What is the Arab American Cultural Center?

“My hopes and dream with the center is that by integrating Arab and Muslim communities into campus life and into the fabric of diversity at UIC, when administration or faculty and staff think about the needs of our students, they see all of the diversity in our communities.” – Nadine Naber, Director

We are Palestinians Iraqis Kuwaitis Yemenis Saudi Arabians Bahrainis Jordanian Lebanese Omanis Syrian Qatari Emiratiean Egyptians Libyans Tunisians Djiboutian Moroccans Algerians Sudanese Eritreans & Mauritians; we are Maronites Catholics Jews Protestants Greek Orthodox Sunnis Ismaili Shia Druze Sufis Alawites Nestorians Assyrians Copts Chaldeans & Bahais; we are Amazigh Kurds Armenians Bedu Shirazi Roma & many others with different languages religions ethnic & national identifications & cultures who are all congealed as Arab in popular representation whether or not those people may identify as Arab

Inspired by Suad Joseph, 1990
Our History
The Arab American Cultural Center (ARABAMCC) is the first cultural center serving Arab students on a college campus in the United States. It was born out of decades of Arab student organizing at UIC. Between 2013 and 2015, the Arab and Muslim American Community Network brought faculty and students together who determined the need for a space for building community and contributing more fully to UIC. In 2015, a working group labored tirelessly with the administration to propose an Arab American Cultural Center at UIC. The ARABAMCC opened its doors in October 2017 and is part of UIC’s seven Centers for Cultural Understanding and Social Change (CCUSC) within the Office of Diversity.

Our Mission
The Arab American Cultural Center seeks to affirm the diverse needs of the Arab American students; to increase awareness about Arab American cultures and histories; and to build community, solidarity, and safe spaces while promoting social justice, equality, and inclusivity at UIC and the Chicagoland area.

Our Vision
The Arab American Cultural Center serves individuals who affiliate with Arab and Arab American cultures, languages, and communities as well as anyone interested in building alliances with our communities.
Documenting the Growth of the Center

In Fall 2017, the ARABAMCC released a new video about the creation of the center and its activities in the first year of operation. Co-produced by Erin Turney and Sangi Ravichandran with videography by Ahmed Hamad, the video can be viewed at arabamcc.uic.edu
In its second year, the ARABAMCC sought to expand its service to UIC by strengthening its infrastructure, increasing its visibility, educating the campus about Arab American identity, expanding its collaboration with other centers, documenting the needs of Arab and Muslim American students, supporting and encouraging Arab American arts and cultural heritage at UIC, and providing training and professional development for undergraduate staff, interns, and task force members. The ARABAMCC also continued to support the ongoing and growing needs of Arab and Muslim American students at UIC while developing partnerships with Chicagoland communities, including the Council on American Islamic Relations, the Arab American Action Network, and the Chicago Cultural Alliance.

The ARABAMCC flourished in addressing its goals, drawing higher event turnouts. It expanded its reach, adding 400 students to its listserv and communicating more frequently through weekly newsletters. It finalized its staff manual and increased staff trainings and professional development. It redesigned its physical space, including hosting two exhibits displaying Arab American art from across the U.S. It provided community meeting space for groups like like USPCN, Lifted Voices, Love & Protect, and Grassroots Collaborative while serving as a welcoming home to a growing number of students, faculty, and staff. The ARABAMCC conducted a preliminary study of the needs and experiences of Arab American students at UIC. It will use the findings to continue working towards its mission in Fall 2018.

“The Arab American Cultural Center is a platform where I can have my voice heard and make the general public aware of what’s going on. I hope it inspires other schools to open up a cultural center like this because Arab students need somewhere to call home in a college campus.”

-Nadia Alzerijawi, UIC undergraduate student
Academic and Student Support

Relaxation Nation, Coffee and Cram  October 11, 2017; December 5-8, 2017; May 1-10, 2018
Extended hours, coffee, tea, snacks, bubble wrap popping, stress balls, fabric art and coloring, and massages for students studying for midterms and finals.

American Studies Association Meeting Session: Connect Chicago  October 19, 2017

Anthropological Innovations Seminar  April 5, 2018
Talk by Lara Deeb, Professor at Scripps College, on “Preliminary Reflections On Sectarianism and Intermarriage in Lebanon” as part of the Anthropological Innovations Seminar.

Buddy System  Ongoing
A buddy system that partners international Arabic speaking students with UIC students who can assist them with language barriers that may impact their education and career goals.

