

Muslim Studies

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

Newsletter of the MSU Muslim Studies Program

Fall 2026

Volume 14, Issue 1

A Message from the Director

As usual, we have a full slate of events this fall, including our 20th anniversary lecture (Sept. 18) featuring the founding coordinator of the Muslim Studies Program, Prof. Mohammed Ayoob. Please see the newsletter insert for a listing of our events. And please see pp. 2-3 for an overview of our Muslim Journeys series and a listing of accomplishments. Below, you will find Prof. Ayoob's interesting account of the founding of the Muslim Studies Program. —Mohammad H. Khalil

The Story of the Founding of the Muslim Studies Program

Mohammed Ayoob, University Distinguished Professor Emeritus in JMC and Founding MSP Coordinator

The process that led to the setting up of MSP was gradual and took three or four years to complete. It all started with 9/11. One of the first reactions to the tragic event came from President Peter McPherson and especially Provost Lou Anna Simon. They were worried about the negative impact of the event on the student body and wanted to avert this and immediately started consulting with some of the Deans and with me. Sherm Garnett (then-Dean of James Madison College) took the lead in this process. This led to several outcomes:

- One, the launching of a lecture series by prominent scholars on the problems facing the Muslim world, especially the Middle East. The Provost sanctioned an annual grant for this, and I was tasked with organizing the lectures, which I did from 2002 to 2005.
- Two, JMC was charged with establishing a Muslim Studies specialization, and the Dean appointed me as its Coordinator. The Provost wanted to call it Islamic Studies, but I persuaded her and Sherm to call it Muslim Studies, both because we did not have sufficient expertise on Islamic theology, law, and other related disciplines, and because I wanted it to focus on the lived experiences of Muslim societies with all their diversity. MSU had a small group of faculty members in the social sciences and humanities working on Muslim societies and politics. My aim was to add to and strengthen this core group rather than spread resources so thin that they would have no significant impact on teaching and research about Muslim societies.
- Three, I launched a course in the Fall of 2003 called Islam in World Politics which was cross-listed in JMC and PLS. Enrollment was capped at 60 students (30 from each). It maintained an enrollment of between 55 and 60 for the 10 years that I taught it. This course became the flagship course and the chief attraction for the Muslim Studies specialization, which had an enrollment of 50 to 70 students during my tenure.
- Four, with this demonstration of student interest, I was able to persuade the Dean of ISP, the Dean of JMC, the Provost and the Vice-President for Research and Graduate Studies about the need for a Muslim Studies Program. It took some persuasion, but eventually all of them pitched in to provide seed money for the Program, and once again, I was tasked to lead it.
- Five, even before the program was formally launched, Sherm and I persuaded the Provost in 2005 to sanction five positions as a Muslim Studies cluster in JMC, History, Anthropology, Sociology, and Political Science in order to strengthen the Muslim Studies core faculty.
- Six, I organized a conference on Saudi Arabia in the Spring of 2006 and called it the first Muslim Studies conference even before the program was launched in order to present it as a fait accompli. The papers presented at this conference were edited and published in book form in 2009. The program was formally launched in Fall 2006 and I was nominated its coordinator. Professor Fawaz Gerges gave the inaugural lecture of MSP in Fall 2006.
- Seven, during the initial years, the major focus of MSP was on the Middle East and for good reason. The Muslim Studies Initiative, as it was first called, was launched in response to the 9/11 terror attacks, which in turn was a product of the political situation in the Middle East and the US involvement in the region. This initial focus on the Middle East was driven by the need to make the university community aware of the reasons why the 9/11 terror attacks occurred and that there was much more to what was dubbed "Islamic terrorism" than Islam itself. The last conference that I organized was called "Assessing the War on Terror" in September 2011 exactly ten years after the 9/11 attacks. Papers presented at that conference were edited and published in 2013 to coincide with my retirement from MSU. I am glad to see that MSP has widened its scope during the past decade and has achieved new heights under the leadership of Professor Mohammad Khalil.

