

Winter Student Program 2017 Student Biographies



Hayat Abdelal (United States; Junior at Drew University) is currently a double major in History & Comparative Religion with a double minor in Photography & Leadership for Social Action at Drew University. She is interested in pursuing a PhD in Islamic History and her goal is to become a professor. She has worked with various non-profits and tries to give back to her community. Hayat enjoys research and interdisciplinary studies. She is particularly interested in the vast area of Islamic Studies, including the arts, histories, and global contributions of Islam. She is excited to attend IIIT and enhance her knowledge and understanding in Islamic Studies.



Muhammad Akram (Pakistan; Graduate of Government College University, Faisalabad) is a young leader in the nonprofit sector working to research and advocate true spirit of Islam and how it provides space for interreligious peacemaking and religious freedom, specifically in the predominantly Muslim majority countries. He has around eight years of technical and leadership experience in projects associated with USAID, UKAID, UN, The Asia Foundation, Norwegian Church Aid, the British Council, and others. His key focus areas include religious freedom, intra/interfaith peace, and rights of religious minorities. He has six research papers and 15 article published internationally. Currently, he is spending an year in the U.S. as an Atlas Corps Fellow, working at the Center for Islam and Religious Freedom (CIRF).



Abdulla Al-Qubaisi (UAE; Junior at University of Richmond) is, majoring in Mathematical Economics with a concentration in International and Middle Eastern Studies. He has a growing passion for Islamic studies and particularly in light of today's daunting issues that face Muslims globally. He enjoys a philosophical along with spiritual approach to Islam. Some of his favorite scholars who represent such an approach are Abu Hamid Al Ghazali and Said Nursi. He is pleased and grateful that this program offers knowledge in both the philosophical and spiritual aspects of Islam.



Arsla Arain (United States; Senior at George Mason University) is completing her B.S. in Information Technology and Sciences at the Volgenau School of Engineering. She will be graduating with Honors in May 2017 and continuing her education through an Accelerated Masters. Arsla is a member of the National Society of Women Engineers and Women Techmakers. She currently works at the headquarters of General Dynamics Information Technology. Arsla is a recipient of the ISNA Scholarship and the National Council on Youth Leadership Award. She is an advocate of women

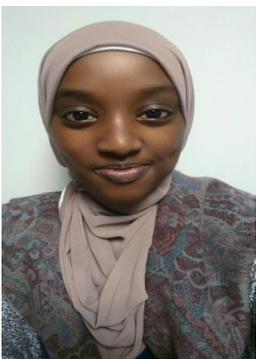
in STEM and empowerment through education. Arsla has been a part of the Muslim Student Association for 7 years, being president of her high school chapter and is currently Vice-President of the George Mason MSA. At IIIT, Arsla hopes to increase her knowledge in Maqasid of the Qur'an and apply the education to her own life while giving back to the community.



Helen Ard (United States; Senior at Lehigh University) is an undergraduate student at Lehigh University studying Global Studies and Economics with a language concentration in Arabic and a regional concentration in North Africa and the Middle East. Her research areas of interests involve the intersection of identity, language, and religion in terms of integration policies and programs both within the United States as well as Europe. In the future she intends to work in immigration law and policy as well as to attend graduate school to further her concentration in Near and Middle Eastern studies. At IIIT she is excited to be able to gain more experience and general knowledge in the area of Islamic Studies. Her hope is to more thoroughly explore the intersection of Islam and identity in the United States including more constructive ways for more mutual engagement with diverse communities to combat discrimination and Islamophobia. Some of her favorite past times include brewing tea, traveling, and listening to Disney in Arabic.



