MESA and the American University

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My theme is MESA and the American university. It is a worthy topic because MESA, and MESA's membership, occupy distinctive places in the American academy. We are, as academic organizations and academic fields go, relatively small; but our membership constitutes, collectively and often individually, a deep reservoir of knowledge about a part of the world that has become of central importance to our country over the past several decades, and is likely long so to remain. The diverse and detailed understanding we hold about our region of special interest—the Middle East—is, or at least should be, a resource of immense value for those in our country, and beyond, who are also concerned with it—whether they are ordinary citizens, or business leaders, or political leaders and others who shape policy.

MESA exists, of course, in the context of the North American university system. MESA was founded in 1966 by a small group of American academicians—at a meeting in Chicago, no less, that quintessentially American city in which I am so fortunate to live. It offers a unique forum for the unfettered exchange of information and ideas on the Middle East, especially the contemporary and recent Middle East, free of any political or economic or cultural or religious orthodoxies; and it serves as a vehicle for encouraging scholarship on every aspect of the region from the perspective of all disciplines, and for encouraging and sustaining the intellectual development of the scholars who undertake such work. While MESA is autonomous and independent of any particular university, we all realize that it simply could not function effectively in the absence of the hundreds of universities and colleges in which most MESA members serve as faculty, academic staff, or students. Without our university or college paychecks most of us would hardly be able to pursue research on the Middle East. It is, I think,

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no mere coincidence that MESA was born in the 1960s and grew rapidly in the subsequent three decades, the period when the American university system itself reached perhaps its apogee in size and sophistication. MESA can be seen in some sense as a reflection of that period of educational flourishing.

The Growth of Middle Eastern Studies in American Universities since 1960

In our fields, the period from about 1960 until 2000 saw tremendous development in university programs dealing with the Middle East. When I began my own studies of the Middle East in the late 1960s, there were about a dozen programs of Middle East studies in the United States. In those days, instruction in various Middle Eastern languages—for most of us, one of the essential pillars of our professional training—was rudimentary in method, and limited in range, in depth, and in availability. Opportunities for study abroad, including language study abroad, were almost non-existent. As a result, the majority of the relatively small number of students who completed doctorates in Middle East studies in the 1950s and 1960s went on the job market as generalists with, often, mediocre language training. I say this in no way as criticism of them; they were simply products of a system that had not yet developed, and for all the limitations in the training they received, they were the pioneers who brought the beginnings of Middle East studies to a wider range of institutions than the half-dozen universities that had supported it before the Second World War. And, indeed, it was some of these early pioneers who had the vision to see that things could be better, and who founded MESA to help realize that vision. So we owe them a tremendous debt.

We live today, fortunately, in a different world. The range and sophistication of courses regularly offered now on the history, culture, politics, economics, and religions of the Middle East would stupefy our predecessors of fifty years ago. Most students who enter graduate programs in Middle East studies today do so with strong language training already under their belt—in stark contrast to the situation fifty years ago, when the few students entering graduate programs in Middle East studies usually had to enroll in elementary language courses in Arabic, Persian, or Turkish because as undergraduates they had been unable to pursue any Middle Eastern language study at all. Students of Middle Eastern languages today have many opportunities to pursue intensive training in the region itself. Advanced students, likewise, have increasingly been able to avail themselves of research opportunities in the Middle East because of the ready availability of many fellowships and grants that enable them to spend an extended period in the region in order to undertake fieldwork.

MESA has played some role in this flourishing of training programs, but it was initially jump-started by an influx of federal funding, growing out of the

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cold war, that supported language and area instruction and provided graduate fellowships. The National Defense Education Act of 1958—the year the Soviet Union, by launching *Sputnik*, beat the US to the punch in an early phase of the "space race"—the Fulbright-Hayes Act of 1961, and especially the Higher Education Act of 1965, which created the Title VI area studies centers and provided a regular stream of graduate fellowships, provided a powerful impetus for the development of Middle Eastern studies as well as the study of other regions of the world.

