The Kurdish people, a large and diverse ethnic group, have been one of the inhabitants of the Middle East since ancient times. With the formation of the nation-state system in the Middle East in the early 20th century, they became marginalized minorities. This historical experience has been central to the formation of Kurdish political identity and struggle for equality and recognition.

The prospects for Kurdish revival are more promising in our times. In particular the Kurdish self-rule consolidated in Iraq in 2003, after decades of state violence. The Syrian war enabled the formation of Kurdish governance in that country for the first time. In both countries, the Kurdish forces have emerged as the main military partners of the U.S. in the fight against the self-styled Islamic State.

The Kurdish Political Studies Program (KPSP) at UCF is the first and only academic unit in the country dedicated to the study of Kurdish issues. Since its establishment in fall 2015, KPSP has emerged as a vibrant center organizing unique research and learning opportunities for UCF students. KPSP brings illustrious speakers to campus, supports scholars who conduct cutting edge research on Kurdish issues, offers the public accurate information and objective analyses of Kurdish politics and promotes collaboration with universities across the globe.

As we celebrate the second anniversary of the KPSP, you will find a glimpse of these activities in this two-year review.

The KPSP looks forward to expanding our activities both at UCF and beyond, and bolstering our reputation as the place for the academic study of Kurdish politics in the United States.

I would be personally thrilled to discuss your suggestions for future events and initiatives. Contact me at 407.823.2608.

More information about the KPSP can be found at sciences.ucf.edu/kpsp.

GÜNEŞ MURAT TEZCÜR, PHD
Jalal Talabani Chair of Kurdish Political Studies
Director of Kurdish Political Studies Program
The Kurdish Political Studies Program (KPSP), hosted at the UCF Department of Political Science, is the first academic program dedicated to the study of politics of Kurds and Kurdistan in the United States. The KPSP promotes academic studies and public awareness of Kurdish politics, organizes events addressing contemporary issues affecting Kurdish people, facilitates exchanges and collaborations between UCF and Kurdish universities, and develops curriculum focusing on themes related to the Kurdish experience. The KPSP also closely collaborates with UCF Global Perspectives and is integrated with the UCF Security Studies Doctoral Program.

The KPSP is the home of the Jalal Talabani Endowed Chair of Kurdish Political Studies, the only such position in the country, which was inaugurated on October 29, 2015. The Endowed Chair was established by a donation led by Najmaldin Karim, M.D., a neurosurgeon, who is also the Governor of Kirkuk, Republic of Iraq and President of the Washington Kurdish Institute. Güneş Murat Tezcür, Ph.D. is the current holder of the Chair.

This award sponsored by the KPSP recognizes the best article in Kurdish Political Studies by a rising scholar during the previous calendar year. The award is open to all articles published in English language peer-reviewed journals, and all disciplines under social sciences and humanities.

2017 Awardees

The First Prize Winner

Honorable Mentions

Selection Committee: Sabri Ateş (Southern Methodist University), Hakan Özoğlu (University of Central Florida), Güneş Murat Tezcür (University of Central Florida), and Nicole Watts (San Francisco State University).

2016 Awardees

The First Prize Winner

The Second Prize Winner

Selection Committee: Janet Klein (University of Akron), Hakan Özoğlu (University of Central Florida), Güneş Murat Tezcür (University of Central Florida), and Nicole Watts (San Francisco State University).
**PROGRAMS & EVENTS THUS FAR**

**KURDISH POLITICAL ISSUES FORUM**

University of Central Florida

Dr. Najmaldin Karim, a neurosurgeon, Governor of Kirkuk, Republic of Iraq, and President of the Washington Kurdish Institute, opened the forum by describing the role the Kurds play in fighting ISIS. Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman, the Kurdistan Regional Government Representative to the United States, delivered the keynote address.

**PEACE ACTIVISM IN TUMULTUOUS TIMES**

Global UCF; University of Central Florida

KPSP hosted Halil Ibrahim Yenigün, formerly an assistant professor at Istanbul Commerce University. He was fired after he signed a petition titled Academics for Peace. He came to UCF in partnership with the Political Science department to talk about Turkey’s nascent peace movement that aims to contribute to the resolution of its decades long Kurdish conflict.