Marie Bourdin (France; Sophomore at McGill University, Canada) is pursuing a BA in Political Science and Islamic Studies. Marie has grown interest in geopolitics, human rights, religious coexistence and education, which reflect her field of studies. Independent and full of curiosity, she finds her passion in traveling the world as a way of bridging cultural gaps and understanding the “other”. People fear differences and embrace identities as a protection against the unknown, but in fact we are somehow all connected... Islam, in particular, is oftentimes regarded as an opposition to the West. Currently involved at the Syrian Kids Foundation, where she tutors Syrian teenagers, she believes that education is a weapon against radicalization and prejudice, and understanding Islam can challenge the general rising Islamophobia in Europe and America. Thus, she is eager to gain a deeper understanding of Islam, discuss, and question the major misconceptions too often associated with Muslim societies.



Hawa Dirie (United States; Junior at George Mason University) is an undergraduate student at George Mason University studying Electrical Engineering. She is also pursuing a minor in Mathematics. She currently works as a teaching assistant for the computer science department at GMU. As a UTA, she assists students during lab hours, grades assignments, and holds office hours to help students understand theory or go over projects. She is interested in studying the Arabic language in the future so she can have a closer connection to the Holy Quran. At IIIT, she is eager to learn more about the history of Islamic thought and what it has offered and what it

still has to offer the world. She is very excited to be a part of WSP 2017 and can't wait to learn from distinguished scholars.



Zaynab Elgazar (United States; Senior at George Mason University) is studying Civil and Infrastructure Engineering. Zaynab hopes to continue onto graduate studies concentrating in water resources management and development of analytic software of reusable water. She has been an active member of GMU MSA since her sophomore year, serving on the board as treasurer and then president. By serving the community and connecting with the Ummah, her passion to expand her knowledge of Islam and its teachings. Zaynab hopes to gain more knowledge that will be a part of her journey of self-reflection, allowing her to strive to achieve oneness with Allah through the IIIT Winter program.



Umar Farooq (Pakistan – United States; Sophomore at George Mason University) has worked for a media start-up called PushBlack, which aimed to provide evergreen news content for the millennial black community. He has also worked as a legal assistant working in immigration law at the firm Blessinger Legal, PLLC. He has recently finished the State Department’s Critical Language Scholarship Arabic program over the summer in Amman, Jordan. He is interested in working in the field in investigative journalism, working to expose corruption, corporate wrongdoings, and crimes against humanity. Umar wants to learn about Islamic thought, epistemology, and jurisprudence so that he can channel the power of media and storytelling to properly represent Islam in the Western media. Upon completing his undergraduate studies, he plans to pursue graduate study in the field of journalism.



Margaret Follett (United States; Sophomore at Brown University) is a sophomore at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, although she spent her freshman year at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota. Despite being currently undeclared, she expects to graduate with a double concentration in Middle Eastern Studies and computer science. She is particularly interested in the interaction between Islam and the academic study of other aspects of culture, especially in areas such as North Africa. Margaret is currently involved in the non-profit Paper Airplanes, which connects college-age Syrian refugees with college students in the US for English tutoring sessions via Skype.



Nouran Ghanem (United States, Senior George Mason University) is a senior, expecting to graduate with a B.S. in psychology in December 2016. She plans to pursue an M.S. in health and medical policy to merge her interests between healthcare and policy. She further intends to pursue a PhD in public policy and administration as her wider, long-term goal is to impact society through vigilant efforts to influence or produce policy which solves domestic and international policy issues such as curbing climate change, improving American k-12 Education, alleviating extreme poverty and more. Nouran is interested in learning the metaphysical components of Quran and Islam as she believes this scope of knowledge is important in inciting interfaith dialogue and in informing our purpose in this world. She specifically finds fascinating the links between modern science and Quranic insight on worldly creationism. Additionally, she finds interest in how to apply communal theology and Islamic based conflict-resolution to strategize against radical lines of thinking in modern times. She is eager to learn all that WSP 2017 has to offer and to meet some new and old friends!



