

Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations

Department Website: <http://nelc.uchicago.edu>
Program of Study

Majors in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations (NELC) at the University of Chicago pursue rigorous knowledge about a region of the world that is known as “the cradle of civilization” and the home of several important religious and cultural traditions, as well as one of the most important geopolitical areas of our contemporary world. NELC majors acquire languages; learn how archaeologists, economists, historians, linguists, literary scholars, and careful readers of legal, religious, economic, and other kinds of texts critically evaluate evidence; and acquire, largely in small class settings, analytical writing, thinking, and research skills that will help prepare them for a variety of careers.

Geographically centered on the Nile to Oxus and Danube to Indus region, NELC also embraces North Africa and Islamic Spain, as well as Central Asia and the Balkans in its ambit, from the early Bronze Age to the recent era of revolutions. Students can gain expertise in a wide variety of languages, including the living spoken tongues of the modern Middle East and Central Asia (Arabic, Armenian, modern Hebrew, Kazakh, Persian, Turkish, and Uzbek) or languages that open gateways onto the ancient past (Akkadian, Aramaic, Biblical Hebrew, Coptic, Egyptian Hieroglyphics, Elamite, Ge’ez, Hittite, Middle and Old Persian, Ottoman, Syriac, Ugaritic, etc.).

In an interdisciplinary area studies department like NELC, majors learn about the region through primary sources (material, oral, or textual) and scholarly analysis, structuring their curriculum around various disciplines and methodologies, including stratigraphy and paleobotany, comparative literature, cultural and civilizational studies, economics and numismatics, gender studies, history (economic, political, religious, and social), human rights, public policy, and digital humanities approaches.

Areas of specialization within NELC include:

- Arabic Studies
- Armenian Studies
- Archaeology and Art of the Ancient Near East
- Classical Hebrew Language and Civilization
- Cuneiform Studies (including Assyriology, Hittitology, and Sumerology)
- Egyptian Languages and Civilization
- History (Ancient Near East, Islamic History, Modern Middle Eastern History)
- Islamic Thought (including Law, Sufism)
- Israeli and Jewish Studies (including Biblical and Modern Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac)
- Persian and Iranian Studies (Culture, Language, Literature, History, Religion)
- Semitic Languages and Literatures (Comparative Semitics, Northwest Semitics)
- Turkish and Ottoman Studies (Culture, History, Languages, Literatures)

Students who major in NELC learn one or more of the primary native languages as a means of access to the cultures of the ancient Near East and/or the modern Middle East. In consultation with the Director of Undergraduate Studies, each student chooses an area of specialization and devises a program of study that provides a sound basis for graduate work in that area or for a career in business, education, government, journalism, law, museology, public policy, public service, or a variety of other disciplines and professions.

Major Requirements

Requirements for the NELC major are described below. The Director of Undergraduate Studies and the Department Coordinator are available to answer questions, discuss programs of study, and support students as they make their way through the major in NELC. Students are encouraged to track their progress through requirements by using our major worksheet (available on the department website (<http://nelc.uchicago.edu/undergraduate>)). NELC strongly encourages students to study abroad if they are able.

Thirteen courses and a BA paper are required for a NELC major.

Summary of Requirements

Two or three quarters of one of the following civilization sequences: *

200-300

NEAA 20001-20002-20003-20004	Archaeology of the Ancient Near East I-II-III-IV-V-VI
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NEHC 20001-20002-20003	Ancient Near Eastern History and Society I-II-III
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NEHC 20004-20005-20006	Ancient Near Eastern Thought and Literature I-II-III
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NEHC 20011-20012-20013	Ancient Empires I-II-III
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NEHC 20416-20417-20418	Semitic Languages, Cultures, and Civilizations I-II-III	
NEHC 20501-20502-20503	Islamic History and Society I-II-III	
NEHC 20601-20602-20603	Islamic Thought and Literature I-II-III	
Jewish Civilization ⁺		
Six courses in one of the Near Eastern languages (e.g., Akkadian, Arabic, Armenian, Egyptian, Hebrew, Kazakh, Persian, Turkish, Uzbek) ^{**}		600
Three or four elective courses in the student's area of specialization [§]		300-400
NEHC 29800	BA Paper Seminar	100
Total Units in the Major		1300

* Note that the course sequence on "Archaeology of the Ancient Near East" does not fulfill the general education requirement in civilization studies. All of the other NELC civilization sequences do fulfill the general education requirement. If a Near Eastern civilization sequence is used to meet the College general education requirement, a second Near Eastern civilization sequence is required for the NELC major.

