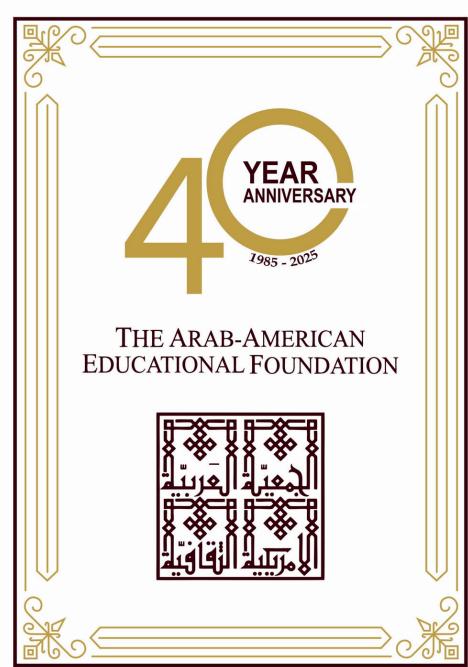




THE ARAB-AMERICAN
EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

ANNUAL REPORT



20
25



ARAB-AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION VISION AND MISSION

As part of our strategic planning process that was formalized in early 2025, the board updated AAEF's vision and mission.

Vision: A just and educated society that values the heritage and contributions of Arabs and Arab Americans.

Mission: To advance the understanding and appreciation of Arab and Arab American culture, history, and language through educational and academic initiatives.

The Arab-American Educational Foundation (AAEF) is a nonprofit organization. Since 1985, AAEF has been at the forefront of promoting Arab heritage in the U.S., fostering intellectual exchange, and supporting academic programs.

AAEF STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

- Build Capacity
- Engage in Educational Advocacy
- Expand Impact



Estevanico: Highlighting the Journey of Mustafa Azemmouri



Arab-American History Month 2-Day Educational Event

Featuring Keynote Address by Dr. Abdelkader Jamoussi and documentary screening at The Arab American Cultural & Community Center Friday, April 25th at 7 PM

Panel discussion on Saturday 26th, 10 AM at UH Student Center South (Astrodome Room)



AAEF 2025 ACHIEVEMENTS

This report is produced with deep gratitude to the community that made these achievements possible.

February: 40th Anniversary Kickoff Reception at the Houston Junior League. More than 150 guests were treated to refreshments, a **mayoral proclamation**, and a slide show highlighting 40 years of achievements and spotlighting major donors. Guests heard remarks from the AAEF President Aziz Shaibani, MD, AAEF Vice President Amer Al-Nahhas, Secretary Ruth Ann Skaff, the new U of H Chair of Modern Arab History, Hanan Hammad, PhD, and the new Program Director of the AAEF Center for Arab Studies, Patrick Higgins, PhD. We are also treated to remarks from graduate students supported by the AAEF Center for Arab Studies and the Rice University Chair of Arab Studies.

April: Co-sponsored Arab History Month events, including lectures on *Estevanico, the first Arab and Muslim in North America*.

May: Co-sponsored the *Gaza Habibi* Multimedia Exhibit.

August: Launched our **first national writing contest; we are grateful to the volunteer judges for the first round evaluating more than 40 submissions, and to final judge Sahar Mustafah. Winner and runners-up will be announced in early 2026.**

August–November: AAEF was matched with University of Houston classes on Public Relations and Social Media. The result was six rich proposals to improve marketing. We are grateful to instructor Jan Ulrich and her dedicated students.

GAZA HABIBI
جَازَةِ حَبِيبِي
Houston
May 15 to 24
2025
Opening Thursday
May 15 at 6 PM

My Beloved City
A Photography Exhibit
At MATCH
Midtown Arts & Theater Center Houston
3400 Main St, Houston, TX 77002, United States

AAEF THE ARAB-AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

40 THE ARAB-AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

AAEF فلسطين UNTQUD

THE ARAB-AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

The Arab American Short Story Writing Contest

Are you an Arab American with a story to tell? We are thrilled to announce AAEF's Short Story Contest celebrating the rich and diverse voices of Arab Americans living in the United States, creating a platform for understanding, celebration, and reflection.

