RESPECT GRADUATE SCHOOL: A DESCRIPTIVE CASE STUDY ON THE CREATION OF AN ISLAMIC

POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTION

Ginasophia Altieri

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Supervisor of Dissertation:

_____

Marybeth Gasman, Professor of Education

Dean, Graduate School of Education:

_____

Pamela L. Grossman, Dean and Professor

Dissertation Committee:

Marybeth Gasman, Professor of Education

Eric Kaplan, Senior Fellow

Darnell Cole, Associate Professor of Education, University of Southern California

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Jocelyne Pierre.

You are my first teacher and love.

You instilled in me the importance of education and serving others.

I am who I am because of you.

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ABSTRACT

RESPECT GRADUATE SCHOOL: A DESCRIPTIVE CASE STUDY ON THE CREATION OF AN

ISLAMIC POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTION

Ginasophia Altieri

Marybeth Gasman

Since the early 1980s, several Muslim communities have attempted to create indigenous Muslim American institutions of higher learning. Many of the first attempts failed to sustain their operations beyond a few years; and until recently, none could attain accreditation. Since early 2000, a second wave of Islamic postsecondary institutions has emerged. This paper analyzes the circumstances that initiated one of these institutions, Respect Graduate School (RGS), by employing a qualitative case study investigation and a semi-structured individual interview protocol to examine the persons, events, philosophies, and systems significant to its founding.

The themes that emerged from this investigation include: (1) the shortage of Muslim colleges in the US, (2) theoretical conceptions of service or *hizmet*, (3) the strength and capacity of social networks, (4) correcting the false image of Islam, and (5) the diversity of Islamic Studies.

The findings of this study constitute three original contributions to the topic. First, it provides an account of an institution that is part of the second wave of Muslim

colleges founded in the US. Second, it examines a new category of Minority-Serving

Institutions (MSIs). Third, it documents the emergence of a postsecondary Gülen-

Inspired Schools (GIS) to be founded in the US. Based on these findings, the study

recommends further studies on the establishment of Islamic colleges and universities in

the US. Moreover, a comprehensive compilation of the history of Islamic post-secondary

institutions is also suggested.

Keywords: Respect Graduate School, Islamic Higher Education, Islamic

Postsecondary Institutions, Islamic Studies, Gülen-Inspired Institutions (GIS), Minority

Serving Institutions (MSIs), and Religiously Affiliated Colleges and Universities.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Respect Graduate School (RGS) is a private graduate school located in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. RGS admitted its first class in the fall of 2015. It began its operation by offering a dual track master's degree in Islamic studies. Unlike other postsecondary institutions that offer graduate degrees in Islamic studies, RGS was founded by Muslims in America. Its mission is "to be an institution where students and faculty engage in research, teaching, learning, and service with an emphasis on Islamic Studies for the public good" ("Respect Graduate School"[1]). It does not aim to be the Muslim equivalent of a Judeo-Christian seminary; instead it aims to position itself as a research-based institution founded by Muslims in America. Although it received authorization from the Pennsylvania Department of Education in 2015, it is seeking regional accreditation through the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE). If it succeeds, it will be the second Muslim college in the United States to hold an accreditation by a nationally recognized accrediting body.

While there have been several attempts to create Muslim post-secondary institutions, most have failed to gain regional or national accreditation. As of 2017, Zaytuna College in Berkeley, California, is the only Muslim college to achieve regional accreditation through the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). Another Muslim college, Bayan Claremont, offers students accredited degrees through its

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[1] http://www.respectgs.us/respect-graduate-school

partnership with an accredited Christian postsecondary institution, Claremont School of Theology.

The aim of this study is to explore the persons, events, philosophies, and systems that created RGS. While there has been substantial work on the history of Islamic primary and secondary schools in North America, there remains a gap in the literature on the recent emergence of Islamic postsecondary institutions. What is known is that since the 1980s, there have been less than a dozen attempts to create Islamic postsecondary institutions in the US. Most have not been able to adequately sustain their operation beyond a few years, and until recently, none could achieve regional or national accreditation.

While this study will not provide a detailed historical account of all the Muslim colleges and universities that have been initiated in the US, it will make three unique contributions to the topic. First, it will provide an account of an institution that is part of the second wave of Muslim colleges founded in the US. Second, it will examine a new category of Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs). Third, it will document the emergence of post-secondary Gülen Inspired Schools (GIS) in the US.

Statement of the Problem

Although, there is a considerable body of work on the history of Islamic primary and secondary education in the US, there has not been an examination or compilation of the Islamic post-secondary institutions such as American Islamic College, Bayan Claremont, Islamic American College, or Zaytuna College. Brief descriptions of these

institutions have appeared in various publications, but there has not been a detailed

account of the histories of Islamic colleges and universities in the US. Despite the

growing interest in Islam as a religion and Muslims as a religious minority in the West,

researchers have yet to seriously examine the increased interest in Islamic Studies or

the development of indigenous Muslim American colleges. Instead the literature has

focused on the marginalization and discrimination of Muslim students in a post-9/11

America. This case study on the founding of RGS provides an understanding of the social

factors that led to the development of one Islamic postsecondary institution and the

emergence of a new category of religiously affiliated and minority serving institution—

the Muslim College.

Research Questions

The study addresses the following research questions:

- What are the social factors that led to the creation of RGS?

- How is RGS and its offerings similar and/or dissimilar to established graduate

  programs in Islamic studies?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to provide an overview of historical and contextual information on several topics related to the formation of an Islamic postsecondary institutions and the creation of a new category of religiously-affiliated and Minority Serving Institutions. This review of the literature is centered on understanding Islam as a religion, Muslims as a religious minority in the US, the history of Islamic education in America, and the conditions that led to the founding of RGS. First, I will provide an overview of the religion of Islam. The overview will include a description of the basic tenets of the faith and the major sects found in the US. Next, I will review the current demographics of the US Muslim population and the current literature on Muslim students involved in higher education. Finally, I will discuss the history of Islamic Studies and Islamic education in the US and the impetus for the creation of an Islamic graduate school.

Introduction to Islam

Islam is a monotheistic Abrahamic religion based on the teaching of the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad (Abū al-Qāsim Muhammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbd al-Muttalib ibn Hāshim). *Islam* in Arabic means "*surrender.*" Thus, a *Muslim* is a person who follows the religion of Islam or "*one who surrenders or submits to the will of God*." Islam recognizes 25 other prophets from the Jewish and Christian traditions. In addition to the Quran, the Torah and the New Testament are regarded as revealed holy books. Founded in 610 C.E., Islam is the youngest of the three Abrahamic religions. All three

faiths share similar beliefs, holy books, teachings, and ancestral roots: "these three religions exist on the same Judeo-Christian-Islamic trajectory as expressions of belief in *one* God. God is called Elohim or Yahweh in Hebrew, Lord or God in English, and Allah in Arabic" (Hasan, 2000, pp. 50-51).

The framework for the Muslim way of life is represented by the five pillars of Islam and the six articles of faith. The five pillars are *Iman*, *Salâh, Zakat, Sawm,* and *Hajj*. *Iman,* or faith in one God, is expressed through the recitation of the *Shahada* or the verbal testifying of faith, which states that there is only one God.[2] *Salâh*, or prayer, are the obligatory prayers[3] every Muslim must perform five times a day. *Zakat*, or charity, consists of annually giving to the poor from one's excess income. *Sawm*, or fasting, is required during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. *Hajj* is a pilgrimage to Mecca that every Muslim should perform at least once in their lifetime, if they can afford it. The six articles of faith are the beliefs every Muslim must hold to be considered a follower of the religion. This consists of a belief in God, angels, revealed books,[4] messengers,[5] the last day (also known as the Day of Resurrection), and destiny (belief in God's

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[2] The *Shahada* has been described as "the Islamic confession" (McCloud et al., 2013, p. 47). The statement has two parts: *la ilaha illa'llah* ("there is no god but God") and *Muhammadun rasul Allah* ("Muhammad is the messenger of God"). Conversion to Islam consists of stating the *Shahada* in front of two Muslim witnesses. The *Shahada* is also recited during the *Adhān* (the call to prayer) or before the start of the five daily prayers.

[3] *Fajr* (morning), *Dhur* (noon), *Asr* (late afternoon), *Magrib* (sunset), and *Isha* (night prayer)

[4] The *Taurah* (Torah), *Zabur* (Psalms), and the *Ingil* (Evangel or Gospels)

[5] Adam, Idris (Enoch), Nuh (Noah), Hud (Heber), Salih (Methusaleh), Lut (Lot), Ibrahim (Abraham), Ismail (Ishmael), Ishaq (Isaac), Yaqub (Jacob), Yusuf (Joseph), Shu'aib (Jethro), Ayyub (Job), Dhulkifl (Ezekiel), Musa (Moses), Harun (Aaron), Dawud (David), Sulayman (Solomon), Ilias (Elias), Alyasa (Elisha), Yunus (Jonah), Zakariya (Zachariah), Yahya (John the Baptist), Isa (Jesus), and Muhammad

preordainment).

As with Judaism and Christianity, Islam has several sects. The two largest sects are Shi'a and Sunni. Within each sect are several *madhabs* or legal schools of thought. Each sect accepts the five pillars and the concept of *tawhid* [6] (the oneness of God or monotheism), but there are many variations in the interpretation of Islamic laws and principles which govern each group's practices.

Islamic Sects in the US

Shi'a

The Shi'a population is estimated at approximately 10 to 15 percent of the world's Muslims. Shi'a schools of thought include Ithna 'Ashariyah, Isma'iliyah, and Zaydiyah. Ashariyah is the largest subsect in Shi'a Islam, also referred to as "Twelvers." Shi'a doctrine asserts that the first successor of the Prophet Muhammad was 'Ali ibn Abi Talib.

Sunni

Approximately 85 to 90 percent of the world's Muslim population are Sunni. The primary Sunni schools of thought, or *madhabs,* are *Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali.*[7] Each agrees on the primary sources of law; the differences lie in the schools' analysis

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[6] *Tawhid* is the concept of a single creator who is the source of the universe.

[7] The four Sunni *madhabs* are named after the imams whose scholarship and methodology founded the respective legal schools of thought, also called the Four Rightly Guided Imams. They are Abu Hanifa an-Nu'man ibn Thabit (Hanafi School), Malik ibn Anas (Maliki School), Abū ʿAbdullāh Muhammad ibn Idris ash-Shafi'i (Shafi'i School), and Ahmad ibn Hanbal (Hanbali School).

and utilization of Islamic law (Tarsin, 2015). Sunni doctrine asserts that the Prophet

Muhammad did not designate a successor, and that Abu Bakr was the first elected

religious successor. For Sunni Muslims, Abu Bakr represents the first Caliphate, or

religious successor to the Prophet Muhammad, and the first of the *Rushiduns.*[8] Sunnis

recognize 'Ali ibn Abi Talib as the fourth Caliph and last of the *Rushiduns,* or Rightly

Guided Caliphs of Islam.

American Islam

Islam has had a continuous presence in the US since the founding of the thirteen

colonies (Diouf, 2013; Diouf, 2014). Although Muslims have always been a religious

minority in the US, there has not been a period in the country's 241-year history when

Muslims were not part of the nation's composition. The Ahmadiyya, Ibadi, Shi'a, Sunni,

Sufi and other proto-Islamic communities have made American expressions of Islam

distinct and diverse (Curtin, 1967; al-Islam, 2006; Diouf, 2013; Diouf, 2014).

Some have contended that a new form of Islam has emerged, termed *American*

Islam. Hasan (2000) describes American Islam as "a return to the Quran without the

influence of pre-Islamic Arab cultures" (p. 55). While American Islam is not a recognized

branch of Islam, it aptly describes the growing number of Americans who have adopted

and practice the religion without adopting the cultural customs and traditions that are

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[8] Sunni Islam has a notion that there were four *Rushiduns* or Rightly Guided Leaders in Islam. The *Rushiduns* are the first four Sunni Caliphs who ruled during the first 30 years of Islam. They are Abu Bakr as-Siddiq, Umar ibn al-Khattab, 'Uthman ibn 'Affab, and 'Ali bin Abi Talib.

typically associated with Islam. This growing community is described as practicing an

American Islam, and they may also be described as Muslims who practice the religion

without cultural amplification (Hasan, 2000).

