



Duke Islamic Studies Center
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Established in 2006, the Duke Islamic Studies Center (DISC) is a vibrant, diverse community of scholars and students engaged in interdisciplinary teaching, interactive learning, and cutting-edge research about Islam and Muslims. We are educating today's students to become tomorrow's leaders by equipping them with knowledge about the breadth and diversity of Islamic cultures, cross-cultural experiences, and language skills.

DISC aspires to be the preeminent institution in North America for the study of Islam and Muslims. Its comparative, cross-cultural approach to Islamic Studies will foster fresh interpretations of Islam and encourage creative solutions to entrenched social problems that confront the world's Muslims. DISC will promote positive relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, at home and abroad, in both the public and private sectors.

We live in a world where knowledge about Islam and the Muslim world has taken on vital importance. Islam is a global religion, with over 1 billion practitioners worldwide—nearly one quarter of the world's population. Only 20 percent of Muslims live in the Middle East, and Islam is one of the fastest growing religions in the United States. Predominantly Muslim nations are playing an expanding role in global economic and political relations.

Despite the growing presence of Islam and Muslim nations on the global stage, too many Americans are uninformed about basic Muslim beliefs, practices, and history. Few Americans recognize the diversity of Islamic cultures or know

how much Muslims have contributed to philosophy, science, commerce, and art. U.S. Foreign Service, military, and business leaders who work in Muslim countries are often not fluent in Arabic or other Islamic languages. Muslim leaders and professionals, for their part, need more than a superficial understanding of Western culture, institutions, and beliefs if the desired dialogue and exchange of perspectives is to be productive.

The Duke Islamic Studies Center is taking on the critically important work of using education as a tool for advancing cross-cultural understanding and addressing the economic, political, and social challenges of the world's Muslims. We are committed to working

with partners at home and abroad to provide students, professionals, and policy makers with the knowledge about the Muslim world and Islamic cultures, beliefs, and practices that will enable them to operate effectively in a multicultural world.

The profiles in this brochure give examples of the kinds of extraordinary students and faculty who are part of DISC. The chart of gift opportunities shows some of our important fundraising needs.

Gifts to support Duke's Islamic Studies Center

Your gift of...	will...
\$2.5 million	endow a Professorship for the Interdisciplinary Study of the Islamic World.
\$500,000	endow an annual conference or speaker series on the study of the Islam and the Muslim world.
\$375,000	endow a DISC annual distinguished lecture.
\$250,000	endow an undergraduate scholarship named for you or a name of your choosing.
\$250,000	endow a graduate fellowship named for you or a name of your choosing.
\$100,000	endow a research and internship fund for undergraduate and graduate students.
\$100,000	endow a fund for library acquisitions in Islamic culture.

As a DukeEngage student in Yemen in the summer of 2007, **Isabelle Figaro** attended conferences with the country's vice president, and met ministers and other officials. But the biggest impact on her was made by some of Yemen's poorest citizens.

Figaro (born and raised in New England of Haitian parents) worked as an intern at a nongovernmental organization that promotes children's rights. "Children as young as seven are often imprisoned in Yemen for such minor crimes as theft and fighting," Figaro explains.

Her visits to minority housing projects in Sana'a, Yemen's capital, exposed Figaro to the country's Akhdam community, descendants of former slaves. "All of Yemeni society is divided into tribes," she says, "but the Akhdam don't have a tribe; they were the slaves of tribes."

Figaro became friends with several young Akhdam women. "Instead of just doing things for people, I tried to do things with people," she says. "I taught English to women to perhaps give them more employment opportunities or perhaps a desire to continuing their schooling."

Figaro plans to major in international comparative studies, with a certificate in Islamic studies. She hopes to study abroad in Jordan and to one day return to Yemen. Her experiences abroad and her activities with Duke's Islamic Studies Center have instilled her with a desire to better inform people about Islam and Islamic culture. "People should know, for example, that the word jihad doesn't necessarily mean war against non-Muslims; it refers to personal internal struggle. Or that Islam comes from the word for peace. Knowing that might give people a different outlook on how to approach conflict, how to negotiate with people, how to approach daily relationships."



