

Final Report for Islamophobia in Perspectives Speaker Series
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Project Overview

The purpose of Islamophobia in Perspectives speaker series was to historicize the contemporary prejudices and stereotypes of Muslims, and raise awareness of the ways Muslims in general, and women in particular, experience marginalization in the United States. Even though when I wrote the UF grant application last year, my intent was to bring four speakers on campus for the Fall 2017 semester, it became a year long series. In addition to writing the UF grant, I contacted some institutes and departments on campus and raised extra money to cover the full expenses of the series. Furthermore, as I approached the speakers and began scheduling, it was best to stretch the series over the full academic year, Fall 2017 and Spring 2018.

Summary of the Public Lectures

In September 13, 2017, the series began with a public lecture by Dr. Donna Nevel. This presentation came from the perspective of a Jewish American partner in the movement to challenge Islamophobia. Dr. Nevel discussed the different forms and manifestations of Islamophobia, and how to be an accountable, principled partner in the broader movement to challenge Islamophobia and racism.

Dr. Lawrence Davidson presented the second public lecture on October 10, 2017. Dr. Davidson's talk placed Islamophobia within an historical context. He underscored that ethnic and religious phobias have always been driven back by concerted resistance involving purposeful alliances and the reassertion of constitutional values. He argued that it is by learning this lesson and adopting a stance of permanent vigilance that American Muslims, and all other at-risk minorities, can best guarantee their futures.

Last presentation for the Fall semester was by Dr. Muqtedar Khan on November 6, 2017. His presentation explored the historical basis of Islamophobia. He argued that there is a new dimension to the prejudice which is modern and post-cold war. Dr. Khan discussed the impact of Islamophobia on American Muslims and on US relations with the Muslim world. He also suggested ways to combat the prejudice and the positive steps already taken to combat it in the US.

In the Spring semester, the series kicked off by Dr. Maryam Kashani's public lecture on February 19, 2018. Her talk drew on ethnographic research and theories of race and gender to chart how Islamophobia facilitates discourses regarding culture, race, gender, and sexuality in ways that are more accurately articulated as anti-Muslim racism. Dr. Kashani discussed how Muslim women, in terms of their relationships, rights and practices are impacted by such discourses and how they respond.

The series wrapped up by Dr. Jamillah Karim's public lecture on March 27, 2018. Dr. Karim focused on how contemporary black Muslim women continue the tradition of protest to both racial and gender injustices. Her talk drew on ethnographical accounts to engage in the topic. The

narratives were framed around the dialectics of social change vs individual transformation and race concerns vs gender predicaments. The talk invited the audience to especially pay attention to the ways in which the shared narratives create a chorus of black Muslim feminist voices and seek social justice.

Cross-Cultural Dialogue and Campus-Wide Participation

As the speakers discussed issues of diversity, the series was oriented toward cross-cultural dialogue, which provided the WCU community with an opportunity to hear about the past and current geopolitical and socioeconomic relationships between the Muslim and the Western worlds to understand various and complex dimensions of Islamophobia. As our University increases its international programs and aims to prepare our students for a more globalized workforce, the series served to assist in these measures, as well as positively enhanced the campus climate.

All of the public lectures were well attended. There were 122 students, faculty, staff, and community members who attended the first talk by Dr. Nevel. The second talk by Dr. Davidson also drew about the same number of people, 120. Dr. Khan's lecture was attended by 94 individuals and there were equal number of people (60 in each) who came to the last two presentations by Dr. Kashani and Karim. In total, there were 456 individuals, students, faculty, staff, and community members who attended the speakers. This impressive support shows that it was a timely series and that there was an interest in the topic.

Additionally, I taught a special topics course in Women's and Gender Studies on "Islam, Gender, and the Media" (WOS 325) during Fall 2017. This series enriched the students' learning in this course as they had an opportunity to hear from other experts in the field. As part of the assignments, I required the students to attend at least two lectures and have had very intellectually stimulating class discussions.

Cross-Unit Collaboration

In addition to the UF grant, the series was sponsored by the following institutions and departments:
Center for Women and Gender Equity
The Multicultural Center
The Ethnic Studies Institute
Philosophy
English
The Muslim Student Association

Sustainability

One key aspect of sustainability is that the information and the insights that participants took away from the speaker series. It could have lasting impact on how to understand Islamophobia and situate global and local extremisms into a context. This kind of understanding is a necessary first step to combat Islamophobia in the world we live in. Furthermore, the speaker series has been recorded with the speakers' permission, and could be made available on D2L for future class viewing as some faculty could find them relevant to their courses.