A "second wave" of enhancement to Middle East studies came starting in the late 1990s, and in this the by then thirty-year efforts of MESA to encourage such study, as well as the increasingly obvious importance of the Middle East in world affairs, played a greater role. By that time, it became clear to every self-respecting university and even many small colleges that they could hardly remain credible as well-rounded educational institutions without having some faculty who were knowledgeable about the Middle East and Islam. Beginning in the 1990s, enrollments in Middle Eastern languages, especially Arabic, began to increase gradually but steadily, at least doubling during the decade of the 1990s.The events of September 11, 2001 led to a sudden surge in enrollments in language and Middle East area studies, but it was a surge that built on three decades of patient campaigning by MESA and MESA members to persuade our previously tuned-out fellow citizens that the Middle East and Islam were, in fact, subjects of both great importance and great interest. September 11 provided a kind of final, horrible but undeniable, confirmation of the validity of what most of us in MESA had been preaching for years, to hitherto skeptical deans and colleagues and neighbors and friends: that the Middle East matters, and that we need to pay attention to it. We need to understand the Middle East, which as Norman Daniel, Abdul Latif Tibawi, Edward Said, and many others have shown us over the years, has long been the quintessential "Other" and hence the target of opprobrium, for Americans and the West generally.[1] We can hope that Americans will soon begin to see the wisdom of the old proverb, "Never criticize a man until you have walked a mile in his shoes," and will try to apply it to understanding the Middle East. Some will argue, I suppose, that not criticizing a man until you've walked a mile in his shoes is simply common sense: after all, that way, when you do criticize him, you're a mile away, and you have his shoes.[2] But, humor aside, we can hope that people are beginning to realize that we must try to see the problems (and successes) of the Middle East at least sometimes from the perspective of the peoples of the Middle East itself—to walk, at least for a mile, in their shoes.

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The American University System

American universities emerged in the mid-twentieth century as components of a remarkable system of institutions that gained worldwide recognition for excellence. The American higher education system is a unique amalgam of different kinds of institutions. It includes private liberal arts colleges, many quite small and many founded in the nineteenth century or before; "land grant" colleges and universities of the later nineteenth century that originally had a decided focus on practical vocations such as agriculture, mining, health services, and business but that soon outgrew these limitations to offer a broader general education; and research universities. The research universities (many of them formed by adding graduate faculties to existing private or public colleges) mostly crystallized in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century and were originally modeled on the great central European, especially German, universities of their day. The sheer number of American institutions of higher education—over 2000, their great disparities in size, and the existence of both publicly supported state institutions and independent private institutions (some of them lavishly endowed), gave American higher education a richness and diversity unique in the world, and by the mid-twentieth century these assets were beginning to bear fruit. America had produced some great scholars already in the nineteenth century, to be sure, but until World War II even leading American institutions were generally not on a par in terms of advanced research with their European counterparts. The dislocations of World War II, the flight of many brilliant scholars, especially Jewish scholars, to America during the war years, and the postwar surge in government funding for higher education, all played a role in the ascent of American universities to the pinnacle of excellence. In our own field of Middle East studies, we can see the impact of the great wartime migration of scholars in the names of luminaries who were the leaders in our fields (at least in my field) and came to teach here: Joseph Schacht at Columbia, Franz Rosenthal at Yale, Giorgio Levi della Vida at UCLA, and Gustave von Grunebaum at Chicago and then UCLA, to name but a few. The flow of European scholars, or of American scholars trained in Europe, continued for a time after the war: Andrew Ehrenkreutz (Michigan), HAR Gibb (Harvard), George Makdisi (Pennsylvania). But by the 1960s, American universities had begun to produce home-grown scholars who gained international reputations for their research (in our fields, Marshall Hodgson at Chicago [1922-1968] and Martin Dickson at Princeton [1924-1991] for example, though both profited greatly from their own independent travels in the Middle East). The Middle East programs at many American universities by the 1960s often had more numerous and more

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diverse staff and were better funded than their European counterparts, and enjoyed strong support for both research and advanced studies.

By the 1960s, then, the American university system was emerging as a national treasure; viewed in the broader context of American society as a whole, one can argue that the American university system was a crucial engine of social mobility that helped break the grip a few 'aristocratic' private schools had held over elite education, and helped contribute to the rise of a larger middle class. Before 1960, elite schools, including the major research universities, had tended to train doctoral students mainly for each other, but the increased production after 1960 of well-trained PhDs in many fields, including Middle East studies, meant that first-rate young faculty were more and more being placed in schools that were hitherto lower in the status hierarchy—resulting in an even broader national base of high quality education, and an extension of serious research to many more institutions. This, I think, is why by the 1970s and 1980s, the best American universities reached parity with, or began to outstrip, European and other universities in the production of world-class research.

