

Arabic program attracted Elizabethtown senior Noah A. Stevens to WKU

The Arabic language program has become a pillar of Elizabethtown senior **Noah A. Stevens'** undergraduate experience at Western Kentucky University.

“The Arabic program at WKU is one of the primary reasons I decided to enroll at the university,” he said. “During my college search process, I was interested in finding a university that would allow me to explore my interests in the Middle East as well as offer language study to augment that regional expertise.”

Stevens, a student in the Mahurin Honors College, will graduate in May with three majors – Arabic, International Affairs and Middle East Studies.

“Coming from a family and community with deep ties to the military, I have been surrounded by stories of the Middle East -- both good and bad -- since early childhood,” Stevens said. “A desire to learn more on my own about a region that dominated both news headlines and dinner table conversations throughout my upbringing led to my choice to study Arabic and Middle East Studies, while my desire to better understand the policy decisions that tied the U.S. to the region led me to International Affairs.”

In mid-March, Stevens will be one of four WKU students traveling to Qatar to compete in the fifth International Universities Debating Championship.

“Because WKU has fielded a team for the QatarDebate Championships twice since I began studying Arabic, I have seen the success of other students from the program and made being selected to participate on behalf of the university and the U.S. the ultimate goal of my Arabic education,” he said.

WKU will be one of five U.S. universities participating in the international competition, hosted by QatarDebate, that brings together Arabic and non-Arabic speaking students from around the world to Doha, Qatar, for six days in mid-March.

Since being selected for the team in late November, Stevens and seniors **Madi Crawford** of Hendersonville, Tennessee, **Keightley Dudgeon** of Crestwood and **Kassidy Orrender** of Crestwood have been preparing for the competition and are enrolled this spring in an Arabic debate course taught by Lhousseine Guerwane.

“The students have been preparing since they were selected, even during the winter break they were submitting two assignments a week that I corrected and gave feedback on as they learn how to debate and improve their Arabic language skills,” Guerwane said. “The students also

attend the Arabic Debate Club two hours a week and submit online assignments weekly. In addition to learning about debate and practicing debate skills, students also are working on exercises to improve their listening skills, pronunciation, body language, confidence and vocabulary.”

WKU launched its Arabic language major in 2014 and the program has grown to more than 50 students. This will be the third year Guerwane has taken students to debate competition in Qatar.

“I am very excited to travel to Qatar,” Stevens said. “The trip will be my first to the Gulf region which is so central to understanding the contemporary Middle East. Qatar is a prime example of a rapidly developing, new Middle East that marries heritage and tradition with growth and modernization, so it will provide an entirely new experience to me.”

During the summer of 2016, Stevens participated in a faculty-led study abroad program to Morocco to study international politics in the Middle East and the Moroccan dialect of Arabic. In the summer of 2018, he completed an internship at the U.S. Embassy in Oslo, Norway, with the U.S. Department of State through the prestigious U.S. Foreign Service Internship Program.

In the first part of the State Department internship, Stevens was placed in the Office of Iraq Affairs in Washington, D.C. “My internship was perfect in providing practical, professional experience to augment my WKU education,” he said. “The sense of obligation that I always felt to serve in some capacity has grown exponentially after serving two years with the Department of State. I intend to pursue a graduate degree in U.S. Foreign and Defense Policy after graduating from WKU in May so I am best equipped to return to the realm of government service to continuing working on behalf of U.S. interests at home and abroad.”

Stevens encourages students from all academic disciplines to consider government internships. “The people serving in government across agencies and bureaus and departments at every level are patriots and among the best our country has to offer. There is much to learn from them and immense pride to gain in using your skills and passions as a young adult to better your country.”

He also encourages students to consider studying Arabic, even if they are unsure of adding the major or minor. It complements a wide variety of academic programs from business to science and fine arts and gives students a tangible skill that will make them competitive in the global economy. And while the language may seem difficult at first glance, the WKU Arabic

program makes practical proficiency a goal and makes learning the language a fun and worthwhile experience.”

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