

R W2017.02

A Resolution Supporting the Replacement of the *al-Kitaab* Textbook in Arabic Instruction

A bill for the consideration of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts Student Government

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Whereas, the mission of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts Student Government (hereafter LSA SG) is to “actively seek the voices of LSA students and advocate their interests to improve academic and non-academic life”;¹ and,

Whereas, the Arabic Program in the Department of Near Eastern Studies utilizes the textbook *al-Kitaab fii Ta'allum al-Arabiyya*, (hereafter, *al-Kitaab*); and,

Whereas, as evident by the signatures and extensive comments on a petition that was published as an op-ed in the Michigan Daily, many of our constituents agree that the problematic vocabulary and blatantly politically charged language in *al-Kitaab* is inappropriate; and,

Whereas, *al-Kitaab* has been cited as problematic at multiple universities across the country, including in an article in the Stanford Daily², Chicago Monitor³, and the Tufts Daily⁴; and,

Whereas, to list a few examples of such vocabulary, expanded on in the attached letter, the Arabic terms for “United Nations” (Lesson 1), “translator,” (Lesson 2), “army,” “officer,” “political science” (Lesson 3) are introduced before the terms “to play,” “running,” “life,” and “hobby” (Lesson 6); and,

Whereas, students are taught how to ask “who wants to work at the UN?” (Lesson 1), how to read an obituary (Lesson 6), how to ask “who should be able to join the army” (Lesson 8), a biography of the the non-Arab Ayatollah of Iran (Lesson 10), how to ask “In [your] opinion, are relations between Iran and the US/Europe, and China and the US better than last year? Will they get better? Do they think that relations between the US and any other country will be cut off? Which country?” (Lesson 11); and,

Whereas, Lesson 3 includes a chart and family tree of the Prophet, the Rightly Guided Caliphs, the Umayyads, the Abbasids, and the Hashemites, further exacerbating the conflation of Arab culture with Islam and Muslims; and,

¹ The Constitution of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts Student Government. Article II

² <http://www.stanforddaily.com/2015/09/30/me-kk-the-politicization-of-learning-arabic/>

³ <http://chicagomonitor.com/2016/06/op-ed-politicization-of-learning-arabic/>

⁴ <http://tuftsdaily.com/features/2016/02/10/politics-language-teaching-arabic-u-s-colleges/>

Whereas, the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts (hereafter LSA) asserts that “informed respect for other cultures [and] tolerance...are the hallmarks of a liberal arts education, and the study of foreign languages fosters precisely these capacities.”⁵ and,

Whereas, the utilization of a textbook that perpetuates negative and Orientalist stereotypes about Arab culture and misrepresents the purposes of the Arabic language does not foster the aforementioned capacities in LSA students; and,

Whereas, disseminating these biases through institutions (i.e. universities) renders *al-Kitaab* a facilitator of racism; and,

Whereas, authors of LSA’s plan for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) specifies that they are “institutionally obligated to better train our faculty, staff, and administration to acknowledge and address climate and interpersonal and personal issues that interfere with student learning and educational success,”⁶ and the aforementioned biases negatively impact cultural understanding and consequently, campus climate; and,

Whereas, it is incumbent upon us, as the “Leaders and Best” and responsible citizens, to acknowledge and criticize the irresponsible utilization of this textbook.

Be it therefore resolved, LSA SG formally recognizes that *al-Kitaab* is inappropriate and harmful, and as representatives of the LSA student body, we support any efforts by Arabic Program director(s) to review and replace it; and,

Be it further resolved, the Arabic language courses that use *al-Kitaab* should include a disclaimer in syllabi explaining that *al-Kitaab* does not reflect the views of the Near Eastern Studies Department regarding Arab culture or Arab people; and,

Be it finally resolved, LSA SG shall send this resolution along with the attached letter to Director of the Arabic Language Program Martha Schulte-Nafeh and Near Eastern Studies Department Chair, Gottfried Hagen.

⁵ <https://lsa.umich.edu/lsa/academics/degrees-requirements/language-requirement.html>

⁶ <https://lsa.umich.edu/content/dam/lsa-site-assets/documents/dei-documents/UM-LSA-DEI-SUMMARY-10-5-16.pdf>