The overall goal of this program was to equip Iraqi institutions of higher education to engage globally and to promote social, political, and economic development in Iraq by sustainably linking these Iraqi institutions to U.S. academic institutions. An additional goal of the project is for the newly implemented curriculum and the entire process of curricular revision to serve as a model for curricular revisions in other universities in Kurdistan.

To these ends, MSU faculty worked with Duhok faculty to review and revise course curricula, explore alternate teaching styles, collaborate on research and generally exchange ideas and develop sustainable relationships with one another.

Officially known as “The Iraq University Linkage Program: Collaborations in Higher Education between Michigan State University and University of Duhok,” the project was funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, and was awarded to IREX, a non-governmental organization based in Washington, D.C.

As a sub-contractor to IREX, MSU colleges participating in the collaboration include the College of Arts and Letters, the College of Engineering, Lyman Briggs College, and the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources. College of Arts and Letters involvement in the project was led by the Center for Language Teaching Advancement (CeLTA).

During the first year of the project, MSU faculty worked closely with their Iraqi counterparts to better understand the context of teaching at the University of Duhok (including technology capabilities), and to review and revise the curricula for the selected departments. College of Arts and Letters faculty who were involved in the project included co-PIs and co-directors of CeLTA Professor David Prestel and University Distinguished Professor Susan Gass, Carol Wilson-Duffy and Professors Charlene Polio, Shawn Loewen, Jyotsna Singh, Salah Hassan, and David Stowe, as well as Second Language Studies doctoral student Virginia David, who joined the group in year two.

David Prestel is CAL’s senior associate dean for research, scholarship and personnel. Susan Gass is chair of the Department of Linguistics and Germanic, Slavic, Asian and African Languages, and director of both Second Language Studies and the English Language Center. Polio and Loewen are faculty of the Department of Linguistics and Germanic, Slavic, Asian and African Languages, and Second Language Studies. David Stowe is interim chair of the Department of English, of which he, Hassan, and Singh are faculty. Carol Wilson-Duffy is Associate Director of the English Language Center in charge of technology initiatives.
MSU faculty members traveled to Northern Iraq to learn about Iraqi teaching strategies and the curriculum currently used in the Department of English at Duhok University. In addition, faculty from various University of Duhok departments also visited MSU. The visits resulted in curricular revisions and discussions of potential research collaboration. In particular, the English exchange culminated in the development of a curriculum plan for the entire four-year undergraduate program. Materials were developed for selected literature courses and for the language program of years one and two; implementation of the new curriculum began in 2013.

The model used for teacher development incorporated a “train-the-trainers” approach, allowing Duhok faculty members to develop research and teaching skills that could be shared with their colleagues in Duhok.


The MSU College of Arts and Letters and Lyman Briggs College also developed virtual spaces for online exchanges between MSU and Duhok faculty.

In addition to the work by the English team, faculty from Lyman Briggs and the MSU Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering met with their Duhok counterparts in Europe for professional conferences. These exchanges exposed the Duhok faculty members to new ways of thinking and helped them network with other academics in their field.

Lalita Udpa, professor of electrical and computer engineering, served as lead principal investigator on the project. Co-PIs included Prestel and Gass from the College of Arts and Letters, and Kelly Millenbah, Philip Strong and Cheryl Murphy of Lyman Briggs College.

UNIVERSITY OF DUHOK
Located in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, the University of Duhok comprises 18 colleges and serves nearly 10,000 undergraduate and graduate students.

IREX BACKGROUND
IREX is an international nonprofit organization providing thought leadership and innovative programs to promote positive lasting change globally. It enables local individuals and institutions to build key elements of a vibrant society: quality education, independent media, and strong communities.

English Also Receives Iraq-Focused Funding

In addition to the IREX-funded project, CAL’s English department received a $100,000 grant from the Institute for International Education to host a 10-week workshop on American Literature for a group of Iraqi university professors from Mosul, Kirkuk and other Iraqi areas, who visited the U.S. during summer 2013. English Professors Salah D. Hassan and Stephen Arch submitted the grant proposal and coordinated the program activities.

Working with MSU English Department faculty, Iraqi professors developed syllabi, gave public presentations of research papers, wrote or revised articles for publication, participated in reading groups, and observed classroom instruction.

A four-member delegation of visiting faculty from Iraq’s University of Duhok meets with University Distinguished Professor Susan Gass and graduate student Virginia David (second and third from left), former CAL Dean Karin A. Wurst (third from right), and CAL Senior Associate Dean David Prestel.