Muslim Population in the United States

It is estimated that over 1.8 billion people worldwide practice the religion of

Islam (Lipka, 2017). Although it is the fastest growing and the second most practiced

religion in the world, only a small number of Americans identify as Muslim. It is

estimated to be only one to two percent of the US population. It is difficult to get an

accurate measure of the total number of Muslims living in the US, given that the US

Census Bureau and the Immigration and Naturalization Service have not tracked

religious affiliation since 1936 (Cole & Ahmadi, 2010; Serhan, 2014). According to the

Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), there are an estimated six to seven million

Muslims living in the US, while the Pew Research Center estimates that number at closer

to 3.3 million (Pew, 2016).

Racial and Ethnic Composition of Muslims in the United States

Islam arrived in the Americas in two distinct migratory patterns: the first being

the forced migration of Africans during the Transatlantic Slave Trade (Curtin, 1967;

Austin, 1997; Diouf, 2013; Diouf, 2014) and the second being the successive waves of

Muslim immigrants from the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, and Eastern Europe

after the abolition of slavery in 1865 (al-Islam, 2006). Some scholars estimate that as

much as 30 percent of the slave population was Muslim (Curtin, 1967; Nurani, 2014),

though the practice of Islam among the slave population often did not endure following their conversion to Christianity. There is evidence of Muslim slaves' presence in historical artifacts such as the slaves' journals, memoirs and portraits,[9] as well as abolitionist literature, newspaper advertisements for runaway slaves, and slaveholder books documenting slaves' Islamic names and West African countries of origin (Diouf, 2014). In addition, their presence is felt through the Arabic language that is found in the Gullah language of the Sea Islands of South Carolina (Diouf, 2013; Diouf, 2014).

As this first-generation of Muslims perished, they were replaced with a new generation of African Americans who would convert to a "New World Proto Islam" (al-Islam, 2006) as opposed to the Old World Islam of their ancestors. At the same time, Muslims from Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon arrived as immigrants in the late 19th century (Naff, 1993; al-Islam, 2006).

From 1916 to 1930, Black Muslim communities emerged in Northern cities during the Great Migration (Diouf 2014) and these communities emerged from three proto-Islamic organizations: the Moorish Science Temple of America (MSTA), the Nation of Islam (NOI), and the Ahmadiyya Missionary Movement of India.

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[9]It is documented that Muslim slaves who started their Quranic education in West Africa, and were later captured as adults, were literate. This attribute set them apart from other slaves as well as many Whites in the New World. Since Quranic education started at the age of seven, adult slaves were able to leave behind memoirs in Arabic of their experiences as enslaved Africans. Examples of Islamic Quranic teachers and *huffaz* who were captured as slaves and who left behind memoirs include Omar ibn Said and Ayuba Suleyman Diallo. Omar ibn Said produced 14 manuscripts including his 1831 autobiography in which he denounced his enslavement. Ayuba Suleyman Diallo's memoir was published in two separate publications written by Thomas Bluett and Francis Moore in the mid-1700s (Bluett, 1734; Moore, 1738; Said, 2011; Diouf, 2014).

The first African American to launch an indigenous Muslim American organization was Timothy Drew, who would eventually take the name Noble Drew Ali. Ali founded the MSTA in 1913 in Newark, New Jersey. The second indigenous Muslim American organization emerged under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad with the NOI in the 1930s (Serhan, 2014). The third movement came out of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community[10] (Diouf, 2014). In the 1920s, the Ahmadiyya sent missionaries to the US in an attempt to proselytize and expand their populace. The missionaries, under the leadership of Mufti Muhammad Sadiq, established a community in Chicago. The Ahmadiyya were not well received by the majority white population, and eventually they turned to African American communities in Detroit and Chicago. This decision resulted in a sizeable amount of conversions amongst African Americans (Diouf, 2014).

While all three of these organizations are not recognized as sects of Islam, they represent early indigenous manifestations of Islam in America and scholars such as Diouf and al-Islam describe them as proto-Islamic movements based on their Islamic references and influences. The Ahmadiyya, NOI, and MSTA communities eventually declined, and many of their adherents turned to more conventional and traditional forms of Shi'a and Sunni Islam. Today, nearly 20 percent of the US Muslim population is

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[10]The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, or the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at, is an Islamic religious movement founded in British India near the end of the 19th century. It originated with the teachings of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835–1908). The adherents of the Ahmadiyya movement are referred to as Ahmadi Muslims or Ahmadis. The Ahmadiyya are considered heretical because the Ahmadiyya founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, claimed to be a prophet, and under traditional Islamic doctrine, there can be no other recognized prophet after Muhammad.

African-American, with the remainder evenly distributed among various racial and ethnic groups.

Ali (2014) reasons that accurately identifying Muslim American communities today is difficult, since few of these communities exhibit traditional racial markers (p. 1245). According to Bagby, Perl, and Froehlt (2001), only 15 percent of Muslim Americans are of Arab descent, with the vast majority coming from an array of racial and ethnic backgrounds originating in Africa, Asia and Europe. Serhan estimated that since 1965, Muslims have represented 77 ethnicities that are racially and ethnically mixed (Serhan, 2014, p. 40).

Muslim Students in Higher Education

Despite the lack of research on Muslim college students in the US, researchers have focused on the challenges Muslim students face regarding their religious beliefs and practices while attending US institutions of higher learning. In a review of the literature, three themes emerged: the role of the media in misrepresenting Islam and Muslims; perceptions of bias that veiled women students experience; and the discrimination and marginalization of Muslim students on college campuses.

The Misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims

Muslim college students face an array of issues at US colleges, including (1) misrepresentation of Muslim students in the classroom; (2) unsuitable use of media in the classroom, which may introduce misunderstandings about Islam; (3) lack of respect for religion; and (4) failure to accommodate students' religious practices (Speck, 1997).

In addition to these challenges, Nasir and Al-Amin (2006) found that Muslim students contend with the pressure of managing impressions caused by the prevailing stereotypes and negative sentiments about Islam and Muslims. They assert that Muslim students are forced to engage in an "identity-management process" in order to deal with these stereotypes. The researchers added that this identity-management process may become challenging and ultimately all-consuming while they are attending college. Consequently, Muslim students must devote time and energy to this process that could otherwise be devoted to their studies.

Peek (2003) reported that Muslim students were unhappy with the media's coverage of Arabs, Muslims, and Islam. The students in Peek's study detailed their dissatisfaction, asserting that the media create misunderstandings of Muslims and misrepresent their faith. Students also stated that media distortions influenced their interactions with the public as well as other students. According to Peek, students "wished their universities would have been more forthcoming about providing general information and sponsoring educational events about Islam to avoid or curtail ethnic or religious backlash" (p.74).

Ali (2014) found that Muslim students had to contend with a series of tropes and stereotypes on college campuses. In this study, students reported being perceived as "pre-modern Muslims" who lacked the ability to use rational logic, participate in a liberal democratic society, or engage in dialogue to express disagreement (p. 1251).

Students described being treated as a "suspect class" (p. 1253) and stated that their bodies were seen as "a site of fear" among their peers (p. 1254).

Experiences and Perceptions of Bias by Hijabis

Women who adopt the Islamic dress code and wear a headscarf or veil are commonly referred to as *Hijabis or Muhajabas.* According to Islamic law, men and women are required to dress modestly in public. For women, the modesty mandate includes covering their hair and wearing modest clothing in the presence of *non-mahram*[11] men. The style and custom of the covering varies according to the person's culture and country of origin. Although the veil or headscarf[12] is oftentimes called a *hijab,* the term encompasses one's attire and demeanor.

Ali and Bagheri (2009) explain that "there is not one universally accepted definition of *hijab* in Islam, which is why women who choose to wear the hijab may look different depending on their nationality and culture" (p. 51). In a study that explored the experiences of women who wore *hijab* on a Midwest college campus, Cole and Ahmadi (2003) found that some students stopped wearing it due to hostile reactions on campus. Students reported that after experiencing discrimination, they questioned their religious reasons for wearing the *hijab*, and opted to cease their veiling practice (p. 60). They also stated they were perceived by their classmates and professors as anti-feminist,

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[11]A *mahram* is a person who is unmarriageable kin such as a parent, grandparent, or sibling.

[12]The Arabic word for a headscarf is *khimar*. A *khimar* is a piece of fabric that covers the head, neck, and shoulders. The words *khimar* and *hijab* are often conflated and confused for one another. *Hijab* refers to the entire dress code, but oftentimes it is also used to describe a headscarf.

conservative, and submissive because they chose to wear it. Students reported having to frequently explain their reasons for wearing the veil and that these constant conversations became burdensome. Some opted to cease the practice, while those who continued to wear the veil sometimes changed their behavior and interactions in order to avoid confrontations. One student admitted that she sometimes entered classrooms from the rear in order avoid student reactions to her *hijab* (p. 58).

In a study that was conducted at a predominately Christian research university, Seggie and Sanford (2010) noted that while many Muslim students found the campus environment cordial, they felt marginalized and excluded from the greater campus community. While these students did not experience daily discrimination, they sometimes felt challenged or ridiculed in the classroom environment. In addition to classroom experiences, they had to contend with looks and comments while they were walking, eating, and socializing with other students. The researchers found that because women were more easily identifiable as Muslims due to their veils, they experienced more acts of discrimination compared to either Muslim women who did not wear a veil or Muslim men not immediately identifiable as Muslim.

Students in the Cole and Ahmadi (2003) study stated that when they wore *hijab*, they were assumed to be oppressed, undereducated, and submissive. Students in the Seggie and Sanford (2010) study pointed out that some faculty assumed they were unable to perform academically or discriminated against them in terms of grades.

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The opinions expressed by the female students in these studies demonstrate that regardless of their nationality, race, or ethnicity, they were all rendered more visible than their male or unveiled counterparts and reported more instances of bias or discrimination. *Hijabis* also described having to make an extra effort in the classroom in order to prove themselves to faculty and students, due to their heightened visibility as veiled women. While veiled students did not necessarily experience daily acts of discrimination, most acknowledged minor marginalization and prejudice, both inside and outside the classroom. The findings of Seggie and Sanford (2010) and Cole and Ahmadi (2003) suggest that such climates may be less supportive and more discriminatory for Muslim women than the men.

Discrimination and Marginalization of Muslim Students

Although most universities provide chapels and chaplains for Christian students, they rarely provide adequate prayer space for Muslim students and adequate facilities for the ritual washing or *wudu*[13] in preparation for daily prayers. Students oftentimes utilize public bathrooms, but the mechanics of washing may brand Muslim students as abnormal, since they are required to wash their hands, arms, face, and feet in preparation for prayer. Lack of prayer space and washing facilities means that Muslim student must use vacant classrooms or public spaces in which to pray and prepare for prayer, attracting negative attention from others. Nasir and Al-Amin (2006) found that

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[13]Ablution, a ritual washing or process of purification which one must perform before any act of prayer.

Muslim students struggle to practice their faith while attending college, and stress that "the practice of Islam in the college setting is at once intensely personal and painfully public" (p. 22).

Seggie and Sanford's study (2010) detailed the issues that may arise for practicing Muslim students who live on campus. Along with a lack of adequate prayer space, students may face a number of obstacles in terms of living accommodations, i.e., coed residential halls, where men and women share living and lavatory facilities. For students who are attempting to observe *hijab,* such housing makes it difficult to maintain their veiling and modesty practices.

Muslim students also contend with dietary restrictions. This is a way of eating referred to as *halâl* (or permissible). Although the word *halâl* may encompass anything that is allowed or lawful under Islamic *fiqh* (Al Jallad, 2008), in the US the term primarily applies to food that complies with dietary restrictions. Islamic dietary restrictions are similar to *kashrut* (kosher), the law of foods in Judaism. Although *kashrut* and *halâl* are similar, under Islamic law, Muslims are prohibited from consuming alcohol, pork and its related byproducts, such as pork-based gelatin or lard, or any meat that is not slaughtered according to the Islamic law called *dhabiha*[14] (Tarsin, 2015). Many college dining facilities may not understand the intricacies of these requirements and inadvertently expose students to food that is not prepared properly or is exposed to

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[14]The prescribed method of ritual slaughter under Islamic law of all *halâl* animals (cow, chicken, goat, sheep, fish, camel, buffalo, deer, antelope, rabbit, duck, quail, rooster, and goose)

prohibited ingredients.

