

# Proposal for The Digital Collections Grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

(Submitted June 2018)

## Project Title

The Arab American Community in Central Ohio: Negotiating Cultural Identities and Adapting Traditions.

### 1. Project Description

This project is designed to create a digital oral history collection of the Arab-American community in central Ohio. This large community is diverse in its cultural, social, economic, linguistic and educational backgrounds and has been concentrated in cities like Columbus (e.g., Jordanians, Palestinians, Syrians, Somalis), Dayton (Palestinian and Libyans), Toledo, Cleveland (Yamani, Lebanese, Syrians) and Dearborn, MI (Iraqis-Chaldeans, Assyrians-, Lebanese and now Syrians). The goal of this project is to broaden understanding of Arab Americans and to bring visibility to their contributions to and engagement with their local communities. The project is based on face-to-face interviews and videos that will be digitized and archived to highlight the lives, activities and cultural practices of the migrant Arab-American community. Topics of these interviews will cover broad themes on mobility and migration, identity formation, cultural practices, family, food, clothes, etc. The values of this project are many. On a general level, the project will enhance our students' engagement with their surrounding local communities to build a sense of understanding and empathy. The project will also provide the Arab American community with cultural visibility and will introduce their values, norms and costumes to a wider audience. On an academic level, this digital collection project will provide an open resource of lively pedagogical materials that will enhance and supplement the teaching and learning of various aspects of Arabs' cultures within a formal classroom context. It is an open resource that has potential for curricular integration by other Arabic programs within and beyond the Great Lakes Colleges Association (GLCA) consortium as well as other disciplines related to the Middle East and North African (MENA) region. Finally, since this project is pedagogically oriented, and is based on students' involvement, it aims at achieving the following specific academic/scholarly goals:

1. Equip students with the skills necessary to conduct oral interviews, ask important questions, dig deeper with great follow up questions and critically think about claims and calls for action that dehumanize others.
2. Develop students' linguistic skills, both productive and interpretive. Students will continue building and developing their oral/aural skills to enhance their production and communication skills through conducting parts of the interviews in Arabic. Students will also continue practicing their listening skills and benefit immensely from the writing exercise through the process of interview transcription and translation.

3. Develop student's cultural competencies. The project fits right in with the ACTFL 5 Cs and the P21 framework (Partnership for 21st Century Skills). Students will learn best by doing and seeing the communities in Columbus. Then they can compare their research and interviews with other online resources.
4. Extend scholarly opportunities for students to conduct field research in areas of their interest that have not been possible via regular course work.
5. Offer MENA students the opportunity to fulfill their MENA experience requirement (equivalent to a study abroad program).

### ***Nature of the Interviews:***

For this project our initial plan is to collect 10 interviews (30-40 minutes long) from the Arab-American community in Columbus, then we hope to expand it to include more communities in the future, as will be explained in the sustainability section below. After proper training by Cheryl Johnson and Hanada Al-Masri, students will travel to Columbus (the closest Arab-American community, as a start) to conduct the interviews and illicit data that will be the basis for their research projects later. These interviews will be conducted in two languages: Arabic and English and will include questions such as: when did the individual(s) migrate to the USA/ Columbus area? Why did they choose Columbus? Whom did they come with (family, single)? What are the reasons behind leaving their original Arab country? What are some of the challenges they faced? How do they preserve their cultural practices and identities? Are there practices/customs that they had to abandon? How would they describe their involvement with the community? How do they identify themselves in terms of identity, etc.?

## **2. Project Timeline**

Due to the large size of the Arab American community in central Ohio, we anticipate this work to be a long-term project. It will consist of multiple phases of which Columbus will be our starting point. The first phase of the project will take place during the 2018-19 academic year. Below is an explanation of implementation:

***The first phase*** (July & August 2018) is the preparatory stage and includes:

- Building connections with Arab Americans in Columbus, Ohio, identifying community members (research subjects) and scheduling interviews to be conducted in the fall 2018.
- Consulting different resources to start building literature on the history of Arab Americans in the USA and in Ohio.
- Obtaining IRB Certificate of completion (individual online training-for students).
- Preparing consent forms to be signed by the community members.
- Taking care of Copyright issues, should there be a need.

***The second phase*** (1<sup>st</sup> week of August 2018)

- Training students on proper interviewing techniques and technical training (including filming and digitizing the interviews). The training is done by both Cheryl Johnson and Hanada Al-Masri.

