



Islamic Studies at North American Theological Seminaries

Spotlight on Theological Education

Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner, Editor

Spotlight on Theological Education is a major initiative of the AAR Theological Education Steering Committee and is an important venue for exploring opportunities and challenges in theological education. Each issue focuses on a particular theme, setting, or concern to theological education. *Spotlight* appears as a special supplement to *Religious Studies News* in the spring of each year.

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Transforming the field of pastoral theology, she has edited or coedited four volumes involving fifty contributors over twenty-two years: *Women in Travail and Transition* (Fortress Press, 1991); *Through the Eyes of Women* (Fortress Press, 1996); *In Her Own Time* (Fortress Press, 2000); and *Women Out of Order* (Fortress, 2009). Additional publications include *The Spirit of Adoption* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), *A Primer in Pastoral Care* (Fortress Press, 2005), *A Prelude to Practical Theology* (Abingdon, 2008), and *Portable Roots: Transplanting the Bicultural Child* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014). She was honored with AAPC's Distinguished Achievement in Research and Writing Award.

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Feryal Salem is assistant professor of Islamic scriptures and law, codirector of the Islamic Chaplaincy Program, and associate editor of *The Muslim World* journal at Hartford Seminary. Her research interests are in Islamic theology, hadith, Sufism, Islamic scriptures, as well as interfaith dialogue. Feryal received her PhD in Islamic studies from the University of Chicago and her forthcoming book, *The Emergence of Early Sufi Piety and Sunni Scholasticism: 'Abd Allāh b. al-Mubārak and the Formation of Sunnī Identity in the Second Islamic Century*, will be published in Brill's Islamic History and Civilization Series in the late spring.

Ermin Sinanović is currently the Director of Research and Academic Programs at the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), where he is also the director of The Fairfax Institute. Before joining the IIIT, he was an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, MD. He studied for an MA and a PhD in political science at the Maxwell School of Syracuse University. Sinanović obtained two BAs (one in Qur'an and Sunnah studies, the other in political science) from the International Islamic University Malaysia, and an MA (Islamic civilization) from the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. His research interests include transnational Islamic revival, revival and reform in Islam, Islamic political thought, Southeast Asian politics, and Islam and politics in general. He speaks Bosnian, English, Arabic, and Malay.

Introduction

Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner, Perkins School of Theology

In the midwestern town of Dubuque, Iowa, plans to build a mosque are underway. Seventy percent of the building costs have been raised, and according to Lieutenant Scott Baxter of Dubuque's police department, no threats, complaints, or hate crimes have occurred. Cardiologist Rami Eltibi, a member of the Tri-State Islamic Center, sees the mosque's construction "as a milestone in the organization's efforts to break through the misinformation and fear surrounding Islam. The site will be focused on fostering increased conversation and understanding among those with differing beliefs in creating a more welcoming and inclusive Dubuque" (*Telegraph Herald*, January 11, 2016).

How do we do this in the academy? In a period of growing Islamophobia in the United States, how can theological institutions help "build a mosque," metaphorically speaking, and replace sites of misinformation and miscommunication?

Dr. Ermin Sinanovic, of the International Institute of Islamic Thought, opens this collection of essays by explaining the background of the 2015 AAR Annual Meeting panel, "Opportunities and Challenges of Teaching Islamic Studies in Theological Seminaries." Issues highlighted in his essay impact the *ummah*, or global Muslim community, and can create an intellectual as well as moral crisis. Sinanovic recognizes theological schools as welcoming to religious faith communities and as resistant to "securitizing" Islam and Muslims. His essay offers an overview to the formation and process of the AAR panel.

Dr. Nevin Reda, of Emmanuel College of Victoria University at the University of Toronto, raises provocative pedagogical questions from her context. For example, epistemological challenges for the Muslim community include addressing a centuries-old focus on law and building an "intellectual infrastructure to offer education in areas such as Islamic spiritual care and counseling that are more in tune with contemporary needs." How can Muslim students expect Christian faculty to adapt their course content when they have not been trained to do so? Exposing these and other challenges, she concludes that the challenges are "inherently also intellectually stimulating opportunities." Her essay suggests many models.

Dr. Feryal Salem is codirector of Hartford Seminary's Islamic Chaplaincy Program which was formed in 2001 to respond to the growing need for Muslim representation in the military, hospitals, prisons, and universities. In an interfaith environment at Hartford, Christian, Muslim, and Jewish professors approach the classroom as an exercise of "deepening faith and exploring differences."

Dr. Scott Alexander, of the Catholic Theological Union, directs the Catholic-Muslim Studies Program. He is very honest about institutional and individual limitations in interreligious pedagogy. According to Alexander, Muslim faculty and students are "inevitable subalterns vis-à-vis their Christian counterparts"

in a Roman Catholic University. He further explains that transformational learning occurs in the "ultimate superiority of learning *from* over merely learning *about* the religious other" (emphases mine). Team teaching and the modeling of interreligious relationships among faculty are some of the "best practices" that his essay details.

Dr. Munir Jiwa, of Graduate Theological Union, speaks of the shift from "being religiously representative to a deep engagement within and across traditions." His honest assessment of working or teaching in a crisis mode, as the media and the public thrust urgent questions about Islam and Muslims, illustrates the cost imposed on faculty in the field of Islamic studies. This current crisis mode has both an emotional toll and a scholarly impact on the field of Islamic studies as attention is diverted. Teaching "beyond the confines of Euro-American Christianity" and within the five "media pillars" through which the entire "Muslim world" is presented are particular pedagogical challenges. Jiwa closes with successful ways Graduate Theological Union has worked in "mediation, translation, and boundary-crossing."

In closing, all of these scholars help the reader imagine the dangers of construction, especially building an Islamic studies program on the site of a predominantly Christian foundation. There will be numerous and varying pedagogical tools that are needed to dig deeply. The epistemological soil may be layered or even hardened from previous eras. However, the season for growth is now, and each essay fertilizes our imaginative minds of how plentiful the harvest may be.

International Institute of Islamic Thought and Its Role in Promoting Islamic Studies at Theological Seminaries

Ermin Sinanović, International Institute of Islamic Thought

The Idea for the AAR Panel

The idea for organizing a panel at the American Academy of Religion 2015 Annual Meeting about teaching Islamic studies in theological seminaries came through sustained conversations that the International Institute of Islamic Thought had with several professors and administrators at these institutions—namely, Mark Toulouse and Nevin Reda of Emmanuel College, and Serene Jones and Jerusha Tanner Lamptey of Union Theological Seminary. Once basic components and ideas for the panel were in place, we reached out to several other colleagues who all immediately accepted our invitations. Thus, the proposal was put together mainly by Nevin, Jerusha, and myself.

