



The Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies

مرکز شرین و بشرن مصوررحمانی برای مطالعات ایران و خلیج فارس

DIRECTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2013-2014

This brief report is intended to inform about the first year for the Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies (hereafter the Mossavar-Rahmani Center). 2013-2014 saw a number of important and exciting developments that mark the opening phase of our activities in respect of teaching, research and supporting the growth and strengthening of Iranian Studies in the widest sense both on the Princeton campus and more broadly in the USA. Our official public launch is scheduled for Tuesday October 14th, when we will have a public lecture followed by a reception and small exhibition in the Princeton Art Museum, followed in turn by a dinner in honor of our benefactors, colleagues and all those who have helped establish the Center.

Our mission

The purpose of the Mossavar-Rahmani Center is to support teaching and research on all aspects of Iran and Persian Gulf studies at Princeton University. The Mossavar-Rahmani Center will employ a comprehensive interdisciplinary approach to advancing the understanding of Iran and the Persian Gulf, with special attention to the region's role and significance in the contemporary world. The Mossavar-Rahmani Center's scholars and students will explore a broad range of topics including but not limited to such policy issues as the impact of Iran and the Persian Gulf on regional and international security, oil and energy markets, trade and global finance. Scholars will conduct research and teach courses that address the history, politics, economics, religion, literature, art and culture of the region, from ancient Persia to the modern states that border the Persian Gulf. We will, by virtue of our wide-ranging and inclusive approach to Iranian and broader Persian Gulf studies, create and support productive and innovative connections to departments throughout the University.

Our goals may be summarized as follows:

- to build world-class intellectual and academic capacity in the field of Iran and Persian Gulf Studies
- to draw outstanding talent into the Mossavar-Rahmani Center
- to facilitate outreach through international conferences, film festivals, lecture series, concerts and publications programs
- to promote understanding of Iranian society and culture
- to support Iranian-American students and students from Iran and the Persian Gulf at Princeton, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels, regardless of their fields of study
- to draw visiting faculty and scholars from Iran and the Persian Gulf to Princeton
- to support faculty and student travel, study and research in Iran and the Persian Gulf

The purpose of this short report is to enumerate the main accomplishments of the Center in its first year, all steps intended to establish a sound basis from which the Mossavar-Rahmani Center can achieve the goals set out above. I should stress at the outset that we have benefited greatly from the enthusiastic support of colleagues across the Princeton University community, and in particular from Near Eastern Studies, Sociology, PIIRS, the Woodrow Wilson School and the History Department; while the members of the Executive Committee have worked particularly effectively to help the Center off to a flying start. I cannot overemphasize the fact that our successful first year is a result of the support and teamwork of all those involved, and demonstrates very clearly what can be achieved in a short time through a combination of expertise, commitment, goodwill and enthusiasm. I should like to single out for special thanks my diligent, enthusiastic and immensely knowledgeable Associate Director, Dr. Kevan Harris, without whose support, hard work and ideas we would not have made the progress indicated in this report.

1. Our **webpages** were formally launched in late January this year: go to www.princeton.edu/iran, where you can also see our new logo. The webpages will be constantly updated, especially in respect of events, resources and courses, and we hope that the resources section in particular will soon grow into a major national and international resource for all aspects of Iranian and Iran-related study and research.
2. We moved into our **new office space** in Green Hall, on Washington St., opposite the Firestone Library, where we now have on the second floor a staff office and reception

area, five faculty offices, a seminar/meeting room, and a shared common room. Currently two of these rooms are occupied (by the Director and Associate Director, Dr. Kevan Harris), but in the course of the fall semester three others will be occupied by a center manager, an associate researcher and a newly-appointed postdoctoral researcher.

3. As noted in the foregoing, we have recently appointed a **postdoctoral researcher**, Dr. Rose Wellman, currently of the University of Virginia. Dr. Wellman is a sociocultural anthropologist working on a new project entitled *The Family, Shi'ism, and the Making of Post-Revolutionary Iran*, drawing on several years of ethnographic research between 2007-2010 in the Islamic Republic. She will take up her post in September 2014.
4. We will conduct a search in 2014-15 for a **second postdoctoral position**, specializing in Iranian and Gulf oil politics, economics and/or diplomacy. With these two positions we will position ourselves very clearly to make a substantial contribution both to the scholarship and further study of the region as well as to understanding the culture, politics and international situation of the region.
5. We are currently searching for a **manager/administrator** to take up a post in the Mossavar-Rahmani Center in the fall.
6. In collaboration with the Department of Art History & Archaeology we hosted in May an **opening public lecture** by the internationally-recognized historian of Islamic and Persianate art, Dr. Michael Barry, which was a great success – the talk was given in McCormick Hall 106, and the lecture theater was filled to overflowing.
7. Our formal program of **lectures and seminars** will begin in the fall of 2014. We currently plan 3 seminars each semester, with invited specialists from a range of different fields; as well as an occasional public lecture. The program for the fall semester is currently being finalized, that for the spring is currently being planned. Invited speakers for the fall semester include Jason Rezaian, Washington Post Correspondent in Tehran (Co-Sponsored with the Woodrow Wilson School & the Bobst Center); Sara Vakhshouri, Oil and Gas Consultant (Co-Sponsored with the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies); and Nahid Siamdoust, cultural studies scholar and former TIME reporter on Iran.
8. The schedule of **classes** we support (in Near Eastern Studies, History, Classics, Art & Archaeology, the Woodrow Wilson School, PIIRS), and through which our activities in