This is your opportunity to share your unique journey—moments that have shaped your identity, challenged your perspectives, and brought meaning to your life. Whether your story is joyful, thought-provoking, or deeply personal, we want to hear it! Let your words bridge worlds, spark dialogue, and leave a lasting impact.

What We're Looking For

Short stories that explore themes such as:

- The formation of a dual identity as both Arab and American.
- The journey of navigating cultural, social, and personal identity.
- Struggles with conflicting social values and balancing multiple cultures.
- Experiences with perceived bias or misunderstanding.
- Joyful accounts of acculturation, assimilation, belonging, and community building.

Why Participate?

Top Prize: The winner will receive the prestigious AAEF Short Story Writing Contest Award and a cash prize of \$1,000.

Publication Opportunity: The selected story will be featured in a publication, amplifying your voice and inspiring others with your experiences.

Deadline to submit: October 15, 2025

How to Submit?

For rules and information on how to participate, please refer to the contest webpage at: <https://theaef.org/contest>

Contest Webpage

Submissions will be initially reviewed by a distinguished committee of professors.

Final judging will be by acclaimed author Sahar Mustafah. Other distinguished writing works include the novel *The Beauty of Your Face* and short stories "Star of Bethlehem" and "Tree of Life".

The Arab-American Educational Foundation (AAEF) is dedicated to upholding a fair and transparent selection process that amplifies the voices and lived experiences of Arab Americans.



uh.edu/class/aaefcas/

AAEF CENTER FOR ARAB STUDIES ACHIEVEMENTS

The Arab-American Educational Foundation Center for Arab Studies (AAEF-CAS) is the only academic center in Texas, and one of two in the United States, solely focusing on the Arab region. Based at the University of Houston's College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, CAS houses two major endowed positions: the Arab-American Educational Foundation Chair in Modern Arab History and the Arab-American Educational Foundation Dr. Burhan and Mrs. Misako Ajouz Endowed Professorship in Arab Studies.

The Arab-American Educational Foundation raised \$3 million to establish a Chair of Modern Arab History and the Arab-American Educational Foundation Center for Arab Studies (AAEF CAS) at the University of Houston, with endowed professorships and funding to support graduate students.

The AAEF was involved in discussions for **hiring the second AAEF Chair of Modern Arab History** after the departure of the inaugural chair. **Dr. Hanan Hammad was hired in 2024.** AAEF CAS then recruited **Dr. Patrick Higgins**, who earned his PhD through the Center, as the **first AAEF CAS Program Director** in January 2025.

Current Student Cohort Details: Total number 16 (10 Core Students focus on Arab Studies, 6 Affiliated Students work on transregional, Middle East and/or global south studies).

One newly recruited student started a PhD in history this fall. Four new students joined AAEF CAS from across UH including Public History, Department of Sociology and the College of Education.

Student support mechanisms include scholarships and professional development meetings.



Student Professional Development Efforts

Graduate student professional development luncheon, February 26, 2025, attended by 15 students.

Professional development session, last week of May, 2025, with medical history professor **Dr. Pratik Chakrabarti**.

Summer 2025 Writing Bootcamp for three weeks in May and June. The average attendance per day was 10–15 faculty and students.

Additional AAEF CAS Efforts

A flyer and call letter were sent to 35 professors in the field of Arab Studies, 20 academic centers/institutions, and all social media platforms.

AAEF CAS has added a Masters track program for incoming students.

To make a welcoming hub to all UH Faculty engaging with Arab Studies, AAEF CAS reaches out to colleagues across campus. This effort has succeeded in recruiting Dr. Marwa Ghazali, professor of anthropology, and Dr. Ali Yildirim, a visiting scholar in women's, gender, and sexuality studies.

Faculty and Student Achievements

Five students in the department **passed comprehensive exams into the All-But-Dissertation stage** of their doctoral study; one doctoral student submitted his completed dissertation.

