

TO: Award Committee
King Salman Global Academy
FROM: Nora Peterson, Chair
Department of Modern Languages and Literatures
RE: Prize for Arabic Language for **Dr. Abla Hasan**

Dear Award Committee,

25 May 2023

I am writing to nominate Dr. Abla Hasan for the King Salman Global Academy Award for Arabic Language. Dr. Hasan earned her Ph.D. from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) in Religious Studies (2013). She is Associate Professor of Practice (Arabic) in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures. Dr. Hasan joined our department in August of 2016 and has been Associate Professor since the fall of 2019.

In this letter, I will address the work that Dr. Hasan has done to build the Arabic Studies Program at UNL and her work as Professor of Practice to support the curricular mission of that program since 2013. I will then speak to the work that she has done to build connections and to raise the visibility of the Arabic Program beyond our department and beyond UNL. Finally, I will speak to her impact in the classroom, which has been impressively consistent in its excellence since her hire in 2013.

One of the main charges to Dr. Hasan when she was hired into our department in 2013 was to build a minor in Arabic Studies. She did so very quickly, proposing the minor within a year of her hire. Though she has been working with extremely limited resources (she is the only permanent faculty member in the Arabic program), the Arabic Studies minor at UNL has been thriving ever since, and Dr. Hasan has continued working on ways to grow its size, visibility, and impact. She has taught 78 courses over ten years and has coordinated and overseen the remaining classes taught by graduate students, Fulbright Teaching Assistants, and Lecturers. The turnover in the program has meant training and retraining the other instructors in the program; Dr. Hasan has done this with unflinching dedication and has nevertheless managed to think creatively and with great innovation about ways to build the scope and reach of Arabic Studies at UNL and in the state of Nebraska. Dr. Hasan is a leader in the Arabic community in Lincoln (evidenced by her 2021 College of Arts and Sciences Engagement Award), often inviting guest speakers from the community to speak in her classes, and she works closely with leaders in the Arabic community and potential students. She has been instrumental in the launching of Arabic as a heritage language (now being offered at Lincoln Public Schools), which will presumably add to the pipeline of students interested in continuing their studies at UNL. Her regularly fully enroll or overenroll. Dr. Hasan's 101-102 courses, taught online, are regularly taken by students at other sister campuses across Nebraska that do not offer Arabic Language. Dr. Hasan is expanding to

offer the second year of Arabic for online delivery, so that students across the state can take two full years of Arabic language online at UNL.

Dr. Hasan has a highly visible presence as a leader of Arabic Studies on campus. She regularly teaches WMNS 250 (Sex and Gender in the Arab World) as part of the Women's and Gender Studies Program. In 2020 she was appointed Honors Faculty Fellow, and taught a freshman honors seminar (MODL 189H, Arab Intellectuals on Love and Gender), and UHON 301, a seminar the UHON experiential track, where Dr. Hasan took advantage of her community connections and invited speakers on Arabic culture from across the country to participate in a conversation series. Dr. Hasan also hosts the annual Big Arabic Day, which highlights Arabic Studies on campus and in the community by hosting a lecture series and other student-centered events and that regularly attracts over 100 participants. Since 2018 she has cultivated and maintained a partnership with DISC. (Digital Islamic Studies Curriculum) – a grant-funded initiative run out of the University of Michigan to support collaborative teaching and conversation of Arabic Studies across the Big Ten Academic Alliance. Dr. Hasan has both “hosted” courses – sharing ARAB 306 with Rutgers University in 2019 and 2020, and has facilitated “receiving” courses from other BTAA institutions. As DISC liaison, she is involved in conversations about the Arabic Studies curriculum across the Big10, which means that UNL has a visible presence and is a major player in DISC despite its small program relative to other, better-resourced programs.

Dr. Hasan has taught and touched hundreds of students over the last decade. As she notes in her self-reflection, she has earned the score of “5” (outstanding) in teaching, service, and research for *every single annual performance review* since her appointment in 2013. For context, “5” is the highest possible score that a faculty member can earn at UNL. This is truly remarkable, given that the composition of the review committee changes regularly and did not even include professors of practice until fairly recently (2020). Dr. Hasan regularly engages in training and professional development that makes her teaching practice effective. She is OPI trained in the ACTFL standards – the “gold standard” of language instruction in the US. She has earned grants from the CTT and from ENHANCE to develop her pedagogy, in addition to participating in the STARTALK grant for teachers of Arabic in 2014. She has participated in the peer review of teaching project at UNL to evaluate the textbook used in Arabic language courses.

Dr. Hasan's own work and expertise on women's voices, love, and sexuality in the Arab World and in the Qur'an closely connects to the courses that she teaches. These are controversial subjects and approaches in the scholarly conversation, an awareness and sensitivity to which influences the careful work that Dr. Hasan does to frame her course content and to structure conversations in an inclusive but challenging way. Dr. Hasan has written three monographs on subjects adjacent to the courses that she teaches, and her students often benefit from reading her scholarship as part of their course. Her student evaluations are consistently excellent, with students often noting that Dr. Hasan's courses change the way they think about the world. Last year, Associate Dean June Griffin shared that two students had named Dr. Hasan's ARAB/WMNS 306 class as the best class they have taken at UNL as part of their Orientation Leader application. One student writes, “My perspective had been so limited to a white, western and christocentric view of womanhood and issues faced by women. This class was a crucial look into the

importance of keeping in mind an array of perspectives when approaching issues of identity and religion.” A second student, writing about the same class, noted that the class “gave me a new understanding of the Qur’an as a text that not only marginally improved women’s rights with regard to property rights, inheritance, and divorce, but as a text that provides a continuing theoretical basis for full equality for women in political, economic, and social life.”

I have the privilege to see Dr. Hasan teach and have observed her conduct what she calls a “careful reading of students’ different learning styles.” Dr. Hasan is an excellent and compassionate listener, and she recognizes the diverse opinions that her students bring to courses whose content is sometimes challenging and almost always brings a different world view than the one that students come to class feeling familiar with. Dr. Hasan’s succeeds in bringing together diverse voices and opinions and in creating a conversation grounded in inclusivity and an understanding that diversity leads to new insights and to excellence. Her pedagogy, her mission of building the program in Arabic Studies at UNL, and her dedication to her students, exemplify the strategic goals of the King Salman Global Academy. I highly and enthusiastically recommend her for the Award for Arabic Language.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nora Martin Peterson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Nora" being the most prominent.

Dr. Nora Martin Peterson
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Associate Professor of French Cultural Studies
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