The American educational model has now come to be widely emulated abroad, even in Europe. New "American universities" as well as overseas branches of many established American universities seem to have sprung up like mushrooms in recent years in many parts of the world, including notably in the Middle East, functioning in English and almost always with an important contingent of American faculty.[3] There had been, of course, a noteworthy earlier trend in this direction, in the founding of Robert College (now Boğaziçi University) in 1863, Syrian Protestant College (now the American University of Beirut) in 1866, and the American University in Cairo in 1919. But this earlier activity was a facet of Christian missionary activity. The recent surge of American-style universities and joint campuses reflects something different, a worldwide recognition of the general excellence of, and worldwide demand for, the American model of secular higher education.

Troubling Patterns

It would be comforting to think—and easy complacently to assume—that the juggernaut of American higher education that I have just described, undoubtedly in somewhat idealized terms, will continue for the indefinite future. Such complacency is not possible, however, for all is not well in American universities today. And this has dire implications for MESA and its members, who—to paraphrase Chairman Mao—swim like fish in the water of the American university system. Maybe Rumi said it better: "Beauty surrounds us," for the American university has been a beautiful environment in which to work. However, the beauty, or the water, may be draining away.

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The general economic crisis that has affected the United States since 2008 has already resulted in sizeable reductions in government investment in the national infrastructure, including the higher educational infrastructure, by both the federal government and state governments.[4] For example, as most of you know, the Title VI grants that sustain our Middle East Centers were cut 47% two years ago. In the case of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Chicago, since about half of our grant funds were earmarked for salary support that cannot be cut, this has meant that virtually all our funding for programs—lectures, conferences, and the like—has been eliminated. On the national level, dealing with the looming "fiscal cliff" about which so much has recently been written (but so little has been done) will almost certainly mean further, and even more painful, reductions in funding for higher education in the years ahead. It will affect public universities most directly, but it will also affect private universities, even well-endowed ones, as research grants are reduced or cut out entirely. Ominous signs from Washington suggest that programs like Title VI and Fulbright may not long be with us—unless, that is, we can mobilize strong public support for what we do, an issue to which I shall return below.

The financial pressures faced by universities are threatening enough in themselves. But they are compounded by another problem, one that exacerbates the damaging impact of financial constraints. That is a trend toward greater bureaucratization in the university, and the increasing adoption of a top-down corporate model for university governance and management. This model is alien to the way colleges and universities traditionally operated. Of course, institutions must pay attention to financial matters, and always have, but the traditional style of management was one that gave individual teachers and departments a great deal of autonomy in how they pursued their teaching, their research, and the way they structured their programs; and, at research universities, faculty were left with sufficient free time to actually pursue original research and writing—the creation of new knowledge.

All this, and more, is changing rapidly in the new "corporate" university, many features of which have been described in a recent book by Professor Benjamin Ginsberg of Johns Hopkins University.[5] One aspect of these changes is an increase in administrative overhead. There has been a rapid—one might say metastatic—growth in the number of higher administrators and the administrative staff who serve them. To give just one statistic: in the twenty years between 1985 and 2005, student enrollments nationally increased 56 percent, and faculty numbers increased 50 percent, but administrators increased 85 percent and professional staff increased 240 percent.[6] Some institutions have such bloated administrations that they have twenty-five or more deanlets for every 100 students—in one egregious case, sixty-four

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deanlets per 100 students. (The national average is eight or nine per 100 students).[7] There are significant differences between institutions in this "administrative bloat," but the general trend is clear. Obviously, these extra administrators and staffers—many of whom, especially on the upper levels, earn considerably more than senior faculty in the humanities and social sciences[8]—consume university resources that do not go to the faculty or to the teaching mission of the institution.

There has also been a change in the nature of university administrators. In the past, most upper level university administrators were regular faculty who, after many years of teaching, agreed to serve a term as dean or provost, after which they returned to the faculty ranks. They understood teaching and research, and had no interest in building an administrative "empire" during their term of administrative service. Increasingly, however, upper level administrators—including university presidents—are being drawn not from the faculty ranks, but from cadres of people skilled in corporate management, who often have little knowledge of, and less sympathy for, the ethos of a research university. One result is that administrations have become more focused on securing lucrative grants, and less concerned about teaching and "basic research." Indeed, for many university administrators, only projects that can tap into large federal or private grants really qualify as "research"—as a respected colleague now himself engaged in high university administration informed me. What most of us do by way of archival research, he discovered—such as the study of texts, or the interviewing of groups of informants—is viewed by such administrators perhaps as a kind of professional hobby, but not really as research. And they see no reason why faculty should be given time to pursue such unremunerative "hobbies."[9]