AAEF CAS supported students embarking upon at least **19 professional development events**, including conferences, workshops, and readings in London, Harvard University, the Museum of Fine Arts-Houston, University of Bologna, and more. Students and faculty **published more than 14 articles** in peer-reviewed journals and other publications.



Dr. Patrick Higgins holds a PhD in History from the University of Houston and currently serves as Program Director of the Arab American Educational Foundation Center for Arab Studies.

AAEF CAS students and faculty received at least **five outside awards/recognitions**.



Maha Abdelwahab

PhD Candidate in Literature and Creative Writing Maha Abdelwahab read three of her poems, each a response to a different piece of Islamic art, at the Houston Museum of Fine Arts' "Art of the Islamic Worlds" entry of their Writers Remix Series.

PhD Candidate in History Rahil Asgari passed her comprehensive exams with distinction. She received the Ernesto Valdez Oral History Prize for her article "The Notebook, the Closet, and the Film: Iranians Processing Trauma Through Public History, Case Study: The 1988 Executions."

PhD Candidate in the Department of English Ibrahim Badshah presented papers at two conferences.

PhD student Muhammad Nurul Islam spent this summer at Harvard University's Institute for World Literature.

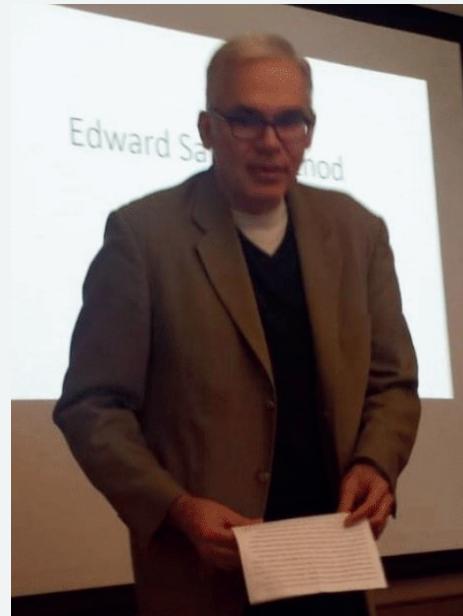
The former AAEF CAS Assistant Director and PhD student in Modern Arab History Fadi Kafeety has been appointed as the Program Manager of UC Berkeley's newly launched **Maha Abu** Palestinian and Arab Studies Program which is led by CAS Senior Fellow and inaugural Chair in Arab Studies at Rice University, the estimable Dr. Ussama Makdisi.



Rahil Asgari,

PhD Candidate in the Department of English Iqra Raza organized a panel titled "Representations of in/visibility: Human Rights Across Genres" at the 2025 Modern Language Association Meeting, was awarded the Outstanding Teaching Fellow Award from the Department of English.

Inaugural holder of the Arab-American Educational Foundation Burhan and Misako Ajouz Professorship in Arab Studies Dr. Hosam Aboul-Ela became the 2025-26 President of the American Comparative Literature Association.



**Dr. Hosam Aboul-Ela
Inaugural Holder of AAEF
Burhan and Misako Ajouz
Professorship of Arab
Studies**

Dr. Hayan Charara, Honors College Faculty, published several poems from his forthcoming collection and presented at two conferences.

Center Director and Arab-American Educational Foundation Chair in Modern Arab History Dr. Hanan Hammad delivered the keynote speech at the conference "Beyond Nostalgia: History and Archives of Vernacular Cosmopolitanism in Colonial Egypt" hosted by the University of Bologna. Dr. Hammad was invited to deliver presentations on her research in several international academic conventions.

Rand Khalil received the University of Houston Teaching Excellence Award for Spring 2024. She passed her comprehensive exams in April of 2024.

AAEF CAS Alumnus Dr. Derek Ide accepted the position of Visiting Professor for 2025-26 in the History Department at Grand Valley State University.

CAS PhD candidate Said Sultan Al-Hashimi successfully defended his dissertation with distinction and has been awarded his PhD. He also published his newest Arabic-language article in the Journal of Palestine Studies, titled "Palestine and the Omanis between the Nakba and the Flood: A Comparative Historical Reading of the Popular and Historical Positions."