ARABAMCC Student Task Force  Ongoing
New leadership body that worked with staff to increase student involvement in ARABAMCC by serving as liaison to student organizations and the student body, jump-starting events relevant to student interests, and assisting staff in increasing awareness about Arabs and Muslims on campus.

Civic Dialogue: Halakat Nikash [Discussion Circle]  February 8, 2018
A conversation about Arabs on the 2020 Census and federal attempts to block a new category for Arab Americans and other Middle East and North African communities on the US Census.
The ARABAMCC organized its programs around a new campaign called “404 ERROR DEMOGRAPHIC NOT FOUND: A Campaign About Arab American Identity.” In alignment with its goals to educate the UIC campus about Arab American identity, the campaign focused on five artistic and cultural events that celebrated Arab American heritage while also bringing awareness to the invisibility or lack of knowledge about Arab Americans today, including not being counted or recognized in the federal census. The artistic and cultural events were organized under the ARABAMCC’s ongoing series Layali al Fan [Art Nights], including monthly events that bring the oral, dance, and musical traditions of the Arab region to the UIC community. At Layali Al Fan, we turn to our inspiring cultural artists and traditions to supply us with love, strength, and resilience, and to foster new connections across campus.

The ARABAMCC also produced educational materials and workshops for the 404 Campaign focusing on the theme: “Who is Arab American?” ARABAMCC staff led workshops at faculty meetings, in classrooms, and to the undergraduate advisors. It also strengthened its relationship with other CCUSC units, academic departments, and initiatives at UIC through co-organized and co-sponsored events.
Arts & Culture

Tunjarat Tata al Tayebah (My Grandma’s Tasty Cooking)  September 14, 2017
Tasting and cooking event where participants learned about diverse Arab cultures by exploring food items native to the Arab world, learning to make their own Hummus, Tabouleh, Qahwa/Coffee Arabiya, Maramiya Tea, and Mint Lemonade.

Arab Game Show Night  October 26, 2017
A fun night of elimination games, challenges, contests, and prizes focused on educating the campus about Arab and Arab American history and culture.

You Think You Can Dabke?  November 30, 2017
An interactive evening workshop of dabke, an Arab folk dance, led by Ahmed Hamad, a Chicago-based performer & instructor.

Arab Film Fest  February 15, 2018
First annual ARABAMCC Film Festival, screening six short Arab films followed by discussions with professors, filmmakers, and students. Films: Laila’s Birthday, Nation Estate, The Square, Planet of the Arabs, Barakah Meets Barakah, and Ave Maria.

Omar Offendum Arab Hip Hop Workshop  March 21, 2018
A talk and performance by Omar Offendum, a Los Angeles-based Syrian American rapper/poet. Students asked questions about Omar’s poetry, his music, and his humanitarian work in this interactive event. Co-sponsored with GLAS and MSA.

Art Installations in ARABAMCC Gallery  Ongoing
September 27 - December 15: Zeinab Saab  February 20 – May 20: Nadia Awad
Establishing ARABAMCC Traditions

“Record! I am an Arab!”
September 16, 2017
A UIC Orientation event where ARABAMCC staff welcome new students with activities that affirm Arab and Arab American identities through the arts and a celebration of Arab traditions, histories, and communities.

Open Houses: Fall and Spring Semesters
September 27, 2017 and January 23, 2018
Open House celebration for UIC community to enjoy the newly redesigned space and learn about programs, ways to get involved, events, and affiliated student groups.
2nd Annual Zaffah, Knafah, & a Graduation Haflah  April 17, 2018
Second Arab graduation at UIC, including live traditional zaffah music and dance by Chicago Zaffa, Arab sweets, and a commencement speech by Camille Odeh, a long-time Chicago community organizer who founded and directed the Southwest Youth Collaborative. The event honored 70 graduates, with over 300 attendees including families, community members, and students.

“One of your parents left everything they knew to come to the U.S.--for your education--and some of your families have lost their land or their homes and survived war and displacement before you made it today. Now, you are here, making history, at UIC’s second Arab American graduation.” – Nadine Naber

One Year Anniversary  March 6, 2018
One-year anniversary of the opening of the first Arab American Cultural Center on a college campus, honoring the center’s founders, sharing a meal, and screen printing tote bags. The event featured keynote speaker Suzanne Adely, a human rights lawyer and global labor organizer who has made pioneering contributions to feminist and labor struggles in New York, Chicago, India, and the Middle East and North African region.
Strengthening Connections

In its second year, the ARABAMCC embraced its role as “a space for Arab students to produce community and also to produce connections with other group of students, faculties, allies on campus.”