This mentality leads some administrations to shift funding from the humanities and 'unremunerative' social sciences, like anthropology, to more 'vocational' programs like economics, engineering, and law. Some administrators also seek to reduce costs by increasing what they consider to be the efficiency of instructional programs—often, however, in ways that seriously undermine the educational mission. Language programs—so central to what we in MESA do—are in particular danger, because they require many small sections. Deans and higher administrators are tempted to minimize the ranks of lecturers by reducing their status from long-term staff to that of piece-workers, to be hired or released semester by semester in response to fluctuating demand. Such measures tend to demoralize the lecturers, and are based on the mistaken assumption that quality lecturers in Middle Eastern languages are easy to find. Equally important, such measures overlook the fact that a language program can develop strong enrollments only if a language is predictably taught, year

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in and year out, even if enrollments in some years are low: "list it and they will come." Or, at least they *may* come—but if a language is not regularly listed as available, one can be fairly sure that enrollments will atrophy over time.

The long-term target of sharp administrative knives, however, is not the lecturer cadres, but the regular faculty—particularly those who are not tapped into sizable science grants. When I started teaching in 1975, nearly 70% of university faculty in the United States (and 80% of full-time faculty) were tenured or on tenure-track. Now, that figure is 30%; the "missing" 40 or 50% have been replaced by part-timers and adjuncts—people paid by the course at a very low wage and frequently with no health or retirement benefits.[10] If our faculty jobs could be offshored to China or some other even cheaper labor market, I do not doubt that university administrators would already have done so (and "distance learning" may make this possible). The ideal, from the administrative perspective, would be to replace regular tenured faculty as much as possible with adjuncts, who can be hired and released at will, and many universities over the past forty years have come close to realizing this dream.

An especially disturbing example of this mentality was a proposal made a few years ago by the chancellor of the California State University system, who suggested that its institutions should adopt what he termed a "culture of graduation." The goal of striving to maximize graduation rates is actually laudable, in my view, but the centerpiece of his plan was to require entering freshmen to meet with an adviser and, after suitable consultation, to register in advance for *all* the courses they would take for their four years of study. Students would be allowed to change to different courses at a later date if they wished, or to take longer than four years to graduate—but only by paying a significant penalty for course change or delay.[11] The administrative goal in such a scheme seems to be to make the downstream demand for teachers in particular subjects predictable, so that the administration could lay off teachers for whom demand was low, and hire (on term contracts) teachers for whom demand was robust. The shift to large numbers of adjunct and part-time faculty obviously fits such a scheme, as it allows the administration to hire and release teachers on short notice. Tenured faculty, in such a scheme, are an impediment to attaining maximum flexibility in staffing.[12]

Such concerns are not merely hypothetical possibilities; several recent cases suggest that faculty tenure is becoming the target of corporate-mold administrators. Earlier this year, Wayne State University's administration made proposals during contract negotiations with the faculty union that were widely interpreted as an attack on faculty tenure. The changes would have allowed Wayne State to dismiss tenured faculty in programs the administration decided to eliminate or reduce. Is it a coincidence that the relatively new

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(2011) President of Wayne State, Allan D. Gilmour, is a former executive from the automotive industry with no prior experience in higher education except for a stint working as a teaching fellow during his studies for the MBA? Similar threats to tenure have recently surfaced at other institutions as well, including Florida State University and the University of Louisiana system; in the last instance, they seem to have been implemented.[13]

The corporate model that lies at the root of such efforts threatens to transform the university from an educational institution into a kind of factory, turning out graduates with maximum efficiency as if they were products, each identical with the next. But students aren't products; each is a unique individual, with unique contributions to make. The "efficiency" of the corporate model assumes that the university provides merely *training*—that is, instruction designed to instill a clearly-defined set of skills and facts, such as one might learn in a vocational program in arc welding or dentistry. But the university, and the liberal arts college, provide something other than mere training; their real and most important objective, and the one for which our best universities are rightly celebrated, is to provide *education*—which, as the etymology of the word itself suggests, means to "lead forth," to bring something of value out of the student.