Said Sultan Al-Hashimi, PhD

The AAEF Center for Arab Studies and The AAEF Burhan and Misako Ajouz Professorship invite you to 2024 Burhan Ajouz Lecture

Sentimental Adjustment Programs: Empathy as the Emotional Style of Neoliberalism

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 24, 2024
RECEPTION: 5:00 PM LECTURE: 5:30 PM
ALUMNI HALL (room 104), UH HILTON



Presented by:
Professor Joseph Slaughter, Columbia University

The rise of empathy in human rights discourse, literary studies, and cultural politics corresponds to both economic neoliberalization and coordinated obstruction of Third Worldist efforts to reform the international order in the 1970s and 80s. Far from providing an antidote to neoliberal globalization, empathy has become its dominant emotional style for responding to human suffering, promoting personal expressions of care over political mobilization and collective solidarity.

2025 AAEF Nijad and Zeina Fares Distinguished Lecture in Modern Arab Studies

ARAB BRAZIL: TERNARY ORIENTALISM AND THE QUESTION OF SOUTH-SOUTH COMPARISON

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2025
RECEPTION 5:30 PM LECTURE 6:00 PM
ALUMNI HALL (room 104), UH HILTON

Arab Brazil

Fictions of
Ternary Orientalism



Arabs have left a permanent imprint on Brazil from the Moorish legacy of Muslim Iberia, transmitted by Portuguese settlers to waves of Arab immigrants since the late nineteenth century; to the prominence today of Brazilians of Arab descent. The first book of its kind, *Arab Brazil: Fictions of Ternary Orientalism* explores representations of Arab and Muslim immigrants in Brazilian literature and popular culture since the early twentieth century. The book shows how the Arab world works paradoxically as a site of otherness and solidarity.

Wail S. Hassan
is a Professor of Comparative Literature and English at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. He is the author of *Immigrant Narratives: Oriental and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature* and *Arab Nights and the Politics of Cultural Translation*. His work explores Arabic and world literatures, translation, and cultural exchange.

www.uh.edu/class/aaefcas | [@ArabStudiesUH](https://ArabStudiesUH) | cas@central.uh.edu

Fall 2025 Nijad and Zeina Fares Distinguished Lecture in Modern Arab Studies

Wounds of War: How Conflict Rewrites the Boundaries of Medicine

WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 10, 2025
RECEPTION 5:30 PM LECTURE 6:00 PM
ALUMNI ROOM 104, UH HILTON



Dr. Omar Dewachi is a medical anthropologist, historian, and physician whose work explores the enduring legacies of war on health, medicine, and the body in the Middle East. Trained in medicine in Iraq and public health in Beirut, he received his PhD in Anthropology from Harvard University. He is the author of *Unforgettable Life: Medicine, Memory, and Trauma*. Dr. Omar Dewachi is now Associate Professor and Chair of Anthropology at Rutgers University. His research has been featured in *The New York Times*, *The Lancet*, and *Al Jazeera*, and he is a leading voice on the intersections of war, medicine, and the environment.

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AAEF CAS Event Highlights

Since Fall of 2024, the AAEF CAS has organized and/or co-organized/co-sponsored 14 educational and community-building events with hundreds of attendees. Event Brite was implemented to track RSVPs with many events reaching capacity. Some of the events are detailed here.

"Piracy and the Spanish Empire in the Pacific" with Drs. Kristie Flannery and Nine Abad.

**The Fall 2024 Burhan and Ajouz Misako Lecture,
"Sentimental Adjustment Programs: Empathy as the Emotional Style of Neoliberalism" with Dr. Joseph Slaughter of Columbia University.**

"The Unending War on Palestinian Children" with Drs. Fady Joudah and Heidi Morrison.

Film Screening of *Israelism* with Dr. Sarah Ann Minkin, Director of Programs and Partnerships at the Foundation for Middle East Peace and co-founder of the Palestinian Voices Study Group.