**STUCK IN TRAFFIC: AN INSIDER’S VIEW OF THE FAILED TURKISH COUP**

Global UCF; University of Central Florida

Hakan Özoğlu, Ph.D., co-chair of the Middle Eastern Studies program at UCF, shared his experience and insight after being in Turkey during the July 2016 coup attempt, where over 300 people were killed and 6000 arrested.

**GENDERED DYNAMICS OF INTERNATIONAL SECURITY**

University of Central Florida

This international conference about gendered aspects of armed conflict, peacebuilding and social movements covered sexual violence, women as fighters, peacekeepers and victims in armed conflicts and the relationship between gender equality and human security.

**KPSP SPECIAL PRESENTATION**

University of Central Florida

This ceremony introduced the Kurdish Political Studies Program, announced student essay awardees, inaugurated the Jalal Talabani Kurdish Political Studies Endowed Chair and involved a panel of distinguished speakers.
The establishment of the KPSP in fall 2015 has greatly increased interest in Kurdish issues among UCF students at both the undergraduate and graduate level. A group of students actively work with UCF faculty on various aspects of Kurdish politics. They present their findings in international conferences, publish opinion pieces and write scholarly articles.

**CLAYTON BESAW**  
*Security Studies, Ph.D. candidate*

**Dissertation Topic:** “Inter-Group Conflict, Anger, and Support for Costly Punishment”

Clayton’s dissertation addresses the question of under what conditions, do individuals become willing to accept personal costs to punish members of an out-group? His empirical research has a comparative scope encompassing two countries and three different groups: Americans, Germans and Kurds in Germany.

Clayton will join the One Earth Future as a research analyst in spring 2018.

**CHRISTOPHER FAULKNER**  
*Security Studies, Ph.D. candidate*

**Dissertation Topic:** “The Causes, Dynamics, and Implications of Child Soldiering”

Chris is writing a dissertation on the dynamics of child soldiering. In particular, he is interested in specifying the conditions under which insurgent groups supported by external states decide not to employ child soldiers.

**CHRISS EDGERTON**  
*Political Science, M.A.*

Chris graduated with a master’s degree in spring 2017. He was a research assistant and developed comparative perspectives between African American and Kurdish experiences. Chris is currently working for LexisNexis in West Palm Beach and planning to apply for law schools.

**PEYMAN ASADZADE**  
*Security Studies, Ph.D. candidate*

Peyman conducts research on formation of Kurdish political mobilization in Iran and Turkey with a focus on linguistic and sectarian factors.

**KELLAN RITTER**  
*Political Science major*

Kellan is the inaugural Dr. Najmaldin Karim Fellow in Kurdish Political Studies. He studies the conditions under which civilians are targeted in the Kurdish conflict in Turkey from 2000 to 2016.

**MELISSA ZAMBRI**  
*International and Global Studies major*

Melissa studies the effects of violence related to the Kurdish conflict on the electoral results in Turkey from summer 2015 to spring 2017.

**STEPHANIE MELENDEZ**  
*International and Global Studies major*

Stephanie is comparing women and children in the Kurdish insurgency with the FARC of Colombia as part of her Honors in Major thesis.
PUBLIC OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

VISITS TO IRAQI KURDISTAN, FEBRUARY 2016 & SEPTEMBER 2017
In his visits, Tezcūr explored and discussed avenues of cooperation between UCF and Kurdish universities including joint conferences, exchange and training programs and enrollment of students from Kurdistan in UCF’s graduate programs. During his stay in Kurdistan, he also had meetings regarding the current political and socioeconomic situation of the Kurdistan Regional Government and U.S.-Kurdish relations. Photo #5

EDUCATING THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE, MARCH 2016
What are the current and future prospects for Iraqi Kurdistan? That’s what audiences at two presentations in Washington, D.C., organized by UCF’s Global Perspectives Office, came to discuss. The forums were a product of the partnership between UCF and Soran University, which is located in Iraqi Kurdistan. Specialists from both universities, as well as other experts, contributed to the discussions. Photo #4

VISIT TO CENTCOM IN AUGUST 2016
Several students and faculty from the UCF Security Studies Ph.D. program visited the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) in Tampa to present their research. CENTCOM personnel expressed interest in the students’ research, providing positive feedback and discussing collaboration on future events. Photo #2