Maryam Bahar Gheyaszada (United States; Senior at George Mason University) She goes by her middle name Bahar. She was born in Queens, New York, but Northern Virginia is home. She went to a mix of private and public schools and is perusing a major in Biology with a concentration in Microbiology and a minor in Chemistry, Inshallah. She works as an ER scribe and a biology learning assistant/teaching assistant. Bahar is also on the planning committee for a Model World Health Organization at GMU this upcoming spring. Much of her youth was spent planning camps with MYNA, being in leadership positions at school organizations like MSA and UMR, and otherwise being active in her community. She has a passion for medicine and research and plan to continue into a master's program next year.



Bridget Houston (United States; Sophomore at Marlboro College) is studying Arabic language, Medieval History, and Religion. Originally from Vermont, she spent a year abroad in high school in Gaziantep, Turkey and attended an Arabic language intensive in Oman. She is especially interested in Islamic philosophy and mysticism as well as the exegesis and linguistics of the Quran, and hopes to be able to broaden her understanding of various theological interpretations of the Quran during the WSP. She is excited and grateful for the opportunity to continue her

study of Islamic thought in an intensive academic setting alongside other seriously dedicated students and teachers.



Rizky Kafrawi (Indonesia; Freshman at Hobart and William Smith Colleges) was born in Canada to Indonesian parents but moved to America shortly afterwards. During his sophomore year in high school, he moved to Indonesia for a year and attended a private high school called Al-Irsyad Satya in order to get in touch with his native heritage and improve his understanding of Islam. He is currently a first-year undergraduate at Hobart and William Smith Colleges who intends on majoring in Biochemistry on a pre-med track. Despite his major, Rizky has a strong interest in the effects of humanitarian conflicts such as the Syrian civil war on the globalization of ideologies. As an active member of the college's Project Nur chapter, he aims to eventually bring these concerns to light and promote intercultural dialogue within his community.



Waking Kong (China, Freshman at The University of Vermont) is currently in his second semester of freshman year at the University of Vermont. Waking is curious about the world around and has desire to explore and experience the world as much as possible. He started travelling, within China and abroad, by himself when he was 13 and met many people from around the world who changed his life path along his Journey. After witnessing the aftermath of Egypt revolution in 2014, he became interested in Middle East and Islam. Currently, Waking is majoring in History and Economics and planning to concentrate on Islamic study from both

historical and economic perspectives in his future and also to focus on the connection and interaction between Islam and China.



Dina Lahham (United States; Junior at Seton Hall University) is a junior undergraduate student at Seton Hall University, majoring in Mathematical Finance and Information Technology and minoring in Mathematics. She hopes to eventually pursue a masters in Mathematics. Ultimately, her goal is to become an actuarial fellow and work within the financial district. Recently, she interned with an accounting firm and realized that she does not want to be an accountant forever, and is instead interested in the financial regulatory reform of the United States and

hopes to contribute to regulatory reform through her studies. She hopes that IIT can both broaden her current understanding of Islam, and explain the financial world through the Islamic lens.



Jeta Luboteni (United States; Senior at American University) is pursuing a BA in International Relations and a minor in Sociology from American University in Washington, D.C. Jeta was born and raised in Springfield, Virginia, but their entire extended family lives in Kosovo. An initial interest in improving the political situation there morphed a desire to study Islam for the positive contributions it can make to a society. Jeta would like to pursue an MA in Islamic Studies, and is especially interested in the Quran. They are especially interested in the divergence between culture and

religion. Additionally, Jeta has a strong passion for social justice in all facets of life. Jeta looks forward to working with other students of similar interests in this program, as well as learning from the best scholars in the field.