The corporate model of "training" views the student as a passive, empty vessel being filled up with as much information as the container will hold; but we know that in fact, the student embarking on an education is setting out on a voyage of self-discovery, during which his or her inner resources are drawn out, developed, strengthened, sometimes indeed discovered. The corporate "one size fits all" model, which confuses training with education, simply cannot provide real education and, indeed, will thwart it. Think back on the rigid system of course registrations proposed as part of the "culture of graduation" scheme I mentioned a few minutes ago: it simply does not allow for individual discovery and growth, which would in fact be virtually eliminated by such a model.

Relationship to Academic Freedom

The drive by corporate administrators to replace tenured with adjunct faculty will, however, have other negative consequences—beyond undermining the true educational mission of the university. It will also affect the ability of the faculty to express controversial or unpopular opinions, and to pursue research on them. That is, it will affect academic freedom. The AAUP has for almost a century persistently recognized the crucial link between tenure and academic freedom.[14] As the dean of Yale Law school, Robert Post, recently noted, "Academic Freedom insulates scholars from the political pressure of

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public opinion so they can pursue the disciplinary practices by which expert knowledge is created and certified."[15] That is, academic freedom is also vital for intellectual productivity.

Adjunct faculty on term appointments, however, really have no academic freedom. If they make even one statement that is highly unpopular with someone, they can be attacked, and the administration of the university—often sensitive to the wishes of alumni and other potential donors—can simply hire someone else to do the job next time around. The demise of the tenure system will politicize the university, though its dismantling will be done in the guise of "controlling quality" by giving administrators a free hand to prune the university of "dead wood." The result will be faculties that are less secure and more ideologically homogeneous, all hewing the line deemed politically correct.

This should be an especially worrisome prospect for scholars in our field, Middle East studies, because we deal routinely with the many highly contentious issues that affect the region, whether it is Israel and Palestine, Turkey and the Armenians, the Kurds and their status in Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria, *salafis* vs. secularists, *shari'a* law vs. feminists, etc. I ask you, fellow members of MESA: is there even a single person among you who does not hold *some* opinion that could be called controversial, on some topic relating to the Middle East? I certainly hope not! Contention is a natural part of our complex region and the subjects we study. But the creeping insecurity of our employment, or of that of increasing numbers of those with whom we work and teach, is likely to mean that opinions that are deemed unpopular, no matter how well-founded in fact, are likely to become muted or simply self-censored, for fear of endangering the bearer's livelihood.

These trends are of general relevance within the university, but I think they are especially damaging to Middle East studies. It is of course also bad if they undermine quality teaching of what most might consider "mainstream" subjects, like calculus, genetics, or French literature. But calculus, genetics, and French literature are not subjects afflicted by widespread public ignorance or ill-will, as we know our fields unfortunately are. And ignorance of the Middle East is not limited only to the public. Even those in the media, who play a central role in setting the terms of national debate, and public officials responsible for formulating national policy, have repeatedly been shown to be woefully ignorant, or misinformed, about the Middle East, or capable of making willfully misleading statements about it. So to stifle the ability to speak out, of those in our society who are really well-informed about the Middle East—and that, fellow colleagues in MESA, means you—represents a serious threat to the national interest.

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In sum, the widespread and increasing pressure to make universities conform to the corporate model—often cloaked in optimistic rhetoric about "best practices"—threatens to corrode the essential virtues that have historically made American universities great. We must not let this happen.

What Can We Do?

What, then, can we do? There are several practical measures we can take to resist creeping corporatization of our universities.[16]

1) All faculty, especially tenured faculty, must be alert to what is going on, and become involved. Administrations will try to wrest real control of their institutions from faculty, and must be resisted by invoking the faculty governance clauses embedded in most university statues.
2) As tenured faculty, we should make an effort to secure faculty representation on our university's Board of Trustees.
3) Tenured faculty must stand up for, and work to improve, the status and privileges of our part-time and adjunct colleagues, including lecturers. Administrators may well try to pit us against one another, to mobilize the pride tenured faculty feel in their superior status and to convert it into disdain for our less-favored colleagues, but to succumb to this kind of flattery will be fatal. Our long-term goal must be, rather, to convert part-time and adjunct positions as much as possible back into full-time, tenure track positions. This will not happen overnight; just as it took thirty years and more for administrators to shift many faculty lines from tenure-track to adjunct, so it may take decades to effect a shift back. But it is essential to do so if we wish to restore the health of the university system.
4) Those of us who are tenured faculty must take on some administrative work ourselves; shunning it only leaves an administrative vacuum that will be filled by corporate staffers. The best bulwark against the corporate trend is probably to have respected colleagues holding positions as deans and provosts.
5) For adjunct faculty and those, such as lecturers, who toil in insecure positions with inadequate remuneration: organize yourselves! Statistics make it clear that pay and benefits are significantly better where adjuncts and other contingent labor are unionized.