***The third Phase*** (2<sup>nd</sup> week of August 2018)

- Initial set up of the webpage/platform that will host the project.

***The fourth phase*** (August- December 2018)

- Conducting two (2) face-to-face interviews.
- Transcribing the interviews into Arabic/English (depending in the language of the interview)
- Translating the interviews into Arabic/English (depending in the language of the interview)
- Digitizing the interviews and mounting them on the webpage/platform.

***The fifth phase*** (January 2019)

- Conducting preliminary textual analysis on the two interviews before collecting more interviews.

***The sixth phase*** (February-May 2019)

- Conducting eight (8) more interviews and repeating the steps in phase 4.

### **3. Sources of Financial Support (other than the Mellon DC Grant)**

We plan to apply for financial support grants from the following venues at Denison: The Pedagogical Practice Projects (PPP) grant from The Center for Teaching and Learning; Foresman Fund from the Dept. of Modern Languages; Denison University Research Foundation (DURF), Lisska Center for Scholarly Engagement and the Provost's office.

### **4. Team Members**

Hanada Al-Masri (Assistant Professor of Arabic, Modern Languages), Cheryl Johnson (Educational Technology/Modern Languages), Debra Andreadis (Director of Denison Libraries) Denison University students: Alexis Grimm, Olivia Reynolds, Victoria Alrabaa, Fatima Ghazawi, Hannah Bennett and Tanner (Adam) Venrick.

#### ***Team Information/Roles***

- ***Hanada Al-Masri:*** Hanada specializes in Arabic language pedagogy, translation, and sociolinguistics and has done extensive research in these areas and will contribute her linguistic and cultural expertise to the project. She is also an ACTFL certified Oral Proficiency Tester of Arabic and ACTFL AAPPL rater (Assessment of Performance towards Proficiency in Language). She is

responsible for coordinating the scholarly and practical aspects of the project: the transliteration of the interviews and their translations into English/Arabic. She will recruit, train and coordinate tasks among students collaborating in the project.

- **Cheryl Johnson:** Cheryl is the instructional technologist for Modern Languages. Cheryl has a wealth of experience working in collaboration with faculty who teach a variety of languages and with a wide range of technologies. Cheryl also has knowledge and experience in creating multimedia and online resources for similar projects. Cheryl will help facilitate the online platform, programming, and design, as well as provide instruction and mentoring in these areas for faculty and students. Both Cheryl and Hanada will train students on how to collect good oral interviews, using the ACTFL criteria for Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI).
- **Debra Andreadis:** Debby is Deputy Director of Denison Libraries. She will provide guidance on the project's transferability and long-term preservation. She will also serve as an advisor and liaison to the library regarding student hiring, reimbursement, and grant requirements.
- **Denison Students: Alexis (Lex) Grimm:** Lex is a rising junior at Denison. She is an International Studies major with a Middle East and North African Studies (MENA) concentration, and a Classical Studies minor. Lex's interest in this project stems her deep passion for learning about Arab people and the Arabic culture. She is particularly interested in learning more about the cultural practices and cultural identities of Arab-Americans in the surrounding area, as well as learning about their experiences and raise awareness about the population. Lex's responsibility in this project is to conduct, transcribe, and translate the Arabic interviews into English.
- **Olivia (Haleema) Reynolds:** Haleema is a rising junior majoring in East Asian Studies and takes Arabic as a second foreign language. Her interest in Arabic started when she took a language course for two semesters in high school. Then, she continued her Arabic study at Denison for the past two semesters. Haleema wants to know more than just language, so she volunteered as an English mentor for a Syrian refugee family in Baltimore for the International Rescue Committee. From this experience she got to practice her Arabic as well as learn how a family adapts to American culture while keeping family traditions. She is excited to contribute to this project so that she can build her Arabic language skills as well as learn about Arab American identity. Haleem's responsibility in this project is to conduct, transcribe, and translate the Arabic interviews into English.
- **Victoria Alrabaa:** Victoria is a rising sophomore at Denison University, majoring in Biology/Pre-Med track. Victoria is passionate about this project because of her roots as an Arab American herself where she is exposed to both cultures: Arabic culture through her family and the American culture outside of the family/home

context. By being able to experience both cultures, she can clearly see the divide between the two when it comes to their views on Arabs. Victoria wants to be able to impact people's views and show them the truth of what an Arab is and hopes to change the image of how Arabs are viewed in the media to a better one. Victoria's responsibility in this project is to establish contacts with Arab-Americans in the Columbus area (through her family), and to conduct, transcribe, and translate the Arabic interviews into English.