Muslim students also face difficulties during the holy month of Ramadan, a time of fasting. From sunrise to sunset, Muslims must refrain from all food and beverages. The timing of the fast may not coincide with the hours of campus dining facilities, and this can make it difficult for students to gain access to meals each day on campus when the fast is broken. In many ways, the structure and administration of housing and dining facilities at American colleges may interfere with Muslim students maintaining their religious practices while attending post-secondary institutions. Furthermore, few universities recognize the major Islamic holidays of Eid al-Adha[15] and Eid al-Fitr.[16] While universities generally observe Christian and secular holidays such as Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving, most do not accommodate students wishing to observe non-Christian holidays such as Eid.

Clark (2003) defines privilege as the manifestation of unearned and unacknowledged advantages that those in the dominant social or cultural group (in this case, Christians) experience in their everyday lives. Ali and Bagheri (2009) argue that the acknowledgment of Christian holidays while failing to recognize non-Christian ones constitutes a form of Christian privilege, and "one of the most apparent manifestations of Christian privilege in universities is the academic calendar. It is centered on Christian

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[15] A celebration marking the culmination of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca and a commemoration of the sacrifice of the Prophet Abraham.

[16] The feast and celebration marking the end of the fast of Ramadan.

holidays and fails to recognize holidays of other faiths, including Islam" (p. 50).

Another form of privilege noted by Seifert (2007) is having a physical space on campus in which to practice one religion (p. 13), as well as the inclusion of informal norms such as nondenominational prayers at commencement or before special events on campus. Most of these invocations at special events are based in Christianity and exclude those who may be agnostic, atheist, or non-Christian. Seifert explains that these Christian norms pervade learning environments and put non-Christian students in a position in which they must suppress their spiritual identity in order to conform to the norms and practices of the institutions. In addition, the practices also convey to students that the colleges and universities have greater respect for some faith traditions than others (p. 14).

Islamic Education in the US

Although the US is one of the most religiously diverse countries in the world, religion is not studied in-depth in public schools. This can be attributed to the first amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which prohibits making laws regarding the establishment or exercise of a religion. Government agencies, such as public schools systems, are careful not to promote any specific religion or religious doctrine such as creationism. In order to avoid the practice and perception of indoctrinating students into a particular religion, most American students earn diplomas and college degrees without learning about world religions (Moore, 2005). According to Douglass and Dunn (2016), after World War II, the majority sentiment among educators was that "ignoring

religion in schools was an effective way to avoid conflict" (p. 56). Religion was nearly

written out of American social studies programs altogether in order to maintain peace

and social order, and it was not until the 1970s that the study of religion reentered the

classroom.

Primary and Secondary Islamic Education in the United States

In the 1930s, the NOI established one of the first Islamic pedagogical institutions

in the US (Grewal & Coolidge, 2013). The NOI is a proto-Islamic and American Black

Nationalist movement founded in 1930 in Detroit, Michigan, by Wallace Fard

Muhammad. Fard Muhammad, an itinerant minister, fused Christian and Islamic

doctrine with anti-Caucasian rhetoric (Berg, 2009). His community of followers would

come to be known as the "Nation of Islam" (NOI). The NOI is not considered an Islamic

sect, and it is denounced by Islamic scholars for its racialist ideologies. In addition, the

extreme veneration of Wallace Fard Muhammad and Elijah Muhammad were viewed as

a form of idol worship, or *shirk,*[17] by Muslim scholars.

Under Elijah Muhammad's direction, the NOI established several Islamic primary

and secondary schools in the US. Although these schools were not institutions of higher

education, they were called the University of Islam. Between the 1930s and the early

1970s, the schools' curriculum did not adhere to traditional Islamic doctrines but

focused instead on Black Nationalist ideologies. After the death of Elijah Muhammad in

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[17]Shirk is the act of associating anything in worship to God, associating partners with God, or venerating any person or entity that is not God. This is considered a major sin in Islam.

1975, his son, Warith Deen Muhammad, disbanded the NOI and invited followers to convert to traditional Sunni Islam.

In 1977, an ideological and physical separation took place in the University of Islam system, leading to a reorganization of the primary and secondary school systems. Some of the schools remained under the control of the NOI, then under the direction of Louis Farrakan, while the rest became traditional Sunni Islamic primary and secondary schools. The Sunni Islamic schools were renamed the Sister Clara Muhammad Schools (SCMS), after Warith Deen Muhammad's mother Clara (Grewal & Coolidge, 2013; Rashid & Muhammad, 1992). Today there are approximately 75 SCMS in the US.

The 1980s marked a period of expansion for Islamic primary and secondary schools. During that time, immigrant populations established 85 percent of American Islamic schools that are still in operation today. Although the majority of Islamic schools in the US are Sunni, Shi'a primary and secondary schools were also established by the Shi'a community. The Islamic schools in the US were modeled after American public schools (Grewal & Coolidge, 2013), with the notable difference being the incorporation of Arabic language and Islam into the mainstream curriculum. The only exception to this are Islamic schools identified as *madrasas*.[18]

Madrasas

WASCGrewal and Coolidge (2013) found very few Islamic schools in the US which

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[18]This is a traditional place of learning. In Arabic it translates to "place for studying."

identify themselves as *madrasas*. The longest running *madrasas* in the US are the

Institute of Islamic Education (IIE) in Chicago and the Darul-Uloom Al Madania (DUM) in

Buffalo, New York, founded in 1989 and 1992 respectively. Both are products of the

Deobandi movement,[19] with curriculums focused on the memorization of the Quran and

classical Islamic disciplines. Students who attend *madrasas* train to become *Hafiz,*[20] or

memorizers of the Quran. According to Grewal and Coolidge, the majority of American

madrasa students are children of South Asian descent. Unlike Islamic K–12 schools,

which are coeducational, strict gender segregation is enforced in the *madrasas*. The

majority of the *madrasa* curriculum is focused on traditional Islamic curriculum and

pedagogy, and many students supplement their Islamic education with correspondence

courses or General Education Diplomas (GED).

Grewal and Coolidge (2013) estimate that only four percent of Muslim American

youth attend Islamic schools full-time; the vast majority of American Muslim families

opt to send their children to non-Islamic schools, supplementing their education with

part-time religious instruction in the form of Islamic Sunday schools, private tutors, or

religious summer camps.

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[19]The Deobandi Movement is considered to be a form of Sunni Islam, specifically, the Hanafi *madhab*. The Deobandi Movement emerged in India in the latter half of the 19th century. Its teachings are inspired by the scholar Shah Waliullah Dehlawi (1703–1762). This movement was officially founded in 1867.

[20]The literal translation is "guardian" or "translator." This is a term used for someone who has memorized the Quran and been formally tested on their knowledge and memorization by Islamic scholars (*hafiza* is the female equivalent; *huffaz* the plural form.) *Huffaz* are highly respected within the Islamic community. They may use the honorary title "*Hafiz*" or "*Hafiza*" before their names and are addressed as such.

Islamic Higher Learning

Since the 1980s, there have been several attempts to establish Islamic postsecondary institutions in the US. According to Grewal and Coolidge (2013), "the wide range of institutions of higher learning established by Muslim Americans has had diverse outcomes: some pedagogical experiments have failed and disappeared, others reinvented and resuscitated, and several are clearly growing and successful" (p. 255). In 1981, the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) was established in Herndon, Virginia, and in the same year the American Islamic College (AIC) was founded in Chicago, Illinois. AIC would fall into financial ruin in 1986, and it would close its doors until it was reopened in 2010 by Turkish educators linked to the Gülen Movement. While the Turkish educators were able to generate enthusiasm with the 2010 re-opening, the institution does not have the same pedagogical and philosophical vision of its original founders, Isma'il al-Faruqi and AbdulHammad AbuSulayman (Grewal & Coolidge, 2013). Although the AIC is currently recognized by the State of Illinois through the Illinois Board of Higher Education, it does not have any regional or national accreditation. IIIT is still in operation, but it offers a graduate degree through a partnership with Beirut Islamic University. Its courses are taught in Arabic and are offered through a combination of distance learning and onsite course offerings. IIIT's master's degree in Contemporary Islamic Thought is unaccredited.

Three other institutions were later founded in the State of Virginia: the Institute

of Islamic and Arabic Sciences in 1988, the Muslim Teacher's College in 1991, and Cordoba University in 1996. Each would close its operation after a few years. The Institute of Islamic and Arabic Sciences was a satellite of Imam Muhammad ibn Saud University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The school trained imams and chaplains for a brief period but was later investigated by the US government. According to a December 3, 2003, *Wall Street Journal* article, the school was used by the Defense Department to hire imams for the Pentagon. The Defense Department stopped using the institution after it underwent congressional investigations, and the satellite closed shortly thereafter. The Muslim Teacher's College was founded by the SCMS to train primary and secondary teachers for its schools. While the Muslim Teacher's College trained primary and secondary school teachers for a brief period, it also ceased its operation after a few years of operation. Cordoba University was part of a US Department of Defense program to train Muslim military chaplains. According to Internet webpage archives, the university's website stated it was made up of the Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences (GSSS) and Cordoba School of Professional Studies. Cordoba was also listed as an affiliate of the Washington Theological Consortium. All three of these institutions were unaccredited, and all closed after a few years of operation. According to Grewal and Coolidge (2013), most of the first attempts of Islamic higher education failed due to a lack of resources.

Three additional institutions emerged in the 2000s: Islamic American University

(IAC) in Southfield, Michigan (2002); Zaytuna College in Berkeley, California (2009); Bayan Claremont in Claremont, California (2011); and Respect Graduate School in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania (2015). All are in operation today, but only Zaytuna College has achieved accreditation through the WASC.

Islamic Studies and American Higher Education

Until the 1960s, very few American universities offered courses on Asian, African, or Middle Eastern history (Douglas & Dunn, 2013). As a result, primary, secondary, and post-secondary teachers entered the profession without a systematic knowledge of these regions or cultures. Even if teachers were inclined to do so, there was no academic structure in place to provide the knowledge and expertise needed to educate American students in these subjects. Most world history taught in public school classrooms was limited to ancient Greece and Rome, medieval Christendom, and modern Europe (p. 53).

At the post-secondary level, only a small number of university specialists were interested in Asia or Africa. Douglass and Dunn (2013) assert that most of the information Americans had on these regions came from television, films, advertising, and print journalism, and that "stereotypes and misrepresentation of Islam have been deeply ingrained in American culture. Just as the legacy of slavery has shaped popular images of Africa as a continent of heathen tribes and impenetrable jungles, so the western medieval and colonial heritage of hostility to Islam has underlain modern

miseducation about Muslim society and history" (p. 53).

Since the terrorist attacks that took place on September 11, 2001, there has

been increased public interest in the Arabic language and the religion of Islam.

According to the Modern Language Association,[21] from 2002–2006, the number of

American students enrolled in Arabic language courses grew by 126.5 percent and again

by 46.3 percent between 2006 and 2009. Concurrently, there was also a surge in

enrollment in Islamic studies and Middle Eastern studies courses. Although interest in

these subjects increased, there was still a lack of accessible knowledge and instruction

on Islam or Quranic Arabic.[22]

Those who taught Islamic or Middle Eastern studies at American colleges and

universities often faced criticism that they are teaching from an Orientalist[23] perspective

or that they were not qualified scholars of the religion, since many have Western

degrees as opposed to traditional Islamic *ijazahs*.[24] According to Edward Said (1979),

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[21]https://www.mla.org.

[22]American colleges and universities teach Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), a literary variation of Arabic used in contemporary writing and formal speech. Classical Arabic, or Quranic Arabic, is the form used in the Quran and classical literary texts from the Umayyad and Abbasid era (7th to 9th centuries).

[23]See Said (1979), where he first presented the notion that Western scholars teach about the East from an ethnocentric or biased orientation. Orientalism is deemed an inaccurate source of Islamic knowledge where Arabs and Muslims were depicted as exotic, backward, uncivilized, and even dangerous peoples. Some argue that they continue to be viewed through an Orientalist lens.