These measures will not be easy, but they are essential, and may help us to resist the creeping corporatization of our universities and colleges, and keep the light of real education shining brightly.

A deeper problem, however, lies in the fact that work in the humanities and humanistic social sciences generally—the kind of research that most of us

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in MESA engage in—has lost much public support over the past half-century. And, without wide public support, it is not clear that we can long continue to enjoy government funding or even robust student enrollments. The relevance of medicine, law, business, engineering, economics, computer science, and the physical and biological sciences is patently obvious to everyone, and reinforced almost daily through new discoveries that promise to improve our lives or our wallets. They have become high-prestige fields, and are remunerated accordingly. The study of history, or literature, or religion, or culture, on the other hand, is I think viewed by many as a kind of luxury, an unnecessary frill. Some people—not a few, I am afraid—even express outright disdain for the humanities, which is, or should be, alarming.

It would be too facile simply to dismiss such people as philistines, as uncultured boors. Rather, I think that what we do as scholars is often disdained (by professionals, by scientists, by politicians and the public) simply because, as scholars in humanistic fields, we have failed to make clear the importance of what we do—or sometimes, even to make clear just what it is that we do. Literary studies in particular, during the 1970s and after, entered what might be called the "critical theory wilderness" when what passed for cutting-edge scholarship was virtually incomprehensible to most people, and scholars seemed to be more intent on showing what we could not know, rather than what we could. And, unfortunately, that mode of discourse was picked up by some other disciplines, particularly anthropology. I think, however, that this style of writing had a lot to do with the loss of public support for the humanities, for it came across to many people as obfuscation and superficial banality masquerading as profundity, and pretentiously claiming supreme significance.

I am admittedly not a student of literature or literary theory, but the literary theory of that era that I tried to read certainly appeared to me to be intentionally obscure—and I am an academician myself, and was trying to understand what these writers were saying. Perhaps an example can help make clear the nature of my disenchantment. At some point about twenty years ago, the noted French philosopher Jacques Derrida came to Chicago to give a series of lectures on "The Gift." As I had previously attempted, without much success, to grasp the significance of some of his writings, I thought it would be good to hear him in person, to see what he would say about "the gift." After a fulsome introduction by a colleague, Derrida began his oration, which opened with the statement that "When we think about it, we realize that the gift is impossible." This tantalizing opener was followed by at least forty minutes of, to me, incomprehensible ramblings. After about forty-five minutes, Derrida came to the end of the first part of his lecture, and summed up what he had covered so far by saying, "And so, we see that in order for

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there to be the gift, someone must give something to someone else." I thought: *It took us 45 minutes to get to this? Not a good cost-benefit ratio.* He then plunged into another oratorical fog, which I had to leave after a further quarter hour because I needed to fetch my kids from day care.

I'm not trying to argue that Derrida had nothing to say; I'm merely proposing that he chose to say it in a peculiarly murky and, I think, pompous way. His style of writing, however, seems to have been imitated by many in the field of literary theory in those days. Maybe what I gather to be Derrida's central insight is a valid one—that any gift inevitably brings with it a host of obligations on the recipient that undermine its quality as a pure gift—, but even if it is valid, the obscurity in which he chose to wrap his "insight" suggests that he was insecure about the significance or originality of what he was saying, and wished to conceal the obviousness of it, and enhance its sense of mystery and profundity, by obscuring it behind a veil of confusing verbiage.[18]

This is not a model of exposition I would recommend that we emulate. If those of us who work in the humanities and social sciences wish to regain and hold the support of the general public, of our political elites, and of the business and financial elites who shape so much of our public policy, in the Middle East and elsewhere, we cannot afford to engage in such obfuscation and word games. We must say what we mean, and say it clearly and directly, in terms that any person of average intelligence who is interested in our subject can grasp; otherwise, we will simply continue to lose market share in the marketplace of ideas. If our ideas, when expressed as simply as possible, seem banal—as, frankly, some of Derrida's ruminations on the gift seem to me—then perhaps we deserve to lose public support because we are not, in fact, contributing much by way of new insight.