teaching are focused, can be found on our webpage. The aim of the Mossavar-Rahmani Center is to act as a focus and resource for the whole campus through which interest in Iranian Studies in the widest sense can be promoted. The Center directly supports the teaching of modern Persian as well as a number of other courses, and we hope to be able to help with the expansion of these activities in the coming years. In this we collaborate closely with and support the department of Near Eastern Studies, which has been the home for the study of Iran and Persia at Princeton for many years and has an established international reputation in the field.

9. We have already ***funded and supported*** a number of Iranian Studies-related research projects this, both graduate and undergraduate, as well as scholarly meetings and publications. This aspect of our activity will probably grow in coming years.
10. We are currently planning four key ***research or research-support projects***:
 - a. *The Mossavar-Rahmani Center Translation Series*, intended to the support the priorities and needs of scholars, students, and the general public in Iran for well-translated works, and in collaboration with Iranian publishing concerns;
 - b. *The Junior Iran Scholars Workshop*, in which graduate students and recently graduated scholars will present ongoing work to an audience of peers and senior scholars. The seniors scholars invited to participate will be an interdisciplinary mix of academics inside as well as outside Iranian studies. We hope that this project will play a significant role in strengthening the field. The aims are twofold: to ensure that younger scholars working on Iranian and Persianate topics have the best access and advice on sources and methods; and second, to ensure that young scholars learn to approach their projects with an eye to contemporary debates, questions, and problems, thus rendering their research relevant to the broader academic world.
 - c. *Princeton as Iranian Studies Reservoir*. This project is twofold and builds from the university's well-known reputation in Near Eastern studies, through which scholars such as T. Cuyler Young, Martin Dickson, and Charles Issawi helped to shape Iranian studies as we know it today. In addition, Princeton trained many scholars within the fledgling field. The intention is to exploit this legacy to support two initiatives: first, to rediscover and publicize Princeton's past role in the formation of Iranian studies as an intellectual domain; second, to support nascent domestic Iranian efforts in archival curation and digitization.
 - d. *The Iran Polling Project*. Princeton has a well-established expertise in sophisticated and rigorous survey polling, and our Survey Research Center provides cutting-edge guidance. Princeton scholars in Politics and Sociology – Amaney Jamal, Alejandro Portes, Doug Massey, and Edward Telles, for example – are pioneers in using

survey research to answer outstanding questions concerning political and social change in the developing world. Given the problematic and often flawed nature of much polling in Iran, the aim will be for the Mossavar-Rahmani Center to design and implement a longitudinal polling project for Iran. The goal would be to generate rigorous survey results on pertinent social science questions related to contemporary social life, tracked consistently every 3-5 years. This would be primarily concerned with investigating areas of Iranian society which today are mostly known through anecdotes: generational patterns of migration, urban and rural life, voting and civic participation, cultural interests, economic activity at work and home, and attitudes towards foreign and domestic affairs. In addition, we would solicit questions from social scientists inside Iran to add on to our survey and package all data available for public use. This would not only enhance the sphere of social science inside Iran, but it also would foster best practices among polls conducted in Iran by other agencies and organizations. As such endeavors are absent from any other Iranian studies center in the US, such a polling project, diligently conducted, will greatly enhance the reputation of the Mossavar-Rahmani Center.

11. We have established a ***Library/resources working group*** which is constructing a list of desiderata for the library, particular with a view to (a) filling gaps and (b) building up our holdings in modern/contemporary Iran/Persian Gulf Studies.
12. We have likewise begun to establish a consolidated Center ***mailing/publicity list***, aimed at individuals and organizations with which we should be in touch. There are three main target groups: (a) Iranian/Persian Studies organizations; (b) individual scholars/interested non-academics who may be able to contribute in some way (financial etc.); (c) regional universities and Centers (e.g. Rutgers, Columbia, UPenn, NYU, CUNY etc.)

By way of a concluding comment I should like to acknowledge the generosity, enthusiasm and foresight of our benefactors in establishing the resources from which the Center is funded, and to repeat my thanks to all those who have supported and promoted the work and mission of the Center in its first year.

John Haldon

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