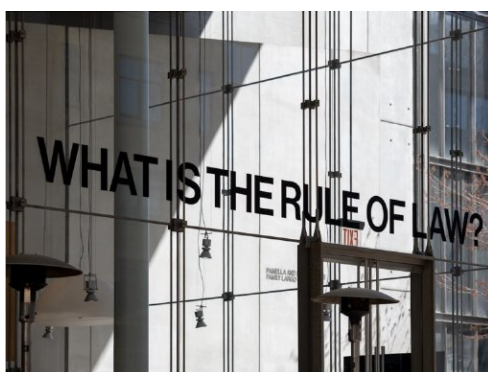
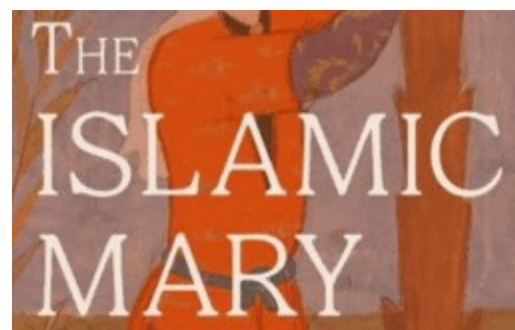


Muslim Journeys Book and Art Events, 2026-27

Deborah Margolis, Middle East and Religious Studies Librarian



The 2026-27 Muslim Journeys series will begin with an author-led book discussion event: Dr. Younus Mirza of Shenandoah University will be with us on September 22nd at 1pm in 303 International Center. We'll listen to a short lecture from Dr. Mirza on his recent book, *The Islamic Mary: Maryam Through the Centuries* (available as an ebook through the MSU Libraries) and then break into small groups for discussion, led by students. This topic holds great promise for both inter- and intra-faith discussion. We hope you will be there!



In October, we'll go on a curator-led walking tour of *Rayyane Tabet: 128 Civics Questions*. Across the Broad Art Museum and throughout campus you'll see questions Tabet has installed, from the United States 2025 Naturalization Civics Test. Thank you to Dr. Rachel Winter for leading this "Muslim Journeys edition" tour on Thursday October 15th from 5:30–7pm. Meet at the Broad!

In January, we anticipate holding an event at the East Lansing Public Library in relation to the Malcolm X Community Forum, as we've done for many years now. We continue to learn from our faculty, from visiting authors, artists, and filmmakers, and from each other at Muslim Journeys.

Please feel free to contact me with questions, deborahm@msu.edu.

Faculty Accomplishments (2025-26) (Select)

Farha Abbasi (Psychiatry) was nominated to the Executive Committee of the American Psychiatric Association Foundation. She was also recognized by the MSU College of Human Medicine during Muslim American Heritage Month for her many contributions to mental health care, education, and advocacy.

Shireen Al-Adeimi (Education) was promoted to Associate Professor with tenure.

Nareman Amin (Religious Studies) published a book entitled *Is God for Revolution? Affect, Youth, and Islam in Post-2011 Egypt* (Oxford University Press).

Elizabeth Drexler (Anthropology) was promoted to full Professor. Her book, *Infrastructure of Impunity*, came out in an Indonesian version. And her project team received a prestigious award in Indonesia (for the 2025 World Class Academic Excellence Competition) for "Technologies of the Self: Gender and

Subjectivity of Acehnese Women Twenty Years After Conflict."

Samira Fathi (AAHD) received a HARP development grant to work on her manuscript, *Urban Memory and Architectural Patronage in Post-Safavid Isfahan*. Also, she and **Shayan Rajani** (History) received a GenGen Fall 2025 Strategic Partnership Grant to work on a collaborative project entitled "Home and the World: The Lives of pre-Modern Women." This grant supported their March 30th MSU workshop "Gender and Space in the Early Modern World" and research trips to Canada and Pakistan.

Mara Leichtman (Anthropology) was awarded a HARP Development grant entitled "South-South Islamic Networks and Tanzania's Shi'a Minority: Charitable Giving, International Development, and Pilgrimage to the Middle East," 2026-2028.

