of Beginner Arabic Learners**

### **3.1 RESEARCH METHODS**

#### **3.1.1 Participants**

As indicated in Chapter 1, data for this study was collected from two student surveys that were administered over the 2013-2014 academic year. Fifty-seven participants completed the survey in the fall and forty-two participants completed the survey in the spring. The significant drop in the number of total participants in the spring is mainly due to the fact that a substantial amount of learners discontinue their Arabic studies after the fall semester. The profile of participants for both surveys, as shown in Table 1, is commensurable to that of the overall student demographic in beginner Arabic courses at the University of Texas at Austin, with the majority falling into the 19-21-age range and more females than males.

Additionally, twelve participants who took the fall survey were recruited as a sample of the study population for the interviews conducted in the spring. Of the twelve, four were male and eight were female. They were mostly undergraduates in their freshman or sophomore year with the exception of one graduate student.

<b>Fall 2013</b>	<b>Spring 2014</b>
n= 57	n= 42
<i>Age Group</i>	<i>Age Group</i>
16-18: 21.05%	16-18: 2.38%
19-21: 63.16%	19-21: 76.19%
22-25: 10.53%	22-25: 9.52%
25+: 5.26%	25+: 11.90% <sup>2</sup>
<i>Gender</i>	<i>Gender</i>
Male: 43.86	Male: 42.86%
Female: 56.14%	Female: 57.14%

Table 1: Participant profile

Participation in this study was voluntary. Both surveys included consent statements at the very beginning [see Appendix D] and all interview participants had to sign a consent statement [see Appendix E]. Participants were not offered any financial compensation or academic incentive for choosing to participate in any phase of the study. The researcher reassured all those who participated in the surveys and interviews that their responses would remain anonymous.

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<sup>2</sup> The significant differences between the number of participants in the fall and spring for the 19-21 age range can be attributed the fact that the fall survey simply had a higher number of total participants. Also, it is apparent that a large number of young incoming freshmen discontinued their study of Arabic after the first semester, while a substantial number of students' that are 25 or older placed in to the second semester of Arabic.

### **3.1.2 Instruments**

The study was conducted in three phases. The first and third phase used the same instrument, i.e. a survey that was administered at the beginning of the Fall 2013 semester and the end of the Spring 2014 semester. The surveys were administered online and the instructors of all beginner Arabic sections disseminated links for them via email.

In the fall, the survey included thirty-two items that were divided into four sections. The first section included a combination of multiple choice and short answer questions about participants' knowledge and perceptions regarding Arab culture *before* commencing their study of Arabic. The second section consisted of seven statements about the Arab world and participants were asked to determine the accuracy of each statement using a three-point Likert scale (Accurate, Inaccurate, I don't know). The third section aimed to gauge participants' attitudes towards Arab culture by presenting four statements about the prevalence of certain cultural behaviors and values in the Arab world. In this section, participants were asked to indicate their agreement with each statement using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". An "I don't know" option was also provided for this section so that participants could indicate that they didn't have definitive opinions towards a statement. The fourth section focused on participants' attitudes towards Arab cultural ideas in comparison to those in American culture. To determine these attitudes, participants were given five cultural aspects (e.g. the role of religion and family life) and asked to rate



how similar they perceived them to be in Arab culture and American culture using a degree of similarity scale. The possible answers in this scale ranged from 1 to 5 with the value of 1 equating to “not similar at all” and the value of 5 equating to “almost identical”. The ideas and topics chosen for these questions were derived from cultural guidelines and student cultural need guidelines proposed by earlier studies in TAFL (Al-Batal 1988 and Abuhakema 2004). Lastly, there was an open-ended question for the participants about what they were expecting to learn in their Arabic class.

The spring survey consisted of thirty items that were also divided into four sections. The items from the second, third and fourth sections of the fall survey were included in the spring survey. The researcher changed the order of the items and altered the wording of some to limit the conceivable effects of task familiarity. Finally, the items about exposure and perceptions prior to taking Arabic were replaced with a combination of multiple choice and open-ended items to evaluate the cultural component of the beginner Arabic course. For the full text of the fall and spring surveys, see Appendix A and Appendix B.

The one-on-one interviews represented the second phase of the study and were conducted at the beginning of the Spring 2014 semester. In these interviews, participants answered open-ended questions about their learning experiences pertaining to Arab culture in their Arabic course. For the list of questions that were posed during these interviews, see Appendix C. Moreover, those who participated in the interviews offered insight and made suggestions on how to better integrate culture in the beginner Arabic curriculum.

### **3.1.3 Data Analysis**

The data obtained from both surveys and the interviews was analyzed aggregately using qualitative and quantitative methods, in so that observable trends in the survey responses are supported with interview responses. Additionally, the researcher did a comparative analysis for survey items that were included in both surveys to observe any changes in learners' knowledge and attitudes towards the Arab world. This comparative analysis examined significant changes in learners' knowledge and attitudes towards the Arab world over the course of the year.

The analysis focused on five broad themes: 1) prior knowledge and perceptions of Arab culture 2) the impact of cultural exposure on knowledge and attitudes 3) perspectives on the learning of culture 4) perspectives on the teaching of culture 5) comparisons between Arab culture and American culture. These themes will be explained in detail and will be related the results in the following section.

## 3.2 RESULTS

### 3.2.1 Prior knowledge and perceptions of Arab culture

Regarding participants' awareness of the Arab world prior to studying Arabic, Figure 1 shows that forty-nine percent said that they were moderately aware and approximately twenty percent said they were somewhat aware.

**Question #10 (fall survey): How aware were you about the Arab world?**

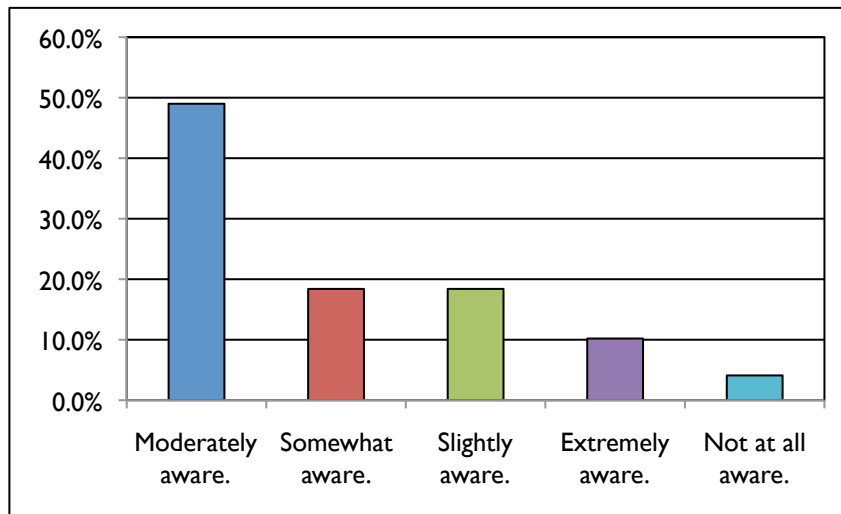


Figure 1: Responses for Question #10

The survey contained a follow up question to the question on prior Arab cultural awareness in which participants were asked to report how they were exposed to the Arab world prior to taking Arabic. Participants indicated their response to this question by ranking six sources of exposure (e.g. family and friends, internet, etc). The responses for the rankings were recorded as percentages as shown in Table 2. Interestingly, 29% of participants ranked family and friends as the source that provided them with the most exposure to the Arab world and 26% ranked it as the source that provided them with

the least exposure to the Arab world. This phenomenon can be explained by the fact that there are two distinct groups in the participant pool; one group that regularly interacted with people of Arab origin before studying Arabic while the other group didn't. Of the study population, forty-two percent indicated that they regularly interacted with people of Arab origin in their responses to question #6 in the fall survey (How often do you interact with people of Arab origin?) while close to forty-eight percent indicated that they rarely or sometimes interacted with such people.

**Question #13 (fall survey): What was your main source of exposure to the Arab world?**  
**\*Please rank each item by writing a number from 1 through 6 in the boxes below. You may only use each number once. 1 = least exposure 6 = most exposure.**

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
Family and Friends	<b>27%</b>	12%	16%	8%	8%	<b>29%</b>
News Channels	10%	23%	<b>27%</b>	10%	16%	14%
University/School Classes	14%	16%	12%	18%	<b>25%</b>	14%
Internet	14%	16%	<b>25%</b>	<b>25%</b>	10%	10%
Newspapers (Print and Electronic)	25%	20%	2%	24%	<b>25%</b>	4%
Films and TV shows	16%	14%	20%	10%	14%	<b>25%</b>

Table 2: Responses for Question #13

Beside family and friends, film and TV shows appear to be the main source of prior exposure to the Arab world for many, closely followed by university and school classes. Surprisingly, the Internet was not ranked in the top two sources of exposure, however, newspapers in their print **and** electronic forms received the second to the highest ranking.

Although ranked high, newspapers and other news sources were not necessarily influential to forming learners' preconceived perceptions. An interview subject noted that even though she didn't know any Arabs, she couldn't rely on news sources to inform her knowledge about the Arab world:

*S07 (sophomore, undergraduate)* There is a lot [about the Arab world] that I did not know from before because I came in pretty limited in my knowledge. I didn't really have any misconceptions or preconceptions because I didn't know anybody and I didn't just want to base it on the news. I went to a really small high school and we didn't really have any Muslims kids or Middle Eastern people.

Additionally, participants specified the nature of their perceptions towards Arab culture before studying Arabic. It is apparent from the percentages in Figure 2 that the majority, close to sixty percent, had positive prior perceptions of Arab culture and only ten percent had negative perceptions.

**Question #14 (fall survey): How would you describe your overall perception of Arab culture?**

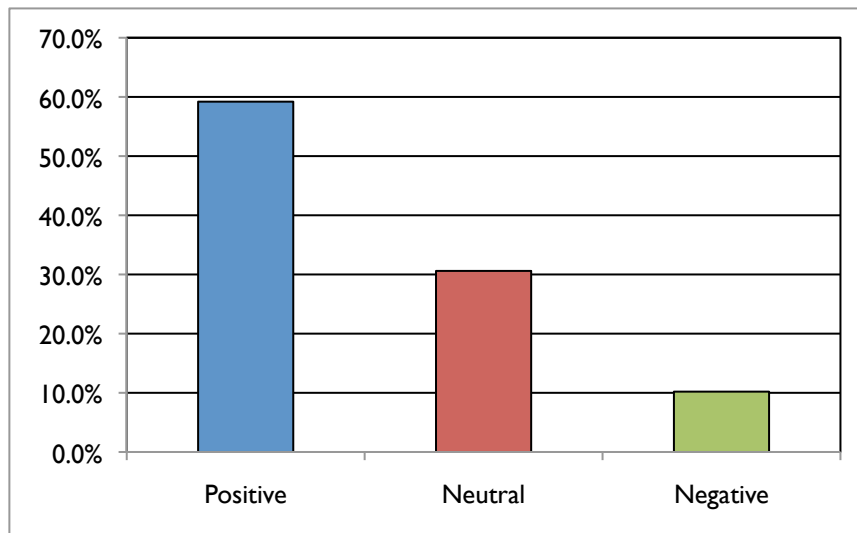


Figure 2: Responses for Question #14

It is noteworthy that a considerable number of participants reported that their perceptions were neutral, i.e. neither positive nor negative. Some interview subjects admitted to having neutral perceptions about Arab culture but being aware that negative perceptions regarding Arab culture are prevalent in the United States:

*S01 (freshman, undergraduate)* I had told one of my friends that I am going to take Arabic class and he was like: you are a terrorist. Also, I had seen this video on YouTube, it was a political campaign for some Republican guy saying “I'll keep you safe from people like this” and it was a picture of stereotypical Arabs. I just felt that a whole society, a huge part of the world, couldn't be just barbaric like that.

*S03 (freshman, undergraduate)* Coming from America you hear a lot about terrorism and negative ideas about Arab culture. I don't think I necessarily had those ideas. I definitely know about them. I know there are a lot of negative connotations about Arab culture but I personally didn't have them.

One participant in particular expressed how the prevalence of such perceptions is what piqued his interest in studying Arabic:

*S10 (senior, undergraduate)* There are a lot of generalizations, a lot of it is from just ignorance and a lot of it is particular exposure that isn't the pleasant side always. Saying things like all Muslims don't respect women's rights are generic stereotypes about the culture. I always wanted to know why but I never got the chance, so I had a very subjective view because I didn't speak the language. It was very difficult to bridge that gap and I think that made me more interested.