KURDISH ISSUES IN TOKYO, JAPAN, JANUARY 2017
Tezcūr presented on four different topics at the Institute of Developing Economies (IDE-JETRO). He addressed the motives of individuals joining armed movements with a particular emphasis on the transnational Kurdish insurgency. His micro-level research provided evidence for some conventional explanations, challenged others and offered new theoretical perspectives about the decision to rebel informed by insights from behavioral economics. Photo #1 and photo below

COLLEGE OF SCIENCES DISTINGUISHED SPEAKER SERIES, JANUARY 2017
Tezcūr explored the topic: Why do ordinary men and women risk their lives to engage in acts of political violence? His presentation focused building insights from multiple disciplinary approaches to conceptualize the decision to fight as a form of altruistic punishment. Photo #6

THE SEXUAL VIOLENCE AS A WEAPON OF WAR CONFERENCE, BERLIN, GERMANY, JUNE 2017
The conference in Berlin had three key themes: empowering of the victims, ending the culture of impunity and addressing the social stigma. After the conference, an award ceremony took place honoring two victims of political violence. Tezcūr represented UCF in both events and served on the Help Human Rights Award Committee. Photo #3
LEADERSHIP AND AFFILIATES

BOARD MEMBERS

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HOWAR ZIAD, Former Ambassador of Iraq to Canada

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UCF FACULTY AFFILIATES

KONSTANTIN ASH, Department of Political Science

ULAŞ BAĞCI, Center for Research in Computer Vision

DAVID DUMKE, Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd Program

HAKAN ÖZOĞLU, Department of History

Drs. Zibari and Tezcür in Barzan area of Iraqi Kurdistan in February 2016.

Dr. Zibari giving a press conference as the leader of a medical mission in Dohuk, Iraqi Kurdistan.
KURDISH POLITICAL TIMELINE

1918
The emergence of the Kurdish question with the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the World War I

1946
The rise and fall of the Mahabad Republic in Iran, the first modern attempt in Kurdish self-rule

1961
The outbreak of the Barzani rebellion in Iraqi Kurdistan

1984
The outbreak of the PKK insurgency in Turkey

1988
The Iraqi chemical attacks against Kurdish civilians in Halabja

2003
The U.S. invasion of Iraq and the consolidation of the Kurdish autonomous rule

2011
The outbreak of the Syrian civil war and the gradual rise of the Kurdish self-governance (Rojava) in northern Syria

2017
Independence Referendum in Iraqi Kurdistan

IN MEMORIAM

JALAL TALABANI (1933-2017)

Mam Jalal, or Uncle Jalal, was the Kurdish leader who went from fighting guerilla war against the Iraqi state to becoming the first Kurdish President of Iraq. He died in Berlin on October 3. He was 83.

Talabani was known for his charm, optimist pragmatism and tireless diplomacy treating his foes as potential allies. He was born to an illustrious family in the Kurdish village of Kelkan, in the northeastern part of Iraq. His father was a well-known local Sufi sheik. At the age of 18, he was one of the youngest members of the central committee of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, the main party seeking autonomy for Kurdish people in Iraq and led by Mustafa Barzani.

He attended law school at Baghdad University, but withdrew to evade arrest for his role in founding the Kurdistan Student Union. He traveled abroad to China in 1955, then returned to Iraq and finished his degree. He became one of the founders of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan in 1975 after the collapse of the Kurdish rebellion.

Talabani was an important U.S. ally, though he openly disagreed with some American policies. As a result of genocide and chemical weapons used against the Kurds during the Iran-Iraq war from 1980 to 1988 under Saddam Hussein, Talabani traveled to the U.S. to disseminate the plight of Kurdish people. He spoke at the United Nations and to politicians in Washington, D.C. He campaigned for a Kurdish self-rule in northern Iraq. Following Iraq's failed invasion of Kuwait in 1991, he emerged as one of the leaders of the Kurdish autonomous zone.

Talabani is one of the towering figures of modern Kurdish politics, and his namesake was chosen for the chair of the Kurdish Political Studies Program. His transformative life story from guerrilla fighter to President of Iraq, the very state he fought against for most of his life, symbolizes the collective struggle of the Kurds against the odds.