[24]An *ijazah* is a certificate used to indicate a high level of competency in an "Islamic Science." It enables a person to teach and establishes them as a scholar in a particular subject. In his 1993 article, "Traditionalism in Islam: An Essay in Interpretation," William A. Graham defines *ijazah* as a "basic system of 'the journey in search of knowledge' that developed early in *Hadith* scholarship, involved traveling to specific authorities (*shaykhs*), especially the oldest and most renowned of the day, to hear from their own mouths their *hadiths* and to obtain their authorization or "permission" (*ijazah*) to transmit these in their names. This *ijazah* system of personal rather than institutional certification has served not only for *Hadith*, but also for transmission of texts of any kind, from history, law, or philology to literature, mysticism, or theology. The *isnad* of a long manuscript as well as that of a short *hadith* ideally should reflect the oral, face-to-face,

Western scholarship historically portrayed Islam, Middle Eastern, Asian and North

African societies as barbaric, irrational, and underdeveloped. Said posited that Western

scholarship was understood to be developed, rational, and progressive, while traditional

Eastern scholarship was depicted as underdeveloped, irrational, and backwards, and as

a result, much of what is taught in American colleges and universities has been fraught

with accusations of cultural bias and ethnocentrism. Critics such as Said, Andrea Lee

Smith, Norman Daniel, and Bryan Turner asserted that Orientalist scholars created a

binary that privileged the West while denigrating non-Western cultures.

American Muslims who wanted to study traditional Islamic sciences historically

went to the Middle East or North Africa to seek admission at prominent Islamic

universities such as the University of al-Qarawiyyin in Morocco (established in 859), Al-

Azhar in Egypt (established in 970–972), or Nizamiyaa Academy in Baghdad (established

in 1091). Prior to 9/11, students could travel overseas to study personally with eminent

scholars in order to attain an *ijazah* in Qur'anic studies, Islamic theology or

jurisprudence. Post-9/11, it became increasingly difficult for students to gain access to

these institutions and scholars.

Haddad et al. (2009) argue that Islamic schools existed for centuries in the Arab

world as well as the Indian subcontinent. These were generally associated with mosques

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teacher-to-student transmission of the text by the teacher's *ijazah*, which validates the written text. In a formal, written *ijazah*, the teacher granting the certificate typically includes an *isnad* containing his or her scholarly lineage of teachers" (p. 511).

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or Islamic revivalist movements such as the Azhar school network in Egypt, the Maqasid in Syria and Lebanon, the Pesantran in Indonesia, the Deobandi school system in India and Pakistan, and the Gülen Movement in Turkey and the Balkans. Many of these schools arose in former colonies, as a reaction to British, Dutch, and French missionary schools.

The current struggle to provide Islamic education in the American school system in many ways parallels earlier efforts to establish parochial education by Protestants, Catholics, and Jews (Haddad et al., 2009). As these religious populations grew in the US, so did their aspirations to establish institutions that could provide sound Jewish and Christian-centered education. It can be posited that Muslims in America are currently grappling with a similar challenge to create indigenous Muslims institutions in a social and political climate that is suspicious and, at times, intolerant of Muslims just as Protestants, Catholics and Jews struggled in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Religiously Affiliated Colleges and Universities in the United States

According to the US Department of Education, there are over 900 religiously affiliated colleges and universities in the United States. Most are Christian-affiliated; 26 are categorized as Jewish institutions of higher learning.[25] VanZanten (2011) notes that the majority are liberal arts colleges or comprehensive institutions, and only a few are categorized as research institutions. Religiously affiliated schools enroll over 1.5 million

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[25]According to the National Center for Education Statistics IPED's database, 936 institutions were classified as religiously affiliated for the 2014-15 period.

college students per year.

Although all of the early colonial colleges were founded by religious organizations,[26] most have evolved into private, secular institutions of higher learning. Throughout much of the 19th and 20th centuries, colleges and universities worked to keep religion out of the curriculum. D. Jacobsen and R.H. Jacobsen (2013) contends that "the vast majority of institutions operated on the assumption that religion had little or nothing to do with the core goals of higher education. While many students were traditionally religious at a personal level, most colleges and universities did their best to keep religion out of curricular instruction offered in the classroom" (para. 6). For students who faced discrimination due to their religious affiliations, newly established, religiously affiliated schools became safe havens for those in the religious minority.

In *The Chosen* (2005), Jerome Karabel details the rampant discrimination faced by Jewish students during the early 20th century. He gives an account of a meeting of the Association of New England Deans in 1918, convened to discuss the growing "Jewish problem"[27] on their campuses. These men would go on to implement an array of policies and practices to limit Jewish enrollment at such schools as Columbia, Harvard, Princeton, and Yale.

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[26]Harvard (Church of England), College of William and Mary (Church of England), Yale (Puritan), Princeton (Presbyterian), Columbia (Church of England), University of Pennsylvania (Church of England), Brown University (Baptist), Rutgers (Dutch Reform Church), and Dartmouth (Puritan)

[27]The "Jewish Problem" was described as the increasing number of Jews at universities formerly attended only by White Anglo-Saxon Protestants. See Chapter 4 of *The Chosen*, "Jewish Problem at Yale and Princeton." It was also referred to as the "Hebrew Invasion."

As a result, character and psychological tests, standardized exams, selective admissions criteria, alumni interviews, and quota systems emerged at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Each policy was implemented to control the demographics of incoming students. Harvard instituted the submission of photographs in order to identify Jewish students who might have changed their last names to avoid discrimination (Steinberg, 1989). Dartmouth, the University of Michigan, the University of Pennsylvania, and Yale all implemented Jewish quotas. Jews were also denied admission to medical school because of institutionalized anti-Semitism (Halperin, 2001).

Jewish students' ability to participate in extracurricular activities on college campuses was also constrained. Horowitz (1987) asserts that many were denied opportunities to join literary magazines, debating clubs, music clubs, and historically Christian fraternities. Some students responded by establishing Jewish fraternal organizations (Alpha Epsilon Pi, Alpha Epsilon Phi, and Sigma Delta Tau).[28] Others focused on their studies, eschewing social interaction with Protestant classmates. Jews were essentially cast as outsiders, not allowed to participate fully in extracurricular and social activities due to a fear that organizations would supposedly be overrun by Jewish students (Horowitz, 1987).

Fueled by the threat of "WASP flight," in 1914, Frederick Keppel, dean of Columbia University, announced that a large number of immigrants made the college

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[28]Founded between 1909–1917

"socially uninviting to students who come from homes of refinement" (p. 87). Fifteen

years later, Yeshiva University was founded in New York City; in the following years,

over a dozen Jewish post-secondary institutions would be established to welcome and

educate Jewish and non-Jewish students alike (Gurock, 1988; Karf, 1976). Hebrew Union

College, Yeshiva University, and Brandeis University began as a reaction to institutional

anti-Semitism and quotas, and provided all students access to education that was

nonsectarian, though based on Jewish principles. Today, a strong case can be made that

Muslims are also facing similar challenges. Islamophobia, or the fear and/or prejudice

against Islam and Muslims, continues to persist in the US; and the creation of Islamic

post-secondary intuitions is analogous to the creation of Jewish institutions of higher

learning in 19th century America.

According to Mutakabbir and Nuriddin (2016), religious minorities are not

necessarily identified in numerical terms but rather as groups with unequal access to

economic, political, and social resources based on their religious affiliation. Groups once

considered religious minorities, such as Jews in the 19th and 20th centuries and Catholics

in the 18th century, went on to establish post-secondary institutions to not only serve as

safe havens for their disenfranchised groups, but to infuse and include their religion into

the curriculum and character of the schools. Clauss, Ahmed, and Salvaterra (2013)

remarked the following:

> Although we may look at the development of Islamic Schools as somewhat of a
> new concept, we recognize that other religious denomination have faced similar

dilemmas of religious identity over the last 200 years. Catholic schools were established to counteract anti-Catholic bigotry in the 19th century. Nativists feared the influx of "papists" from Ireland and Europe would supplant their Protestant affiliations. Recognizing that young Catholics might seek safety in their assimilation into a secular milieu, Catholic parents and Catholic parishes anchored their faith in parish schools (p. 4).

Muslim Colleges and Universities

Although there have been formal Islamic pedagogical institutions in the form of primary and secondary schools in the US since the 1930s, Islamic post-secondary institutions did not emerge until the 1980s. These institutions emerged to provide access to the academic study of Islam, Islamic culture and science.

Regardless of their racial and ethnic backgrounds, Muslims and Jews as populations are "racialized" and each are deemed social minorities. Both share a complicated history of being racialized by the majority population in the US. For Muslims in America, this racialization process has amplified since 2001. Serhan (2014) notes that "the notion of Muslims in America as a distinguishable or coherent group is a by-product of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. It is a recent historical phenomenon that has been an imposition upon disparate segments of the native and immigrant population" (Serhan, p. 29). Garner and Selod (2015) state that religion is "raced," and Muslims are racialized as a group (p. 11). They assert that while racialization is not the only lens to understand negative experiences of Muslims in the US or Europe, it is an essential lens for understanding how Muslims have been racialized. Historically, race has been derived from a combination of physical and

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cultural characteristics; and for Muslims their racialization is due to a combination of

social and historical factors. Garner and Selod (2015) explain:

> Muslims have historically been one of these groups that experienced racism, as have other faith-based groups, most obviously Jews. Their racialization is accomplished not only by reference to religion but other aspects of culture such as physical appearance (included but not limited to dress). Muslims can be racialized, and the ways (plural) in which this occurs can be understood as constituting Islamophobia. Islamophobia is therefore a specific form of racism targeting Muslims, and racialization is a concept that helps capture and understand how this works, in different ways at different times, and in different places (p. 12).

Bowman and Smedley (2013), in their study, found that "regardless of student's

racial/ethnic background, perceptions of a hostile campus racial climate are negatively

associated with social and academic adjustment" (Bowman & Smedley p. 747). They

also assert that repeated exposure to subtle and overt forms of discrimination can result

in mental, emotional, and physical strain, which can negatively impact students'

experiences on college campuses. The racialization and marginalization of Muslims in

the US aids in understanding how the recent emergence of Muslim colleges and

universities can be understood as the emergence of a new category of religiously

affiliated institutions as well as a new category of Minority-Serving Institutions.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Description of the Population

The target population for this study was administrators, board members, faculty, and staff of RGS. The objective was to understand the motivation for the creation of an Islamic graduate school. In addition, I sought to understand the decision-making process for the selection of RGS's curriculum and approach to learning.

Research Design

Qualitative Method. I did not employ a specific theoretical framework. That is because the purpose of interpretivist research such as this is not to confirm or disconfirm prior theories. Instead, as Berg (2007) stated "theory can be uncovered and informed as a consequence of the data collection" and interpretation of this data made throughout the development of the case study" (p. 286). While there are a number of interpretive methodologies that could have been employed, the descriptive case study methodology emerged as the best fit for this inquiry. Bogdan and Bilken define a case study as "a detailed examination of one particular setting, or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event" (2003, p. 54). Through the use of a case study, I sought to explore the persons, events, philosophies, and systems that created RGS. The use of a research-before theory model, such as the case study, may also lessen the potential for bias since the approach was built from the accumulation of the data produced throughout the course of the study instead of a theory-before-research model, which seeks to verify and test an existing theory. This method allowed

me to understand the role of internal and external influences that shaped the creation of this institution.

Robert Yin, in his seminal book "Case Study Research", stated that case studies are only successful when built upon the collection and analysis of multiple data sources. For this reason, I also obtained through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request the school's original application to the State of Pennsylvania's Department of Education. Documents that were collected and analyzed from this request include RGS's Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, Organizational Charts, Budget Data, Strategic Plans, and other institutional documents.

Selection of Participants

Fourteen people agreed to participate in the study. The participants consisted of senior administrators, staff, trustees, and faculty. For the purpose of this study, the term "administrator" is defined as dean, president, or vice president. The term "staff" is defined as full-time employees of RGS such as a director or registrar. The term "board member" is defined as someone who served as a member of RGS's Board of Trustees during its inaugural year. The term "faculty" is defined as professor, assistant/associate professor, adjunct professor or lecturer. The interviews were conducted in person with the exception of four male participants who requested telephone interviews. One students was interviewed, but only to discuss their association with the Board of Trustees. The duration of the interviews were between 45 to 60 minutes.

I utilized a semi-structured interview protocol. I asked participants a series of
open-ended questions about their experience with the institution's founding and the
creation of its curriculum. Although I prepared a detailed script of questions,
participants were permitted to depart from the questions if they wished to contribute
data that they felt was relevant to the study. The semi-structured interview also
allowed the participants to add to or elaborate on key discussion items, as well as
introduce data that was not part of the original interview protocol. This liberty allowed
me to gain a better understanding of the founding narrative, and it also led to the
discovery of unforeseen findings and themes. In addition to the interviews, I also
observed classes that were offered during the fall 2016 semester.