In addition to answering questions about their overall awareness and perceptions in the fall survey and interviews, participants also answered very specific questions about characters, ideas and words that they associated the Arab world with **before** studying Arabic. For the first question in this set, participants were asked to provide the names of fictional Arab characters and briefly describe them in a couple of words. The results

in Figure 3 show that an overwhelming majority gave the names of characters from the Disney film *Aladdin*. Participants mainly described these characters in one word such as “hero”, “villain” and “heroine”.

**Question #4 (fall survey): What were some fictional personas or characters from the Arab world that you were exposed to? Please list AT LEAST 2 and describe each character in one word (example: villain, hero, etc).**

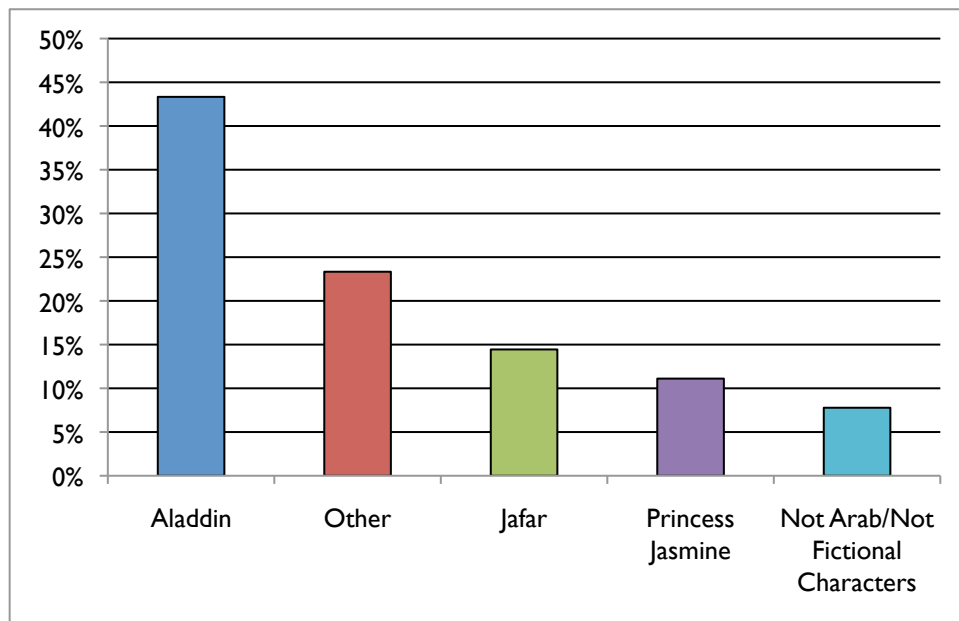


Figure 3: Responses for Questions #4

In the “other” category, the character names provided came from famous Hollywood movies and Arab folk tradition. Interestingly, the characters in this category were described more elaborately than the characters from the film *Aladdin*. For instance Saladin from the Hollywood movie *Kingdom of Heaven* was described as a “brave military leader” and Scheherazade from *1001 Nights* was described as “a smart storyteller” and “the hero of *1001 Nights*”.

A small number of fictional characters that are actually not Arab but of Iranian, Afghani or Pakistani origin were recorded as Arab characters. Such entries were included in the “not Arab/not fictional characters” category. Moreover, a small number of participants recorded Muhammad, the Muslim prophet, in addition to “Muslims from the common media” and “protestors in the Arab spring” as fictional characters. Such entries were also included in this category as they were erroneous in that they are not fictional characters.

Moreover, participants also recorded cultural ideas and practices associated with the Arab world that they knew of prior to studying Arabic. In the responses to this question, we observe that religious practices and routine cultural patterns, i.e. day-to-day practices such as greeting and eating (Lafayette, 1988: 123) had the highest response rate. Similar to the previous question about fictional characters, participants were asked to record how they learned of the said cultural idea or practice. In the religious practices category, all of the entries were specific to Islam. Participants recorded practices such as the following: “pray five times a day”, “call to prayer”, “Ramadan” and “*hajj*” and “*hijab*”. Almost all participants said that they learned about such practices in a social studies class that they took in high school or an introductory humanities course in college. However, a majority of those that recorded “*hijab*” as a religious practice attributed their knowledge of it to conversations about it with acquaintances and friends.



**Question #12 (fall survey): What were some cultural ideas and practices unique to Arab world that you had heard about? Please describe 2 practices or ideas and specify how you learned about them.**

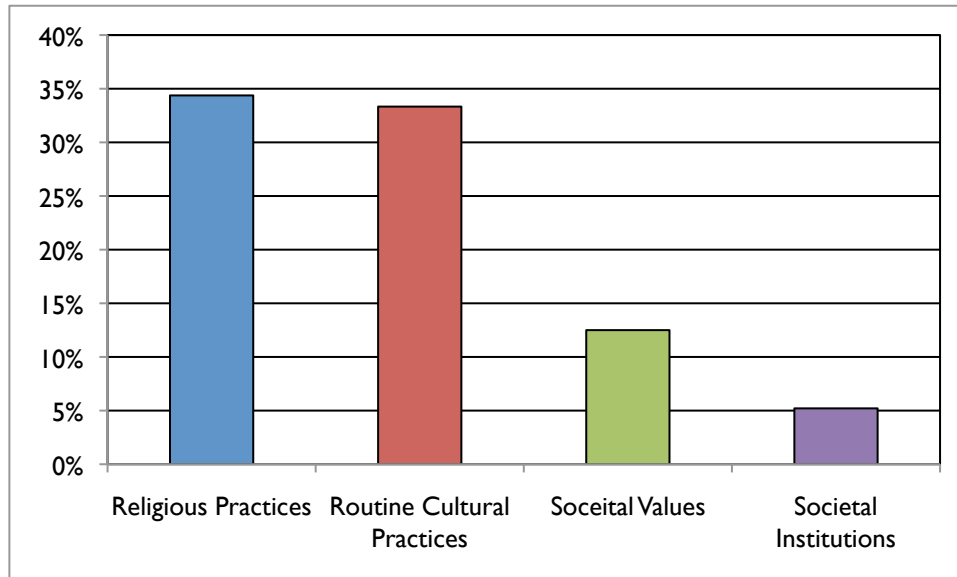


Figure 4: Responses for Question #12

In the “routine cultural practices” category participant responses were extremely varied. Practices such as “smoking hookah”, “doing *dabke*<sup>3</sup>”, “eating *hummus*”, “drinking tea and coffee”, “greeting endlessly”, “offering food and drink” amongst others were recorded by participants. An overwhelmingly majority said that they learned about such practices by interacting with people of Arab origin. Knowledge of societal values such as “hospitality” and “family-oriented” in addition to societal institutions that define cultural aspects such as marriage customs, education, and political choices were recorded to a lesser extent.

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<sup>3</sup> A folk dance prevalent in the Levant countries.

Lastly, participants were also asked to record Arabic words that they knew of before they started their study of Arabic and how they learned of them. Approximately half of the responses were greeting phrases such as *salaam*, *ahlan wa sahlana*<sup>4</sup> and *assalaamu ‘alaykum*<sup>5</sup> and the word *shukran*, i.e. “thanks” in Arabic. A handful recorded terms of endearment such as *habibi* and *habibti* that basically mean “my darling” in Arabic and can be used for any loved one, not just a significant other. The majority of participants that recorded such words and phrases said that they learned them from friends, parents of friends, etc. Surprisingly, a considerable number of participants had previous knowledge of cultural expressions with the word *Allah* or *rabb*, another word for God in Arabic, in it. Most participants said they knew of such words because of their Islamic religious background or their knowledge of other languages such as Persian and Urdu that use such phrases extensively. A substantial number recorded words such as *jihad*, *Al-Qaeda*, *mujahedeen*<sup>6</sup>, *Taliban* and *Qur’an*. Unlike greeting phrases and terms of endearment, the participants mentioned that they had learned of such words through the news and Internet. Several other random words were also recorded such as *kalb*<sup>7</sup>, *kursi*<sup>8</sup>, *‘an jadd?*<sup>9</sup>, *intikhaabaat*<sup>10</sup> amongst others and there was great variance in how participants learned of such words.

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<sup>4</sup> A common greeting used by Arabic speakers, it can mean “welcome” and/or “hello”.

<sup>5</sup> An Islamic greeting that literally means “Peace be upon you” and is used as a variation of “hello”.

<sup>6</sup> An Islamic term used to describe Muslims that struggle for a cause in the name of God, literally translates to “strugglers”.

<sup>7</sup> Dog

<sup>8</sup> Chair

<sup>9</sup> The equivalent of “really” as it used to express surprise and/or emphasize an idea in Levantine Arabic.

### 3.2.2 Impact of cultural exposure on knowledge and attitudes

The results from the spring survey and interviews indicate that the cultural exposure learners received as part of the beginner Arabic curriculum has greatly increased their knowledge of various aspects of Arab culture and influenced their attitudes towards Arabs. As one subject put it:

*S03 (freshman, undergraduate)* The class reinforced that the people are the same but the culture is a little bit different. How we live our lives is fundamentally the same and how we think is fundamentally the same but day-to-day we do different things. I think the class has reinforced this idea that people are all fundamentally the same.

Some interview subjects even touched upon how they didn't know much about the Arab world and were surrounded by biased and negative ideas with respect to Arabs previously. For these learners, the cultural exposure they received in their beginner Arabic course provided the opportunity to develop more positive attitudes.

*S01 (freshman, undergraduate)* After taking the class you see these videos and get exposed to these ideas and you are like: hey they are normal people.

*S09 (sophomore, undergraduate)* Honestly, if anything, it's brought up these gaping holes in my knowledge of this rich culture that I just wasn't exposed to before as much. I grew up in a small town in West Texas and you aren't really taught that in high school. There is a one-sided history of this region or cultural information you are given which is very limited.

Another subject's response indicated that he had some generalized perceptions about the Arab world but the cultural exposure he has received in the course pushed

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<sup>10</sup> Elections

him to dig deeper, defy popular stereotypes about Arabs and develop more positive attitudes.

*S10 (senior, undergraduate)* I had a lot of generalizations but coming here it's been really nice to see that it's not [a] culture about hate, there are people within any group of culture that are angry and have some crazy beliefs but there is always a reason behind it ...I appreciate that I can peel back the onion a little bit deeper and see what is life like for them and what is important to them. I like that my purpose here is to learn, not just about the language but also the culture.

Based on the results, the aspects of Arab culture that have had the most significant impact on learners' knowledge and attitudes can be broadly categorized as the following: cultural diversity amongst groups and across the region, status of women, the role of religion and family life. The following sub-sections discuss how learners' knowledge and attitudes were impacted regarding each one these aspects.

### ***I. Cultural diversity amongst groups and across the region***

In the spring survey, participants were asked to specify how their learning experiences in their beginner Arabic course influenced their awareness of cultural diversity in the Arab world. The results, as shown in Figure 5, indicate that learners' awareness definitely grew with regard to cultural diversity in the Arab world; over forty percent of participants became "moderately aware" and over twenty-five percent became "somewhat aware" by the end of the year.

