Knowing your Neighbors: Engaging with Community Experts in Outreach to K-12 Educators

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Community Partnerships

- Go beyond university resources to partner with local community experts and organizations with ties to the region of study
- Celebrate the value of different kinds of expertise
- Help teachers make connections within their communities
- Provide opportunities for experiential learning
Middle East and African Cultures Teacher Fellows program

- Enhance teachers’ area studies expertise in Middle East and African studies
- Highlight Middle Eastern and African culture, history, and communities
- Structured site-visits across NC (performance, mosque, food tour, refugee resettlement agency, Lebanese and Iranian cultural societies)
- Develop culturally responsive pedagogy
- Migration and Diaspora; Shared Histories & Cultural Retention; Cultural Landscape & Community
Connecting the Middle East to the Southeast local study tour

- Local “immersion experience”
- Visits to local places with connections to the Middle East, such as cultural facilities, restaurants, and commercial enterprises
- Educational sessions by Consortium faculty and community experts
- Aim to equip teachers with strategies to make the region relevant to NC students
Participatory community methods

- Participatory planning: community knowledge is different than the scholarly experts’ but equally valuable
- Knowledge is shared
- Involve community members actively in the decision-making process
- Participation can be: information sharing, consultations, shared control over decision-making, or transfer of control over decision-making and resources to stakeholders
- Community mapping
- Understand different power dynamics in communities
Evaluation

- Over the past three years, 63 teachers have participated in local study tours; 100% of teachers reported that the program increased their understanding of the Middle East
- 98% reported feeling prepared to enhance their lessons and activities with content from the study tour
- 13 current MEAC fellows
- Evaluation in December

“"I feel that I have a better understanding as a whole of the religion, a deeper respect for the individuals, and a desire to be more loving, accepting, accommodating, and protecting of future students.”
- 6th & 8th Grade Math & Science Teacher, Eastern Wayne Middle School
Lessons learned

- Take time for relationship building
- Learn what the community wants to share
- Open communication important; importance of fostering dialogue
- Mutual respect
- Connections make concepts tangible for teachers
- Troubleshooting off-site
- Flexibility is key
Thank you!

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