"Arab Brazil: Ternary Orientalism and the Question of South-South Comparison," 2025 Annual Nijad and Zeina Fares Distinguished Lecture in Modern Arab Studies, with novelist and University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Professor Dr. Wail S. Hassan.

"Wounds of War: How Conflict Rewrites the Boundaries of Medicine," Fall 2025 Nijad and Zeina Fares Distinguished Lecture in Modern Arab Studies, with Dr. Omar Dewachi, Rutgers University

In February of the Spring 2025 semester, **AAEF CAS co-sponsored with the UH Honors College “Palestinian Meditations in a Time of Annihilation,”** with Dr. Fady Joudah.

To celebrate both Ramadan and Arab Mother's Day 2025, **AAEF CAS hosted a special Arab Mother's Day Iftar Dinner** in March. CAS students, faculty, and community members shared a delicious meal while reflecting together on cherished Mother's Day memories and the day's cultural significance in Arabic music and art. The night culminated a special musical performance by local band Zaytounat (The Olives).

The annual **Paul Kardoush Memorial Endowed Lecture honored the beloved Lebanese singer Fayrouz in “Neighbor of the Moon: Fayrouz as a National Arab Icon.”** For this memorable combination of scholarship and music, AAEF CAS packed the palatial Student Center Theater to hear a lecture by ethnomusicologist and Humboldt postdoctoral researcher at the University of Würzburg **Dr. Loab Hammud**, followed by a live performance of Fayrouz classics by Hammud on the oud, Syrian singer **Liliane Kheirbek** on vocals, and **Suleiman Aldalgamone** on percussions.

AAEF CAS's Spring Virtual Lecture Series addressed some of the most urgent crises and dilemmas confronting the Arab region today.

AAEF CAS concluded the Spring 2025 semester with **“Estevanico: The Journey of Mustafa Azemmouri,”** a unique collaboration with the Arab-American Educational Foundation, the Arab American Cultural and Community Center, and the Moroccan Society of Houston, that traced the footsteps of the remarkable African Muslim explorer Mustafa Azemmouri (known also as Estevanico) through Southwestern North America.

Current and Upcoming Projects

Building out infrastructure, starting with the completion of by-laws, and building community connections by continuing to add official affiliations with other UH centers and departments. The center will be moving to another building over winter break.

RICE UNIVERSITY AAEF CHAIR AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENTS



Abdel Razzaq Takriti, PhD

The Rice University Chair of Arab Studies was endowed by the AAEF in 1995. The second holder of the chair, following after inaugural holder Ussama Makdisi, is Abdel Razzaq Takriti, PhD, who was the inaugural holder of the AAEF Chair of Modern Arab History at the University of Houston.

Since joining the Rice University History department, Abed has recruited graduate students with excellent promise, including students who hold MA degrees from institutions such as New York University, University College Dublin, and the University of Chicago.

In 2024, Abed helped to organize an academic conference in Houston about the Gaza genocide. Abed is on sabbatical working on his next book this semester.

The Rice University – University of Houston collaboration is progressing with students still able to take credit classes at the other university.

Two Rice University PhD graduates, Nathaniel George and Cyma Farah, have found excellent positions.

Nate is now at the University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies. Nate published an article in the *American Historical Review*, a journal for which only 8-10% of submissions are accepted.

Cyma is a research associate at Oxford University working on the Lebanese constitution and with a particular interest in French colonialism in the Levant.



Cyma Farah, PhD

DONOR IMPACT

Total Value of AAEF Endowment Funds at Rice University as of June 30, 2024: \$4,272,834.74

Total Value of AAEF Endowment Funds at University of Houston as of August 31, 2024: \$4,172,748.08

Major Donors to AAEF Projects

\$750,000

Burhan and Misako Ajouz

\$500,000

Farouk Shami

\$250,000 Family

Issa Cook

Nijad and Zeina Fares

Michael and Hoda Kardoush

\$50,000

Wajih Abu Rish

Mahmoud Rabie

Palestinian American

Cultural Center

\$25,000

Rauf Diab

Mohammed Salhoot

Hatem Saqr

Aziz Shaibani, MD

The impressive achievements of the Chair and Center for Arab Studies at the University of Houston and the Chair at Rice University have the same roots – the generous donations from members of the community and the work of dedicated board members.