Isabelle Figaro T'10

SherAli Tareen came to the United States from his native Pakistan to study at Macalester College in St. Paul, MN. "I had no idea what Minnesota was, or how it was different from New York," Tareen says. "I was a 17-year old kid with no idea about anything, really. I majored in economics and took a course in Islam—my nominal religion—because I thought it would be an easy A. I suddenly became aware of issues and angles and a multiplicity of discourses that I had never thought about. I found my interest in economics going down and my interest in religion going up."

Tareen is working toward a Ph.D. in religion at Duke with an aspiration to teach students like his former self at a small liberal arts college. He specializes in South Asian Islam, with a focus on the 18th and 19th centuries, a time when Islam was threatened by colonial intrusion into North India. "Scholars began to contest over questions of ritual practice and theology," Tareen says. "There were theological debates over such religious practices as the celebration of the Prophet's birthday, about music, about visiting the shrines of dead saints. Some scholars trying to construct a more exclusive religious identity in light of the colonial situation objected to the resemblances of such practices to Christian celebrations like Christmas."

Tareen's advisor is Ebrahim E.I. Moosa, associate research professor in the Department of Religion and the Duke Islamic Studies Center research director. Tareen believes centers like DISC "break the barriers between people in the academy and the public and promote general education about such important issues as the role of Islam in the modern world. I'm optimistic about helping people think about religion in a subtle and intellectually sophisticated fashion. We can not only transfer knowledge but also change ourselves in the process."



SherAli Tareen



Yasmina Chergui T'11

Yasmina Chergui wants to be a diplomat or an ambassador. "Or I might go to law school," she adds. "It ultimately depends on the four years I spend at Duke."

As a first-year student fresh from Durham's Riverside High School, Chergui gravitated toward classes that reflect her Muslim heritage. Born in Marrakesh, Morocco, she came to the United States at age four, speaking the Moroccan dialect of Arabic, as well as French. She enrolled in beginning Arabic, to learn the standard form of the language, and plans to refresh her French.

Chergui also took the Humanitarian Challenges Focus module, which featured a seminar on Islam, Human Rights, and Terrorism taught by Professor of Religion Bruce Lawrence, director of DISC. (Coincidentally, Chergui is the first recipient of the Friends of Bruce Lawrence Scholarship.) She is considering a double major in Arabic and public policy.

Chergui says her heritage "has never made me feel isolated or distinct from others." When conversations about international events have turned to Islamic terrorism, "I've explained that Islam doesn't teach violence; it's a very peaceful religion." When asked why she doesn't wear a headscarf, "I explain that it's not mandatory; it's a choice that some women make."

The potential future diplomat also says that "in order to be optimistic about resolving tensions in the Middle East, many misconceptions have to be destroyed. It's important to distinguish between the people of a country and the government."

Born in New York, raised from infancy in Turkey, and educated at Princeton and Stanford as an economist, **Timur Kuran** has long been thinking about how Islam has shaped economic life in the Muslim world. He is at work on a book that explores why the Middle East, once prosperous by global standards, subsequently became economically underdeveloped. "Certain elements of Islamic law," he argues, "account for both the initial economic successes and the subsequent disappointments."

Islam's inheritance system, says Kuran, who came to Duke in 2007 as Professor of Economics and Political Science and the Gorter Family Professor in Islam and the Social Sciences, stands out as a remarkably potent instrument for spreading wealth. But it had the unintended effect of hindering the preservation of successful business enterprises. Islam's vast system of waqfs had its own unintended effects. Although they enabled Muslim societies to supply a vast array of social and charitable services in a decentralized manner, with limited government direction, they also drew resources, says Kuran, from the dynamic commercial sector into a sector that was relatively rigid.

Kuran has been a prominent analyst of Islamic economics, which is a doctrine, he says, that emerged in the mid-twentieth century in response to modern challenges of the Islamic world. Its most significant achievement, Islamic banking, has stimulated economic life by attracting deposits from millions of people reluctant to place their savings in, or borrow from, banks that give and take interest. His research shows, however, that the operations of the Islamic banks by and large resemble those of the conventional banks they seek to replace.

Kuran was attracted to Duke by the opportunity to teach and do research in several disciplines, including economics, political science, history, and legal studies. "At Duke interdisciplinarity is not just a buzzword," he says. "It is put into practice." He was drawn to Duke also by the goals of the Duke Islamic Studies Center. DISC differs from similar centers elsewhere, observes Kuran, "in giving the social sciences a significant role."



Timur Kuran