The International Institute of Islamic Thought and the Study of Islam

The International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) was established in 1981 as an academic and educational institution with the objectives of revival and reform of Islamic thought. The founders of the Institute maintained that at the core of the current problems afflicting the *ummah* (global Muslim community) was an intellectual crisis. That crisis could only be addressed through critical examination of Muslim heritage, which needed to be coupled with an in-depth critique of modern secular thought. The founders of IIIT also believed that Muslims should restore an integrated reading of revealed knowledge that comes from Islamic scriptures—the Qur'an and Sunnah (Prophet Muhammad's examples)—and human knowledge, acquired through the humanities, social and natural sciences. This approach is known as "reading the two Books," a revealed Book (the Qur'an) and the book of nature. To that end, the IIIT advocates reform of education in Muslim societies (and elsewhere) that takes into account these integrated approaches to knowledge.

One of the founders of the IIIT, late Professor Ismail al-Faruqi (d.1986)—whose illustrious career spanned studying and teaching at Harvard, McGill, Syracuse, Indiana University, al-Azhar University in Cairo, and Temple University—founded the Study of Islam Section at the American Academy of Religion. In 1979, he helped convene, in his own words, "a very unusual meeting"—a gathering of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim academicians who engaged in what al-Faruqi later called, "a Trialogue of Abrahamic Faiths." A book by the same name was published in 1979, and later republished by IIIT in 1981. Positing the conversations among the Abrahamic faiths as a "trialogue," al-Faruqi invited us to think about multilateral approaches to the interfaith deliberations.

Al-Faruqi would not be surprised to find that such a triialogue continues to this day. What he would probably be amazed at is the new reality where the study of Islam has become an accepted norm at

several well-known theological schools and seminaries in North America: Hartford Seminary, Emmanuel College, Union Theological Seminary, and Graduate Theological Union, among others.

Entrance into Theological Schools

Noticing this shift in theological education in North America—caused partly by greater acceptance of Muslims in the Western context but also by a decline, in many places, in Christian students' enrollment at theological schools—the IIIT took a firm decision to support Islamic studies within this new context. Our relationship with Hartford Seminary, spearheaded by visionary leadership at both institutions, has produced sustained conversations in Christian-Muslim dialogue, but it did not stop there. New programs were established, including a graduate certificate in imam and Muslim community leadership which seeks to graduate Muslim religious and community leaders who complement their Islamic knowledge with a firm grasp of North American religious contexts and realities. Another program, Muslim chaplaincy, took hold at Hartford and was heavily supported by IIIT. More recently, IIIT entered into a partnership with Union Theological Seminary by providing support for their newly formed program, Islam, Social Justice, and Interreligious Engagement.

To help these various programs and initiatives, IIIT has facilitated hiring of Muslim scholars of Islam in order to diversify theological schools and to empower Muslim voices within theological and seminary studies. The result has been, as is obvious from other contributions that emerged from this panel, an infusion of invigorating interfaith and intrafaith discussions. A score of Muslim students were admitted into these theological schools, adding to diversity of the student body and enriching course offerings across the theological and religious spectrum.

What makes teaching and studying Islam at theological schools attractive to IIIT is the fact that religious faith and commitments are welcome at these institutions. While scholars of religion at "secular" institutions engage seriously with questions of faith, they do not look favorably upon faith-based study of religious traditions. The underlying assumption is that faith-based study of religion is subjective and cannot be used in a methodologically objective fashion. Thus, normativity is eschewed, heteronormativity is elevated, heterodoxies are often seen as more attractive subjects of study than orthodoxies, and the whole idea of religions as systematic and coherent systems of belief is deconstructed and, sometimes, completely negated.

Another important dimension of studying Islam in the post-9/11 context is the increased securitization of Islam and Muslims. Funding started pouring in from the US Department of Defense and other security agencies to the chronically underfunded departments and schools of Middle Eastern and/or Islamic studies. The pressure was to understand Islam from a narrowly defined perspective that would help in waging the "war on terror." Thankfully, theological schools were not large recipients of such funding, and that fact allowed them to avoid the trap of securitizing Islam and Muslims. As a result, the approaches to studying Islam were not tainted by day-to-day politics and security needs of the nation-state. Theological schools remained, to a large extent, oases of nonsecuritized scholarship on Islam and Muslims.

The Way Forward

As more Muslim faculty and students continue joining and enrolling at theological seminaries, there will be more need to widen and deepen the scope of Islamic studies at such institutions. The Muslim population in North America has started showing more interest in religious studies, including at theological schools. This presents an opportunity to many such institutions to capitalize on this interest and begin offering Muslim studies. At the same time, there is a potential backlash from the traditional

base on whom such schools have relied in the past: that theological schools are giving in too much to the Muslims. The administrators at these schools will have to tread a fine line between appeasing their older alumni/alumnae and donor base, while also trying to expand their reach to the Muslim population and their giving capacity. As North America is becoming more diverse and pluralistic, there is every reason for theological schools to move in that direction. This move will require a deep self-examination of theological commitments, the nature of the institutions, and ultimately a vision of what type of educational institution to be in the future.

Muslim Studies at Emmanuel College: Intercultural Pedagogies and Emerging Epistemologies

Nevin Reda, Emmanuel College

Emmanuel College of Victoria University in the University of Toronto is one of a handful of North American theological schools associated with mainstream Protestant denominations that have introduced a Muslim studies program, hired Muslim faculty, and accepted Muslims into its denominationally diverse student body. This major institutional shift broadens the scope of the study of Islam to include new areas of research that have a theological and practical dimension, such as spiritual care and counseling. Before this move, the formal study of Islam was restricted to departments for the study of religion and other university departments which are normally not conducive to theological inquiry. Post-secondary Islamic theological institutions in North America also have their limitations, and since they are mostly unaccredited, with little in the way of resources, their curriculum consists of traditional subject matter, and they generally do not incorporate the most current scholarship or research into changing contexts. While they allow for a thorough grounding in the classical sources, some also form intellectual ghettos with few opportunities for advanced degree studies and intercultural bridge-building in a North American academic context. As a result, the new theological setting of the study of Islam offers unprecedented learning opportunities but also significant pedagogical challenges that accompany such a monumental change. This essay explores some of these opportunities and challenges from an Islamic perspective.