Interview Process

   Initial Contact. I sent invitations to prospective participants through the college's
Director of Communications. Current administrators, board members, faculty and staff
from RGS were targeted. Those who responded and agreed to participate in the study
were sent consent forms and they were notified that they could withdraw from the
study at any time before the final publication of the dissertation. The forms included a
description of the intent of the study and a statement on how their confidentiality
would be maintained throughout the study. All participants in the study had the
capacity to give informed consent and no one was a member of a protected or
vulnerable population.

Interviews. I gathered data using semi-structured interviews. I contacted twenty

individuals via email. Fourteen responded and were subsequently interviewed. I

conducted ten of the interviews in person, and four were conducted on the telephone

at the request of the participants. Before each interview, I gave the participants a short

overview of the study and an estimated time frame. Each was given an opportunity to

ask questions before the interview. Once it was established that the participants did not

have any questions and their consent was established in written and verbal form, I

started the interviews. Each session was recorded with a digital recorder, and recordings

were transcribed with the permission of the subject. Although a detailed interview

protocol was prepared, participants were able to depart from the original script of

questions. The interviews resulted in approximately 14 hours of recordings. The

interviews were professionally transcribed using the transcription service,

TranscribeMe. Participants were sent a copy of their transcripts for review. Transcripts

were sent to private email accounts that were not connected to the research site.

After each interview, I sent a copy of the transcribed interview to each

participant for member-checking. Each participant had the opportunity to edit, clarify,

and/or elaborate on their statement. Member checks ensured that the participant's

statements were in harmony with their experiences and thoughts. In addition, member-

checking validated the accuracy of the participant's statements.

I separated relevant data and coded it in order to identify common themes in the

participants' responses. Using a modified version of methods identified by Ryan and

Bernard (2003), I used a combination of scanning for repetitions, indigenous typologies,

and a process of cutting and sorting to identify common themes in the participants'

responses. Data was reviewed, sorted, and subsequently coded using Nvivo coding

software. The purpose of the coding was to identify and link chunks of data that were

representative of similar phenomena.

Confidentiality. I gave each participant an informed consent form. The form

detailed the description and purpose of the research project that was proposed.

Included in the consent form was a clause that stated that each participant was free to

withdraw from the study at any point of the process. Each participant was also given a

statement that detailed how their confidentiality will be maintained. Due to the unique

nature of this institution and the study, anonymity could not be guaranteed. Each form

contained my contact information in the event that a participant had additional

questions or concerns after the interview.

The participants' privacy and confidentiality was maintained in the following

ways: (a) participants' names were replaced with numbers and pseudonyms; (b) each

interview session was coded by number; (c) all research records (recruitment

documents, emails, audio recordings, and transcripts) were stored securely in a locked

location; (d) all transcripts were processed through a transcription service which

required all transcribers to sign non-disclosure and confidentiality agreements; (e)

transcripts were stored on an electronic device which was password protected and kept in a locked location; and (f) the collected data (recruitment documents, emails, audio recordings, surveys, and transcripts) will be destroyed after the acceptance and publication of the final dissertation.

Researcher Bias. Bias is defined as "any tendency which prevents unprejudiced consideration of a question."[29] According to Pannucci and Wilkins (2010), "bias can occur at any phase of research, including study design or data collection, as well as in the process of data analysis and publication" (para. 3). While bias may be diminished with proper study design and implementation, Pannucci and Wilkins assert that "some degree of bias is nearly always present in a published study" (para. 3).

One of the ways to address researcher bias is through the adoption of instrumentation rigor and the inclusion of contrary data, literature, and viewpoints. According to Yin (2014), researchers should strive to overcome the propensity for bias by being sensitive to contrary evidence (p. 70) and adopting a broad set of "researcher ethics" (p. 76). Yin argues that "a good case study researcher, like any social scientist, will strive for the highest ethical standards while doing research. These include having responsibility to scholarship, such as neither plagiarizing nor falsifying information, as well as being honest, avoiding deception, and accepting responsibility for one's own work" (p. 76-77). Yin added that researchers must also maintain "strong professional

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[29] Dictionary.com: http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/bias

competence that includes keeping up with related research, ensuring accuracy, striving

for credibility, and understanding and divulging the needed methodological qualifiers

and limitations to one's work" (p. 77).

My religious affiliation may be perceived as both an advantage and an

impediment. It is an advantage since I may be personally acquainted and accustomed to

various cultural, religious, and social practices and norms in the Muslim American

community. This understanding may have lessened the possibility of misinterpretations

or instances of ethnocentrism; but the following techniques were used in order to

minimize my bias:

1. **Triangulation:** Multiple sources of data and several methods of data

   collection were utilized throughout the study. I obtained through a FOIA

   request RGS's application to the State of Pennsylvania's Department of

   Education as well as their Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, Board of Trustees

   Meeting Minutes, Organizational Charts, Budget Data, Strategic Plans, and

   other institutional documents. Other sources of data included news articles,

   journal articles, books, and other forms of media. This information was used

   to substantiate and contextualize the data that was collected.

2. **Comprehensive Documentation & Detailing Methods and Methodological**

   Choices: Throughout the course of the study, detailed records of the data

   were collected. Records include researcher memos, notes, and recordings.

Limitations. The primary limitation of this study is that the findings of this study cannot be generalizable to other postsecondary institutions. However, this is not the point of case study research. This study focused on a single institution that is the first of its kind in the US. While the findings may not be generalizable, the study will add to the existing body of literature on Islamic postsecondary institutions, Islamic studies, religiously affiliated colleges and universities, and MSIs.

Participant Profiles

The demographic makeup of the participants in this study is detailed in Table 1. Due to the size and uniqueness of the institution, and in order to ensure confidentiality in reporting the findings in this study, participants' names, nationality, ethnic, and racial classifications were withheld.

Table 1: Demographic Makeup of Participants

Participant	Gender	Religious Affiliation	Highest Education Achieved
Aiden	Male	Christian	Ph.D.
Bella	Female	Muslim	M.A.
Caleb	Male	Muslim	Unknown
Dylan	Male	Muslim	Unknown
Ethan	Male	Muslim	M.A.
Felicity	Female	Muslim	B.A.
Grace	Female	Christian	Ph.D.
Hunter	Male	Muslim	M.A. (in progress)
Ian	Male	Christian	B.A.
Jordan	Male	Muslim	Ph.D. (in progress)
Kaden	Male	Muslim	Ph.D. (in progress)
Luna	Female	Christian	Unknown
Miles	Male	Muslim	Unknown
Nolan	Male	Muslim	Ph.D.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this case study was to explore the persons, events, philosophies, and systems that created RGS. The following research questions informed the study: (a) What were the social factors that led to the creation of RGS? and (b) How is RGS and its offerings similar and/or dissimilar to established graduate programs in Islamic studies?

During individual interviews, participants described their understanding of the origin of the school and the process that was utilized to create and conceptualize the school and its inaugural offerings. The research findings that this chapter reports are based on the following data sources: semi-structured interviews, RGS's application to the Pennsylvania Department of Education; RGS's Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, Organizational Charts, Budget Data, Strategic Plans, and other institutional documents; books, newspaper articles; journal articles; and my observations during the site visits.

Background

The participants of the study were comprised of 14 people who, at the time of the study, were current administrators, board members, and faculty of RGS. One student was interviewed, but the interview was limited to their experience as a member of RGS's Board of Trustees. The participants ranged in age from late-20s to mid-70s. Ten of the participants were male and four were female. The participants included four Christians and 10 Muslims. One participant reported two years of teaching experience, one reported over 40 years of teaching experience, and the average teaching experience

for the faculty was 11 years. All but one of the administrators had prior teaching experience. For reporting purposes, and in order to conceal the identity of the participants, each was assigned a pseudonym in lieu of their actual names.

At the time of this study, there was one female administrator, one female faculty member, and two female board members. It was noted during data collection that males were overly represented in the institution, and all of the female respondents noted the gender gap during their interviews.

In addition to the gender gap, the institution was also predominately Turkish. Turkish Americans established the school in a Turkish community. Recruitment efforts in this community may have attributed to the over representation of Turkish people. Several respondents stated that the school engaged in several recruitment efforts in order to diversify its student and faculty population, and there was an acknowledgement that the school needed to diversify its pool of applicants if it was to sustain its operation. In the months following data collection, the institution lessened its faculty gender and diversity gaps. A diverse group of male and female academics appeared on the campus as guest lecturers; and as of the spring 2017 semester, two females were added to the faculty.

The participants of the study contributed differing amounts of data depicting the themes that comprise the narrative of the findings. Certain participants provided details relevant to specific themes, while others made numerous contributions across several

themes. I attempted to include the range and diversity of each of the responses that was uncovered during the interviews.

The Research Site

On December 14, 2012, the "Respect Institute" was incorporated under the State of Pennsylvania's Nonprofit Corporation Law. The names listed on its Articles of Incorporation include RGS's first President and two members of its Board of Trustees. According to the Respect Institute's application to the Pennsylvania Department of Education, the Board of Trustees first convened on February 15, 2013. Minutes of the first board meeting reveal that an initial group of five men met to elect its Board of Trustees, appoint its President, approve its bylaws, authorize the opening of its bank accounts, and designate the permanent address of the organization.

The Respect Institute would change its name to the "Respect Graduate School" (RGS). It would begin its financial operation with an endowment of US$507,840.79 and an additional unrestricted deposit account of US$99,098.59. Its trustees were tasked with the oversight and protection of the endowment as well as the operation, financial well-being, and development of its first graduate program.

During the period of 2013 to 2015, the board expanded to include nine members (eight men and one woman), appoint a vice president, and hire three full-time administrators. By August 2015, it received authorization from the State of Pennsylvania to operate as a postsecondary institution, and it began the process of applying for regional accreditation through the Middle States Commission on Higher Education

(MSCHE). By September 2015, the board hired five faculty members, and RGS welcomed its inaugural class of approximately 30 part-time and full-time students.

According to the school's 2014-2015 "College Catalog," the tuition for its first year of operation was US$500 per credit hour or US$1,500 per course. Students who sought enrollment were required to have a bachelor's degree in either religious studies, humanities, or any other related social science; a minimum undergraduate grade point average (GPA) of 3.0; and passing Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores if they were educated abroad. Students who did not meet the minimum undergraduate GPA standard were asked to submit results from the general Graduate Record Examination (GRE). As an incentive for admission, RGS offered five full-time merit-based scholarships that included full tuition as well as a US$1,000 monthly stipend to highly qualified students. According to RGS's budget submitted to the State, this incentive would cost the institution US$45,000 per year.

The school's sole academic program was a dual track 36 credit hour Master of Arts degree in Islamic Studies. Students had the option of an Academic Track, which culminated in a final thesis paper, and a Professional Track, geared to those who wished to pursue a career in chaplaincy or public service. RGS's program offered classes that have not been historically available in American universities, such as Hadith Studies, Tajweed, Islamic Banking and Finance, and Quranic Arabic. It also offered conventional graduate courses such as Research Methods, World Religions, Theology, and Philosophy.

RGS consisted of one large building, which was previously occupied by a non-profit organization—the Lehigh Dialogue Center (LDC). The LDC is a non-profit organization founded in 2004. According to the organization's website,[30] it is a non-political organization engaged in an array of civic activities centered on interfaith relations and community service. For the past decade, the LDC hosted interfaith dinners and seminars, service projects, as well as an annual intercultural trip to Turkey. In addition to its activities in the Lehigh Valley, the website featured information about the Gülen Movement.[31] Although the building was primarily occupied by RGS, LDC continued to host interfaith events at the site, and RGS's President previously served as LDC's Imam prior to the founding of the school.

Data from the participants suggests that LDC and its members were instrumental in supporting the establishment of RGS. One of the most obvious examples of LDC's support is the renovation and use of its building located on 2200 Industrial Drive.

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[30] http://lehighdialogue.org/about-us/

[31] http://lehighdialogue.org/gulen-movement/

Figure 1. Front Entrance of RGS[32]　　　**Figure 2. Rear Entrance of RGS**

The school is located in an industrial area of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. While the

school is not easily accessible by public transportation, it is located near a major

roadway. Visitors driving onto the property see signage on the facade of the building for

RGS, and upon entering from the rear parking area, there is signage for both RGS and

LDC. Although respondents stated that the building was donated by LDC, as of the

publication of this dissertation, LDC's website still cites 2200 Industrial Drive as the

location of its organization. The existence of signage for both organizations on the

façade of the building and the address admission on LDC's website suggests that there is

still a connection between both organizations.