Katie McClelland (United States; Sophomore at McGill University) is a second-year at McGill University in Montreal, where she is pursuing a double major in Political Science and Middle Eastern Studies with a minor in Arabic. Her major interests lie in the topics of forced migration, inter-faith studies, and foreign policy in the Middle East. She looks forward to gaining a deeper understanding of Islamic theology at WSP to add depth to her interdisciplinary studies. In 2014 she

took a gap year with the National Security Language Initiative for Youth, in which she spent 11 months studying the Turkish language in Izmir, Turkey. She enjoys volunteering as an ESL teacher with the House of Friendship, a Montreal community initiative that works with incoming immigrants and refugees. This year she began to study Arabic with the hopes of spending her third year abroad in Amman, Jordan.



Marissa McFadden (United States; Senior at The University of Vermont. She is a history and religion double major, Middle East Studies minor, and a first year accelerated M.A. student of history at the University of Vermont. She is primarily interested in studying the definitions of religion that are created during British colonial rule in India particularly through the implementation of sanitary legislation after the 1857 Rebellion. Her goal in life is to become a social worker and in this, she would like to write health care policy for the quickly growing refugee and immigrant population in

Vermont; a majority of which is South Asian and/or Muslim. She works as an afterschool counselor for the Burlington Kids Afterschool program supporting Burlington's lower income/refugee/immigrant elementary-aged kids and their parents. She also teaches English to refugees through the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program. She is eager to gain more experience in Islamic studies and to apply this to my interests in healthcare policy and racial disparities, and to prepare myself for current and future experiences in the field of Social Work.



Marah Mohamed (United States; Senior at George Mason University) is pursuing a B.S. in Economics with a concentration in Managerial Economics and minoring in Data Analysis. She is interested in development economics and international trade and finance, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa. She hopes to pursue a career in international economic development. Currently, she is a Research Analyst Intern at D3 Systems, an international market research company, and is responsible for working on analytical reports as well as other deliverables based on survey results from countries all over the world. She is also on the executive board of Mason's Muslim Students' Association, where she works with her fellow members

to strengthen the Muslim community on campus. At IIIT, she is eager to learn more about the historical contextualization of the Quran as well as the history of Muslim civilizations and to gain a better understanding of Maqasid al-Shari'ah.



Asma Noray (United States; Senior at Swarthmore College) was born in Nairobi, Kenya and currently studies Political Science and Arabic Literature at where she is also an active leader of the Muslim Students Association and a fellow at the Intercultural Center working to foster a more inclusive environment for marginalized students on campus. She has studied Arabic in Morocco, Oman, and Jordan and hopes to work with refugee populations in the region while also increasing the voice of Muslim Americans in policymaking and particularly in U.S. foreign policy. As a freshman, Asma volunteered in Iran for two months to set up independent English programs for rural and impoverished communities and using language learning as a tool to build cultural understanding between Iranians and Americans. She hopes to pursue graduate studies in public policy and international affairs with a focus on refugee policy and humanitarian aid.



Henry Off (Canada; Senior at McGill University) is a State of Kuwait Scholarship Recipient. He is pursuing a joint honors degree in Political Science with World Islamic and Middle East Studies. He is currently a senior editor for the McGill International Review and the Vice President of Academics for the World Islamic and Middle East Studies Association. He has previously worked in various political and educational programs around Canada and Morocco. Henry plans to continue his studies in the field of politics and Islam at the graduate level. By studying at the IIIT, he hopes to draw connections from a broad range of topics and apply them to his research at McGill.



Jacob Ratliff (United States; Sophomore at Warren Wilson College) in Asheville, North Carolina. Jacob works in the Office of Spiritual Life on campus where he organizes both Christian and Interfaith Programming on and off campus. He is committed to building Interfaith Community on campus, and he works closely with people of many faiths and philosophical world-views. Majoring in English Literature and minoring in Religious Studies, Jacob is particularly interested in examining representations of religion, gender, sexuality and how they intersect in various literary traditions. Aside from his studies, Jacob enjoys traveling, making friends, listening to music, and binge watching Netflix.