I begin by clarifying Emmanuel College's distinct context and follow with some of the major challenges of its Muslim studies project: articulating a vision that informs the project and describes the new institutional identity in addition to the pedagogical dilemmas that emerge from the program. I continue with elucidating the main opportunities the project provides: developing new disciplines in the area of practical theology and related epistemologies, in addition to the experiential spiritual aspect. I argue that these challenges are also inherent opportunities for intellectual and theological growth.

Context

Emmanuel College of Victoria University in the University of Toronto has a unique context and history that contributes to the distinctive character of the program. As the graduate theological college associated with Victoria University, the College is institutionally affiliated with the University of Toronto. As a member of the Toronto School of Theology (TST), and a school historically affiliated with the United Church of Canada, the College has a strong focus on social justice which is reflected in Emmanuel's ethos, its approach to topics in academic classrooms, and its unusual spirit of collegiality. The school is located at the heart of Toronto, Canada's largest city and financial center, with a metropolitan population of 5,521,235, of which 424,935 are Muslim, making Islam the second largest religious affiliation after Christianity (3,128,565) [according to the 2011 National Household Survey](#) performed by Statistics Canada. Emmanuel's highly urban and multicultural context is reflected in the cultural

pluralism of its students, faculty, and advisors.

Emmanuel College offers a variety of research-oriented and professional degree programs at both the master and doctoral levels. It attracts Muslim students to its research-oriented master of theological studies and doctor of philosophy programs; however, its most popular program is its master of pastoral studies (MPS), which allows Muslim students the opportunity to work toward qualifying as spiritual care workers and counselors in a variety of settings. Emmanuel has most recently introduced a Buddhist studies track in its MPS, thereby increasing the diversity of its course offerings and student body.

Vision

In a recent conversation with a colleague at a member school of TST, I was asked why Muslims could possibly want to be educated at Emmanuel College? Underlying this question were additional ones: How could Emmanuel's Muslim studies project possibly be compatible with Islam? What is the Islamic theological perspective and vision that guides this project and informs its ethical underpinnings? To my mind, there has never been any doubt as to this vision: it can be encapsulated in the one Arabic word, *islam*, which I translate as wholeness-making, peace-making, well-being-making, and safety-making rather than the more common "submission." Indeed, only the first reproduces the word's causative nuance (it is a Form IV equivalent to the Hebrew *hifil*) and the meanings implicit in its root (the Form I is *salam*, which means wholeness, peace, well-being, and safety), while "submission" does not (Arabic: *istislam*). To be sure, there is nothing new about this concept, since it is prevalent in both the Jewish and Christian scriptures and faith traditions. In fact, the Islamic tradition associates this terminology with Abraham, so at least from an Islamic perspective, this word, *islam*, allows for an articulation of common historical origin, current ethical praxis, and future interreligious direction. Its relational nuances of making whole one's relationship to God and to God's creations reflect the Abrahamic faith traditions' notions of love of God and love of neighbor. For while "*islam*" expresses the exoteric praxis, "love" describes the inner path.

While this translation of *islam* is relatively new (Reda 2012, 243–245), it does allow Muslims to deal with the challenges of ethical and theological integrity in this evolving institutional setting. While Muslims and Christians believe in the one God of Abraham, they diverge in other beliefs, including the Trinity, and therefore have profound theological differences. Required courses that lie at the intersection of theology and the social sciences, and have therefore traditionally been taught from a Christian theological perspective, must now include Islamic perspectives. Since Emmanuel is a historically Christian institution, how ethical is it to introduce Islamic theologies into the classroom and thereby change the distinctive Christian character of the college? In other words, if one may expand the interpretation of Islam as "wholeness-making" to incorporate the related religious-legal maxim of "harm shall neither be inflicted nor reciprocated in Islam" (Kamali 2008, 36), how can Muslims ensure that they only benefit the institution? And how can they ensure to do no harm to the Christian instructional content while maintaining their own Islamic theological integrity? The constructive character of the notion of Islam, as I have translated it, enjoins an appreciation and a support of the vertical relationship between God and Christians, and the horizontal relationship between fellow human beings, which is integral within Christianity—at least how I have come to understand it. As an ethical praxis, it informs the multidimensional activities of the institution: the generosity of teaching and the humility of learning.

Pedagogical Challenges

The biggest challenge of introducing Muslim studies into theological seminaries is the pedagogical one: how does one educate Muslims and Christians in the same classroom when their educational needs are

so different? To what extent can Muslims expect Christian faculty to adapt their course content when they have been hired to teach Christian subject matter and have no prior training in Islam? It is a complex matter. In order to fulfill their program requirements, Muslim students need to take courses originally designed for Christians, particularly in the pastoral department.

To be sure, some of these required courses are grounded in secular disciplines that can help bridge theological differences, for example, in psychotherapy- and psychology-related spiritual care and counseling. However, in courses that have their theoretical infrastructure in Christian theology, the matter is much more difficult, for example, when teaching the theories and practices of ministry leadership. Therefore, teaching Muslims and Christians together requires some creative cultural translation and theological bridge-building to ensure the cohesion of course content. This exercise also inadvertently identifies much needed areas of research. For example, Muslims struggle with the Christian notion of call and vocation, and few resources present Muslim perspectives (I have found only one). As a result, Muslim students have to rely on primary sources and classical secondary scholarship (in translation) in order to participate in classroom discussions and when fulfilling vocational assignments. The paucity of resources makes teaching and learning a challenge; however, these challenges are also opportunities for deep reflection and theological creativity on questions of religious authority, authoritarianism, and the safe and effective use of self in the practice of counseling and other expressions of religious leadership. To some extent, this interreligious context recalls the early centuries of Islam and the development of dialectical theology (*kalam*), which evolved in conversation with Christianity into a rich discipline.

The dearth of resources and the novelty of the program contribute to the challenge of developing intercultural pedagogies. In some instances Muslims and Christians learn side by side in the classroom, not always with access to the theoretical foundations that allow for insightful theological interaction and reciprocal learning. As a result, the classroom can be *multifaith* rather than *intercultural* in character, having yet to overcome disjunctions in the learning environment. Nevertheless, the spatially interreligious context does provide opportunities for the development of courses that make this connection. For example, one of my course offerings examines different approaches to the connections between the primary scriptural sources, exploring notions such as influence theory, intertextuality, and reception theory, among other things. The course, *Intertwined Texts: Bible and Qur'an in Dialogue*, was awarded a generous grant from the Center for the Study of Jewish-Christian-Muslim Relations at Merrimack College and The William and Mary Greve Foundation. Moreover, Emmanuel's talented faculty members provide tantalizing possibilities for cotaught courses. The College's recent introduction of Buddhist studies expands these possibilities, since the tradition has a highly developed esoteric and practical dimension with strong parallels to Sufism, the esoteric tradition of Islam. Cotaught courses are one avenue of exploring possibilities of developing intercultural pedagogies.