Although the building is two stories, most of the day-to-day activities of the

school take place on the first floor of the building. The renovated interior of the building

is open and modern. The Registrar's office is located at the entrance of the facility, and

the school's senior administrative offices are located alongside the corridors. In total,

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[32] Photos sourced from Respect Graduate School.

there are eight administrative offices on the first floor and five large classrooms, which featured technology such as interactive whiteboards, projectors, and computers.

I collected data during site visits in the fall of 2016. At the time of the visits, the school had completed its first year of operation and was in the middle of its second fall semester. I conducted interviews and observed classes that were offered during the fall 2016 semester. During each of the classes observed (Quranic Arabic, History of Islamic Thought, Theories and Methods in the Study of Religion, and Islamic Theology and Philosophy), it was noted that all of the faculty supplemented their lectures and discussions with the technology that was in the classroom. Classes were observed in order to ascertain the rigor and content of RGS's graduate program as well as to observe faculty and student interactions. In addition to the classes, I observed extra-curricular events such as an interfaith dinner, evening *halaqas,*[33] and an ancient Quran exhibit that was open to the public.

At the center of the facility is a small (605 square feet) and highly structured library, managed by a full-time librarian with over 14 years of professional experience and a specialization in archival and museum collections. At the time of the visit, the librarian was preparing for an ancient Quran exhibit which was well-attended by the public and covered by the local news media. The librarian detailed RGS's distinctive and unique Islamic collection and the physical and digital resources that were available to

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[33] A halaqa is a religious gathering or study group of the religion of Islam or the Quran.

the students and faculty. The collection included texts that have not been historically

available in the US.

Figure 3. RGS Library View 1
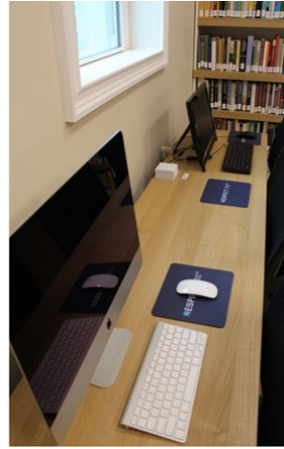
Figure 4. RGS Library View 2

Figure 5 RGS Library View 3

Figure 6. RGS Library View 4

Across from the library was a *masjid* or prayer space that was open to students,

faculty, and the general public for daily prayers and weekly *Jum'ah*[34] services. The

masjid held daily *Tarawih* services during the month of Ramadan. It features three

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[34] Ju'mah is the weekly congregational prayer service that takes place on Friday. Ju'mah is also the Arabic word for Friday.

domes, hand-painted Islamic calligraphy, gilded panels, and blue tiles. The details of the prayer space evoked the feeling of a traditional mosque at the center of the school. Adjacent to the men's entrance of the *masjid* is a *wudu room.* The inclusion of a *masjid* and *wudu* facility is especially noteworthy, since the lack of adequate prayer facilities in the majority of US colleges and universities has been cited repeatedly in previous studies, such as those conducted by Nasir and Al-Amin (2006); Seggie and Sanford (2010); and Ali and Bagheri (2009).

Figure 7. RGS *Masjid*

Figure 8. RGS Hand-Painted Calligraphy on Dome

I observed that the weekly *Jum'ah* service was well attended by students, staff, and the general public. In addition, I noted that local restaurants donated lunches to the school so that those who attended the *Jum'ah* service would have a *halâl* meal before returning to their respective jobs or classes. When asked about the food donations, a respondent noted that this was a common occurrence. Another respondent stated the following about the weekly service:

> **Hunter:** Having Friday prayer here helps in intrafaith dialogue. So, we have other Muslim communities coming. And then as you witnessed today, we have then food afterwards. So, it's just not giving your Salaams and then saying, okay, "Juma Mubarak Tabarak-Allah!" but it's saying, "Juma Mubarak Tabarak-Allah. Let's get some tea and some food." And then people are sitting down, they're chit-chatting, this helps. We have students coming from North Hampton Community College. From other places. We have people coming from half an hour away just to come to Jum'ah here, if not further.

The president of the school typically leads the *Jum'ah* service, but throughout the semester, other

notable imams or scholars were invited to lead the prayers and deliver the *khutbah.*[35] The

inclusion of a *masjid* on the school's property and the weekly Jum'ah service provided

an additional service to the students and it fostered community relations. Respondents

noted that although there were other mosques in the Lehigh Valley, the addition of

RGS's *masjid* was welcomed by other Muslim communities in the area.

Behind the *masjid* and library there was an open area that was used as a

communal meeting space. The area was open and lined with windows, and on either

side of this space were classrooms. Administrators, staff, and students were frequently

observed congregating in this open area preparing for class, sharing food, or simply

speaking with one another.

Figure 9. RGS Communal Space

The atmosphere of the schools was collegial and hospitable. Throughout data collection,

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[35] A khutbah is a sermon that is delivered after the noon congregational prayer on Friday or for the two festivals of Eid.

several respondents remarked on the hospitable and familial quality:

> **Ethan**: I think I found the staff quite friendly, so there's a nice friendly atmosphere.

> **Ian:** I feel it's very familial. Everybody is super kind, and being not Muslim is never an issue. I think the students here are the nicest people, as well as the faculty, and I have nothing but great things to say about Muslims. Everybody wishes me a Merry Christmas and it's just very friendly, and I feel close to everybody here. I've been to their homes for dinner, and we sometimes get together after work and we'll go hiking, play board games and things like that.

> **Jordan:** What has it been like for me? Well, I always like working with Muslims...You know there certainly is this concept of brotherhood and sisterhood, like this very particular bonding that which I have always enjoyed and found very beneficial. Very beneficial to myself and my family. For example, that, the way that RGS has dealt with my family has been quite beautiful.

I remarked the accessibility and visibility of the college's administrators and faculty. The school's president, vice president, and faculty members were frequently seen interacting with the students. It was also common to see the family of the faculty and administrators attending extracurricular events.

Findings

A single founder or founding group was not clearly established during data collection. The question *"What is the origin of RSG?"* yielded divergent responses from the participants. Although each was asked about the origins of the school and the identity of its founders, a clear and concise founding narrative and/or founder(s) was not corroborated. What was established was that there was a community of Turkish Muslims in the Lehigh Valley that advanced the idea and planning phase of RSG. For that reason, the conception and creation of RSG can be credited to the Turkish Muslim

community living in the Lehigh Valley of Pennsylvania.

Throughout data collection, several respondents continuously cited the influence of Said Nursî, Fethullah Gülen, the Gülen Movement, and *Hizmet*. While these respondents included information about these topics, several respondents included disclaimers in their statements that the school was not affiliated with Fethullah Gülen, the Gülen Movement, or *Hizmet.* Rather the respondents cited their own or the organization's philosophical influences which are linked to conceptions of service and education in the teachings of Said Nursî and Fethullah Gülen. In addition, several respondents cited their personal connection to Fethullah Gülen. One stated that they were a former student, one stated that they met with the cleric, and one stated that he was a close family friend. While several respondents had a connection to the cleric, many were adamant that the school was not affiliated with the movement or the cleric. As a result, the recurrence of these topics across several interviews constitutes a dominant theme of this study.

Incorporation documents that were submitted to the State of Pennsylvania identify three respondents of the study as being the original Incorporators of "The Respect Institute," but these respondents did not identify nor credit themselves as being the founders of the school when asked about the identity of RGS's founders. Their reluctance to credit themselves as founders was noteworthy. There may be two justifications for the respondents not wanting to credit themselves as founders. The first can be to preserve the safety of their families and friends who are still in Turkey. As of the publication

of this study, the geopolitical situation in Turkey can best be described as precarious. One

respondent in the study stated that family members and associates were jailed due to their

affiliation with the Gulen Movement. Given that the school is very open about its Gulen

influences, these respondents may be reluctant to cite themselves as founders in this study.

Second, it may also be because of their religious beliefs. Islam emphasizes modesty in ones

conduct. Thus, taking credit and boasting about one's accomplishments in founding an

institution may be deemed as something unpraiseworthy or even sinful.   For this reason, the

founders are described as a community of Sunni Turkish Muslims who have been

influenced by the Hanafi School of Thought as well as the teachings of two prominent

Turkish imams, Said Nursî and Fethullah Gülen.

Prior to the data collection process, I was cognizant of the Gülen Movement or

Hizmet and its role in creating primary and secondary schools abroad as well as primary

and secondary charter schools in the US. One indication of its entrance into

postsecondary education was Grewal and Coolidge's commentary in their 2016 article,

Islamic Education in the United States (2016), which detailed the reopening of AIC by

Turkish educators (257-259). The article briefly explained that AIC closed and reopened

repeatedly in the late 1980s and early 200s due to financial instability and loss of

leadership. It also states that in 2010 AIC was reopened by Turkish American educators

who were part of the Gülen Movement. Grewal and Coolidge describe the Gülen

communities as "highly centralized, corporate structures, with each satellite following a

strict chain of command back to its leader, Fethullah Gülen" (258). Press coverage at the

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time of the 2010 reopening (Brachear 2010 and Lepeska 2011) also cites AIC's affiliation with the GM, but there was not substantial information on the motivation for the reopening or the creation of other GIS postsecondary schools in the U.S.

During data collection, one respondent revealed that RGS and AIC were not the only GIS colleges in the U.S. North American College and Virginia International University were cited; but the accuracy and validity of this statement could not be confirmed by the institutions. It should also be noted that the original interview protocol for this study did not include questions pertaining to the Gülen Movement, Hizmet, or Fethullah Gülen. Hence, the study uncovered a new phase of this movement, its followers, and its role in the current American primary, secondary, and post-secondary education market. I leave this study with a new understanding of the philosophical and social factors that established one Islamic postsecondary institution in the US, and its philosophical connections to Hizmet.

Founding Narratives

Many participants presumed that the inaugural president and vice president were the founders of the school, but when asked, the president and the vice president did not credit themselves as such. What was confirmed was that both men were recruited for their positions by members of an existing Turkish Muslim community in the Lehigh Valley. One board member remarked:

> **Nolan:** We just hired the president and vice president, board itself directly. And then, the faculty or staff, and students, has been taken care by president, or dean of academician [pause] dean of students.

During his interview, the president described his recruitment:

> **President:** I was an Imam in Atlanta until the year of 2012, but I spent already over 12 years in Atlanta leading Turkish community there...This community in Bethlehem, mainly Turkish-American community, they had the idea of opening a school, but they didn't know what to do really. So they just contacted me and they said, "Oh, why don't you come over? This is the idea that we have, but we don't have any person to lead this." So upon that, I just moved to Bethlehem and I started as an Imam here at Lehigh Dialogue Center which is basically the community center for Turkish-Americans. After a couple of months, we realized that the Lehigh Dialogue Center is more community oriented organization and we want to do something academic; therefore, it would be better to open up a new organization. Then we started this organization and slowly—first we got the name of the Respect Institute, and then realized that Respect Graduate School as a DBA would work better because it really gives the sense of school rather than think tank organization or any other type of institution. So this is how it started, and I can say that from the very beginning, Turkish Muslim American community, both local as well as New Jersey area and other parts of America as well as some members from Turkey, some business people, they were both the financial and academic supporters of this initiative. So far, I'm receiving a good deal of academic support from Turkish academics who live in US. So this is the basic story of RGS.

The vice president in his account of his recruitment stated the following:

> **Vice President:** The origin of the school was done when a Muslim student I had at a theological seminary in the area tipped me off that there would be the likelihood to possibility of the development of the school, and that there would be a person coming from another area, and he might get in touch with me, which he did. That was, I believe in 2012.

Both men stated that they were contacted by members of the Lehigh community for their position, and both expressed an excitement for the possibility of helping to create an Islamic graduate school. While the experience of leading a postsecondary institution was new for the president, the vice president had several decades of experience in higher education, particularly in Christian theological schools and private universities. In

addition to his experience as a Christian pastor and professor, he also had significant

experience as an administrator and board member. Having the school led by an Imam

and a former pastor was also intended to signal RGS's commitment to interfaith

dialogue and leadership.