**Question #26 (spring survey): How aware have your learning experiences in First Year Arabic made you about the cultural diversity in the Arab world?**

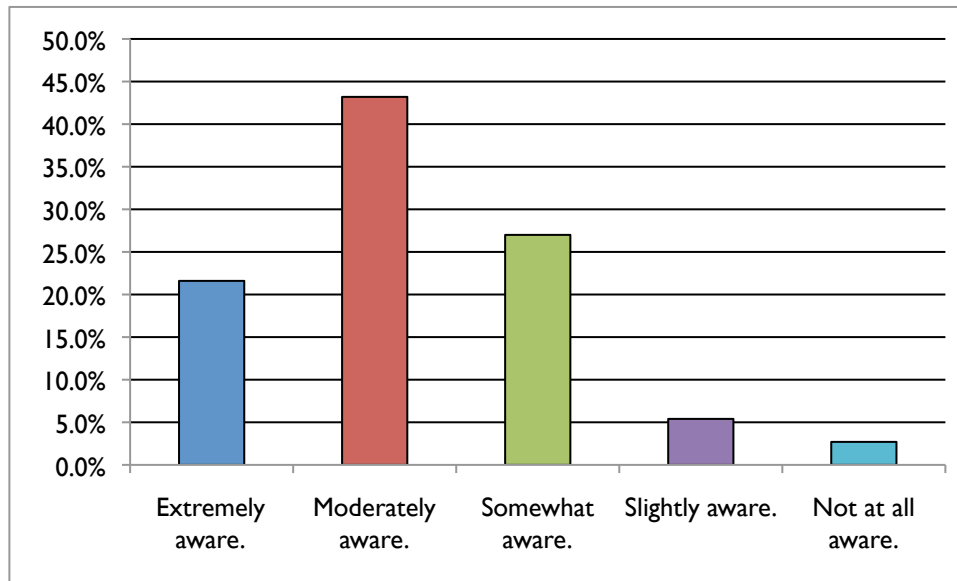


Figure 5: Responses for Questions #26

Participants were also asked to provide a brief explanation for their answer choices in this item. A trend was observed in that those that specified that they were “extremely aware” or “moderately aware” said it was because of the research they did for cultural blog assignments<sup>11</sup> in the spring semester that exposed them to diversity in the Arab world. On the other hand, those who said they were “somewhat aware” or “slightly aware” denoted that their limited awareness of diversity was due to it not being the focus of classroom discussions.

The notion of diversity in the Arab world also came up in the follow-up interviews. The following responses indicate that participants did observe how diverse

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<sup>11</sup> This assignment is discussed in more detail in the next section: “Perspectives on teaching culture”.

and varied the Arab world is with respect to a number of aspects. Several mentioned that learning about how varied the Arab world is regionally resulted in them realizing that Arab culture is non-homogenous and more complex than they had perceived. As one subject put it:

*S09 (sophomore, undergraduate)* I know that I am very much lacking in history of the Middle East but also religions of the Middle East and the very different nuances because there are so many different sects of different religions. I am very ignorant as to what all the differences are in all those but I know they are very important to a bunch of people. So just kind of opening up my eyes to different regions...although I might not know all the differences it's important to know they exist. I thought it was more homogenous than I do now. I try to stay away from that idea because I knew it wasn't correct. I just didn't know of all the differences that there actually were.

Thus, exposure to diversity in the Arab world led to learners to question their previously held perceptions about Arab culture and develop more positive attitudes towards Arabs.

## **II. Status of Women**

Participants were asked to indicate how similar they perceived the status of women to be in Arab culture and American culture in the two surveys. The spring results compared with the fall results as shown in Figure 6 indicate a significant drop in the percentage of participants that perceive the status of women to be “not similar at all” in the two cultures. Also, a gradual increase is shown in the ratings that are higher on the similarity scale in Arab culture and American culture.

**Question #31 (fall survey), Question #10 (spring survey): In your opinion, how similar is the status of women in American culture and Arab culture? Please rate the degree of similarity, 1: not similar at all, 5: almost identical.**

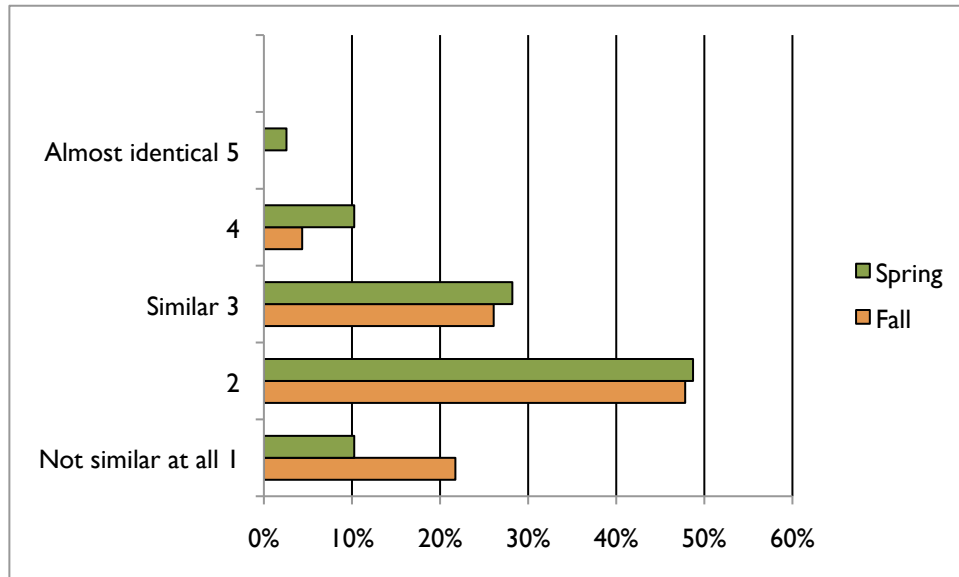


Figure 6: Responses for degree of similarity between Arab culture and American culture regarding status of women.

One interview subject’s response provides a probable explanation behind this gradual shift in attitudes towards the status of women.

*S01 (freshman, undergraduate)* Usually on TV you see them in like full *abaya*, like the face covering you and see only their eyes. In these videos I saw that they like dressed like us, like more Western and then some had super elaborate make-up and I was like: Oh my God! You wear more make up than me! So I thought it was cool to get to see that like hey it's not this crazy like conservative culture, which I had already known that its not all like that but there is still that idea that it was kind of like scary as woman to be over there.

Another interview subject’s response shows that her research for a culture assignment led her to finding content that enabled her to see a connection between the struggles faced by women in the Arab world and the United States.

S09 (sophomore, undergraduate) Last semester I came across this comic strip, *Qahera*. It's a woman from Cairo who considers herself to be a feminist and she is writing these comic strips...I think that's a really cool move on her part and it's an interesting way to express herself. It opened my eyes to that these are issues happening in the US and these are issues happening in Egypt now. Women are experiencing the same things around the world.

### III. Family life

Moreover, the data reflected a shift over the course of the year in attitude regarding family life as participants learned more about it through their cultural training. The results in Figure 7 show that percentage for “similar” increased by more than fifteen percent.

**Question #27 (fall survey), Question #6 (spring survey): In your opinion, how similar is family life in American culture and Arab culture? Please rate the degree of similarity, 1: not similar at all, 5: almost identical.**

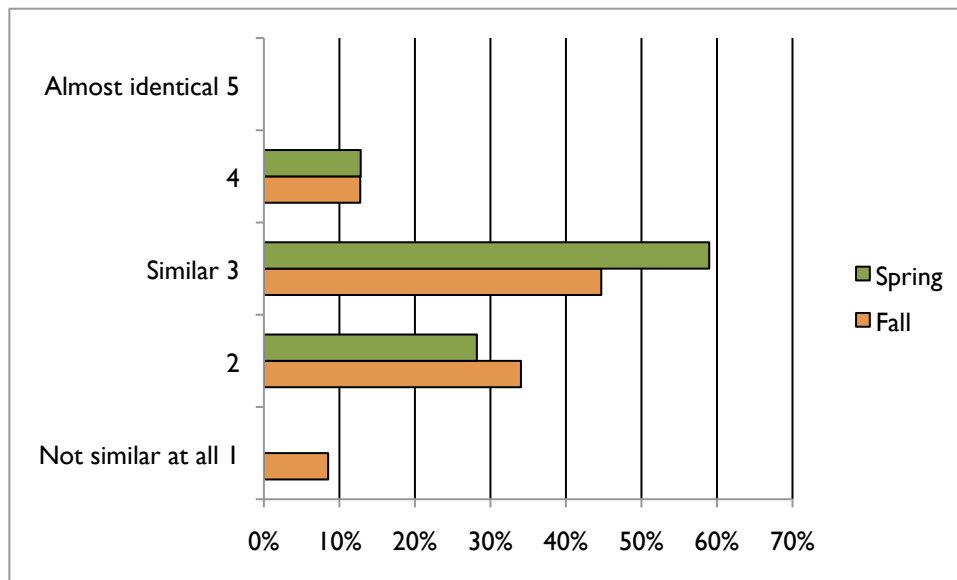


Figure 7: Responses for degree of similarity between Arab culture and American culture regarding family life.



This topic also came up in the interviews and some subjects describe what they had learned about family life in the Arab world in great length, suggesting that this topic was emphasized in the classroom.

*S03 (freshman, undergraduate)* The prevalence of family.... that to me has really stuck out. I really love how important family is. How often families see each other, like even extended families, how they get together on holidays. How close these extended families are to each other. It was brought to my attention when we talked about marriage and divorce and how the families played a role in that. Also the videos we watched in class. The family plays an important role.

*S07 (sophomore, undergraduate)* We have covered family a little bit, a lot of [sic] emphasis on the different words for family members, we covered a lot about taking care of parents when they are older, how the man is in charge of the house but the woman is in charge of the children.

Responses from the interviews also indicate that participants observed similarities in how families operate in Arab culture and their own native culture by way of being exposed to culture in their Arabic course. As, one subject mentioned:

*S11 (sophomore, undergraduate)* Maybe I haven't been there myself but just through my learning experience in the university and learning about the culture and doing research... I am finding so many things that are similar in the Mexican and Arab culture, like family warmth, and that the men are head of the family... they are very close, everyone knows what's going on, they communicate a lot, family warmth is very much there.

However, one subject mentioned that her class discussed some aspects of family life in Arab culture that made it seem less similar to American culture.

*S09 (sophomore, undergraduate)* We talked about how it's more common to see family around the dinner table and that's seen more in the Middle East than in America these days.

Another subject referred to the same apparent dissimilarity in two cultures, i.e. Arabs tend to eat as a family more often, and she referred to how this made her curious so she did more research on the topic and found the positive in such a practice.

*S06 (sophomore, undergraduate)* I also found a study that tracked the eating differences in adolescents in a lot of different countries and the study said that adolescents that ate dinner with their families tended to eat better compared to when they were apart from their families.

#### **IV. The role of religion**

As for the role of religion, the results in Figure 8 show that attitudes towards it gradually shifted as well. The percentage for the response “similar” dropped by approximately ten percent and not a single participant in the spring survey selected “almost identical”. However, this shift is different than the one observed in the results for the status of women and family life as it indicates that more participants perceived the role of religions to be less similar in American culture and Arab culture by the end of the spring semester.

**Question #29 (fall survey), Question #8 (spring survey): In your opinion, how similar is the role of religion in American culture and Arab culture? Please rate the degree of similarity, 1: not similar at all, 5: almost identical.**

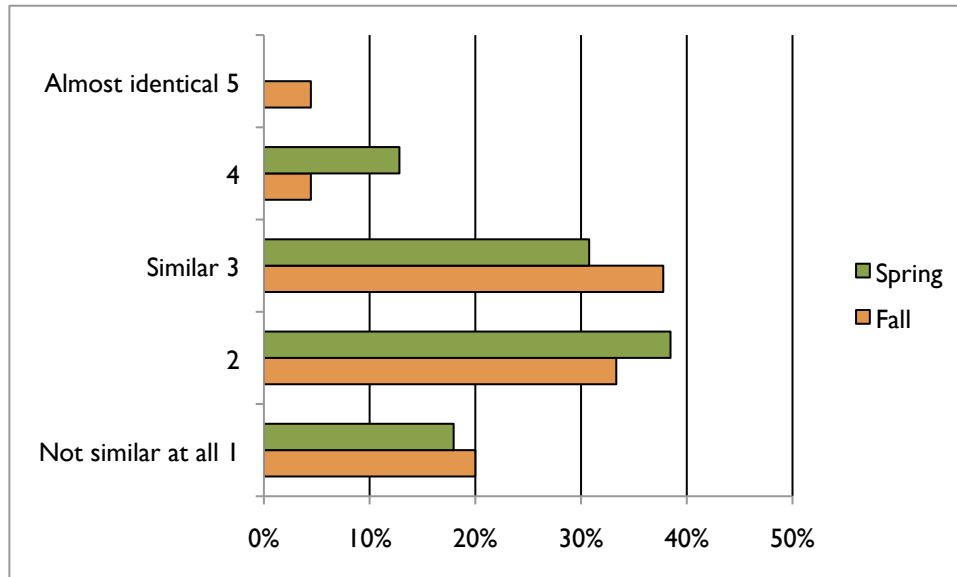


Figure 8: Responses for degree of similarity between Arab culture and American culture regarding the role of religion.