We salute the top ten donors who made it possible to establish endowed lectures, professorships, stipends for graduate students, scholarly research telling the story of people from the Arab regions, and the AAEF Center for Arab Studies.. In just the past year, hundreds of students and community members have attended the events produced by the AAEF as well as the Chairs of Arab Studies and History and the AAEF Center for Arab Studies, advancing our mission. Since our programs were established, thousands of people have attended educational and cultural events.

Many other donations contributed to reach the total goal of \$3 million for the programs at the University of Houston, in addition to the initial \$1 million endowment at Rice University for the Chair of Arab History. The endowments for both universities are producing excellent growth.

The Arab-American Educational Foundation expresses its deep gratitude to everyone who contributed to these vital programs and initiatives. We produced this report so that the community can see the power of what has been established now and into the future.

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON ENDOWMENT

MAJOR DONOR HIGHLIGHTS

Burhan and Misako Ajouz Endowed Professorship



Dr. Burhan and Mrs. Misako Ajouz

\$750,000

Dr. Burhan and Mrs. Misako Ajouz established the Arab-American Educational Foundation

Dr. Burhan and Mrs. Misako Ajouz Endowed Professorship in Arab Studies. The professorship is affiliated with the AAEF Center for Arab Studies at the University of Houston.

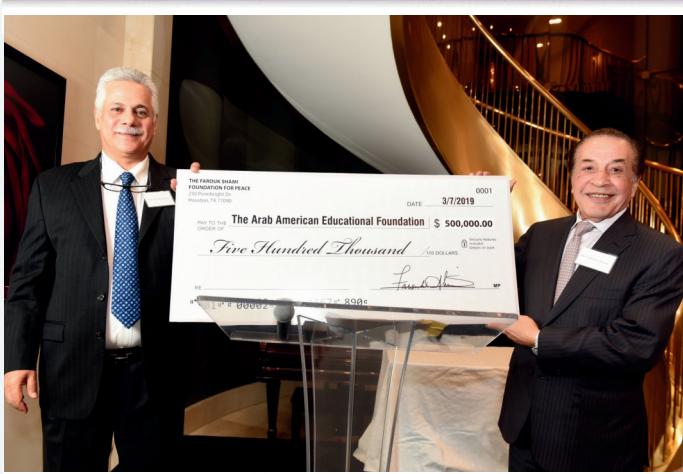
Dr. Hosam Aboul-Ela is the inaugural holder of this professorship.

AAEF Farouk Shami Graduate Colloquium

\$500,000

The AAEF Farouk Shami Graduate Colloquium Endowment was established by Palestinian-American businessman, philanthropist, and former Texas gubernatorial candidate Farouk Shami to support national graduate colloquia in Arab Studies at the University of Houston.

This endowment will empower several educational endeavors by providing graduate students with the opportunity to collaborate with other aspiring academics in spaces that are conducive to critical learning and scholarship.

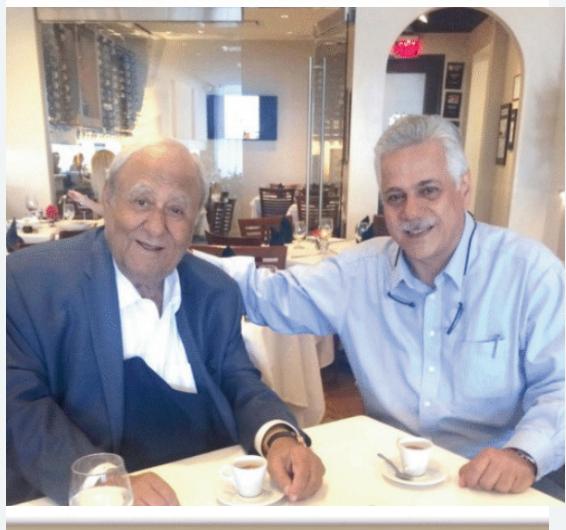


Farouk Shami, right, with AAEF President Aziz Shaibani, MD

\$250,000

Issa B. Cook Family Scholarship Endowment

The Issa B. Cook Family scholarship in Arab Studies was established in 2015. Funds from this scholarship are awarded to graduate students on an annual basis to sustain their research efforts throughout their time in the program. The scholarship honors the legacy of the late Issa B. Cook, who was a highly respected figure within the Arab-American community in Houston.