Other respondents credited the members of an existing interfaith organization

with the idea and/or founding of the school:

> **Grace:** This building belongs to the Dialogue Center, for instance. A lot of the people—the Dialogue Center has activities here and they have their afterschool program here and all kinds of stuff. I think it was partly those people involved in the Dialogue Center that has also been involved in getting this going a bit. Not entirely, but there is an involvement here.

One board member commented:

> **Nolan:** A few of the board members I know before, and I worked for different causes together. And then, we worked certain community services together, and arranged some activities together. We have find some commonalities and seemed there are really serious needs are necessary about this education. We come together to a friend and currently they are actively board members in RGS. And then we invited other board members after our personal relation, personal networks, we brought them.

The exact relationship and connections between the LDC and RGS was not

clearly determined, but there was sufficient data to confirm that members of the LDC

were instrumental in the founding of RGS. What was also determined is that there was

an established community of Turkish academics, business professionals, and community

leaders in the Lehigh Valley who organized the efforts to create the school.

Throughout the data collection process, participants credited established social

networks and personal relationships for aiding in the creation and continued support of

the school. The President stated the following when referencing his own social network and connections:

> **President:** Coming from an Islamic background, definitely, I had connections in terms of academics, scholars (pause) although I was in the field of ministry, meaning that I was an Imam. Therefore, my main network was basically people like myself. But in the meantime, from my interactions with different universities in Atlanta, I had connections and I used those connections definitely. It should be also stated that the Turkish community mainly inspired by teaching of Fethullah Gülen was among my main resources as human resources…So this kind of network also really helped us in terms of accessing the resources that we need as well as—human resources, not just physical resources.

Access to informal and formal social networks enabled RGS to secure the financial, human, and social capital it needed to create and sustain its undertaking. These social networks also enabled the school to attract its first class of students in a relatively short amount of time. According to several respondents, the recruitment and admissions process for the first class occurred in a one month period during the late summer of 2015. Faculty and administrators evaluated each admission application and selected the first class of students.

In this section of Chapter 4, this researcher presents and examines each of the themes that resulted from the interview procedures. The themes that emerged as relevant to the research questions are: (1) The Shortage of Muslim Colleges, (2) Theoretical Conceptions of Service or *Hizmet*, (3) The Strength and Capacity of Social Networks, (4) Correcting the False Image of Islam, and (5) The Diversity of Islamic Studies.

The Shortage of Muslim Colleges

The number of Islamic schools in the US is very limited. Nurani (2014) estimated that there are only approximately 250 schools nationwide and she asserts that the majority do not go beyond eighth grade (Nurani, p. 181). Since the 1980s, there has been less than a dozen attempts to establish Islamic postsecondary institutions; and at the time of this study, there was only one accredited Muslim college in the U.S—Zaytuna College.

All of the participants of this study cited the shortage of Muslim colleges as one of the social factors that led to the founding of the school. The scarcity of Muslim colleges has been discussed in the literature. Currently, there are over 235 (Thurston 2016, p.9) Islamic primary and secondary schools, but there are only 6 postsecondary schools in existence: American Islamic College (Chicago, IL), Bayan Claremont (Claremont, California), International Institute of Islamic Thought (Herndon, Virginia), Islamic American University (Southfield, Michigan), Respect Graduate School (Bethlehem, Pennsylvania), and Zaytuna College(Berkeley, California)--with Zaytuna being the only one to achieved accreditation through the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.

Participants expressed that members of the community identified this disparity in the higher education market and created RGS with the intention of addressing the gap. While participants acknowledged the existence of other institutions such as Zaytuna, they explained that RGS would be the east coast equivalent of these school

since the majority of these schools are located in the mid-west or the west coast of the US.

Several board members also stated that they needed to create institutions that addressed the unique needs of their Muslim American children. They each shared their experience as being immigrants, who were raising Muslim American children who were very different from themselves. They recognized that there was an absence of schools that could provide the education as well as social support that this generation needed, and this was one of primary reasons they agreed to join RGS's efforts to establish a postsecondary school.

While respondents acknowledged the existence of Islamic Studies programs at other non-Muslim colleges and universities, they explained that there needed to be an indigenous Muslim American institution that was founded by and operated by Muslims. Some went on to discuss their misgivings of established programs, and how Muslims needed to create their own educational institutions in order to counteract negative portrayals of Islam and Muslims in the media as well as to counteract the academy's legacy of Orientalism.

The shortage of Islamic colleges and universities was a theme that emerged in every interview. Several respondents expressed their thoughts on the shortage, and a desire to create indigenous Muslim American colleges in the US Some respondents were particularly concerned that there were not any institutions in the US for their children to

attend, and this realization served as a catalyst for them to be involved in the effort to create RGS.

For the participants who emigrated to the US, there was also a recognition that their American-born children were "Muslim Americans" or "Turkish American Muslims" and there was a need to create indigenous Muslim American institutions that spoke to the unique needs of their American-born children.

> **Nolan:** Why did I agree to serve on the [pause] as I told [pause], I live here more than 20 years. My first child is now born in the United States. She raised and born, and I see my generation is completely—not completely—helpless. At certain points, they are different from us. And their understanding, their cultural background is different than us. I believe the RGS is necessary to handle this second generation of the Turkish community.

Felicity also detailed her experience raising children. She explained that her children's American identity is different from her own South Asian identity, and she recognized that there needed to be indigenous Muslim American institutions that spoke to the unique needs of her children. She also explained that existing Islamic primary and secondary schools that were founded by immigrant communities fell short in addressing the unique needs of Muslim American youth. She also stated that although her own daughter did not attend Islamic Schools, this daughter had moved to California to work for Zaytuna Institute, which eventually evolved to become Zaytuna College. Her daughter's work with Zaytuna inspired her to serve on RGS's board. She believed her service would be her contribution to the effort to create additional indigenous Muslim American schools.

While several respondents acknowledged that there were Islamic studies at well-known public and private universities, they expressed that there was still a need for Muslims to create their own institutions. Ian explained that, historically, Muslims American who were interested in Islamic studies could attain their education overseas. While these institutions provide a firm understanding of different Islamic sciences such as *fiqh* or *hadith*, they did not adequately prepare students to return home and serve their communities in the US:

> **Ian:** It is clear that with the growth of Islam in America, there is an ever-growing demand for Islamic studies programs. Someone needs to create the Islamic leaders of tomorrow, and so you are seeing more and more colleges and universities offering courses and sometimes even degree programs or certificates. These programs may be very good on an academic level, but what they are missing is that they are not Muslim. Our Muslim communities want to have their own institutions of higher education that are staffed with Muslim instructors. Up until recently, if one wanted to study Islam at a Muslim institution of higher education and become an imam, they had to travel to Egypt, Dubai, or some other place half a world away. Many of these institutions have been around for centuries and I am sure they are great at preparing their students to serve the community in their respective country, but the culture of Saudi Arabia or Egypt is not the same as that of another region, say Turkey, Morocco, the United States or anywhere else for that matter.

When asked if the founders were aware that the school constituted a new category of religiously affiliated and minority-serving institution, the respondents offered contrasting responses. One respondent stated the following:

> **Aiden:** I think they understood that there was nothing like this in Pennsylvania. I don't think they understood that the vast lack of such institutions in the United States. I don't think they understood that they'd be, in essence, kind of like pioneers in the field. I don't think that that was even anything that motivated them either. I think that they were very much aware, like I said, of the void in Pennsylvania, but probably didn't even cross their mind, I'm guessing.

Another respondent stated that they were wholly aware that they were creating something unique in the higher education landscape:

> **Ian:** Yes, I think that was really the thing that drove them. They knew that there was this hole in the market and that Islam is growing every day and people really in need something like this. Generally, if you want to learn about Islam, you go to your mosque and you learn from your imam, and there's nothing wrong with that. But your imam is obviously going to give you his brand of Islam, and sometimes it's nice just to have the option of an academic approach, where you are able to explore the topics that interest you freely, but at the same time there is still an authentic spiritual element to atmosphere as well.

Ian would go to explain that although there are numerous degree programs in Islamic studies at American colleges and universities, these institutions were not founded or operated by Muslims. In addition, they did not offer the curriculum and services that an indigenous Muslim institution could provide:

> **Ian:** The biggest issue that American Muslims are faced with today is the question of, what does it mean to be Muslim in America? American Muslims come from all over the world, while at the same time, many are born and raised right here in the US. How do you consolidate such a diverse population into a coherent culture? It takes time, but more importantly, it requires that Muslims have their own institutions where they can decide this for themselves, and this is where schools like Zaytuna College, American Islamic College, and Respect Graduate School come in.

A board member added that there was also an understanding that Pennsylvania had a history of being tolerant to religious minorities and perhaps an Islamic school could operate and thrive in Pennsylvania:

> **Felicity:** Pennsylvania is known for academics, and Pennsylvania is actually— and I'm so glad they're in here because it's known for its acceptance of religious diversity education. Where the fact is that you still have your Mennonites, and you still have your Amish people still running their own way of education. And I feel that Pennsylvania non-Muslim population is just so fine around that, that you wouldn't—and I see that [pause] that people are accepting it.

Many respondents acknowledged the existence of other institutions such as Zaytuna

College and American Islamic College (AIC), yet they went on to state that there was a

desire to create additional institutions that could offer a rigorous graduate level

education:

> **Bella:** We know that in our own research, we found very, very few Muslim
> founded institutions that can offer a degree in Islam or Middle Eastern studies.
> Zaytuna College in the West coast, of course, we see ourselves as the Eastern
> counterpart, in essence, of Zaytuna. So having various faith communities
> represented in the academic world, being able to have the right network to
> lend—whether that's professors or some type of expert in the religion of Islam—
> we would be an institution that many other academic institutions would
> automatically look to for guidance in finding those people, or if they have
> students, in essence, who are working on their dissertations, this is the place
> they would go to. So we're hoping that from an academic perspective we're
> filling a very serious need and void that's there.

It was also understood that there needed to be several institutional options within the

US, and institutions such as Zaytuna and AIC could not be the only providers:

> **Felicity:** My whole thing is in order to have your integration in a society,
> especially once you're a minority and legitimize your position as a Muslim, you
> have to have a solid academic hold on institutions.

Although the respondents acknowledged their desire to create these institutions, they

also realized that these attempts may be met with suspicion as well as challenges in the

current social and political climate. Many respondents expressed their concerns about

Islamophobia and the possibility that the creation of indigenous Muslim institutions may

result in remonstration; yet they also believed that their efforts could lessen the effects

of fear:

> **Ethan**: I think the Muslim community, in trying to establish Islamic organizations,

they are aware that they're reaching out or trying to establish something in a post-9/11 American audience. So sometimes just to establish an Islamic organization could unsettle some people, because of a lot what we see on media and terrorism and all of that. In a way to show that this is really just an academic venture and it's— so at the same time, to have this communal face to whoever is trying to remove some of these problems, not make it worse, the interfaith things really help.

While Felicity saw the area as being open to religious minorities, others were more apprehensive, the selection of the institution's name was an example of this apprehension and fear of backlash from the public. While the school was clearly marketing and positioning itself as an Islamic postsecondary institution founded by Muslims, there was a realization that care needed to be taken in the selection of the school's name. An overtly Islamic name may create difficulties, but there was also a desire to convey the school's distinctive culture:

> **Aiden:** A seminary is both a graduate school and a professional school. So my understanding was, and even in the name of the place, I said, "Well why not call it the Islamic Theological Seminary of the northeast or something like that?" And I lost that discussion. I think legitimately and rightfully so I would imagine that if we put something up on the outside sign here and said Islamic Seminary, we would have demonstrators every day. It would not really be the same in this particular area, in this particular time.

Respondents also expressed a desire to create a nonsectarian Islamic institution that would allow its students to study Islam from an academic and social science perspective. Others stated that it was important to develop an institution that was not necessarily connected to a single sect or school of thought. The respondents continually emphasized that their vision for RGS was that it should be a research-based institution that featured the fullness and diversity of Islamic studies.

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Theoretical Conceptions of Service or *Hizmet*.

An unanticipated but central theme in the study is the institutions association to the Gülen Movement and its emphasis on theoretical conceptions of service or Hizmet. Hizmet is a Turkish word for service, and it is also a communitarian social organization whose multi-sector activities are organized in accordance with the teachings of the Turkish Imam Muhammed Fethullah Gülen.