In the interviews, subjects' responses show that they feel that the role of religion and its manifestations in Arab culture and their native culture are very different but they do see some shared characteristics.

*S10 (undergraduate, senior)* For the last blog presentation, I presented what I had found in comparing and contrasting the two different styles and the belief systems behind them. From my personal background of growing up around church music... I wondered what is the equivalent or something similar in Arab culture. Does it exist for the same reasons?

*S11 (sophomore, undergraduate)* In regards to religion there is a bit of a difference. Mexico is mainly Catholic and over there it's mainly Muslims but the general thing that both countries are really into their religion... and some expressions such as Insha'Allah, we have it in Spanish, *ojalá*.

### 3.2.3 Perspective on learning culture

Results regarding participants' perspectives on the learning of culture reoccurred throughout the data set starting with the responses of an open-ended question about what participants expect to learn about culture in their Arabic course in the fall survey. As shown in the figure below, learning about societal institutions that define cultural aspects such as marriage customs, education, and political choices was the number one expectation. Other expectations included learning cultural phrases and using them appropriately, in addition to learning about routine cultural practices such as greeting practices in the workplace, social and food etiquette, making references to popular cultural icons and celebrities. Some participants also indicated that they were expecting to compare various aspects of Arab culture to those of American culture.

**Question #32 (fall survey): What are you expecting to learn about Arab culture in your Arabic class this year? Please briefly describe at least 2 things that you hope to learn more about and the reasons behind them.**

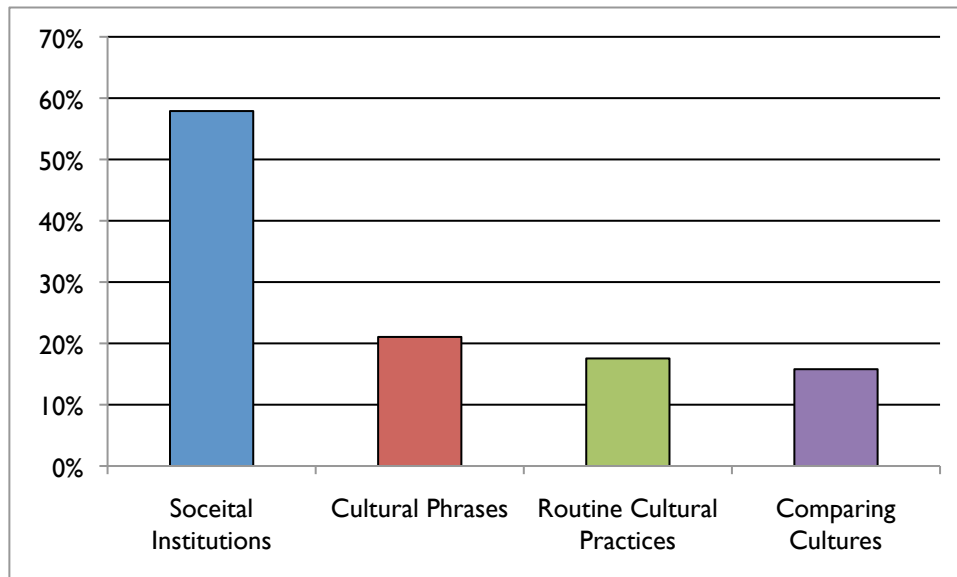


Figure 9: Responses for Question #32

In the follow-up interviews, participants recounted what they had learned so far about Arab culture and their responses suggest that the expectations set out at the beginning of the semester were met to an extent. Subjects mentioned that they learned about some cultural aspects that are shaped by societal institutions in their Arabic course.

*S01 (junior, undergraduate)* We talked about dating and marriage practices in the Middle East, and then right now we are going to [sic] talk about religious and state practices in the Middle East, also a little insight on how schooling is over there.

*S09 (sophomore, undergraduate)* We talked about the amount of pressure that is put on the students in their final year of high school and the test they have to take and how difficult it can be to get into the universities there because there is such limited space.

However, subjects went into more detail when they mentioned the use of cultural phrases and cultural values such as hospitality in Arab culture. Also, their responses suggest that learning about cultural phrases and cultural values influenced their attitudes towards Arab culture in a positive fashion.

*S02 (sophomore, undergraduate)* I think it's really cool that they always refer back to God. I find that interesting. I mean maybe for them they say it everyday so it doesn't mean as much but coming in and seeing that and having not see it before is really interesting.

*S07 (sophomore, undergraduate)* The biggest cultural thing we have had is hospitality. It's a really big foundational part of Arabic culture is to be really hospitable, which is interesting because the notion that the media gives us that it's a violent culture when actually it's very nice and they are generous, they are about family and friends and that kind of stuff.

In the spring survey, participants were also asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with the amount of cultural exposure they received in their beginner Arabic course in the fall and spring semesters and provide a brief explanation for it.<sup>12</sup> Figure 10 provides an overview of their responses.

**Question #28 (spring survey): How satisfied are with the amount of cultural exposure in your First Year Arabic class this past year?**

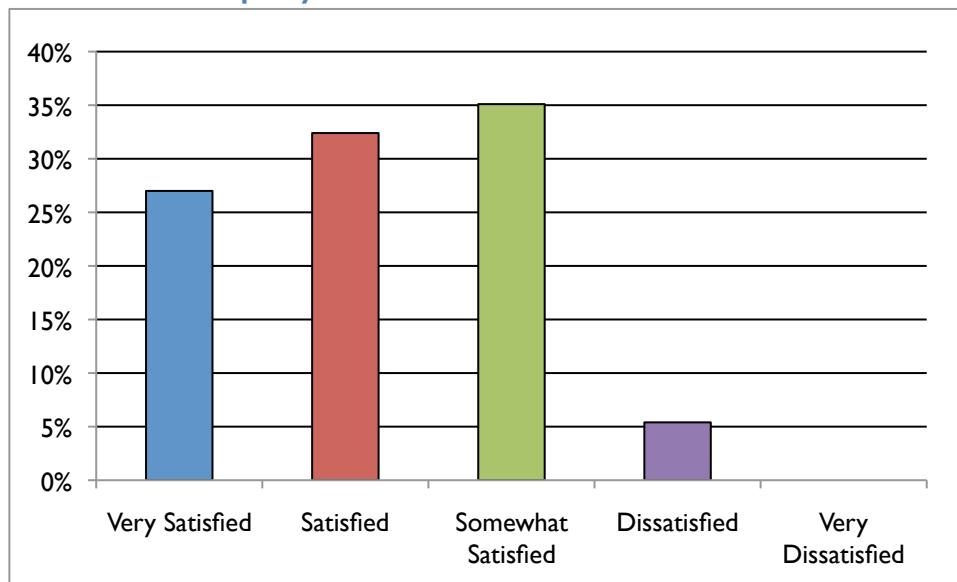


Figure 10: Responses for Question #28.

Moreover, it was observed that most participants with high levels of satisfaction attributed it to the cultural component in the spring semester that consisted of cultural blogs assignments and class discussions on cultural themes. These high levels of satisfaction were also observed in the interviews; there was a sense amongst the

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<sup>12</sup> In the fall semester, every student kept a cultural portfolio and made five entries in English about their perceptions about Arab culture as shown or depicted in various media. Students were given guidelines for the medium of the cultural content for each entry (a film, a lecture, a translated short story and conversation with a native speaker). Whereas, in the spring semester, the class picked and mutually agreed to research six cultural themes throughout the semester using a variety of sources. After researching each theme, students wrote a blog entry about it and discussed it as a class in English.

subjects that the cultural blogs were more learner-centered and the information that they learned from them was more applicable than what they had learned from the cultural assignments in the fall.

*S03 (sophomore, undergraduate)* This semester we have our discussions about our cultural blogs, which is way more intense. We pick our topic as a group, which I love because we all get to choose something that we really want to research. It's nice to have an opportunity to choose what we want to research.

*S07 (sophomore, undergraduate)* Last semester we talked about it (culture) a lot but the cultural portfolios weren't really themes. It was like hey read a book, watch a film, which is great but this semester we seem to be focusing more on details and actually learning how to use it if we travel to the Middle East.

*S10 (senior, undergraduate)* This semester we have talked about culture a lot more. We collectively get together to discuss what topic we want to do a writing assignment on and at that point they would say that we are going to be talking about it in this future class period, so go do your research and take notes, get some background information on the topic and. That way it puts the onus on the student. Everyone always comes back with very different exposure...and I think generally we have really good conversations about because it led everyone to find their own niche and come back and talk about it.

Some spring survey participants even specified how the cultural discussions in the spring provided room for using their critical thinking skills in the classroom, such as comparing and contrasting Arab culture to other cultures and posing analytical questions towards each other.

*S08 (junior, undergraduate)* There was a lot of comparison between the Middle East now and how it was in America during the sixties. The idea of a transitional period in culture was a topic of discussion.

*S03 (sophomore, undergraduate)* People do ask *why* things are the way they are. We asked why girls [face] the stigma of dating... we talked about why there is a

stigma, like why guys can date but girls can't... we talked about interfaith marriages and why non-Muslim women can marry Muslim men but not the other way around.

*S09 (sophomore, undergraduate)* I think in the class it's more of a presentation atmosphere, we do get asked why and what kind of significance something might have just so that we can begin to understand findings that we brought that it's not just a silly ceremonial thing probably means something to these people.

Furthermore, a handful of spring survey participants also indicated that they were satisfied with the cultural blogs as a medium for cultural exposure because it allowed them to access cultural content and discuss it in English. As one participant put it:

*S06 (sophomore, undergraduate)* With the culture blogs, we have been exploring it a little bit more because we have been able to discuss it in English extensively with each other, which is nice.

Although most interview subjects mentioned the positive aspects of the cultural blogs, one subject pointed out that she likes the autonomy given to her in writing cultural blog, however she prefers the structure that the cultural portfolio assignment provided in the fall semester.

*S09 (sophomore, undergraduate)* There are some pros and cons with the way it has been presented this semester. There is a lot of freedom to choose but that can also make it really hard to narrow it down to research a topic. I would personally prefer a little bit more structure in this. I am learning either way, I am learning the way we are doing it this semester and last semester.

In order to elicit responses as to how the cultural component can be improved, spring survey participants were asked to provide cultural topics and themes that they would have liked to be emphasized more. The responses as charted in Figure 11 were



categorized by themes. The most striking result to emerge from this figure is that most participants want to learn more about cultural aspects that are shaped by societal institutions which was shown to be what most of them were expecting to learn about as illustrated in Figure 9 earlier in the section.

**Question #30 (spring survey): What else would you have liked to learn about Arab culture in your Arabic class this past year?**

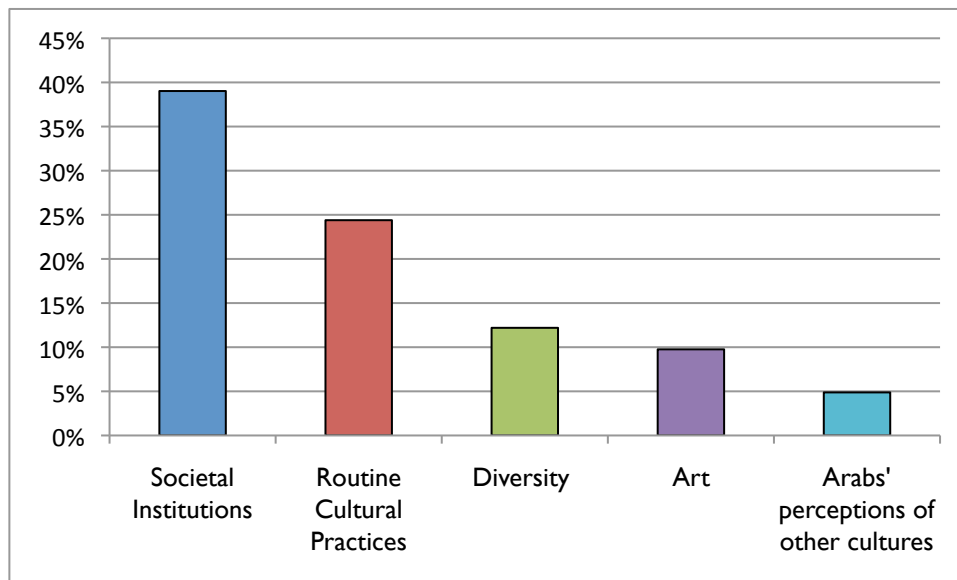


Figure 11: Responses for Question #30.

