Letter to All University of Michigan Faculty and Staff:

Dear Colleagues,

We, the University of Michigan's faculty and staff members, are writing to seek your support on a student-led initiative. As the University continues to implement strategic plans aimed at issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, conversations within the Middle Eastern/North African (ME/NA) community have identified a number of key issues that warrant immediate attention. In particular, we call for a ME/NA identity category on all University forms and surveys that collect demographic data on campus, including on applications from prospective students and employees.

ME/NA students, constrained by Census categories, are expected to check the white identity box. However, many people of Middle Eastern and North African descent do not identify with or have the lived experiences of being white in the U.S., especially in a post-9/11 environment of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim racism. In addition, the lack of an identity box for U-M's ME/NA students perpetuates the erasure that many marginalized communities experience. Given that we live in a state with the largest concentration of ME/NA individuals outside of the Middle East/North Africa, we have a unique regional responsibility to implement the ME/NA identity category.

Not identifying ME/NA student, staff, and faculty is problematic for a number of reasons that impact campus climate, including but not limited to: tracking student recruitment and retention rates; having the ability to reach the community on key issues that directly impact it; identifying trends in the hiring of faculty, staff, and administration; and bias incident reporting. For the University, the ability to ascertain who identifies with the ME/NA community is a necessary step in developing programs and interventions to address any disparities and to achieve Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) goals.

As cited by the DEI strategic plan, UM strives "to broaden its diversity and strengthen its inclusiveness" and "our strong tradition of student activism and striving for change" has "led us to this next concerted effort to create a diverse, equitable and inclusive environment for our entire campus community" (DEI Strategic Plan). We have to call into question our ability to achieve inclusion when we overlook and misrepresent a community with a distinctive history and experience at UM and in the state of Michigan.

An identity category option has been a central issue for the ME/NA community on campus for a number of years. In the past year, the UM Islamophobia Working Group identified the ME/NA identity box as a central DEI concern in its report to the University. Not only have ME/NA students pushed for this for over a decade, but, in the last year, more than 12 student governments on this campus have unanimously passed a resolution or written a statement of

solidarity for this movement, including Central Student Government (CSG), LSA Student Government (LSA SG), Rackham Student Government (RSG), Engineering Student Government (ESG), Residence Halls Association (RHA), Law School Student Senate (LSSS), Ross BBA/MBA Councils, Medical Student Council, and Undergraduate Public Policy Council. Furthermore, ME/NA students and faculty members organized with the UM-Dearborn and -Flint student bodies and faculties and have identified that this issue pertains to all three campuses.

Additional Background:

Arab American civil rights groups have been lobbying for a Census category since the 1990s and over the last few years, the Office of Management and Budget that oversees the U.S. Census has been testing the possibility of implementing a ME/NA category in 2020. The Arab American Institute, which has been at the forefront of this initiative nationally, proposes defining the ME/NA category to include the population with origins in the League of Arab States (Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen); in Non-Arab ME/NA States (Turkey, Iran, and Israel); and in trans-national communities (Assyrians/Chaldeans, Kurds, Berber/Amazigh, etc.). Students on this campus have proposed that we adopt this same definition.

Higher education institutions have already begun the work of inclusion. In 2013, the University of California system instituted a similar identity category. Also, Wayne State University implemented a ME/NA category in 2013 to track retention rates for their ME/NA students. Furthermore, University of Southern California has also added a ME/NA box for their undergraduate admissions application. In the meantime, Brown University and other campuses across the nation are working with their student community to add a box.

Thus, the purpose of this letter is to ask for your support in requesting that the University of Michigan add a ME/NA category when collecting data on our student, staff, faculty, and other University related community members.

Finally, we ask you, both faculty and staff members, to please circulate this letter widely and to add your name in support. #WeExist

Sincerely, staff and faculty from the Islamophobia Working Group,

- Evelyn Alsultany, Arthur F. Thurnau Professor, Associate Professor of American Culture and Director of Arab and Muslim American Studies
- Samer M. Ali, Director, Center for Middle Eastern & North African Studies

- Robbie Abdelhoq, Program Manager, Office of Student Conflict Resolution
- Ashley Bates, Project Coordinator, Conflict and Peace Initiative at the International Institute
- Abby Chien, Program Manager, Office of Multi-Ethnic Student Affairs
- Marjorie Horton, Assistant Dean for Undergraduate Education, College of Literature, Science and the Arts
- Charlotte Karem Albrecht, Assistant Professor of American Culture and Women's Studies, Faculty in Arab and Muslim American Studies
- Karla Mallette, Professor, Italian and Near Eastern Studies and Director of the Islamic Studies Program
- Sammy M. Mansour, Clinical Assistant Professor, Law School
- Angelo Pitillo, Director, English Language Instituted

Signatories - the following faculty and staff urge the administration and Regents to implement the Middle Eastern/North African identity category immediately on all University forms and surveys that collect demographic data:

On the Google form:

Name*
Title/Position*
Department Affiliation*