Epistemological Opportunities

For Muslims, the most exciting prospect at Emmanuel is probably the opportunity to contribute to new directions for Islamic intellectual activity and the construction of new epistemologies that better meet the current needs of the Muslim community. In the present-day Canadian context and elsewhere around the globe, there is a growing need for alternative discourses that are more conducive to strong intrafaith and interfaith relations that can help heal individuals and communities. However, most traditional Islamic educational establishments have a centuries-old focus on law that was designed to meet the needs of the Muslim community of the distant past, and they do not have the intellectual infrastructure to offer education in areas such as Islamic spiritual care and counseling which are more in tune with contemporary needs. The preoccupation with law also has social implications, for law by its

very nature tends to give judgment after the fact, after someone has already done their deed. As a result, an overemphasis on law in the general discourse tends to leave behind a culture of judgment, whereas an emphasis on spiritual care and counseling can be more constructive and lead to healthier individuals and communities. Rather than give judgment after the fact, spiritual care workers and counselors have the tools to intervene before some great crisis befalls an individual, supporting them emotionally, spiritually, and morally. While traditional Islamic institutions are not generally equipped to teach care and counseling in ways that meet professional standards, Christian seminaries do. As they offer this expertise in a spirit of hospitality and generosity, they bring Muslims and Christians together in a learning environment, providing opportunities for Muslims and Christians to learn from one another and to build relationships of trust and friendship.

Conclusion

It is often hard to tease apart the challenges and opportunities of introducing Islamic studies into North American Christian seminaries. Probably the biggest challenge is that of preserving the theological integrity of both Christian and Islamic subject matter, which necessitates the articulation of a vision that allows for interreligious cooperation, religious authenticity, and spiritual growth. The pedagogical challenges are also inherently opportunities for developing intercultural pedagogies; the paucity and the burgeoning need for materials in areas such as Islamic spiritual care and counseling are opportunities for research and development in these emerging disciplines. While these are all significant benefits of the Muslim studies program, another aspect gives it a special dimension, transforming lives in unique ways: its contribution to the spiritual life of the people it touches. For practitioners of monotheistic world traditions, such endeavors provide occasions for experiencing how the one God is worshipped by others, and how this transcendent and majestic deity permeates their lives and aspirations. As a result, theological schools by their very focus on knowledge of God, allow for research and scholarship that is centered on the divine and that fosters growth in spirituality. Moreover, as these institutions educate Muslims and Christians together, they provide opportunities for forging networks of creative collaboration that are centered on a love of God and a love of neighbor.

Resources

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Fulfilling the Need for Muslim Chaplains

Feryal Salem, Hartford Seminary

Teaching Islamic studies and directing the Islamic Chaplaincy Program at Hartford Seminary is truly a great privilege. Being the only formally accredited Islamic chaplaincy certificate program in the country, we have promising students from all over the United States who come to Hartford to learn how to think critically, live faithfully, and serve their diverse communities as spiritual care givers. Our program consists of a two-year master's degree in religious studies with a focus on Islamic studies and Christian-Muslim relations followed by a one-year certificate program in Islamic chaplaincy in which students learn skills related to counseling, leadership, and public speaking.

The Islamic Chaplaincy Program was formed in 2001 in response to the growing need for Muslim representation in the military and the lack of any accredited institution that formally trains Muslims to fill this niche. Over time, Muslims have been sought in hospitals, universities, and prisons to serve in similar capacities as religious advisors and spiritual care givers. This made Hartford Seminary's Islamic Chaplaincy Program one of a kind in the nation and a hub from which many highly qualified chaplains today received their training. Being a part of the Macdonald Center for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations shapes in great part the approach we have to teaching in this field.

The first component of the Islamic Chaplaincy Program is the master's degree in Islamic studies and Christian-Muslim relations. This is a 48-credit program typically completed in two years and includes courses in the disciplines of Islamic religious thought and practice, historical and contemporary perspectives on Islamic societies, and theological and social interactions between Christianity and Islam. This is then followed by a one-year 24-credit Islamic chaplaincy certificate in which students focus on enhancing pastoral skills essential to their work as chaplains. In this component of the program, students will take courses related to pastoral care, practices of ministry, as well as complete 240 hours of a supervised field education and one unit of clinical pastoral education.

Hartford Seminary has a strong history of seriously engaging faith while balancing this with critical thought and high academic standards. As a seminary, faith is valued and regarded as a relevant part of a student's learning experience. The Christian, Muslim, and Jewish professors at Hartford Seminary are believers in the faith that they teach. At the same time, they have academic training and value the importance of looking at religious practice through a critical lens. This forms a unique learning experience in the classroom in which professors and students can both appreciate the contributions of faith traditions to societies and individuals while also thinking about the way practices and interpretations have been formed within the frameworks of human history. The diversity of the student population in the interfaith environment on campus also translates into classrooms, where students are most often a mixture of Christians and Muslims from a variety of perspectives within each tradition. This creates a rich learning experience for students who engage with each other in classroom discussions and also ask questions from points of view that are often quite distinct from the way another student—born and raised in her or his own religious tradition—would think about faith-related matters.

This unique combination of faith, critical thinking, academic standards, and religious diversity at Hartford Seminary creates a distinctive environment for students to both expand their minds and souls. This experience is also what makes our Islamic chaplaincy program unique. Muslim students have the opportunity to learn about their faith in a setting that is supportive of the role of faith in their lives while simultaneously being exposed to a wide range of perspectives both within their own faith tradition as well as with those from outside of their tradition. This is an essential component of what we do in the Islamic Chaplaincy Program at Hartford. Through the Hartford Seminary approach of "deepening faith, and exploring differences" as highlighted in the seminary's motto, our students are equipped to work in the public sphere as Muslim chaplains where both spiritual fortitude and the capacity to work within a framework of diverse social, religious, and cultural world views is essential to the role they will play as spiritual care givers.

Catholic-Muslim Studies at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago

Scott C. Alexander, Catholic Theological Union, Chicago

These reflections are a mixture of the institutional and the personal. They focus largely on some of the initiatives and so-called "best practices" of interreligious programming at the institution where I have been teaching for the past fifteen years—Catholic Theological Union in Chicago (CTU). But they also include my own personal history and experience as a Christian Islamicist engaged in Christian-Muslim dialogue on both a professional and personal level for well over thirty years.