Interview participants also touched upon how they would like to see the inclusion of such topics in the beginner Arabic curriculum.

*S03 (sophomore, undergraduate)* I wish we talked more about the role of religion in the day to day lives, how often to people go to the mosque and pray together. I think that's really interesting.... I think a lot people are curious about how religion plays in politics and everyday life that definitely comes up. It was one the topics that comes up the most. When we talk about cultural things, I feel like religion always comes up somehow.

*S07 (sophomore, undergraduate)* I think I'd like to talk about the role of women in the culture because I know there are a lot of discrepancies in different countries. We have been talking about coffeehouses and that they are men-based. We watched a video last semester about the coffeehouse and they were no women. I am just always confused as to what is appropriate for women.

Moreover, as shown in the figure above, participants expressed the need to emphasize routine cultural patterns in class by incorporating topics such as: clothing, food etiquette, sports, popular trends in youth culture and behavior in public places. Interview subjects also mentioned such topics when asked what topics they would like to see more of in class:

*S01 (sophomore, undergraduate)* We haven't really gone over food; different kinds of food, etiquette, what is polite what isn't polite. I do realize this is a language class but travelling to the Middle East you are going to go eat somewhere in a restaurant and you should know if there is like a saying or something to a waiter when he brings you something....Also, how you carry yourself on the day to day basis....just really subtle details that complete the language cultural package. Clothing as well, I feel like we get negative stereotypes from the media. I feel that it would be really helpful to get rid of that. It's not crazy conservative.

Beside routine cultural patterns, several interview subjects indicated the importance of discussing diversity in the Arab world in cultural discussions. Spring survey participants also noted this as a suggestion for improving the cultural component.

*S01 (sophomore, undergraduate)* We all know that Islam is prevalent but we had watched this video about the Pope from Egypt and some people had known it was the Coptic church and I had like never known about and I am still confused because I guess I just assumed that it was Muslim...I don't think we have ever really compared different cultures within the Middle East. I don't think I have learned much about cultural variety from this class.

*S02 (sophomore, undergraduate)* I would like to know more cultural diversity in the Arab world because I think I don't know anything at all. I feel that we really

focus on are Morocco, Egypt and the Levant. There is not a whole lot emphasis on Iraq or anything in between Morocco and Egypt.

*S03 (sophomore, undergraduate)* I think what we do is that we never actually really compare countries. I personally don't know how to differentiate between the countries.

One subject in particular noted that they weren't explicitly exposed to cultural diversity in the Arab world but inferred its prevalence by being exposed to the fact that different regions of the Arab world speak different dialects of Arabic.

*S09 (sophomore, undergraduate)* I think I have experienced some first with the introduction of different dialects of the language...I wasn't very aware that there are different dialects. I guess I was also introduced to the idea that there are a lot of differences by having professors from different areas and TAs from different areas... we are barely touching the surface.

In addition to this, one subject also noted that having instructors from different backgrounds and sharing the classroom with heritage students helped raise her awareness about the extent of diversity in the Arab world.

*S11 (sophomore, undergraduate)* I was exposed it (diversity) very indirectly. In the discussions that we have there are students that are not native speakers of Arabic but they have Arab origin and sometimes they bring their own personal experience through their parents or maybe when they went to visit the country.

Another subject critiqued the topics chosen for cultural blog assignments and mentioned that they should be more challenging. Her response suggests that the topics shouldn't be so as simple as food etiquette but rather more abstract in nature.

*S06 (sophomore, undergraduate)* I think we could be challenged more, like for the food (blog) entry people wrote things like "Arabs use more olive oil". I think we could be challenged more than that.

Spring survey participants also indicated that there should be more of an emphasis on learning culture through the arts and discussing how Arabs perceive American culture. This also came up in the interviews as one subject mentioned how important it is to understand Arabs' perceptions of the US when the opportunity arises for him to interact with them.

*S10 (senior, undergraduate)* I went to South America to study Spanish and most of the people that I encountered were just thrilled about Western culture but then you also find groups that are not like that and I want to be aware of that. I want to be aware of that so I don't commit cultural errors....what are some of the things that are appreciated and not appreciated in these countries in regard to Western culture whether its our music, our entertainment, maybe our value system. When I travel abroad as an American what stereotypes are associated with me? If they come and all they know is that I am from the United States what would they assume?

Additionally, interview subjects also mentioned what they will be taking away from the cultural exposure in their beginner Arabic course. Two subjects mentioned that the importance of learning about culture and language *together* will stay with them.

*S04 (graduate)* The commitment to learn Arabic for me was the commitment to learn about Arab culture. They go hand in hand organically...learning about the culture by being around my teachers and the students in the class and also because of that becoming more aware and interested in just day-to-day events. It has made me a person that wants to read *Al-Jazeera* <sup>13</sup>every morning. It's a life style choice that I made.

*S05 (freshman, undergraduate)* Learning the language has definitely made me more aware about Arab culture. It has enhanced my knowledge of culture, being literate in the language helps a lot.

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<sup>13</sup> A news channel and website based out of Doha, Qatar.

Some subjects mentioned that the cultural exposure in the class has encouraged her to pursue her study or Arabic and take other classes that will further facilitate such an exploration.

*S07 (sophomore, undergraduate)* I have learned a lot because I came in with very little knowledge about Arabic culture other than that the majority are Muslim. I didn't really ever think about it honestly, but I know more about it. I am intrigued.

*S09 (sophomore, undergraduate)* I think first year Arabic has been a lot about me realizing that I just need to learn more but it is also getting me interested in subjects that we are barely scratching the surface of, so that might encourage me to continue my Arabic education or take different classes.

Another subject mentioned that the cultural exposure in the class has helped her connect with others and immerse herself in a cultural experience.

*S11 (sophomore, undergraduate)* It has introduced me to it and with that little introduction, I was able to apply it with people from the Middle East and applying it just a little bit created a little connection between people and myself and through those people I have become more submerged in this culture.

### **3.2.4 Perspectives on teaching culture**

In addition to making suggestions for cultural ideas and themes that they would like to discuss, interview subjects also expressed their views on what they think are the best practices for teaching culture.

*S04 (graduate)* I think the idea of letting students pick the topics that interest them and letting the *ustadh*<sup>14</sup> sort of go over and pick the ones that they think will be the most useful for the students is a really good approach.

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<sup>14</sup> Teacher

*S06 (sophomore, undergraduate)* I really like talking in small groups. I think that's a really good way to share our experiences and ideas and learn from each other.

When asked about what they expect of their teacher when the class is having a cultural discussion, most subjects mentioned that they prefer them to play the role of a facilitator or moderator.

*S09 (sophomore, undergraduate)* I think by facilitating conversation and pressing people like you need to be more accountable for what you are saying. You can't just be like "I found this fact". It's about making you think deeper about why. So when the professor is always asking us why I think that's helpful for the discussion and understanding the research that we have done.

*S10 (senior, undergraduate)* I expect them to ask a lot of questions...just keep the conversation going, point out something interesting but never really take over the conversation. Basically, be more of a facilitator.

*S11 (sophomore, undergraduate)* I think their role is not to be like oh this is what it is or this is how it is, like a very biased opinion, but it's more like letting us come to our conclusions, letting us have our own perspective. It's a back-to-back conversation, it's not about them teaching us or them asking us questions to see if we know the material but us learning from the research we do on the culture.

While some subjects expressed that their teacher should play a more passive role, others expressed that they would like the instructor to play a more active role, i.e. they should intervene if students are saying misinformed ideas or stereotypes during discussions.

*S01 (freshman, undergraduate)* I think he or she should really present the culture the way it is and if there are like some ideas that we have gotten from TV or movie that are wrong or racist that they should break in and say well it's not really like that, this is how it really is.

*S04 (graduate)* I think the role of the *ustaadh*<sup>15</sup> and the TA is to make sure that the ideas that are being floated within the groups are accurate and sensitive and valid. I want them to have an active role...If there has been anything said that's not accurate or sensitive then I would want to know.

Participants did commend their instructors for always reminding them to not generalize and be careful with how they phrase their ideas and thoughts regarding culture.

*S06 (sophomore, undergraduate)* I think our professor has done a really good job at reminding us that there is really no such thing as the "Arab world". He has pointed that out several times because all of the countries are so different from each other. There are so many different nuances; it's not fair to generalize.

*S10 (senior, undergraduate)* We have mainly talked about being conscious of making generalizations. Just looking at myself, I was looking for more generalized articles and information because I wasn't really familiar with the subject matter. I think I had a lot of just really "big picture" ideas about the subject matter but then the TA reminded us that we must be careful of generalizing and saying statements such as "Well I read this about Sunni Arabs or Orthodox Arabs so all of them must do this.". We must say that might have been what was said in one article but in reality it's very seldom that it falls into this one pattern, every situation is different, every country is different...I thought it was a really good reminder of just the danger of making generalizations.

Although reminders about not generalizing and oversimplifying information during discussions were appreciated, participants emphasized the need to adopt the idea of comparing and contrasting the different cultures in the Arab world and the culture of different eras as a teaching practice.

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

*S05 (junior undergraduate)* They (the instructors) do point out when there are cultural differences within the countries in the cultural aspect...but we don't really focus on that, I would like to see more.

*S08 (junior, undergraduate)* I would like to see how things are changing, he could have asked questions [about] how things are right now and how things were twenty years ago.

Also, participants mentioned that they would like to hear more personal anecdotes and perspectives from their teacher as they regard them to be valid and interesting sources of information about Arab culture.

*S03 (sophomore, undergraduate)* It's nice to get a personal perspective... just to get more of an understanding of it (culture) as a whole. It's nice to hear what their personal experience of it is. I feel like getting the personal perspective is much more exciting than getting something off of Wiki.

*S04 (graduate)* Honestly, I'd like to know more from them. In class they are good about taking a seat back and asking us questions but I think sometimes they shy away from providing their own experiences... a lot of people bring in blog entries and so their experiences are every bit as valid.

*S09 (sophomore, undergraduate)* This semester with the culture I feel that the TA and teacher have backed off a little, most of the discussion happened between the students. I think that's great but I also don't mind hearing their experiences with these cultural ideas. My professor is from Lebanon so I would love to hear real experiences from her and not just what I found in a book or something.

Lastly, one subject in particular noted the effectiveness of such teaching practices in developing his critical thinking and analytical skills.

*S10 (senior, undergraduate)* I think I know a little bit better [about] how to ask and how to learn. They haven't taught us everything but they have taught us how to learn, which is a really important concept.



### **3.2.5 Comparisons between Arab culture and American culture**

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the spring survey repeated some of the sections from the fall survey to gauge any changes in participants' cultural knowledge and attitude over the course the academic year. The following section discusses and presents the comparative results for select items that illustrate observable changes in participants' cultural knowledge and attitudes as they relate to the Arab world.

#### ***I. Cultural knowledge***

The items for cultural knowledge were written as statements that participants had to indicate as being accurate or inaccurate. There are several interesting trends that were observed in the results for the knowledge items and are discussed in more detail below.

In the first statement about the Arab world having the highest concentration of Muslims in the world, as shown in Figure 12 the response rate for "Inaccurate" in the fall survey was close to fifty percent. This indicates that the majority of learners commence their study of Arabic with good general knowledge of the region. In the spring survey a positive shift in responses was observed; the percentage for the response choice "Accurate" dropped by more than ten percent whereas the percentage for the response choice "Inaccurate" increased by ten percent.

