

JCCTL Working Group Report: Megan Adamson Sijapati and Amy Evrard
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This group's focus was on sharing ideas and developing new tools, methods, approaches, and strategies for teachers of Islam and Muslim cultures. In particular, we hoped to explore and learn more about how to navigate tricky issues that can arise in the teaching of Islam and Muslim cultures in the current environment of global politics and increasing polarization and identity politics on campus. A particular concern was information literacy: helping our students understand and respond to the messages about Islam that they encounter through the media and everyday conversation.

We held three lunch meetings over the course of the semester. The first was an orientation session to determine our goals. For this meeting, we read excerpts from *Observing the Observer: The State of Islamic Studies in American Universities*, edited by Zahid Bukhari and Sulayman Nyang (International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2012). These readings were helpful in reminding us that our concerns are shared by other teachers in these subjects and giving us a sense of the history of approaches and strategies for teaching Islam and Muslim cultures.

During the second and third meetings, we went over specific issues and problems that had come up in our classes and shared ideas for handling them. For one, we discussed how to deal with strong opinions on the parts of students in class discussions that are either too ideological, not based on factual knowledge of Islam and Muslim cultures, too "politically correct," or dismissive of other students' knowledge and experiences. It was helpful to know that we had faced similar issues, and we were able to learn from each other's successes and perceived failures in dealing with them.

Another major topic was assignments and exams, which grew into a larger discussion about our overall learning outcomes for our courses on Islam and Muslim cultures. Was our primary outcome to teach students basic knowledge about Islam and Muslim cultures, or to give them tools from anthropology and religious studies to help them evaluate basic information about Islam and Muslim cultures that they gained from other sources? We affirmed that the latter was our desired outcome but realized that many of our exams and assignments addressed the former outcome. This mismatch was confusing us and our students. We were then able to develop concrete changes to key assignments and exams.

Because of our schedules, we were unable to meet a fourth and fifth time, as planned. However, we intend to meet again next academic year as we update our syllabi for these courses in light of these three discussions. We appreciate the working groups grant for allowing us to formalize conversations that had been taking place over the years in a more haphazard fashion and address key issues with concrete steps for improving our courses and class discussions in the future.