

The State of Islamic Studies in American Universities

Policy Recommendations

Submitted to

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Universities Should Offer Islamic Civilization as a Regular Course

Almost all colleges and universities in the USA offer courses on world civilizations in their undergraduate programs as part of the general education requirement. Students take mandatory courses on Western civilization and, subject to availability of faculty resources, optional courses on Chinese, Indian, and Islamic civilizations. In most places, however, primary emphasis remains on the study of Western tradition, with non-Western traditions given cursory treatment.

These courses are usually two-semester (or three-quarter) sequence courses that constitute the core of the liberal arts education at the undergraduate level. The University of Chicago, for example, has developed its own comprehensive curriculum and reading material for the sequence on Islamic civilization that was originally conceived by the great Chicago historian Marshall Hodgson. We suggest that other schools should follow this example and offer Islamic civilization as an independent course and one of the options available to the students in their general education requirement. The Islamic civilization course should be conceived as a comprehensive pedagogic enterprise, encompassing introduction to the core Islamic texts, beliefs, and practices; an overview of Islamic history in the context of world historical developments; major landmarks in the development of Islamic civilization and it

We believe that despite the integrity, legitimacy, and achievements of Muslim scholarship regarding Islam, discourse on Islamic studies in the U.S. in particular, and the West in general, has, until recently, remained, at best, indifferent toward or even

One policy recommendation takes into account the role and place of interfaith movements in the faithful distribution of religious knowledge among the constituting members of their multi-religious societies. The departments of religions and theology in colleges and universities can play an important role in initiating interfaith understanding. Being a new kid on the block and determined to take its rightful place within American societies, it is imperative for Muslims to invest heavily in interfaith groups that serve as integrative vehicles for the social communication and inter-religious relationships.

Establish a Website for Islamic Studies in the U.S.

Another recommendation that deserves immediate attention is the development of a website to disseminate information about the state of Islamic studies in American universities for prospective students, faculty, and interested scholars from all parts of the globe.

Educate Students and the Public on Shari'ah

A policy recommendation that addresses the challenges of Shari'ah deserves our attention because of the widespread ignorance of this Islamic legal tradition. A carefully planned educational program, would allow students and their teachers to fill the gap between knowledge and practice. It would also serve as a new bridge of understanding for policy-makers, diplomats, and media as they struggle to shed ample light on issues that are often discussed in stereotypes and caricatures.

Continued Translation of Islamic Books into English

Another policy recommendation is to embark upon a global and continuing translation of classic Islamic books into the English language. Through such efforts, American Muslims and others in the West can enrich and deepen their collective consciousness as they build bridges between their Western intellectual past and the collective unconscious of the Muslims.

This effort would also require the development of a necessary infrastructure for the collection and translation of contemporary important literature from all major Muslim

world, but there is also an almost total lack of awareness of developments in Islamic