



# Preface

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Augustine lived most of his life in Africa. He was a Berber by ethnicity and, after a brief visit to Italy, whose educational institutions fell short of his expectations, established a school in his native Carthage. After Augustine's death, ignorance and anarchy extended into Italy and Greece. A thousand years later, Europe rediscovered classical education. The *Tarikh-al-Sudan* reveals that Arab scholars introduced the trivium into sub-Saharan Africa, at the University of Sankoré in Timbuktu (Diop 1987, 178). These Islamic African scholars used the Koran as their central text and Arabic as the language of instruction and discourse (Lilford 2017, 151).

General education (GE) is quietly and globally significant. A foundation of undergraduate education, GE programs appear throughout the world. GE may be identified with liberal education or liberal arts education (LAE). While the numbers of liberal arts/liberal education/GE programs beyond the United States are small, they are growing. Jung, Nishimura, and Sasao (2016) trace the growth of LAE, including GE, in East Asia. Marber and Araya (2017) explore contemporary instances around the globe. Yusak (2015) describes liberal arts in Indonesia. According to the Global Liberal Education Inventory (Godwin 2013), liberal education, including GE, appears in 183 non-US institutions. Godwin calls this growth a “small, but potentially meaningful global trend,” one that is “percolating, not proliferating” (2015, 2–3). The trend signals the potential to identify common outcomes for student learning, such as critical thinking—shared goals that can help institutions to align programs. At the same time, as GE evolves, it reflects differences across regions and cultures. That is, GE has begun to display both global and indigenous characteristics.

In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), GE may be the largest single program that all undergraduates share. On campuses in the MENA, young men and women get up in the morning and head to class. Students from the wider Islamic world study on campus together. Campus student affairs offices design diversity programs to help students learn together across cultural and religious difference. Service-learning offices devise civic-engagement programs to attract young men in particular, who may not feel engaged by higher education. Educators adapt materials from the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), considering assessment programs using rubrics like VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) and discussing the efficacy of high-impact practices (Association of American Colleges and Universities 2018; Kuh 2008). Faculty debate the meaning of academic freedom and governance in institutions both traditional and progressive. Educators ask the same questions in the MENA as they do in the United States: How do we prepare our students for the global realities of this shrinking and dynamic world? How do we respect ourselves and our culture while joining in a larger endeavor for the sake of people in the future, who will have to work together across distance and difference? Here, exactly, is where a conversation about GE in the MENA begins.