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Donors seek inclusion, education at Oakland with endowed lecture on Islamic understanding

Longtime Oakland University friend Dr. Hamid Sheikh's mother, the late Hajja Razia Sharif Sheikh, was a religious woman who urged her eight children to pursue higher education and respect all cultures, creeds and religions.

Her advocacy for education, openness and strong faith stuck with her children. They earned college degrees, three became practicing physicians, and now, Dr. Sheikh and his wife, OU graduate Amy Sheikh, are continuing the legacy.

The Sheikhs recently established the Hajja Razia Sharif Sheikh Endowment for Islamic Understanding Programs, which will support programs focused on educating students and the community about Islam. The first program, the Hajja Razia Sharif Sheikh Lecture for Islamic Understanding, is scheduled to be held at 7 p.m. on Thursday, Oct. 29, in Oakland Center Banquet Room B. The aim is to promote the understanding of Islam in light of world events that have led to the misinterpretation of the faith, Dr. Sheikh said.

Islam has an extensive history of progress in areas many may not know about, such as mathematics, science, medicine, pharmacology, architecture, business, geography, chemistry and many more areas of expertise, added Dr. Sheikh. To help encourage education of Islam and dispel myths about the religion and culture, the Sheikhs have established fellowships, scholarships and programs dedicated to Dr. Sheikh's mother at five higher education institutions across the country, as well as a charity that helps the sick and homeless in Pakistan, where his mother is from.

"In Islam, we believe wholeheartedly we cannot be Muslim unless we believe in the Bible, the Torah and the Quran. It's all a similar story," said Dr. Sheikh. "Terrorism has elicited universal Islam phobia, but Islam translated means 'peace.' For Muslims, even killing a tree is a sin. How can these criminals be Muslims? We intend to counter this phobia through educational institutions by Muslim and non-Muslim scholars."

One of those scholars, Boston College associate professor of Political Science **Jonathan Laurence, Ph.D.**, will be the featured speaker at the lecture. His discussion is titled, "Taking Politics out of Islam."

Laurence, who has worked extensively on both the political landscape of the Arab countries and issues surrounding Muslim communities in Europe, is also author of the book "The Emancipation of European Muslims," which has been very well-received.

Adolfo Campoy, assistant professor of Spanish for Oakland's Department of Modern Languages and Literatures, said Laurence was asked to give the Islamic Understanding lecture because of his ability to discuss polemical issues in a balanced and productive manner.

Laurence's planned discussion "is insightful in that it subverts the mainstream narrative: Rather than reinforcing the idea that Muslims are somehow complicating democratic life by insisting on making what should be private (religious values) public, Jonathan seems to suggest that it is politics that has intruded in the private lives of Muslim communities," said Campoy.

Admission to the Hajja Razia Sharif Sheikh Lecture for Islamic Understanding is free, but reservations are required. To reserve a space, call (248) 370-2650 or email lposey@oakland.edu.



Boston College associate professor of Political Science Jonathan Laurence, Ph.D., will be the featured speaker. Photo credit: Caitlin Cunningham, Boston College.



Hajja Razia Sharif Sheikh Lecture for Islamic Understanding