When I arrived at CTU in the fall of 2000, the sign on my office door indicated that I was the founding "director" of the soon-to-be inaugurated Catholic-Muslim Studies Program. My excitement over the possibilities of shaping such a program at the largest independent Catholic graduate school in theology in the United States (with students from over 40 different countries) was only matched by my anxiety. I was anxious about whether I could formulate a coherent vision and whether, even though I was a life-long Roman Catholic, whatever I envisioned would be a good "fit" for a Catholic institution owned by a corporation of men's religious orders—many of which had "missionary" histories.

At that point, what I had learned about CTU through the interview process was that its evident commitment to "interreligious dialogue" (the Catholic term for holistic engagement with religious "others") was actually rooted in its institutional *raison d'être*. CTU was founded in 1968 in the immediate aftermath of the Second Vatican Council as a graduate school of theology and ministry dedicated to the principles of the Council. Vatican II, convened for the purposes of clarifying the mission of the Church in the modern world, emphasized that the Church should engage in dialogue with men and women of other faiths for the purposes of witnessing to Christ in modalities that affirmed the dignity of other religious people and "ways," as well as for the sake of greater and lasting peace and justice in the human family (see [Nostra Aetate](#), promulgated on October 28, 1965).

Given the Council's watershed condemnation of anti-Semitism and exhortation to heal the Church's relationship with the Jewish people (*Nostra Aetate*, sec. 4), CTU welcomed a rabbi as a charter member of its faculty. This marked one important step in the founding of what is now CTU's internationally renowned Catholic-Jewish Studies Program. Today CTU has a partially endowed chair in Jewish studies which has been held by two different Jewish scholars since its inauguration. In October of 2000—in response to the Second Vatican Council's mandate for Catholic-Muslim dialogue (*Nostra Aetate*, sec. 3), and with an almost prescient understanding of the importance of Catholic-Muslim dialogue to sustainable global peace and justice—CTU resolved to create the Catholic-Muslim Studies Program. For the last fifteen years, I've tried to collaborate with many in our learning community to help shape the program by offering a number of courses in Islamic studies and Muslim-Christian relations. These courses are, for the most part, team-taught by Muslim and Christian faculty working closely together and modeling strong and respectful Muslim-Christian relations for students.

Of late, both Catholic-Jewish and Catholic-Muslim Studies at CTU have been the bilateral foundations of

a very successful and ongoing trilateral (Jewish-Christian-Muslim) annual dialogue series entitled "In Good Faith," and a new MA concentration in interreligious dialogue which has attracted multiple cohorts of superb students. While we have had many Muslim students and one Jewish student, one of our greatest challenges will be continuing to attract Jewish and Muslim students into the program so that all the students in the concentration and their colleagues have the richest possible experience of interreligious learning.

Interreligious Pedagogy: Institutional, Individual, and Personal Limitations

Many of our efforts at developing best practices in interreligious pedagogy in the Catholic-Muslim Studies Program have been a matter of recognizing and working within the parameters of our institutional and individual limitations, while at the same time committing ourselves to the struggle for transformational learning as we learn from our mistakes and strive to attend to the voices of the students we hope to serve.

The institutional and individual limitations abound.

On the institutional level, we daily live in the tension of working to forge an ethic of *interreligious mutuality* within a larger power structure designed, among other things, precisely to perpetuate and enhance a specifically Roman Catholic identity which is, for all intents and purposes, still principally white, principally male, and principally heteronormative. Like other independent graduate theological institutions, we are also on a very tight budget. At present, our partnerships with key individuals and organizations in local and national Muslim communities have yielded precious wisdom in the form of Muslim membership on the program's advisory board. It has also yielded critical financial support for scholarships (especially for Muslim students to study at CTU) as well as for two adjunct Muslim faculty members. But funding for a permanent full-time Muslim scholar on the faculty still appears to be a ways off, as does Muslim membership on the school's board of trustees.

The individual limitations reflect those of the institution. In Spivak's terms, these individual limitations facilitate the institutional macro-reinscription of a dominant Roman Catholic subjectivity (writ large) through a process of "engagement" with/objectification of the religious Other which proceeds by providing an opportunity for students and faculty to inscribe their own individual subjectivities (writ small) in a context wherein Muslim faculty and students are inevitable subalterns vis-à-vis their Christian counterparts. These challenges are compounded when racial inequalities are added to the mix. Next fall, for example, an African American Muslim activist and community organizer and I will team-teach a course on interfaith collaboration for social transformation. He and I are already discussing strategies for naming and resisting this structural problem, including holding the class at the offices of the black-run NGO for which he works rather than on the campus of CTU.

I am also painfully aware of my own personal limitations, not only as I enjoy white male heterosexist privilege in the dominant cultures of my society and the institution where I teach, but also as a Christian with a PhD in Islamic studies. Despite my efforts to the contrary, I cannot avoid the many hegemonic and self-serving (including the particularly ugly self-congratulatory) dimensions of "devoting my professional career to understanding perhaps the most misunderstood and demonized of contemporary religious others." Also, try though I may to defer to the authority of my Muslim colleagues and students—as well as to invite their critiques of my more obvious and less obvious prejudices—I am never sufficiently decentered in the classroom; my power and privilege never sufficiently "shared." And then there are those moments when I am reminded that, for a small number of Muslims, the fact that I have studied and taught Islam for years and continue to do so with no apparent intention to convert,

makes me just another (perhaps more insidious) agent of the very Islamophobia I claim to have dedicated my life to fighting.

Interreligious Pedagogy: Best (?) Practices for Transformational Learning

As for the seemingly Sisyphean task of attempting to create contexts for genuine transformational learning in the face of such limitations, my Muslim colleagues and I aspire to root our praxis of interreligious pedagogy in a few basic principles and related practices:

Authentic Self-Representation and Empathic Understanding

The faculty of the Catholic-Jewish and Catholic-Muslim Studies Programs at CTU are each respectively comprised of both Christian faculty with expertise in Judaism and Islam, as well as Jewish and Muslim faculty with expertise in Christianity. This is just one structural means of communicating to students the absolute primacy of authentic-self-representation in interreligious studies and dialogue, as well as the critical importance of developing an informed and ideally empathic understanding of religious traditions other than one's own. Although it has come to be a cliché of interreligious pedagogy, we are convinced that one can never underestimate the transformational potential and thus ultimate superiority of learning *from* over merely learning *about* the religious other.