The late Issa B. Cook, left, with AAEF President Aziz Shaibani, MD



Michel and Hoda Kardoush

AAEF Paul Kardoush Lecture Series

The AAEF Paul Kardoush Lecture Series was established in 2019 by Paul's parents, Michel and Hoda Kardoush, to celebrate the memory of his dynamic life. Paul Kardoush (1972-1997) was an erudite and exemplary student who aspired to become a doctor of medicine, all while maintaining a deep fascination and passion for understanding Middle Eastern history and culture through his roots as a Houstonian of Palestinian and Egyptian descent.



Nijad and Zeina Fares

AAEF Fares Family Lecture Series

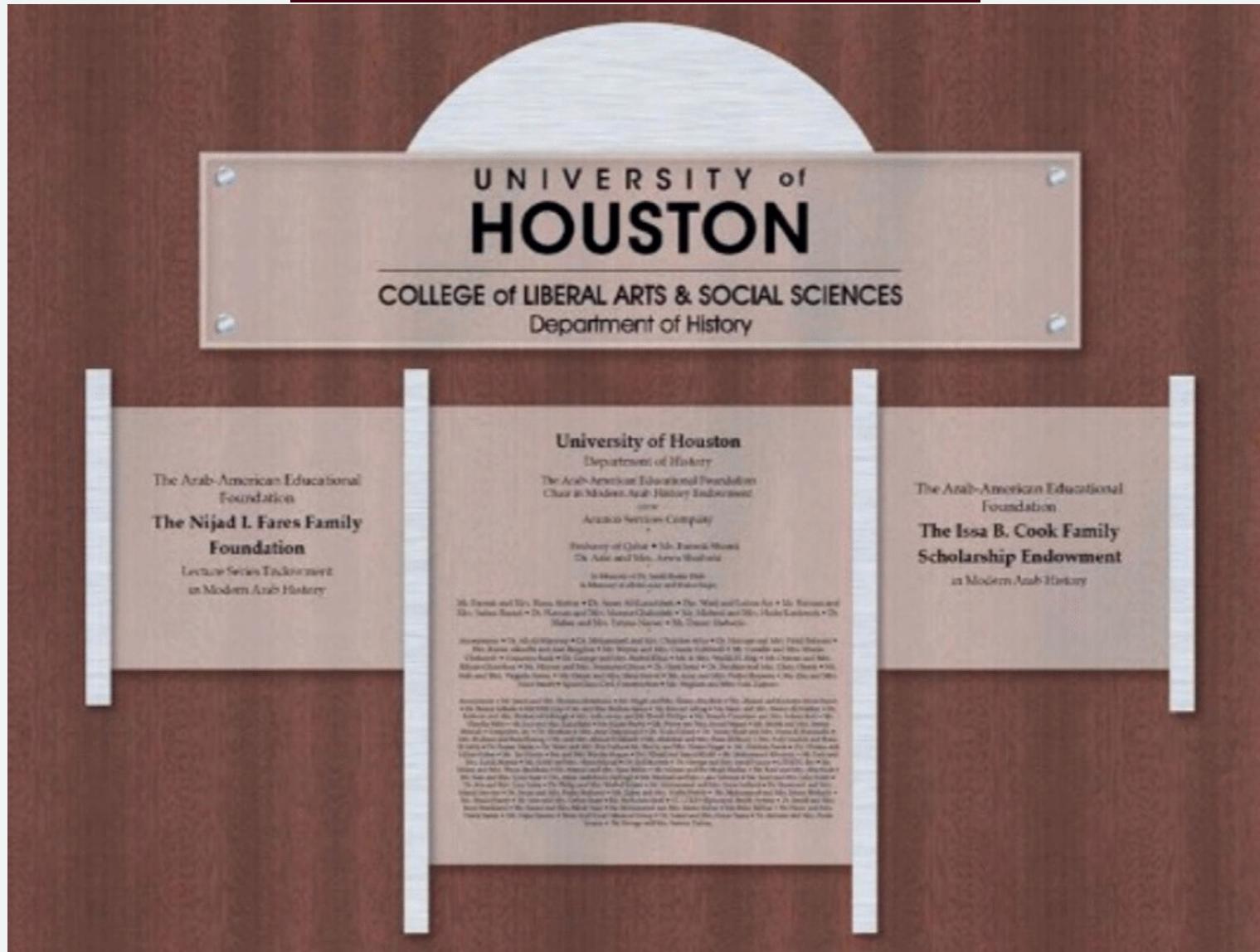
The AAEF Nijad and Zeina Fares Lecture Series was established to complement and enhance the Arab Studies program at the University of Houston. By attracting respected historians, authors, and other figures in academia, the lecture series hopes to foster cultural dialogue and initiate discussions about the Arab world through an academic lens and focus.

