



## Adding Variety to the Arabic Flagship Program

Launched in January 2007, The University of Texas at Austin Arabic Flagship Program (AFP) is still relatively young. Despite this, however, much has already been accomplished, particularly in the realm of student activities and cultural events aimed to supplement learning. Within the Flagship, events are an important part of language learning, and are woven into the AFP students' language curriculum. From casual outdoor barbecues at Zilker Park to educational lectures, career information sessions, and the Arabic Talent Show, AFP-hosted events form an integral part of the program.

At the beginning of the fall semester, Flagship students, faculty, and staff gather at tranquil Zilker Park for an annual barbecue to greet new students recently accepted into the program. Mohammad Mohammad, Associate Professor of Arabic, serves as the resident griller and cooks up tantalizing chicken, beef, and vegetable kebabs. In addition to enjoying a tasty meal, the newcomers have the opportunity to meet fellow students and converse with their future professors and instructors—all in Arabic, of course. Returning students take time to reminisce with each other about their studies and travel abroad in the Middle East, as they excitedly await the adventures that lie ahead. Caitlin Eaves, an AFP student currently studying Third-Year Arabic and majoring in Religious and Islamic Studies, shares that "It is times like these when you really begin to feel comfortable using your Arabic. Professor Mahmoud Al-Batal entertains with 'mum-tastic' stories and jokes, and the teaching assistants share stories from their memorable travels throughout the Middle East, making it a comfortable and relaxing environment to practice our Arabic speaking."

In addition to the famous barbecues, the Arabic Flagship Program hosts an array of other events, including the annual student-led Arabic Talent Show. This year's event saw students from the AFP and Middle Eastern Studies, teaching assistants, and even faculty performing skits and musical numbers for the audience's entertainment. The show opened with Mohamed Abdelsalam's Arabic class presenting their rendition of the Egyptian folk song "Sallam Aly." Zeina Halabi's class brought resounding laughter to the packed theatre with their performance of "The Funeral of Ibn Battuta." Finally, the crowd was called to their feet and told to "Get your horns up!" to join Charles Joukhadar's class in singing "The Eyes of Texas" in Arabic.

Another noteworthy event organized and hosted by the AFP was a private musical performance by renowned Lebanese singer May Nasr this past April. Nasr serenaded an audience of faculty, staff, and friends of Middle Eastern Studies with an acoustic guitar and vocal performance. Afterward, she mingled with audience members in the Texas Union Courtyard to chat about her world tour and to sign CDs and pose for photos with fans.

The integration of educational and language-learning focused events in the Arabic Flagship Program is as important as the inclusion of student social and cultural events. For this reason, the AFP is also diligent about hosting guest speakers, lectures, and workshops. Recent examples included a lecture by Mustafa Mughazy, who visited the AFP in March to present a talk entitled "Alexandria's Dialect over One Hundred Years: A Historical Study in the Sociology of Language."

Caitlin Eaves is appreciative of the events that are planned for AFP students: "Practicing Arabic outside of the classroom and within another setting at these events is definitely an essential part of my language learning. Besides the educational element, these activities allow for socializing in Arabic." She is hopeful that as long as there is the Flagship, there will be educational events like these to encourage her study of Arabic.