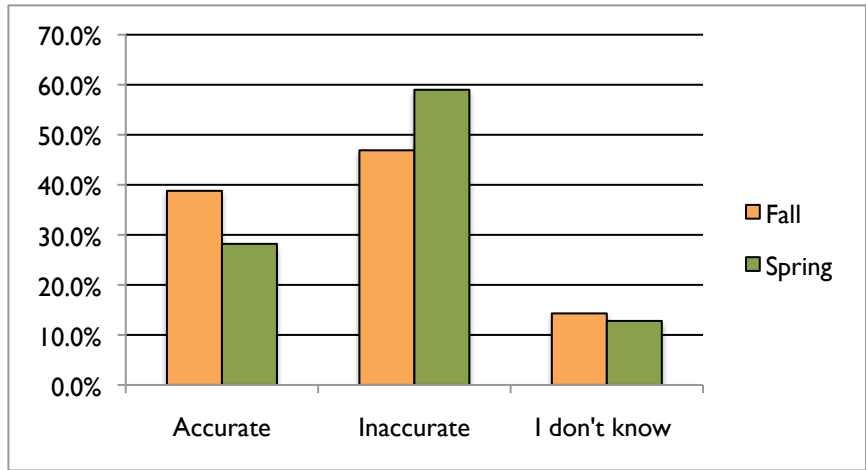


Figure 12: Responses for statement: "The Arab world has the highest concentration of Muslims in the world".

The results for the statement about Iran being an Arab country from the fall survey further confirm that most learners commence their study of Arabic with good general knowledge of the region. There is strong evidence of heightened awareness by end of the academic year regarding this statement is shown in Figure 13. The response rate for “Inaccurate” increased by forty percent and significantly decreased for “Accurate” in the spring survey.

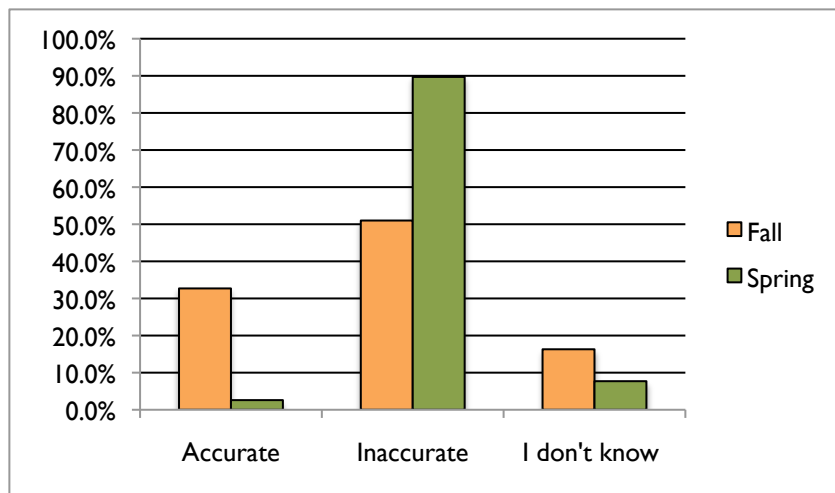


Figure 13: Responses for statement: "Iran is an Arab country".

Moreover, as shown in Figure 14, the results for the statement about whether Arabs speak the standard variety of Arabic at home from the fall survey show that most learners are very aware of sociolinguistic dynamics of the Arab world. In line with the results for the previous statements, the response rate for “Inaccurate” rose in the spring survey proposing heightened awareness with respect to this topic as well.

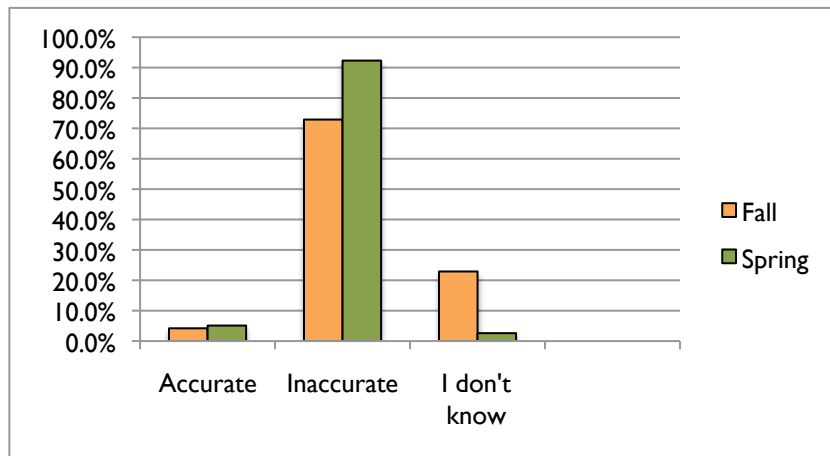


Figure 14 Responses for statement: "Native speakers of Arabic speak *fuSHa* or Modern Standard Arabic at home".

In summary, these results show that most learners’ commence their study of Arabic with high levels of awareness and good general knowledge about the Arab world. Moreover, the percentages for all the items are indicative of a positive trend suggesting that that learners’ knowledge about the Arab world has been enriched by a yearlong study of Arabic language and culture.

## II. Attitudes

If we now turn to the items for gauging learners' attitudes and perceptions of some cultural aspects in Arab culture, we observe that there is more variation in the

results. In the item about physical relationships outside marriage, the response rates for “Strongly agree” and “Strongly disagree” slightly increased in the spring survey.

Furthermore, the response rate for “I don’t know” decreased by fifty percent indicating that some learners’ developed more definitive opinions regarding this idea over the course of the year.

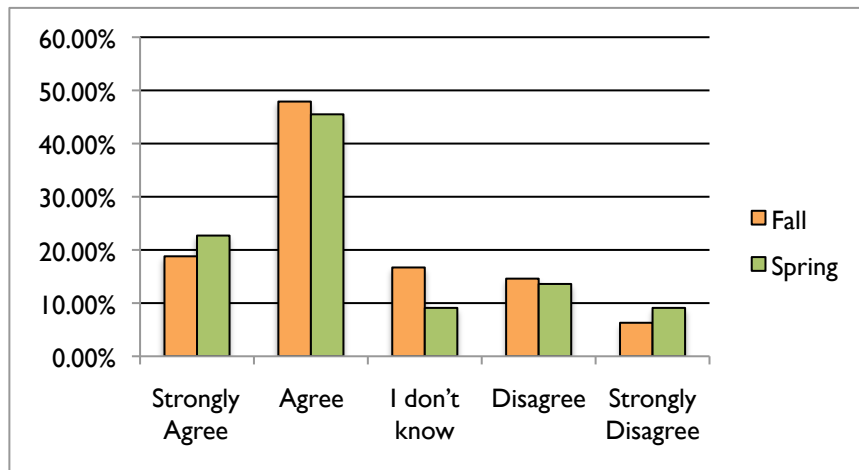


Figure 15: Responses for the statement: “In Arab culture it is unacceptable for two people to have an intimate physical relationship outside of marriage”.

Likewise, the results for whether Arab societies are more individualistic than American as shown in Figure 16 suggest that more learners developed definitive opinions about this cultural value by the end of the academic year. The percentage for “strongly disagree” increased by more than ten percent and the percentage for “I don’t know” significantly dropped in the spring survey, indicating that the cultural component has emphasized that the idea of collective is valued more than the idea of the individual in Arab culture.

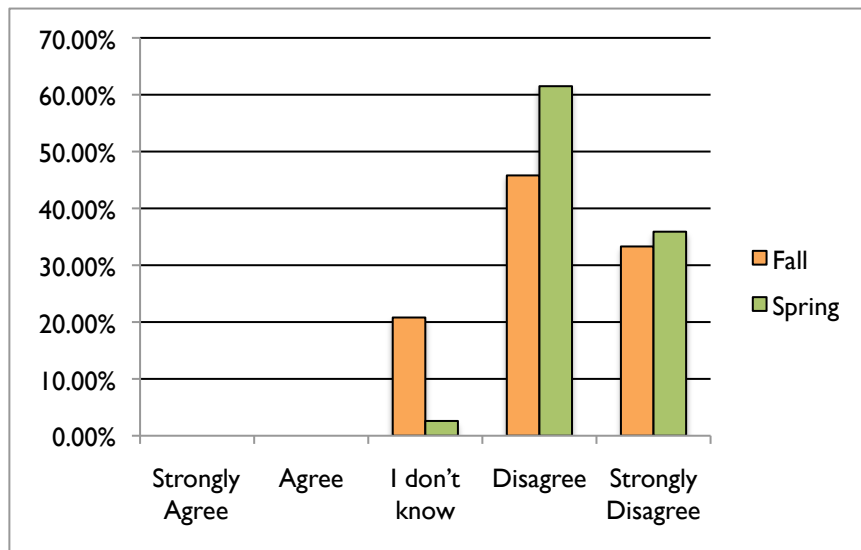


Figure 16: Responses for statement “Arab societies are more individualistic than American society”.

Finally, one item's responses have changed drastically, i.e. the use of the word *Allah* in cultural phrases; the results in Figure 17 show that the majority of participants disagree that such phrases have a religious connotation in the spring survey as opposed to the fall survey. This change can be attributed to the fact that they developed a more complex awareness of the word and its socio-cultural dimensions as they progressed in their cultural training.

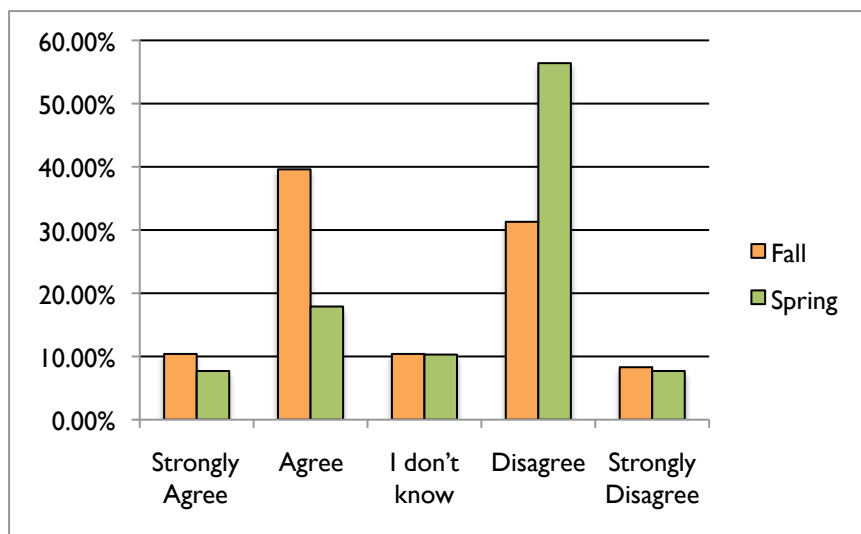


Figure 17: Responses for statement: “The use of the word ‘Allah’ in some phrases in the Arab world has a strong Islamic connotation”.

Taken together, these results suggest that there is an association between learners’ developing stronger opinions and definitive perceptions about certain aspects of Arab culture and progressing in their beginner Arabic course’s cultural training.

## **Chapter 4: An ICC-based pedagogical framework for the beginner Arabic curriculum**

The design of this ICC-based pedagogical framework for the beginner Arabic curriculum incorporates the results of this study as outlined in Chapter 3 and the aforementioned challenges most university level Arabic language programs currently face (diverse learner profiles, varied learner orientations towards Arab culture, high attrition rates, and high motivations levels to study Arab culture). This framework is comprised of two sections-- learning outcomes and teaching methods—that are explained in detail below.

### **4.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES**

In order to align beginner Arabic curricula with the goal of furthering the development of ICC in learners, we must first identify the learning outcomes that we want to observe in learners by the end of the academic year. The outcomes listed below are described as tasks and functions that learners can perform and exhibit with respect to their knowledge of Arab culture. Moreover, the outcomes are color coded to specify the language used to achieve them; maroon denotes that learners' use their L1 and blue denotes that they use Arabic. This was done to uphold L1 usage over L2 usage at the beginner level for developing ICC as the former allows learners to explore and analyze cultural content at a more advanced level, making it the logical choice for an ICC-based framework. Also, the outcomes are organized by cultural topics that have been chosen



based on the results analysis in the previous chapter. These topics are not listed in any particular order and are to be addressed over the course of an academic year in a university level beginner Arabic course that has five to six contact hours a week.

### **Topic 1: Geography**

By the end of the academic year, students can:

- Provide basic facts about the Arabic language and its history (e.g.: the Arabic language has roots in the Arabian peninsula; it spread beyond this region during the Islamic conquests; it belongs to the Semitic language family);
- List basic facts about some Arab cities and countries (e.g.: Fes is in Morocco and has one of the oldest universities in the world, Damascus is the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world);
- Categorize countries into broader regions (e.g. the Levant is made up of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine);
- Differentiate between the Arab world, the Islamic world, and the Middle East;
- Write the names of most Arab League countries and their capital cities and label at least 10 on a map.