But I think that we in MESA have less reason than some others in the academy to fear speaking plainly, because collectively we do have many important things to say. We know that ignorance of the Middle East, and gross distortions and misconceptions about it and its people, are still widespread in our society. We know that policies are formulated and implemented based on these flawed understandings. It is urgently important for us to dispel this ignorance and to confront these misconceptions, drawing on our specialized knowledge of the region, and the more plainly and unmistakably we express ourselves in doing so, the better. Indeed, as most of you know, "stereotype-busting" can be pretty much a full time job for all of us. We need to reach out and persuade our congressmen and our fellow citizens of the importance of what we do.

And so, dear colleagues in MESA, I urge you once again—as I did in my Presidential Letter early this year—to marshal your hard-earned insights into

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the Middle East, and to be bold in going forth to speak about it, and to write about it, and so to bring your insights with crystalline clarity to a broad public. They will thank you for it, and I thank you for your attention.

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End Notes

[1]For the construction of Islam and the Middle East as the West's "Other" see Norman Daniel, Abdul Latif Tibawi, 1963, 185-204 and 298-313; Tibawi, 1979, 3-54; Edward Said; John V. Tolan; and Zachary Lockman.

[2]I owe this bit of wit to Prof. M. Dali Islam of The College of Idaho, who in summer 2002 was a participant in an NEH Summer Institute of which I was co-director.

[3]Salient examples are the American University of Sharjah, founded 1997, or NYU's Abu Dhabi campus, which opened in 2010.

[4]The Obama administration's educational priorities are heavily weighted toward K-12 education; to the extent that it focuses on higher education about areas like the Middle East, its concern seems to be to spread knowledge of world areas to more students, rather than to encourage a few students to acquire "deep expertise" in foreign languages or cultures. See Karin Fischer, "U. S. Will Make Broader Global Skills for College Students a New Priority," *Chronicle of Higher Education* August 7, 2012. http://chronicle.com/article/US-Will-Make-Broader-Global/133435.

[5]Benjamin Ginsberg.

[6]Ginsberg, 28.

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[7]Ginsberg, 206.

[8]See for example www.collegiatetimes.com/databases/salaries/university-of-michigan-ann-arbor/ on University of Michigan salaries. Many law, medicine, and science faculty, and senior administrators, earn three to eight times more than senior faculty in humanities and social sciences. Other public universities, such as those in the California State or University of California systems, are also readily searchable online.

[9]Personal communication, MESA colleague, October 2011.

[10]Note the following two sobering reports on adjunct and part-time academic employment, both worth reading: "Contingent Academic Workforce Survey: A Portrait of Part-Time Faculty Members," at http://www.academicworkforce.org/survey.html, and "Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success," at http://www.uscrossier.org/pullias/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Delphi-Project_Report-on-Working-Meeting_Web-Version.pdf.

[11]My information on this program came from a California State employee. Fortunately, California Gov. Jerry Brown persuaded the trustees not to implement this policy: See http://www.contracostatimes.com/news/ci_22055568/contra-costa-times-editorial-brown-made-right-move.

[12]Since delivering this address, my attention has been called to an effort led by the Chancellor and Trustees of the City College of New York, called "Pathways," that seeks to increase graduation rates and ease transfers among campuses by reducing requirements of the undergraduate curriculum, including removing lab requirements from science courses and reducing language requirements. For a critical look at the program, see http://www.psc-cuny.org/our-campaigns/faculty-staff-and-students-mobilize-pathways-town-hall. For the university's official presentation, see http://www.cuny.edu/academics/initiatives/pathways.html.

[13]See Scott Jaschik.

[14]The AAUP has been enunciating this concern since 1915; the classic formulation is enshrined in its 1940 "Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure," available at http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/policydocs/contents/1940statement.htm.

[15]See Jared Wadley.

[16]Ginsberg, 201-219.

[17]My records suggest that the lecture I heard was presented by Derrida at the University of Chicago on Monday, April 22, 1991. It was presumably a distillation of ideas he had published in his book *Donner le temps. 1. La fausse monnaie*, Paris: Galilée, 1991, translated by Peggy Kamuf as *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. His discussion on pp. 11-12 of the English version seem to correspond roughly to some of what I heard.

[18]A clear, brief, and to my mind decisive refutation of Derrida and his school is John M. Ellis, *Against Deconstruction*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.

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