Many issues that shape the quality of our lives have an international dimension. Global economic interdependence, the development of appropriate environmental strategies, the resolution of regional conflicts and the enhancement of human rights all require a global perspective. Important aspects of the educational experience include discussion and interaction with people from diverse cultures. Since 1964, Kearney State College, now the University of Nebraska at Kearney, has sponsored an international conference to discuss issues of global importance. In 1988 the name of the conference was changed to honor Professor James E. Smith, its founder.
In the spirit of James Smith's desire to bring a global perspective to the UNK community, this year's conference will focus on the dramatic changes taking place across the Middle East. These changes have illustrated the extent that the people of the region share many of the aspirations and beliefs that our society cherishes, as opposed to values that politically challenge or "clash" with the "West". In 1992, Samuel P. Huntington argued that international relations in the post-cold war world would be characterized by a "Clash of Civilizations". Establishing dichotomies between East and West, North and South, Christian and Islamic/Hindu/or Buddhist cultures, he imagined conflicts based not on rational political issues, but rooted in emotional cultural perceptions far more difficult to reconcile through peaceful means. Yet the events of the last 9 months in countries of the Middle East and North Africa that have come to be know as "The Arab Spring" suggest an entirely different dynamic. A series of domestic revolutions in opposition to entrenched dictatorial regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria have shaken any easy perception of the Muslim world as passive and inherently autocratic. While the ultimate outcome of these revolutions remains to be seen, their democratic goals and aspirations, as well as the methods they have used, suggest that the gap between our "civilizations" may not be as wide as Huntington imagined. Our keynote speaker, the writer and entrepreneur Reza Aslan, will address these and related issues in his talk, "The Future of the New Middle East." We look forward to exploring these ideas with Mr. Aslan and obtaining a better understanding of the ever-changing events in the Middle East.

**Mr. Reza Aslan**

With few peers, Reza Aslan addresses the topic of Islam, the Middle East, and Muslim Americans with authority, wit, and an infectious optimism. When he talks about modern Islam, the religion and politics of the Middle East, or the rise of a sophisticated Muslim middle class, audiences listen. His talks entertain, but never at the expense of complexity or nuance. Aslan speaks for a generation of Muslims who eschew the fundamentalist stereotype and want to usher in a new era of Islamic democracy. Extremism is winding down, he says, yet media coverage suggests the opposite. As a bestselling author and entrepreneur, Aslan has made extraordinary efforts to show Americans the true face of Islam today: a generation of change makers in America and abroad, who are solidifying relations with the West while making their own hopeful marks on the world.

Reza Aslan is the author of the international bestseller *No god but God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam*, which has been named by Blackwell Publishers as one of the 100 most important books of the last decade. It is now available in thirteen languages. He is also the author of *How to Win a Cosmic War*, a contributing editor to *The Daily Beast*, and a member of many prominent foreign relations and policy councils. He is also the editor of *Tablet and Pen*, a literary anthology that uses the arts to bridge the gap of understanding between East and West. Aslan appears regularly in the media, on *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart and *The Colbert Report* among other high profile outlets. In the corporate realm, Aslan is President and CEO of Aslan Media Inc., which runs BoomGen Studios, a unique media company focused entirely on entertainment about the Greater Middle East and its Diaspora communities. He has degrees in Religion from Santa Clara University, Harvard, and UC Santa Barbara, as well as a Master of Fine Arts from the University of Iowa, where he was named the Truman Capote Fellow in Fiction.

Individuals needing accommodation under ADA must contact the event coordinator or University ADA coordinator prior to the event at 308-865-8655 TTY/Voice.