### **Topic 2: Societal Institutions**

By the end of the academic year, students can:

- Briefly explain the effect of private and public institutions on the individual (e.g.: the relationship between one's performance on standardized high school exams, and his/her immediate future);
- Identify the system of government of the countries whose dialects they have studied (e.g. Egypt is a republic, Morocco is a monarchy, etc);
- Describe in simple terms the status of economic conditions at the micro-level (e.g.: although many women in the Arab world work outside of the home, they still assume traditional household responsibilities);
- Describe in simple terms how one's religious identity, gender and social class in society determine his/her day-to-day routine (e.g.: Friday prayers in congregation, playing soccer in a club team, etc).

### **Topic 3: Arts, Literature and Media**

By the end of the academic year, students can:

- Analyze cultural themes in a translated short story, comic-strip or other literary forms and relate it to their knowledge of other cultural topics;
- Name at least 3 important cultural celebrity icons or literary personalities in the Arab world and identify their country of origin (e.g. Fairouz is from Lebanon, Tamer Husni is from Egypt, etc);
- Sing along to the chorus of at least one extremely popular Arabic song (e.g. *Hilwa ya baladi* by Dalida).

### **Topic 4: Routine Cultural Practices**

By the end of the academic year, students can:

- Identify different forms of public and private meetings, ex: meeting someone at a coffee shop (*ahwa*), the community club or center (*nadi*) etc.
- Demonstrate understanding of conventions, behaviors and taboos that dictate routine situations (e.g. do not immediately accept an offering of food or drink, refuse it a couple times to be polite);
- Describe appropriate dress for males and females in professional and social settings.

### **Topic 5: Cultural Values**

By the end of the academic year, students can:

- Describe the importance of hospitality and generosity in Arab culture by giving examples of cultural practices that exhibit it (e.g. offering food and drink more than once);
- Describe the importance of family in Arab culture by outlining several aspects of family structure or familial relationships in the country whose dialect they study (Ex: children usually live with parents until marriage; extended families often live in the same building or area; it is common for a woman to move in with her new husband's family after marrying).

## Topic 6: Cultural Diversity

By the end of the academic year, students can:

- Describe the extent of diversity in the Arab world in at least one sphere (linguistic, socioeconomic, historical, political, or religious) in great detail and provide examples (e.g. many Arab countries have French as their official language, Coptic Christians are an influential minority in Egypt, etc);
- Describe the significance of least one important religious and cultural holiday observed in the Arab world (e.g. Eid al-FiTr marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, Egypt celebrates the beginning of spring season with a cultural holiday called *Sham el nisiim*<sup>16</sup>).

## Topic 7: Sociolinguistic and Pragmatic Knowledge

By the end of the academic year, students can demonstrate:

- An understanding of nonverbal behavior interaction (e.g.: eye contact, kissing a friend on the cheek upon greeting him/her, shaking hands) and cultural phrases, niceties (e.g.: why Arabs say *mabruuk*, i.e. *congratulations* in Arabic, to someone when they buy something new).
- An emerging competence in recognizing levels of formality in Arabic and the appropriate contexts for each;
- Partial control of phrases used for greetings, leave taking, appropriate form of address and expressing simple requests in a culturally appropriate way (e.g.: greeting endlessly, asking about a person's health and well-being repeatedly upon meeting them).

## 4.2 TEACHING METHODS

To achieve the outcomes set forth above, instructors of Arabic must incorporate effective teaching methods. The results in sections 3.2.3 and 3.2.4 (perspective on the learning of culture and perspective on the teaching of culture) support Byram's recommendation that portfolios and project-based assignments are best suited to develop ICC in learners (1997). However, in order to make such

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<sup>16</sup> A national holiday in that falls after Eastern Christian Easter but is celebrated by all Egyptians regardless of their religious background.

activities more effective and conducive to ICC development, it is recommended to devise guidelines for them. For the cultural blog activity in particular, it is recommended that they should address topics that are more abstract (e.g. Topic 2 in the cultural topics listed under learning outcomes above: Societal Institutions and Topic 6: Cultural Diversity) as this allows for deeper analysis and interpretation. However, other topics, like Topic 7 for instance, are more appropriately covered using materials such as authentic videos followed by role-plays.

The following guidelines may be of use to instructors of Arabic who wish to incorporate such assignments in their curriculum:

- Be mindful that learners' linguistic competence at this level does not permit them to explore Arab culture in Arabic, so consider what they are capable of doing regarding developing their knowledge of Arab culture in their LI;
- Encourage learners to develop cross-cultural awareness by using their critical thinking and analytical skills during class discussions;
- Allow learners to identify cultural topics that interest them for cultural assignments and discussions but feel free to use your discretion to pick topics that actually present learners with an opportunity to use their interpretation and analytical skills;
- Provide feedback on cultural assignments and facilitate in-class discussions in the form of questions that encourage learners to delve deeper into cultural content;
- Encourage group work and collaboration;

- Allude to the extent of cultural diversity in the Arab world during in-class discussions by presenting relevant content such as interviews/conversations with native informants, sharing personal anecdotes, etc;

## **Chapter 5: Discussion, conclusions and directions for future research**

The results of this study indicate that the majority of learners enrolled in beginner Arabic courses at the University of Texas at Austin have started to develop the *savoir* or “knowing” associated with Byram’s “intercultural speaker” (1997:21). The analysis has identified variables in the study population that suggest that most beginner Arabic learners commence their study of Arabic with the intention of achieving ICC-oriented goals. In addition to this, it has identified cultural topics and themes that have enriched learners’ knowledge, transformed their attitudes and developed their critical thinking skills. It has also specified best practices for facilitating the development of ICC in learners. Finally, this study has integrated these findings in a proposal for an ICC-based pedagogical framework specific to the Arabic instruction at the beginner level.

Most participants were predisposed with good general knowledge of the Arab world when they commenced their study of the Arabic language. The findings reveal that they either regularly interacted with people of Arab origin or took classes that exposed them to the Arab world before taking beginner Arabic course. Also, the fact that they chose to study Arabic suggests that they are looking for more intense exposure to the Arab world to further enrich their knowledge and affirm their positive attitudes.

The findings also suggest that some participants were exposed to oversimplified and stereotypical images of the Arab in popular films, TV shows and news programs prior to taking beginner Arabic. However, this didn’t necessarily result in them having

negative attitudes towards the Arab world. On the contrary, this group admitted to questioning the content presented in such sources and acknowledged that their limited knowledge of the Arab world is what led them to enroll in beginner Arabic. This suggests that learners with limited knowledge begin their study of Arabic with high levels of curiosity and openness towards the Arab world. So, these results affirm those of Husseinali (2006) as they indicate that most Arabic learners are highly motivated to study Arabic because of pre-established interests and curiosity with respect to the Arab world.

On the question of changes observed in participants' knowledge and attitudes with respect to the Arab world over the course of the year, several interesting findings emerged. First and foremost, even though most of them had some knowledge of cultural practices and values before commencing their study of Arabic, the findings suggest the cultural exposure in their beginner Arabic class enhanced their prior knowledge. Furthermore, it is evident that this exposure allowed them to engage with such topics in a manner that influenced their attitudes towards the Arab world in a positive fashion. Participants noted that knowledge cultural practices and values was enhanced by way of discovering such topics with their peers inside the classroom and interacting with people of Arab origin outside the classroom. Such interactions have allowed them see and appreciate different cultural perspectives.

Secondly, the findings suggest that overall participants became more aware of cultural aspects such as gender roles, the role of religion and family life over the course of the year. Such topics were continually presented in the curriculum and as a result of

this, they had the opportunity to explore and analyze them in classroom discussions. Also, the results show that many were able to compare different perspectives regarding such topics in Arab culture and their own native culture. This indicates that as they progressed in their beginner Arabic course and were exposed to more cultural content, their perceptions of Arab culture changed.

In addition to this, the findings suggest that participants became more aware about the extent of diversity in the Arab world because of the cultural topics that they were exposed to as part of the beginner Arabic curriculum. Prior to enrolling in beginner Arabic, many presumed that the majority of Muslims live in the Arab world, indicating that their knowledge of the extent of religious diversity in the Arab world was limited. This also explains the fact as to why several thought that an Islamic country like Iran is an Arabic speaking country and a few associated fictional characters from Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan with the Arab world. However, over the course of the year, learners did infer that the Arab world is not synonymous with the Islamic world and that Arabs practice religions other than Islam.

The most interesting finding was that the majority of participants had favorable perceptions of how the beginner Arabic curriculum incorporated culture, confirming that they recognize the benefits of learning language and culture together. They immensely enjoyed the cultural blog activity in the spring semester because of its learner-centeredness. Additionally, the discussions that followed the submission of cultural blog assignment exposed them to different perspectives and allowed them to apply their analytical skills in the classroom.



However, the findings also suggest that there are some aspects of the current curriculum and teaching methods that can be improved to further enhance the development of ICC in beginner Arabic learners. With respect to curricula, the findings indicate that there is a need to incorporate how societal institutions influence cultural behaviors and practices (e.g. marriage customs) in the cultural blogs and the idea of diversity in the Arab world in the cultural discussions. Participants do recognize the prevalence of religious and regional diversity and how they are manifested in the Arabic language and culture by the end of the year but would like to see such topics addressed more explicitly in the curriculum. Besides this, they also feel that the curriculum could address routine cultural practices such food and social etiquette more effectively. These results match those of previous scholarship on cultural needs (Abuhakema, 2004).

Regarding teaching practices, most learners responded favorably to the teacher being a facilitator of cultural discussion but would like to see them intervene in cultural discussions if generalized ideas and misconceptions are being disseminated. Moreover, learners do appreciate that the teacher takes a backseat in discussions but are interested to hear first-hand accounts and personal anecdotes that are relevant to the cultural discussion.

Most importantly, we noticed that although most learners were satisfied with the cultural exposure, they feel that it is not sufficient. These results are consistent with those of other studies in the field that suggest that the majority of learners enroll in Arabic courses to learn about Arab culture (Kuntz & Belnap, 2001; Husseinali, 2006).

Future research should address the effectiveness of the pedagogical framework proposed in the previous chapter for developing ICC in learners by creating appropriate assessment tools to measure learners' progress. In addition to this, the survey instrument for this study could be expanded to incorporate more items that gauge changes in learners' knowledge and perceptions with regard to topics that are of particular interest to them, such as how societal institutions affect cultural practices, diversity in the Arab world, etc. Also for more precision in the results, future research should gather survey responses regarding the development of ICC at the beginning of the study and at the end of the study from the same subjects. Finally, future studies should recruit a larger participant pool for the interviews to provide for more thorough explanations and diversified perspectives of the trends that were analyzed in this study.

To conclude, the literature review and the findings of this study conducted at the University of Texas at Austin remind us of the crucial role that foreign language education plays in our world today. The foreign language classroom is not just for language learning but also for learners to be exposed to different perspectives partake in analytical discourse and develop skills. The successful implementation of an ICC-based curriculum starting at the beginner level can equip learners with such skills that will be with them long after they leave the classroom and the university.

## Appendix A: Fall Survey

### Background Questions

1. *What is your age group?*

- 16-18
- 19-21
- 22-25
- over 25

2. *What is your gender?*

- Male
- Female

3. *Do you consider yourself to be of Arab heritage?*

- Yes
- No

### Section I

The following questions are about your exposure to the Arab world BEFORE enrolling for First-Year Arabic.

4. *What were some fictional personas or characters from the Arab world that you were exposed to? Please list AT LEAST 2 and describe each character in one word (example: villain, hero, etc)*

- Character #1: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Describe: \_\_\_\_\_
- Character #2: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Describe: \_\_\_\_\_

5. *What kind of underlying messages and ideas did these characters or personas convey about the Arab world?*

- Always positive
- Sometimes positives, sometimes negative
- Always negative

6. *How often do you interact with people of Arab origin?*

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

7. *If you did interact with people of Arab origin, what kind of relationships did you have with them? You may choose more than one.*

- Friend
- Co-worker
- Neighbor
- Family Member
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

8. *Have you ever visited or lived in an Arab country?*

- Yes
- No

9. *If you answered YES to the previous question, please indicate for how long in total.*

- Less than 2 weeks
- 2 to 4 weeks
- 1 to 2 months
- 2 to 6 months
- More than 6 months.