+ Students may also opt to take two or three courses from the Jewish Civilization course clusters. These have course codes in the ranges JWSC 20120–20199 (ancient/medieval) and JWSC 20220–20299 (modern), and are cross-listed with varying NEHC numbers. Jewish civilization courses may be taken in any order and may be used to fulfill the College's general education requirement in civilization studies. In this sequence, to fulfill the general education civilization requirement, at least one course must pertain to the ancient or medieval periods (JWSC 20120–20199) and at least one course must pertain to the modern period (JWSC 20220–20299).

** Credit for language courses may not be granted by examination or petition.

§ These courses must be chosen in consultation with the Counselor for Undergraduate Studies. They may consist of additional NELC language courses, an additional NELC civilization sequence, or approved courses in areas such as archaeology, art, literature in translation, history, and religion. NEHC 29999 may be counted towards the elective requirement.

Grading

All courses used to meet requirements in the major must be taken for quality grades with the exception of the NEHC 29800 BA Paper Seminar, which is taken for P/F grading.

Advising

As soon as they declare their major in NELC, students must consult the Director of Undergraduate Studies to plan their programs of study. In Autumn Quarter of their fourth year, all NELC students must see the Director of Undergraduate Studies with an updated degree program and transcript.

BA Paper

NELC majors are required to write a substantial BA paper during their fourth year. The BA paper should be an original academic paper/research project of approximately 30 to 50 pages. The BA paper provides majors the opportunity to develop research, writing, and presentation skills while working closely with a faculty adviser. The BA paper can be used in graduate school applications or as part of job application portfolios, and some recent NELC graduates have been able to publish their papers. The process of declaring a paper topic and choosing an adviser begins in the third year.

The timeline below assumes a Spring Quarter graduation. Students who expect to graduate in other quarters should consult the Director of Undergraduate Studies.

Year 3: Spring Quarter

NELC majors in their third year should discuss possible BA paper topics with NELC faculty members with whom they have worked or who have expertise in their topic. This may grow out of a paper written from a course or may be an entirely new project.

After choosing a topic and narrowing down its focus, students are responsible to request a member of the NELC faculty to serve as their research adviser, who will help them further conceive the scope and aims of the project and provide guidance about methods and sources for carrying out their research. Students must formally file their proposed BA paper topic with their faculty adviser's signature in the NELC department office before the end of their third year (by Monday of tenth week of Spring Quarter). Forms to register the topic are available on our website (<http://nelc.uchicago.edu/undergraduate>).

Year 4: Autumn Quarter

Students are required to register for NEHC 29800 BA Paper Seminar in Autumn Quarter of their fourth year on a P/F basis. The BA Paper Seminar is a workshop course designed to survey the fields represented by NELC and to assist students in researching and writing their BA papers. The course is run by a BA preceptor, typically an advanced PhD student in NELC. Preceptors work closely with students and their faculty advisers to assist in all aspects of conceiving, researching,

and writing. A passing grade (P) for the BA Paper Seminar depends on full attendance and participation throughout the quarter.

Year 4: Winter Quarter

NELC majors are strongly encouraged to register for an optional one-quarter independent study course NEHC 29999 BA Paper Preparation with their BA preceptor that will allow time in their schedules over Winter Quarter to write and revise their papers. Students will receive a quality grade for this course, equivalent to the final BA paper grade, reported in the Spring Quarter.

Year 4: Spring Quarter

The completed BA paper must be submitted to the Department Coordinator by Monday of third week in Spring Quarter. Students should submit two bound hard copies and one pdf of the paper. The Department Coordinator will distribute the BA papers to the faculty adviser. Students who fail to meet the deadline will not be eligible for honors and may not be able to graduate in that quarter.

The faculty adviser will grade the paper and submit grades and honors recommendations to the Director of Undergraduate Studies by Monday of fifth week in Spring Quarter.