One of the many advantages of the "learning from" dynamic is the way in which it helps us follow Levinas in recognizing all forms of alterity—and especially religious alterity—not as a pedagogical "challenge" to be met in the theological classroom, but rather as a *fundamental pedagogical value* which must be rigorously embraced and thereby inform every aspect of the theological learning process. In somewhat simpler terms, the "learning from" dynamic helps facilitate a deep appreciation of what Jonathan Sacks refers to as the "dignity of difference." I should note that, in my experience, the fruits of this dynamic emerge less as the results of pedagogical exercises specifically orchestrated to this end, and more as the result of an ethos oriented towards the right balance of authentic and assertive self-representation, on the one hand, and empathic understanding in humility, on the other. I am reminded, for example, of an exchange between two of my doctoral students—one a former Baptist minister who had become Roman Catholic, and the other an al-Azhar-trained shaykh and imam at an important area Islamic center. Each was asserting the "obvious" primacy of the specific revelations of their respective traditions. Their very respectful debate unfolded in a collegial environment of fellow Christians and Muslims—most of whom recognized the importance and dignity of this exchange, but who were skeptical about how productive it was. The interreligious exchange between the principal discussants quickly merged with an intrareligious conversation between each of them and their coreligionaries. I witnessed the marvelous ways in which the immediate ethical demands of embodied alterity generated insights and understanding which neither my Muslim colleague nor I could have imagined, let alone strategically planned to elicit.

Interreligious Team Teaching and Relationship Modeling

Interreligious team teaching is an important pedagogical practice through which the principles of specifically *interreligious* self-representation and empathic understanding are ideally integrated. Not only does this practice help ensure a certain degree of interreligious mutuality in syllabus construction, class instruction, and course leadership, but it also can be a vehicle for modeling interreligious relationships. Almost all of the courses in the Catholic-Muslim Studies Program at CTU are team-taught by faculty who, in many cases, have longstanding professional and personal relationships. For example, one of my Muslim colleagues is not only a colleague. He is a mentor, a friend, and even a spiritual director. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that he is like a father to me. We have shared as much

personally as we have professionally over the past 15 years we have known each other, including travel, hospital visits, and family celebrations of various kinds. This last Christmas morning, I once again got to witness my parents laughing and chatting with him over the telephone as they called to thank him and his wife for their annual gift of baklava that had arrived in the mail, as it always does, on Christmas Eve. Earlier in our relationship—in the days before the Christmas baklava—my colleague and I began receiving signs of the impact our developing friendship was having on our teaching. We were quite surprised, at first, and have been deeply gratified ever since our students began to note in their evaluations that one of the most enriching aspects of the courses they took with us were the ways in which he and I modeled interreligious relationships for them.

Muslim Students at a Catholic Institution

It has been our experience that the presence of courageous and path-breaking Jewish and Muslim students within CTU's student body as interreligious teachers, guides, and companions is as important as the presence of our Jewish and Muslim faculty. It is these students who—in classes not directly related to dialogue, in the refectory, in study groups, in the dormitories, and in a wide variety of student social activities—add an invaluable perspective which challenges their Christian colleagues and faculty to grow in ways not previously imagined. Once, I was co-instructor for a course in the core curriculum in which one of our Muslim students happened to be enrolled. Toward the end of the semester we asked each study group to share with the larger class what they valued most about their particular group. The group that included the Muslim student said they were unanimous in their assessment that the single thing they admired most was his presence among them. To paraphrase one member of that study group: "No matter what text or issue we were discussing, Şerif always offered his own Muslim perspective. When he did this, it almost always opened up angles of analysis that we Catholics found amazingly stimulating, challenging, and helpful." To which I recall Şerif wryly responding, "What do you mean *almost* always?" followed by raucous laughter.

The Phone Call from "Gerardo"

A few years ago, I received a telephone call from a former student of mine who had studied in the Catholic-Muslim Studies Program, had graduated with his MDiv, had been ordained as a priest, and then went on to do doctoral studies in Islam and Christian-Muslim relations.

The conversation began with me saying something like, "Hey, man, how you doin'?"

"Great." he responded. "How 'bout you?"

"Not too bad," I said. "How they treating you at [major research university]?"

"Alright, I guess."

Then, after a bit more small talk, he paused and said. "Listen, I called to say thank you for everything..."

"My pleasure," I clumsily interrupted, only then realizing he had more to say, but not yet understanding that the purpose of his call was not just to say hello and express his gratitude. In fact, I hadn't the slightest clue at that point in the conversation that he had called to offer me an insight that would so elegantly encapsulate the heart of my ministry as director of a program in Catholic-Muslim studies at a Catholic graduate school of theology and ministry. "Sorry, Gerardo," I caught myself. "You were about to say...?"

"Yeah," he said in a somewhat quieter voice. "I was about to say that it occurred to me the other day

that I can start a sentence in a way most Roman Catholic priests cannot."

I deliberately said nothing, not wanting to interrupt him as I had done a few seconds earlier. Only this time, I missed my cue. This time he wanted me to respond to his curious teaser and ask: "What would that be?"

Now came that brief interval of awkward silence anxious extroverts like me like to avoid. He cleared his throat and said, "Are you there?"

"Yeah, I'm here." Recognizing what just happened, we both chuckled. "I didn't want to interrupt again." We laughed again. "What sentence is that?" I finally asked.

"The sentence goes like this," he said: "*When I was in seminary, my Muslim colleagues and professors used to say...*"

Ever since, I have recounted this phone call from "Gerardo" to convey to people what can happen, by the power of the Spirit, when an institution and the people who comprise it commit to some version of the principles and practices of interreligious pedagogy I've inadequately described above. Muslims played a defining role in Gerardo's intellectual and spiritual formation for the Roman Catholic priesthood—a role he has come to recognize and value a great deal. Many other students who are graduates of the MA (theology) concentration in interreligious dialogue at CTU have expressed similar assessments of their experience with interreligious pedagogy and have suggested that far more of their colleagues at CTU need to be exposed to interreligious pedagogy as a key element of their intellectual and spiritual formation as religious leaders. Many, if not all, of our Muslim students have voiced similar opinions. In fact, many of my students and colleagues, both Christian and Muslim, have often used the expression "future of theological education" to prescribe the importance of interreligious pedagogy in colleges, universities, and graduate schools of theology alike. I cannot help but agree.

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Challenges and Opportunities in Interreligious Seminary Studies

Munir Jiwa, Graduate Theological Union

Greetings of peace. Before I comment on the opportunities and challenges in teaching Islamic Studies in theological schools and seminaries, I want to first give a brief historical overview of the Graduate Theological Union (GTU). This overview will also help us contextualize the Center for Islamic Studies; I will follow by sharing some of the institutional challenges as well as some of the personal challenges I have to navigate both as the founding director of the Center for Islamic Studies, and as an associate professor of Islamic studies, who is trained as an anthropologist. Finally, I want to share some of the opportunities I think need to be encouraged and funded, especially in the area of Islamic contributions to interreligious studies, dialogue and leadership both in the academy across disciplines, and in the larger public sphere.