Mahmoud Darwish Endowment

- Wagih Abu Rish
- Palestinian American Cultural Center
- Dr. Mahmoud Rabie
- Mohammed Salhoot
- Dr. Hatem Saeer
- Dr. Samir Tuma

The AAEF Mahmoud Darwish Center for Arab Studies Endowment was created in the memory of renowned Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, who passed away in Houston on August 9, 2008, after undergoing heart surgery at the Texas Medical Center. CAS honors the life of Darwish through a variety of graduate research opportunities and community outreach activities.

University Plaque of Donors



Arab American Educational Foundation Directors



Aziz Shaibani, MD

Neurologist
AAEF President



Amer Al-Nahhas
Construction Executive
AAEF Vice President



Saib Saour
Engineering Executive
AAEF Treasurer



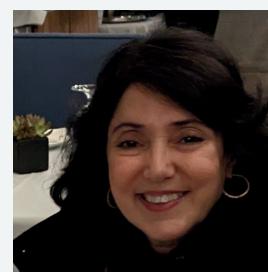
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Claudia Baba
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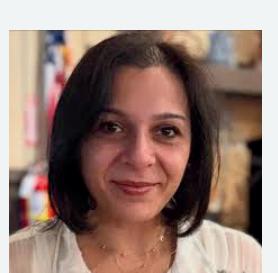
Malek Bohsali
Real Estate Entrepreneur
AAEF Finance &
Rice University Liaison



Ali Daher, CPA
Accountant
AAEF Finance



Rauf Diab
Luxury Boat & RV
Consultant
AAEF Marketing



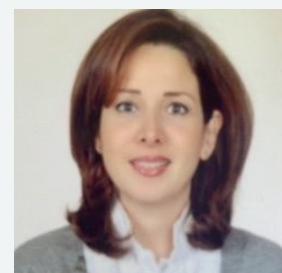
Rolla Elsaiary
Assistant Principal
Arabic Immersion
Magnet School



Lina Sabouni, AIA
Architect
Arabic Immersion Magnet
School Liaison



Faiza Zalila, PhD
Professor
AAEF Marketing & Education



Samar Zahrawi, PhD
Professor
AAEF Story Writing Contest



**The Arab American Educational Foundation
Directors express our deep gratitude to all who
support our mission.**

**Thanks also to Lindsey Craven for providing pro bono
marketing consultation in 2025, and to this year's
student interns, Sara Partida and Edna Gonzalez.**

**Not pictured: 2025 board members DeeDee Baba,
Rolla Elsaiary, and Faiza Zalila**

*Thank
You*



الحكي مش مثل الشوفة.
Speaking is not like seeing.

Website: <https://theaaef.org>