Double Majors

Students taking a double major may, with the permission of the NELC Director of Undergraduate Studies, write a single BA paper that is designed to meet the requirements of both majors, provided that the faculty research adviser is a member of the NELC faculty. Approval from both program chairs is required. A consent form, to be signed by the chairs, is available from the College adviser. It must be completed and returned to the College adviser by the end of Autumn Quarter of the student's year of graduation.

Research Funding

Students are encouraged to begin the reading/research for the BA paper in the summer before their fourth year. Research grants are available to undergraduates. Please discuss the availability of grants with the Department Coordinator and/or Director of Undergraduate Studies early in the third year and visit the department website for updated information.

NELC is a participant in the PRISM program (<https://careeradvancement.uchicago.edu/jobs-internships-research/prism-grants>) and majors are encouraged to apply for PRISM grants.

Honors

Students who complete their course work and their BA papers with distinction are considered for honors. To be eligible for honors, students must have an overall GPA of 3.25 or higher, they must have a NELC GPA of 3.5 or higher, and they must have earned a grade of A on the BA paper.

Prizes

The department awards the Justin Palmer Prize annually to the BA paper judged to be the most outstanding. The Director of Undergraduate Studies makes this determination in consultation with the department chair and faculty members. This monetary prize is made possible by a generous gift from the family of Justin Palmer, AB'04, who completed a minor in NELC.

Minor Program in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations

Students in the College with an interest in the languages and cultures of the Middle East or of the ancient Near East may pursue a minor in NELC. Completion of this minor certifies that your undergraduate course work at the University of Chicago has prepared you with language skills and cultural competency that can give you an advantage on the job market for a wide variety of careers—in business, in medicine or law, or in the public sector.

Students who wish to take a minor in NELC must meet with the Director of Undergraduate Studies before the end of Spring Quarter of their third year to declare their intention to complete the minor. Students must submit the Consent to Complete a Minor Program (https://college.uchicago.edu/sites/college.uchicago.edu/files/Consent_Minor_Program.pdf) form to their College adviser by the deadline above. The Director of Undergraduate Studies and the Department Coordinator are available to answer questions, discuss programs of study, and support students as they make their way through the minor in NELC. Students are encouraged to track their progress through requirements by using our minor worksheet, which can be found on our website (<http://nelc.uchicago.edu/undergraduate>).

Program Requirements for the Minor

Students may choose one of two tracks: language or culture. Both tracks require a two- or three-quarter NELC civilization sequence (see Major Requirements for more detail on civilization sequences). In addition, the **Language Track** requires three courses of one NELC language at any level. Students using a NELC sequence to satisfy the general education requirement in civilization studies may seek approval from the department to substitute additional language course work in place of the civilization requirement in the minor. The **Culture Track** allows students to focus on topics such as archaeology, history, religion, or literature in translation and does not have a language requirement.

The six courses in the minor may not be double counted with a student's major(s) or with other minors, and they may not be counted toward general education requirements. Courses in the minor must be taken for quality grades.

Language Track Sample Minor

AKKD 10101-10102-10103	Elementary Akkadian I-II-III *	300
NEHC 20001-20002-20003	Ancient Near Eastern History and Society I-II-III	300
Total Units		600

Language Track Sample Minor

ARAB 20101-20102-20103	Intermediate Arabic I-II-III	300
NEHC 20601-20602-20603	Islamic Thought and Literature I-II-III	300
Total Units		600

Culture Track Sample Minor

NEHC 20011-20012-20013	Ancient Empires I-II-III	300
NEHC 20004-20005-20006	Ancient Near Eastern Thought and Literature I-II-III	300
Total Units		600

All undergraduate courses being offered in the 2017–18 academic year are listed below, by subject. Upper-level courses and the most up-to-date course information can be found in the NELC section of Class Search (<http://registrar.uchicago.edu/classes>).



Font Notice

This document should contain certain fonts with restrictive licenses. For this draft, substitutions were made using less legally restrictive fonts. Specifically:

Times was used instead of Trajan.

Times was used instead of Palatino.

The editor may contact Leepfrog for a draft with the correct fonts in place.