Rajiv Ranjan (LiLaC) published multiple Open Educational Resources textbooks on Advanced Indonesian, Intermediate Persian, Basic Tibetan, Basic Telugu, Basic Punjabi, and Basic Bangla.

Rachel Winter (Broad Art Museum) published her second book, *Diana Al-Hadid: unbecoming* (Kasmin Books). She was also part of a keynote panel in March 2026 about Art and Activism at Break It Down | Make it Better 2026 in Grand Rapids. She also organized a panel called "The Censorship of Palestinian Art in Museums and Academia post-October 7, 2023" for the 2026 International Association of Middle Eastern Studies Conference, in Madrid, Spain. She presented a paper on the panel titled "'Activism,' Academic Freedom, and Palestine: Examining the longue durée of censorship in the American Midwest."

Snapshots of Spring 2026

19th annual conference ("Does Islam Have a Liberation Theology?")



8th Annual MSP Student Research Showcase



Yusef Salaam delivers the 5th annual Malcolm X keynote



The Central Park Five

Muslim Journeys with Nazita Lajevardi at the East Lansing Public Library



D. Fairchild Ruggles analyzes Andalusian architecture



The Voice of Hind Rajab film screening



Shameer Modongol discusses "Mappila Muslims' Life" in India



Check out our YouTube channel: MSU Muslim Studies Program, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYOZ94QYGrp07JlxbQ27h5A>.

AWARDS (2025-26)

Undergraduate Student Award—Charles A. and Marjorie A. Gliozzo Scholarship
Fatima Rais

Student Paper Prizes (awarded at the MSP Student Research Showcase in April 2026)
Ahmed Amir (Undergrad, JMC) and Jessica Saba (Grad, Social Work)

Faculty Conference Travel Award

Nareman Amin (Religious Studies), Brahim Chakrani (LiLaC), Elizabeth Drexler (Anthropology), Kyle Evered (Geography), Sadam Issa (LiLaC), Camelia Suleiman (LiLaC), Chantal Tetreault (Anthropology), and Rachel Winter (Broad Art Museum)

Faculty Research Travel Award

Najib Hourani (Anthropology)

Faculty Course Buyout Award

Mara Leichtman (Anthropology)

MSP 2026-27 faculty and Gliozzo award applications will be available in the fall, with a deadline of Jan. 8.

MUSLIM STUDIES PROGRAM HISTORY AND MISSION



Established at MSU in 2006 and housed in International Studies and Programs, the Muslim Studies Program coordinates research, teaching, and outreach about Muslims and Muslim-majority societies and states.

Additionally, it organizes lectures, workshops, and conferences on a wide range of topics that reflect the rich diversity of Muslims and Muslim communities around the world. The MSP is unique in the sense that instead of a regional focus, it has a global view of Muslims and Muslim-majority societies and states. It is an interdepartmental and interdisciplinary center whose faculty has appointments in various disciplines at MSU.



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Muslim Studies Minor for Undergraduate Students

The Minor in Muslim Studies, administered by James Madison College, is available as an elective to students who are enrolled in bachelor's degree programs at Michigan State University. The minor provides students with the opportunity for sustained study of Muslim societies and Islam in a range of disciplines and topics.

With the approval of the department that administers the student's degree program, courses that are

used to satisfy the requirements of the minor may also be used to satisfy the requirements for the bachelor's degree.

The student's program of study must be approved by the Muslim Studies Minor Coordinator, Professor Waseem El-Rayes (elrayes@msu.edu) prior to enrollment in any course. For more information, please visit: <https://muslimstudies.isp.msu.edu/students/msp-student-resources>.

Sign up for the e-newsletter at <http://eepurl.com/ci08p1>.

If you would like to support the MSU Muslim Studies Program through a financial contribution, please visit <https://givingto.msu.edu/gift>, or send a check to: MSU University Advancement, Spartan Way, 535 Chestnut Rd., Room 300, East Lansing, MI 48824. Please make checks payable to "Michigan State University," with Muslim Studies on the memo line of your check. Thank you for considering a gift.