Historical Context

During the first half of the twentieth century, several Protestant denominations and Catholic orders relocated their theological seminaries to Berkeley, drawn by the proximity of the vast educational resources of the University of California, Berkeley. The University and individual seminaries opened classes to students of other schools, listed courses in multiple catalogs, and shared library resources. In the early 1960s, understanding of theological education began to shift away from denominational isolation to a more ecumenical approach. Seminaries began to understand the advantages of working in cooperation to strengthen curricula and advanced degree programs.

In this atmosphere, a cooperative degree program was negotiated by Protestant seminaries that resulted in the creation of the GTU in 1962. In 1964, the first Catholic school was admitted to the consortia, and in 1968 the Center for Jewish Studies was established. In the decades to follow, the GTU added several additional academic centers including the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, the Patriarch Athenagoras Orthodox Institute, and the Institute of Buddhist Studies. In 2007, the Center for Islamic Studies was created as an academic program unit of the GTU. We recently officially inaugurated the Center for Dharma Studies in December 2015, and the Center for the Arts, Religion and Education will become a program unit of the GTU in 2016.

The Center for Islamic Studies (CIS) is integral to the cooperative ethos and interreligious engagement of the GTU. The CIS generates innovative research and scholarship on Islamic texts and traditions in contemporary contexts. The Center offers a certificate and master's degree, supports Islamic studies in the various GTU departments at the doctoral level, and provides graduate level courses on Islam for students throughout the GTU consortium and the University of California, Berkeley (UCB). The Center works collaboratively with a wide range of partners, including many departments and centers at UCB, expanding the resources available for classes, research, teaching, and public programs.

A [recent study](#) by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding estimated that 250,000 Muslims,

across a variety of ethnicities and countries of origin, live in the San Francisco Bay Area, within an hour's drive of the GTU campus. This makes the GTU the perfect platform for deepening engagement with Muslims and the Islamic tradition in an interreligious context. The CIS attracts more than 5,000 attendees from Bay Area communities to its programs each year and has offered more than 700 educational programs, forums, and public events since its founding.

Within this diverse interreligious context, the CIS is uniquely positioned to build bridges of understanding within and across religious traditions, through informed scholarship and teaching in Islamic Studies that fosters balanced perspectives and invites deeper conversations.

Institutional Challenges at the GTU, and Moving in the Direction of Interreligious Studies

As the GTU continues to become even more expansive in its religious diversity and outreach, and as it establishes further programs and courses in underrepresented traditions, such as Dharma studies (e.g., Hindu studies, Jain studies, and Indian Buddhist studies), Sikh studies, and Mormon studies, along with its continued support of Jewish studies, Buddhist studies and Islamic studies, it is increasingly met with new challenges. On the one hand, each underrepresented tradition has the immense task of establishing and/or continuing its academic and public programming within its specific tradition. On the other, there are increased demands both by the institution and larger public to have underrepresented traditions included in classes on Christianity, to teach more interreligiously, and to provide interreligious programming. One example of this is how we think more collaboratively about teaching. There are courses modeled along the lines of world religions, where we have a professor from a specific tradition teach about her or his tradition in a week or two! But this model is a very different one from a class in which professors from various traditions and across academic disciplines attempt to actively collaborate to think through theories, methodologies, pedagogies, convergences and divergences around specific topics (e.g., women and gender, pilgrimage, sustainability/environment/ecology, art, etc). There are also models that many of our more ministry-oriented programs must consider, especially in terms of interreligious dialogue skills and sensitivities to the diverse practices of faith communities, including the sensitivities around the intersectionality of religious identity and belonging with race, gender, sexuality, class, culture, ethnicity, nationality, language, and able-bodiedness.

So, in addition to making sure all the courses in Islamic studies are regularly offered, including introductory and foundational courses that are required, we have to balance the faculty time and scarce resources of non-Christian faculty as we also move from being religiously representative (multireligious) to a deep engagement within and across traditions (interreligious and intrareligious).

While this remains a major challenge, extraordinary steps have been made at the GTU to address these challenges by providing opportunities for collaboration in new ways. The changing student body that is increasingly diverse and non-Christian, or those who identify as spiritual but not religious, or who are simply just interested in religion as an academic study, can all find a fit at the GTU. Our newly reconfigured doctoral program is a good example of how academic programs can be structured to advance research, teaching and interdisciplinary scholarship across traditions in innovative ways, attending to the changing religious landscapes in the United States and globally.

Administrative Challenges at the CIS, and Teaching Contemporary Islamic Studies

While I have mentioned some of the larger GTU challenges and offered an example of interreligious collaboration, I also need attend to administrative tasks that are part of my role as director of the CIS. In addition to my academic requirements of teaching, advising students, doing research, and publishing, I am also tasked with fundraising for the program. This includes recruiting new students, establishing and

maintaining academic partnerships—especially throughout the GTU and various departments at UCB, Zaytuna College (the first accredited Muslim liberal arts college in the United States)—as well as public partnerships (e.g., World Affairs Council, Commonwealth Club, hospitals, schools, prisons, media, museums and the art organizations, Muslim and other religious and interfaith communities, to name a few). Growing the Islamic Studies programs simultaneously means attending to growing the interreligious programs. This requires thinking in new ways about contextual learning and pedagogy, whether engaging religion in the city, or in sacred spaces, or the use of media in classrooms, online learning, and immersion learning—all adding to diversifying and internationalizing our programs.

In addition, as we build programs in Islamic Studies, there are numerous (and urgent) demands made on us at the CIS. In the context of Islam/Muslims in the public sphere, Islamophobia, and daily negative news stories on Islam and Muslims, we are constantly engaging the public and media who have serious and urgent questions. Working in this crisis mode takes an extraordinary amount of time, skill and patience, as it also takes an emotional toll. There are also risks in scholarship topics (for example security and terrorism) which can make a scholar a target for particular kinds of scrutiny if one is a scholar who happens to be Muslim. This has a huge impact on academic freedom for such scholars. The other issue this raises is that much needed critical scholarship and understanding on the Islamic classical tradition is often less attended to, as focus is centered on Islam and Muslims in contemporary media and political contexts. This is a major difference from many of my colleagues who do not have to work in such a crisis mode, leaving them much more time for scholarship and publications with less scrutiny.