Ben Rejali (United States — United Kingdom; Junior at Marlboro College) is studying the development of Islamic intellectual thought and modern Middle Eastern politics. Ben was born in Kansas but moved to London when he was 9 years old and lived in London until beginning his undergraduate studies at Marlboro College. While originally interested in Literature, Ben shifted early to Islamic Studies during his first year in college. Ben's Iranian-American background focused his particular interests on

Middle Eastern history and contemporary politics, with a particular focus on how cultural identity was explored in terms of Islam by non-Arab Islamic societies. Ben's main academic interest currently is attempting to pursue an authoritative and balanced understanding of how Islamic fiqh has been understood and enacted throughout history and what the contemporary scholarly discourse is surrounding.



Aisha Shafi (United States; Sophomore at George Mason University) is pursuing a double major in Government & International Politics and Conflict Analysis & Resolution. After graduate school, she would like to work in a postdoctoral fellowship program conducting research to implement political reform in the realm of public and foreign policy that pertains to Muslims, as well as other minority groups, as a means of advocating for social justice. Through her research, she wants to produce a conflict resolution theory on the basis of Islamic jurisprudence, theory, and practices that can assist in peace relations among nations and states. She hopes to be able to share her

research and passion with students in academia through a professorship position. She is excited to and looking forward to meeting everyone at WSP!



Sarah Shapley (United States; Freshman at Allegheny University) is majoring in International Studies with a Middle East North Africa focus and a minor in French and Community and Justice Studies. She is involved in the Law and Policy Program on her campus, as well as the Peace and Conflict Concentration. Sarah is excited for this opportunity to gain a more comprehensive understanding Islam, which she hopes will help to enlighten her understanding of the MENA region, as well as other countries around the world. She hopes that with the knowledge that she gains from the IIIT's program she will be better able to understand Islamic theory and practices

and help her to contribute to an intelligent and well-informed dialogue on how to combat the growing rhetoric that contributes to Islamophobia, in the US and abroad.



Afras Sial (United States; Sophomore in the Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University). He is currently pursuing a degree in International Economics. He is also participating in the Global Business Fellows Program, which focuses on the intersection of business and public policy on a global scale. He is looking forward to learning more about the policy implications of Islamic teachings, as he has greatly enjoyed expanding his Islamic knowledge since beginning his studies at Georgetown. He has worked with multiple organizations that focus on integrating social impact into both policy-making and entrepreneurship; he would like to engage Islamic themes in these fields focused on justice and compassion as well. He appreciates the diversity within the ummah and is currently learning Urdu and French.



Hamza El Haoud-Trudel (Canada; Senior at McGill University) is finishing his undergraduate studies at McGill University, majoring in World Islamic and Middle-East Studies and Economics. His interests were always directed towards the sciences, but the social climate in Quebec and troubles within his community have drawn him into pursuing studies in Islam and, later on perhaps, social work, in order to tackle the issues related to the integration of the immigration, social inequalities, the radicalisation of the Muslim youth, the place of Islam and Muslims in a democratic and secular state. He hopes the winter program of the IIIT will solidify his grounds and help him define a thesis for his coming Masters studies.



Brian Omar Vazquez (United States; Senior at La Salle University) is a senior at La Salle University majoring in Psychology and minoring in Religion. Born in Puerto Rico he moved to Philadelphia at age seven. He is passionate about the topics of diversity, religiosity, prejudice, human sexuality, and social justice. He is currently implementing his psychological research study that explores the extrinsic/intrinsic motivation feature of religiosity as a moderator between religiosity and prejudice in Christian and Muslim college students. Concerned with the lack of psychological research on religiosity, especially within Islam, he hopes his study will add to the growing body of literature. Brian works for an interpretation company; as an academic success coach; and as a writer, editor, and board member for *Motivos Bilingual Magazine*. His extra-curricular activities are: member of the La Salle University Presidential Student Advisory Council and the ADP Leadership Council Committee, and founder of the Critical Thinking Group for Social Justice. He plans on earning a Ph.D. in Social Psychology.