10. *How aware were you about the Arab world?*

- Extremely aware
- Moderately aware
- Somewhat aware
- Slightly aware
- Not at all aware

11. *What were some Arabic words you knew from before? Please list 3 words and specify how you learned about them.*

- Word #1: \_\_\_\_\_
- I learned this word through: \_\_\_\_\_
- Word #2: \_\_\_\_\_
- I learned this word through: \_\_\_\_\_
- Word #3: \_\_\_\_\_
- I learned this word through: \_\_\_\_\_

12. *What were some cultural ideas and practices unique to Arab world that you had heard about? Please describe 2 practices or ideas and specify how you learned about them.*

- Description of practice/idea #1: \_\_\_\_\_
- I learned about it through: \_\_\_\_\_
- Description of practice/idea #2: \_\_\_\_\_
- I learned about it through: \_\_\_\_\_

13. *What was your main source of exposure to the Arab world?*

*\*Please rank each item by writing a number from 1 through 6 in the boxes below. You may only use each number once. 1 = least exposure 6 = most exposure.*

- Family and Friends: \_\_\_\_
- News channels: \_\_\_\_
- University/School Classes: \_\_\_\_
- Newspapers (Print and Electronic) : \_\_\_\_
- Film and TV shows : \_\_\_\_

14. *How would you describe your overall perception of Arab culture?*

- Positive
- Neutral
- Negative

### Section II

This section is comprised of statements that you will be asked to evaluate as either accurate or inaccurate.

15. *"The Arab world has the highest concentration of Muslims in the world." This statement is:*

- Accurate
- Inaccurate
- I don't know

16. "A wide array of religious groups and denominations exists in the Arab world." This statement is:

- Accurate
- Inaccurate
- I don't know

17. "Iran is an Arab country." This statement is:

- Accurate
- Inaccurate
- I don't know

18. "Historically, Arab-Islamic civilization has had little to no influence on other civilizations." This statement is:

- Accurate
- Inaccurate
- I don't know

19. "Every native speaker of Arabic grows up speaking FuSHa or Modern Standard Arabic at home." This statement is:

- Accurate
- Inaccurate
- I don't know

20. "All women in the Arab World wear the "hijab" or headscarf." This statement is:

- Accurate
- Inaccurate
- I don't know

21. "Arab women do not work outside of the home and, therefore, are homemakers." This statement is:

- Accurate
- Inaccurate
- I don't know

22. "All Arab countries have similar economies due to the distribution of natural resources such as petroleum and natural gas reserves in the Arab world." This statement is:

- Accurate
- Inaccurate
- I don't know

### Section III

This section is comprised of questions that ask your opinion on certain aspects of Arab culture.

*23. In Arab culture, it is unacceptable for two people to have an intimate physical relationship outside of marriage.*

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- I don't know
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

*24. Arab societies are more individualistic than American society (i.e. the individual is valued more than the collective).*

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- I don't know
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

*25. Hospitality is an important value in Arab culture.*

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- I don't know
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

*26. The use of the word of "Allah" in some phrases in the Arabic language has a strong Islamic connotation.*

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- I don't know
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Section IV

This section is comprised of questions that ask you to compare certain aspects of American and Arab society.

27. In your opinion, how similar is family life in American culture and Arab culture? Please rate the degree of similarity, 1: not similar at all, 5: almost identical.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

28. In your opinion, how similar is behavior in public places in American culture and Arab culture? Please rate the degree of similarity, 1: not similar at all, 5: almost identical.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

29. In your opinion, how similar is the role of religion in American culture and Arab culture? Please rate the degree of similarity, 1: not similar at all, 5: almost identical.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

30. In your opinion, how similar are male-female relationships in American culture and Arab culture? Please rate the degree of similarity, 1: not similar at all, 5: almost identical.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

31. In your opinion, how similar is the status of women in American society and Arab societies? Please rate the degree of similarity, 1: not similar at all, 5: almost identical.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

32. What are you expecting to learn about Arab culture in your Arabic class this year? Please briefly describe at least 2 things that you hope to learn more about and the reasons behind



*them.*



## Appendix B: Spring Survey

### Background Questions

1. Did you participate in the survey about Arab culture in the fall?
  - Yes
  - No
  
2. *What is your age group?*
  - 16-18
  - 19-21
  - 22-25
  - over 25
  
3. *What is your gender?*
  - Male
  - Female
  
4. *Do you consider yourself to be of Arab heritage?*
  - Yes
  - No
  
5. *How often do you interact with people of Arab origin?*
  - Always
  - Often
  - Sometimes
  - Rarely
  - Never

### Section I

This section is comprised of questions that ask you to compare certain aspects of American and Arab society.

6. *In your opinion, how similar is family life in American culture and Arab culture?  
Please rate the degree of similarity, 1: not similar at all, 5: almost identical.*

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. In your opinion, how similar is behavior in public places in American culture and Arab culture? Please rate the degree of similarity, 1: not similar at all, 5: almost identical.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

8. In your opinion, how similar is the role of religion in American culture and Arab culture? Please rate the degree of similarity, 1: not similar at all, 5: almost identical.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

9. In your opinion, how similar are male-female relationships in American culture and Arab culture? Please rate the degree of similarity, 1: not similar at all, 5: almost identical.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

10. In your opinion, how similar is similar is the status of women in American society and Arab societies? Please rate the degree of similarity, 1: not similar at all, 5: almost identical.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

11. Apart from the ideas/topics mentioned in the questions above, please write 1 idea/topic that you think are strikingly similar and different in Arab culture and American culture.

Similar: \_\_\_\_\_

Different: \_\_\_\_\_

## Section II

This section is comprised of statements that you will be asked to evaluate as either accurate or inaccurate.

12. "Every native speaker of Arabic speaks FuSHa or Modern Standard Arabic at home." This statement is:

- Accurate
- Inaccurate
- I don't know

13. *"The "hijab" or headscarf is part of every Arab woman's attire." This statement is:*

- Accurate
- Inaccurate
- I don't know

14. *"Arab women are part of the workforce in most Arab countries." This statement is:*

- Accurate
- Inaccurate
- I don't know

15. *"The Arab world has the highest concentration of Muslims in the world." This statement is:*

- Accurate
- Inaccurate
- I don't know

16. *"There is little religious diversity in the Arab world." This statement is:*

- Accurate
- Inaccurate
- I don't know

17. *"Iran is an Arab country." This statement is:*

- Accurate
- Inaccurate
- I don't know

18. *"The economies of all Arab countries are dependant on natural resources such as petroleum and natural gas reserves in the Arab world." This statement is:*

- Accurate
- Inaccurate
- I don't know

### Section III

This section is comprised of questions that ask your opinion on certain aspects of Arab culture.

19. In Arab culture, it is unacceptable for two people to have an intimate physical relationship outside of marriage.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- I don't know
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

20. Arab societies are more individualistic than American society (i.e. the individual is valued more than the collective).

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- I don't know
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

21. Hospitality is an important value in Arab culture.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- I don't know
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

22. The use of the word of "Allah" in some phrases in the Arabic language has a strong Islamic connotation.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- I don't know
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

23. Please explain WHY you hold the opinions regarding the topics stated above by providing 1 reason to support it.

- Intimate Physical Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_
- Individualistic Society: \_\_\_\_\_
- Hospitality: \_\_\_\_\_
- The use of the word "Allah" : \_\_\_\_\_

24. What are some personalities from the Arab world that you were exposed to in your Arabic class BESIDES the characters presented in the Al-Kitaab textbook series? Please list AT LEAST 2 and describe each character in one word.

- Personality #1: \_\_\_\_\_
- Describe: \_\_\_\_\_
- Personality #2: \_\_\_\_\_
- Describe: \_\_\_\_\_

25. How has your experience in First Year Arabic CHANGED your perceptions about Arab culture? Please explain your answer by providing 1 or 2 reasons.

- Reason #1: \_\_\_\_\_
- Reason#2: \_\_\_\_\_

26. How aware have your learning experiences in First Year Arabic made you about the cultural diversity in the Arab world?

- Extremely aware
- Moderately aware
- Somewhat aware
- Slightly aware
- Not at all aware

27. Please give 1 or 2 reasons to support your answer in the previous question.

- Reason #1: \_\_\_\_\_
- Reason#2: \_\_\_\_\_

28. How satisfied are with the amount of cultural exposure in your First Year Arabic class this past year?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

29. Please give 1 or 2 reasons to support your answer in the previous question.

- Reason #1: \_\_\_\_\_

○ Reason#2: \_\_\_\_\_

30. *What else would you have liked to learn about Arab culture in your Arabic class this past year?*

## **Appendix C: Interview Questions**

1. What are some cultural ideas and topics you have been exposed to in your Arabic class since the last semester?
2. What are some cultural ideas that you have been exposed to in Arabic class that *changed* your perceptions and ideas about Arab culture?
3. What do you think should be the role of your teacher when cultural ideas and topics are discussed in the class?
4. How is culture integrated in your Arabic class this semester? How is it different from last semester?
5. What kinds of questions come up during the culture discussion session in your Arabic class?
6. To what extent do you feel that your Arabic class has made you more aware about Arab culture?
7. What things about Arab culture will you be taking with you when you leave this Arabic class at the end of the semester?
8. What are some other cultural topics and ideas that you would like to discuss in your Arabic class?
9. What additional thoughts/comments/suggestions do you have about the integration of culture in your Arabic class?



## **Appendix D: Consent Statement for Surveys**

Dear Student of Arabic,

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by Muna Rehman AND the Department of Middle Eastern Studies at The University of Texas at Austin about the teaching Arab culture in the first year Arabic classroom. If you agree to participate in this survey:

- You must be at least 18 years old to participate.
- It will take approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete.
- You will not receive any financial compensation.

Risks/Benefits/Confidentiality of Data:

There are no known risks. There will be no costs for participating. Your participation in the study will contribute to a better understanding of the effective learning and teaching of culture in the Arabic language curriculum.

Participation or Withdrawal:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to answer any question and you have the right withdraw from participation at any time. Withdrawal will not affect your relationship with The University of Texas in anyway. If you do not want to participate either simply stop participating or close the browser window.

Contact Information:

If you have any questions about the study, contact the researcher, Muna Rehman.

CAL 528, 204 W 21st F9400, Austin Texas  
(832) 283-9826  
munarehman@gmail.com

Questions about your rights as a research participant:

If you have questions about your rights or are dissatisfied at any time with any part of this study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board by phone at (512) 471-8871 or email [atrorsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu](mailto:atrorsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu).

This study has been reviewed by The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board and the study number is 2013-06-0032.

If you agree to participate, click "next".

## **Appendix E: Consent Form for Interviews**

IRB USE ONLY

Study Number: 2013-06-0032

Approval Date: 09/10/2013

Expires: 09/09/2014

### **Purpose of the Study**

You have been asked to participate in a research study about learners' attitudes and perspectives towards Arab culture. The purpose of this study is to examine attitudes of First Year Arabic learners towards Arab culture.

### **What will you to be asked to do?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a interview.  
If you chose to be interviewed, your participation will be audio recorded.

### **What are the possible benefits of this study?**

You will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study; however, you will provide valuable perspectives to Arabic language and culture program regarding the cultural component in Arabic language curricula.

### **How will your privacy and confidentiality be protected if you participate in this research study?**

Your privacy and the confidentiality of your data will be protected by a password-protected computer only accessible to the researcher. During interviews, your responses will be recorded for future reference and use in the final research document. Your name will not be mentioned in the document.

If you choose to participate in interviews in this study, you will be audio recorded. Any audio recordings will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the recordings.

### **Whom to contact with questions about the study?**

Prior, during or after your participation you can contact the researcher Muna Rehman at 832-283-9826 or send an email to [munarehman@gmail.com](mailto:munarehman@gmail.com) for any questions or if you feel that you have been harmed.

### **Participation**

If you agree to participate, please sign and return this form to the researcher.

### **Signature**

You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any

time. You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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## **Vita**

Muna Saeeda Rehman was born in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia and lived there for most of her childhood. She relocated to Karachi, Pakistan for some time and then moved to Houston, Texas in 2003. After graduating from high school, she enrolled at the University of Texas at Austin for undergraduate studies and began studying Arabic in 2008. She commenced graduate studies in the Department of Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Texas at Austin in 2012.

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This thesis was typed by the author.