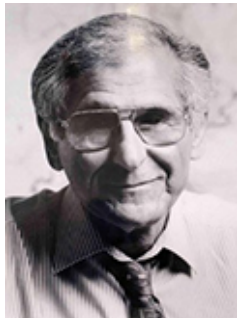


# Thomas Naff, Middle East Center

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*Thomas Naff*

Thomas (Tom) Naff, HOM'84, a former associate professor of Asian and Middle Eastern studies (AMES) at Penn and the director of Penn's Middle East Center from 1967 to 1983, died on August 2. He was 93.

Dr. Naff was born in Spring Valley, Illinois, to Lebanese immigrant parents. He grew up in Highland Park, Michigan, and attended high school there. He earned his PhD from the University of California, Berkeley, for a dissertation titled, "Ottoman Diplomacy and the Great European Powers, 1789-1802," which he pursued concomitantly at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) of the University in London.

After teaching at Harvard and the American University in Cairo, Dr. Naff joined Penn's School of Arts & Sciences in 1967 in what was then known as the department of oriental studies. During his time as director, Dr. Naff significantly expanded both the Near East Center, as it was then known, and the Middle East studies program at Penn. As part of his restructuring of the department, Dr. Naff recruited scholars on the Middle East across multiple disciplines, some of whom are still at Penn today. Under Dr. Naff's leadership, Penn's program became one of the most renowned Middle Eastern studies programs in the country, ranked number one or number two several times in national listings. In the mid-1980s, and with support from scholars including Edward Said and others, Dr. Naff played an instrumental role in raising funds to establish the Janet Lee Stevens Fellowship (named in honor of one of the department's graduate students, who died in the bombing of the U.S. embassy in Beirut in 1983). Even after stepping down as the Middle East Center's director in 1983, he continued to teach until retiring in 2002. The department, then known as Asian and Middle Eastern Studies (AMES), endures today as Near Eastern languages and civilizations (NELC), as does the Middle East Center.

Dr. Naff had a keen interest in the history of Near Eastern and Middle Eastern studies and in how academic institutions and disciplines evolved against their social, political, and economic contexts. To that end, he wrote *Paths to the Middle East: Ten Scholars Look Back* (1993), for which he interviewed leading historians on how Middle Eastern studies had emerged from Oriental Studies and in response to U.S. and international political agendas surrounding Cold War politics, the demand for oil, and more. A decade before the advent of the internet, he launched a program to connect ordinary people around the world via telecommunication satellites and interpreters. He was also an early leader in researching water politics in the contemporary Middle East, and co-edited *Water in the Middle East: Conflict or Cooperation?* (1984). Dr. Naff gave a talk at the Brookings Institution in 2003 on the environmental impact of Saddam Hussein's policies on the Iraqi marshlands and possible courses of action.

Dr. Naff was married to Joan Rice from 1952 until her death in 2015. They had three sons, Clayton, C'78, Derek, and Bryan; and several grandchildren.