This places a huge amount of work on me and other minority faculty and/or those teaching Islamic studies. Like many other minority faculty, I also have to navigate being seen through my identity only as a Muslim. In other words, I must be saying what I am because I am a Muslim, forgetting other identities or academic credentials—like being an anthropologist or working in media and cultural production. This puts me and minorities in general on the defense because we are both trying to attend to excluded histories, while at the same time being evaluated on "objectivity" and critical distance from our identities. For example, in my class on critical theory, when I am looking at the history of Euro-American empire and its continued violence in the world, my critiques are often viewed as coming from "Islam" or my being a Muslim, rather than from my training in cultural anthropology, or being Canadian—just go north to get a vast and steady dose of critiques of the United States!

In my own field of working within contemporary Islamic studies, teaching on topics such as secularism, modernity, liberalism, critical theory, war and violence, identity, media, aesthetics, Islamophobia, the politics of pluralism, and interreligious dialogue, I am always working within the normative frames through which Islam and Muslims are most often represented in the Euro-American public sphere and media. These frames are what I call the five "media pillars" of Islam, namely: 9/11 as the predominant temporal lens through which we approach Islamic history and theology; violence and terrorism; Muslim women and veiling and new discussions on sexual minorities; Islam and the West and questions of compatibility and values; and finally the Middle East as the geographical/spatial lens through which we view the entire "Muslim world," focusing on politics.

In class we unpack these totalizing frames and discuss how difficult it is to work outside of them, given the risks of being unrecognizable or apologetic. We often begin with the language we use, such as "progressive," "moderate," "fundamentalist," including unpacking other English words such as jihad, madrasa, Taliban, al-Qaeda – notice how none of them come up as errors in spell-check! We also focus on how to unlearn or challenge the predominantly Christian lenses through which we attempt to understand the Islamic tradition, for example, not imposing the methodologies of biblical hermeneutics onto Qur'anic Studies, how religious norms are often liberating in many communities, challenging

secular fundamentalism, or how not to dismiss feminisms that might base their liberation in the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition. Or, for example, when I am trying to get my students to think about how Islam is mobilized and instrumentalized to make claims about "religious" violence in the world, I challenge students on how not to think about Islam/religion/theology alone but instead also focus on the sociopolitical and economic context of the military industrial complex.

This takes a lot of imagination among my already very diverse MA, MDiv, MTS, PhD, and DMin students, who, even in their care and sensitivity, often find it difficult to extend themselves to thinking beyond the confines of Euro-American Christianity and secularism – that's why having so many international students adds significantly to class discussions. There is also a difference in the way this is experienced by Muslim and non-Muslim students in class, and those who are in Islamic studies and those who are studying other traditions, or in different academic disciplines.

Madrasa-Midrasha: An Example of Teaching Islamic Studies Interreligiously and Teaching Jewish Studies Interreligiously

While I highlight these challenges administratively and in terms of teaching, I cannot reiterate enough how well the GTU is continuing to address such challenges in very reassuring ways. I think it is critical to find collaborative ways to reflect upon, evaluate, and assess our programs, as well as share our learnings in person, online, and through publications with colleagues within and outside our institutions. I think the Henry Luce Foundation plays a central role in advancing such collaboration.

One such exemplary program, *Madrasa-Midrasha*, developed jointly by our Center for Jewish Studies and Center for Islamic Studies, explores the richness, diversity, and commonalities of the Jewish and Islamic traditions. Since its inception in 2009, the *Madrasa-Midrasha* program has produced courses, workshops, lectures, conferences, and other public programs that offer students, faculty, staff, and community members an opportunity to explore the richness, diversity, and commonalities of the Islamic and Jewish traditions. This program also promotes dialogue among participants about contemporary issues in both communities. Students generate scholarship on both faith traditions, and study the traditions as they are lived and practiced through the celebration of holidays, dietary laws, prayer, rituals, literature and visual arts, and politics.

Events and courses over the years have included topics such as: celebrating Eid and Rosh Hashanah; lunar calendar; laws and practices of *halal/kashrut*; circumcision; religion and the White House; Israel/Palestine; Islamophobia and anti-Semitism; Hajjar/Hagar; women and gender; media representations; aesthetics of sacred space; environment/sustainability/climate change; and sacred seasons: pilgrimage, piety, and personal transformation. Each of these programs and courses has been an opportunity to understand the particularities of studying these two traditions in their own contexts. But there is also the added learning of studying these two traditions together—acknowledging both the similarities and differences, visiting mosques and synagogues—all the while continuing to build and maintain relations with UCB, Muslim and Jewish communities, interfaith communities, and the public at large.

Some Closing Reflections

In this essay, I have tried to highlight some of the challenges and opportunities of teaching Islamic studies at the GTU, and I have tried to do so by both reflecting on my role as a director and professor, and simultaneously trying to do so by focusing on interreligious studies. I think this is critical, as Islamic studies is not just an add-on to how we think about, teach, and practice interreligious studies, but is integral to it. We need to study and reflect upon the Islamic tradition and diverse Muslim practices and

expressions both in their own specificity and history, and we need to do so in the context of mutually constitutive histories—histories of entanglement, overlap, and messiness, but also histories of shared intellectual and spiritual learning and aesthetics.

There are many areas I have not presented here but that provide excellent opportunities for resources, such as our cosponsored [Islamophobia Documentation and Research Project](#) at the Center for Race and Gender, at UCB, now in its seventh year, including the free online *Islamophobia Studies Journal*. As we grow our programs in Islamic art and religion and the arts more generally, and as we develop our proposed work in Islamic and interreligious chaplaincy, and many other pedagogical initiatives such as online and immersion learning, or in growing library resources, there is much that needs to be learned and shared, academically and administratively.

I think Islamic studies and Muslims are not only critical to include in theological schools and seminaries for the obvious reasons of their historical exclusion—Islam is also an American religion and has been here right from the start, and has a long and rich history of African-American Muslims who have upheld the faith—but also because they make significant contributions to how we reflect upon ourselves in profoundly new ways in interreligious and interdisciplinary contexts, where we study and live our faiths. There is a major positive contribution that religions can jointly make. Because interreligious education equips students with skills and professional competencies that promote dialogue and understanding within and across traditions, we have the opportunity as a group of scholars and/or faith practitioners to advance the positive role of religion and theology in education and public life—in media, the arts, museums, public policy, law, social (justice) work, business, and religious communities. I like to think of this work as mediation, translation, and boundary-crossing as it reframes religions and religious practitioners as sources of divisiveness to ones that promote dialogue and understanding. Advancing religious and interreligious literacy in theological schools, which includes understanding people in their intersectionality and understanding things in their socio-political and economic contexts, has a tremendous transformative potential in the larger public sphere.

I look forward to continued conversations.

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