– Rod Ferguson, UIC GWS, AAS Professor

Targeted Other
October 19, 2017
with Asian Resource Cultural Center, JASC, Chicago Japanese American Historical Society, AAAN, Kansha Project
Discussion around how Japanese Americans and Arab Americans experience living in a society where your culture makes you a target for hatred.

Let’s Talk About It
October 23, 2017
with Women Learning Resource Center
Screening of the documentary about immigrant women’s stories of domestic violence and dialogue with Apna Ghar staff.

Resisting Surveillance
October 24, 2017
with AFSC, SJI, Teachers for Social Justice
Panel discussion with community organizers from the Arab American Action Network and Black Youth Project 100 about surveillance in Chicago and how communities are resisting.

Building Global Resistance
October 26, 2017
with LCC, LALS, IRRPP, NASP, Hull House, SJI
Discussion about local and global struggles against racism, sexist violence, colonialism, and displacement, with speakers from Honduras, UIC Native American Student Organization, 360 Nation, and UIC SJP.

Limits of Whiteness
February 6, 2018
with SJI and Middle Eastern and Muslim Societies Cluster Initiative
Talk by Professor Neda Maghbouleh about Iranian Americans and the Everyday Politics of Race.

Feminist Filipina Women
March 15, 2018
with GLAS, SJI, AARCC, Native American Support Program, GWS, AAS, WLRC, Hull House, Chicago Cultural Alliance
Talk on multi-media feminist Filipino American artist Stephanie Syjuco by Dr. Sarita Echavez See, Professor at the University of California Riverside, as part of International Women’s Day 2018 celebrations.

The Pulse of Queer Life: Arab Bodies in Gay Bars
April 2, 2018
with GWS, Racialized Body Cluster
Lecture by Dr. Mejdulene Shomali from University of Maryland on how Arab bodies are inhabited or forbidden from gay spaces.

Kali Akuno Book Talk and Discussion
April 9, 2018
with SJI, IRRPP, AAS, Great Cities Institute
Discussion about struggles for economic democracy and Black self-determination with Kali Akuno, co-founder of Cooperation Jackson, a network of worker cooperatives in Jackson, Mississippi.

The Revolution Will Be Intersectional: Immigration
April 24, 2018
with Feminist and LGBTQ Students Against Institutional Violence, CCUSC, Urban Planning, CLJ, GWS, SJI
Talk on the way immigration struggles impact women of color and survivors of gender violence by Radhika Sharma Gordon, Chicago-based anti-violence organizer.
Thank You

The following groups and individuals made the work of the ARABAMCC possible in the 2017-2018 school year.

UIC Divisions
African-American Cultural Center (AACC); Asian American Resource and Cultural Center (AARCC); Campus Advocacy Network (CAN); Department of African American Studies (DAAS); Department of Criminology, Law, and Justice; Department of Classics and Mediterranean Studies; Department of English; Department of History; Gender and Sexuality Center (GSC); Gender and Women’s Studies Program (GWS); Global Asian Studies Program (GLAS); Institute for the Humanities; College of Letters Arts and Sciences; Latin American and Latino Studies (LALS) Program; Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy (IRRPP); Middle East and Muslim Societies Cluster; Native American Support Program (NASP); Office of Admissions; Office of the Chancellor; Office of the Dean of Students; Office of Diversity; Office of the Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs; Undocumented Student Support; Rafael Cintron Ortiz Latino Cultural Center (LCC); Social Justice Initiative (SJI); Women’s Leadership and Resource Center (WLRC).

Individuals
Sarah Abboud, Professor
Jennie Brier, Professor
Andy Clarno, Professor
Anna Guevarra, Professor
Bassem Kawar, Community Member
Husam Marajda, Community Member
Nicole Nguyen, Professor
Jane Rhodes, Professor
Gayatri Reddy, Professor
Muhammad Sankari, Community Member
Karen Su, Professor

Student Groups
Muslim Students Association (MSA)
Palestinian Children’s Relief Fund (PCRF)
Saudi Students Association
Students for the Advancement of Freedom Equality, and Human Rights (SAFEHR)
Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP)
Thaakat

ARABAMCC Student Task Force & Interns
Nayfah Thnaibat
Dijana Rahmanovic
Nadia Alzerijawi
Mariam Al-Ramahi
Omar Awadh
Siham Elsamahi
2017-2018
ARABAMCC Staff

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