- ***Fatima Ghazawi:*** Fatima is a rising sophomore from Cleveland, Ohio but she spent her entire childhood in Cairo, Egypt, the place she considers home. She is majoring in International Studies, minoring in French and having MENA as a concentration. On campus, she is involved with the Muslim Student Association, the Middle Eastern Student Association, and the Global Fellows committee. Fatima is interested in this project because she is proud of her Arab identity and loves sharing it with others. She states, "anyone who knows me well is aware of how much I connect with that part of me and it has shaped me to be the person I am today." Fatima has high hopes that the project will offer a broader perspective of such a diverse group in Ohio. Fatima's responsibility in this project is to conduct, transcribe, and translate the Arabic interviews into English.
- ***Tanner (Adam) Venrick:*** is a rising sophomore at Denison University. He is majoring in Theatre/Film and is interested in performance, writing and directing aspects of both. He is also interested in how writers play around with languages (both English and foreign.) Adam studies Arabic because he wants to branch out and learn something new after seven years of French between Middle and High School. Adam wants to see what the Arab world would really be like outside of his American view. He is from Upper Arlington, OH. His contribution is filming the interviews.
- ***Hannah Bennett:*** Hannah is a rising sophomore at Denison University. She is a Cinema major with a concentration in Queer Studies. She is from Milbridge, Maine. The responsibility of both Adam and Hannah is to film and digitize the interviews.

## 5. Venues for Dissemination

We plan to send 3-4 members of our team to attend some conferences related to digital scholarship. Attending at least one of these conferences will be a great learning experience before students present their own work in these venues. Some options include: Bucknell University Digital Scholarship Conference - CFP (October 2019); Undergraduate Network for Research and Humanities (UNRA), and ILiADS (June-2019).

## **6. Budget**

This proposal seeks to secure funds for student workers for the academic year 2018-2019 (Fall and Spring semesters). Two student workers will be working on filming and digitizing the face-to-face interviews and four students will be working on the transcription and translation of the interviews into Arabic/English under the direction of Dr. Al-Masri. The budget also requests a stipend for a Research Assistant who will carry on the project and mentor students when Dr. Al-Masri is away for her sabbatical leave in the spring 2019. We also request money to support registration fees for a DH conference (sending 3-4 team members) and website hosting fees, as follows:

1. Two student workers (filming and digitizing) for fall & spring semesters of 2018/19 (5hrs/week @ \$9.25/hr for 30 weeks x 2): \$2,775
2. Four student workers (transcribing and translating) for 2018-19 (5hrs/week @ \$9.25/hr for 30 weeks x 4): \$5,550
3. One Research Assistant (2hrs/week @ \$10/hr for 15 weeks x 1): \$300
4. Registration fees for DH conference (3-4 people): \$1000
5. Website hosting fee: \$100

Total requested amount: \$9,725

Please note that Modern Language's Foresman Fund will contribute to students' conference expenses, and that other campus resources will be sought to cover student's transportation to/from Columbus to conduct their interviews.

## **7. Assessment of the Project's Effectiveness**

We plan to assess the effectiveness of this project in two directions: first, create a comment section on the digital platform to interact with the Arab American community and listen to their feedback and comments, thus create a sense of friendship and belonging on both sides (the community and our students). Second, we will assess the improvement of students' linguistic skills using the STAMP standardized testing tool for Arabic at the end of their first year of work. Student researchers will be assessed through the quality of their research product.

## **8. Sustainability of the Project**

The team members are all very excited about this project. Student workers, who are still in their sophomore and junior years, are passionate about exploring the Arab American community in Ohio and they plan to continue working on and expanding this project. This means we will continue to have a team of interested students at least for the next two years. In addition, because this project is of interest and relevance to students majoring in Global Commerce, International studies and MENA, we will not have a

shortage of interested students. As for Hanada and Cheryl, we do not foresee difficulty in continued participation and mentoring of students in this project.

As mentioned earlier, one plan to continue sustaining this project is to move beyond the initial 10 interviews and populate our digital repository with more stories by reaching out to a wider range of Arab American communities in other places like Cleveland, Dayton, and especially Dearborn, Michigan.