Hizmet followers follow what is often described in the literature as a "moderate" or "tolerant" form of Sunni Islam that is heavily influenced by Gülen and the Turkish scholar Said Nursî. In addition to the basic tenets of Islam, Hizmet philosophies emphasize charity, education, and interfaith dialogue. During the data collection, several respondents echoed these sentiments. One respondent aptly described the relation between Hizmet philosophy and the founding of the school. He stated the following:

> **Aiden:** The Respect Graduate School originates really in the understandings of the Hizmet movement. Although it is not in any organic way affiliated with Hizmet or with Fethullah Gülen, perhaps it's best to say that the school in its origins as to its thoughtfulness, its seeing, of its needs, et cetera, begins within the ideas of the Hizmet movement for education, dialogue for Muslims to enter into modernity or postmodernity, and that is one way of seeing it. That might be called a philosophical understanding for the origin of the school".

As someone who was not expecting this connection, I think this respondent's quote aptly described the institution and its philosophical influences when it comes to the Gulen Movement and Hizmet and its efforts to engage in interfaith and intercultural

dialogue.

Born in Erzurum, Turkey in the 1940s, Gülen is in exile in the US, and has resided in Eastern Pennsylvania since 1998. Fethullah Gülen is described as being Turkey's most recognized and contentious "faith-based communitarian leader" (Hendrick, 2013). His teachings are described as being a mix of traditionalism and modernism. Individuals who have been inspired by the cleric's teachings are collectively referred to as the Gülen Movement (GM) or *Hizmet*[36]. There are *Hizmet* communities in Africa, Australia, Central Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and the US. It is estimated that *Hizmet* communities created over 1,000 schools and several universities in over 130 countries (Dreher, p. 258). In addition, this movement is estimated to have US$25 billion in assets due to its network of schools, businesses, and media corporations (Wood & Keskin, 2013, p. 129).

Hendricks, in his article, "*Approaching a Sociology of Fethullah Gülen,*" stated "*Hizmet* refers to a communitarian social organization whose multi-sector activities are mobilized in accordance with the teachings and charisma of Turkey's most influential, and most divisive, religious personality: M. Fethullah Gülen" (p. 133). What makes this organization unique is that it does not follow a formal organizational or hierarchical structure. Yet, it is often described as being one of the largest Muslim organizations in the world.

Hizmet followers follow what is often described as a moderate and tolerant form

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[36]Turkish word for service.

of Sunni Islam that is also heavily influenced by the Turkish scholar Said Nursî. In

addition to the basic tenets of Islam, the *Hizmet* philosophies emphasize charity,

education, and interfaith and intercultural dialogue. The prevailing notion among the

Hizmet is that by focusing on education, economic development, charity, and interfaith

dialogue, humanity can begin to combat social ills such as ignorance, poverty, and

disunity. (Dreher, 2013, p. 258). During the data collection, several respondents echoed

these sentiments:

> **Nolan:** We believe if we become together, and if the faiths are together, there's going to be—instead of clash of civilizations, we believe civilizations can contribute to each other. They are complementing each other… We believe we are going be much more fruitful, and then helping the United States more strong. And giving right interpretation, right information about our religion or our culture. That takes away so many misunderstandings…That's why we believe interdenominational or interfaith dialogue can be very critical. Also, the reason when we are starting [long pause]—say the ignorance or poverty is the biggest problem in education. Two of them is biggest problem in the world. So if we solve ignorance in education, we're going to help to solve the poverty sooner. One of the biggest step is interfaith and interdenominational dialogue to move together side-by-side to take the burden our shoulder from each other.

One respondent stated that he was a former student of Gülen when asked about his

own Islamic education:

> **Dylan:** I don't have *ijazah*, traditional *ijazah*, but I studied with traditional scholars. One of them is Fethullah Gülen and I stayed in Egypt and I studied Muslim traditional scholars there as well, but I don't have any actual physical papers.

A board member who had recently joined the board stated that it was her

understanding that the school was influenced by Gülen, and it was one of the factors

that drew her to the position:

> **Felicity:** So coming to Respect Graduate, I heard about it before it opened up. I just got so excited. I just said, "Wow." I was familiar with Mr. Gülen, the person who [is the] visionary. I actually knew that community for a long time, ever since I moved to Pennsylvania. Because before that, this community had another scholar, Nursî, they call him Said Nursî… I heard about that this was part of Gülen's idea, because I kind of admired him…I kind of fell in love with his writing, his views. So I think that was very convincing for me that the right people are behind.

Several board members and administrators openly expressed their scholarly interest in *Hizmet* and Gülen's educational and spiritual philosophies. Although this admiration and/or interest was expressed repeatedly, most respondents followed up by stating that there was no direct relationship with the cleric or *Hizmet*. However, in a September 1, 2015, *Hizmet News Portal* article, the president remarked that the name of the school was chosen by Gülen who currently resides in Pennsylvania. While many stated that the school was not affiliated with Gülen or *Hizmet,* what was established is that the philosophical understanding of *Hizmet* influenced several members of RGS's community and their conceptions of Islamic education for the public good. The *Hizmet* influence can be felt in its emphasis on the creation of educational institutions for public good and their emphasis on infusing education with interfaith dialogue.

The Strength and Capacity of Social Networks[37]

Every interview included a discussion of how social networks aided in the

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[37] The tern "social network" was first coined by social anthropologist John A. Barnes in 1954, but the concept of social networks can be traced back to classical sociologist such as Emile Durkheim, George

creation of the school. Administrators, board members, and faculty all cited that Hizmet,

Turkish, Turkish American, or Muslim American social networks enabled the school to

acquire the financial, human, and social capital it needed to create and sustain its

operation. One respondent stated:

> **Aiden:** It was word of mouth…That's why it stayed mostly within the Turkish community. The Turkish-Bosnian community know the history of the Ottoman Empire, the Bosnians, they're really Turkic-Bosnians for this. Largely word-of-mouth through networks. There are both Muslim networks and then Muslim ethnic networks—Bosnian, Bangladeshi—right, right. And as a result of that, the word gets out, and I think through the *Hizmet* network as well.

> Access to diverse Muslim American social networks is one of the reasons why

the school was able to attract students for its inaugural class with very little advertising.

One administrator who was involved in recruiting students stated the following:

> **Bella:** We heavily depended on the word of mouth. I think the reason why we got so many people is because as Muslims we already have connections. We're a community-based culture in America. So because we already have an established community, we were able to go to them and use our own personal names. While we don't have the persona that I mentioned earlier, we used the credit that we have already built with those people and say, "This is an amazing institution that we're trying to start. And just trust me and start with us." And those people will involve their own friends. My understanding, in studying this role that I had, is a lot of schools depend on the word of mouth, that that's a very successful way of doing things. I think probably it would be more so successful in our community because we're already heavily sensitive to that way of doing things. We've put out ads in the local newspaper, in the education guide, they call it. We did get one student that way. We've also, in essence, advertised by just being present at booths at these major Muslim conventions like ISNA, ICNA. We're present at those. MAS-ICNA. And participating at events networking, so people know that we're here. And if they know of someone, again, it's word of mouth. But they would be able to say, "Hey, I did hear a new school opened in Pennsylvania, if

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Simmel, Ferdinand Tönnies, and Max Weber. Social networks are defined as social structures made of nodes, which may be individuals or organizations.

you're interested." I also had made calls to people I knew from many years ago who are now chaplains in different places—Muslim chaplains, or they're not chaplains but they're leaders in the Muslim community—and I would say, "We have a school now, Muslims now have a school in Pennsylvania. Just wanted you to know." And while we didn't necessarily draw in any students just yet from that, that is considered one of our strategies for recruitment.

Another responded added that there was very little time to recruit the faculty and students since the school received their authorization in the late summer of 2015. The respondent stated the following:

> **Caleb:** We couldn't have a lot of time to post ads and everything because, as I said, we didn't know that we were going to be approved. We submitted the file and we thought they could say we are not ready for this year, we can do it next year. We talked to some academics, but they had other commitments. We had to rely on our personal networks, especially the president's networks. And we did that. Both faculties—when we employed full-time faculties—were his connections from Chicago—University of Chicago—and we used personal networks.

The same respondent would go on to elaborate on RGS recruitment of its inaugural class:

> **Caleb:** It was also personal networks. I don't know if you know, but almost all of our students are Turkish. Some of them knew that we are trying to establish a new school and they just applied when we opened the school and they let their friends know. Most of them were involved in that process—word-of-mouth.

Another respondent, Ian, stated the following:

> **Ian:** I was very happy that we were able to get so many students in such a short amount of time. We were given permission to open in, I think, August, and we started classes in September. We were able to get, I think—I forget the exact number now, but it might be around 20 students or somewhere between 18-20 our first semester. You probably got this from somebody else. And so to get that in a month was really significant, but it was a lot of hard work. It was all done through word of mouth. Just going to different communities, different mosques, and introducing ourselves and telling people what we were about.

While the college was able to tap into the Turkish Muslim community, they faced some

barriers when they attempted to recruit from other non-Turkish Muslim communities.

One board member who had extensive experience with other Muslim and non-Muslim

boards elaborated on this barrier:

> **Felicity:** One thing I think I've noticed, even from the start that they are lacking, is the networking into the local immediate communities…non-Turkish community, immediate communities. And I think probably that's why I got on the board. I think I could help them because I am from (pause) I've been living in Pennsylvania, so I know a lot of communities, and I'm going to try to help them, maybe not a whole lot financially, but definitely use my network, too. So that's where, I think, they're lacking.

What is especially noteworthy is that this board member at the time of the study was

the only Muslim female board member. In addition to her career in higher education,

she has extensive experience on other boards such as the Red Cross, the American Civil

Liberties Union, the World Affairs Council, and a number of local non-profits in

Pennsylvania. What was noteworthy is that she was recruited by RGS's female

administrator:

> **Bella:** As a Muslim woman myself, I was highly vested in seeing another woman on the board. The only female that's on the board is an African-American Christian woman. I thought it was incredibly vital that we have a Muslim woman as well, so that's my contribution.

In her interview, she would go on to praise the board member and restate the need to

include the contributions of Muslim women. Bella and Felicity enabled RGS to tap into

other Muslim and non-Muslim communities that were not initially connected to the

Turkish community in Lehigh Valley. In addition, RGS benefitted from their social capital.

Correcting the False Image of Islam

Respondents acknowledged that currently Muslims must contend with negative attitudes and perception about Islam in the form of Islamaphobia or Anti-Muslim sentiments. They explained that RGS through its curriculum, public lectures, and interfaith events aspired to correct the false image of Islam and to engage with other faith communities through its interfaith dialogue. Respondents also conveyed the importance of creating research based institutions that were nonsectarian. In other words, Muslim Colleges such as RGS, would not be an extension of a masjid or mosque. Instead, these schools would become research based academic institution where Muslims and non-Muslims alike could explore the diversity of Islamic Studies.

Respondents also expressed the need to correct false conceptions of Islam. Many stated that was important for them to engage in dialogue with non-Muslims in order to counter problematic portrayals of Islam and Muslims. Some respondents referenced misconceptions in the media, and others discussed the misconceptions that have taken place in the academy and their views of the current state of Western scholarship as it relates to Islamic studies and Middle East studies. One respondent offered the following:

> **Kaden:** I think it's not as big an issue as it was in the past, especially after Edward Said. But even before Edward Said—long before Edward Said, I guess, before he formulated his arguments—there was scholars at least in the United States who pointed out this issue, this bias among Western specialist of Islam. And I think people were aware of it even in 1960s, 70s, and going forward, until our time

now. I don't see it being a very significant problem today on the Orientalist approaches. But in terms of the study of the Quran, I think it is still a very contentious, very problematic issue, the study of the Quran. Not just Islamic history or Islamic culture or literature, the study of the Quran itself is a very problematic area because many of the people who studied the history of Quran in the West are people who identify as members of a religions who of course consider Quran as not what Muslims think it is. At some point you cannot help but wonder if there's anything from their background that kind of projects unto their research, projects unto their conclusions. So there may be some bias in the study of the Quran, but otherwise I think the Orientalist issue is mostly gone.

The respondent also detailed how he has benefited from RGS's intercultural exchanges

and dialogues:

> **Kaden**: Schools like RGS have a very important duty. Just because I'm a teacher here, not through my students in the classes, but through my being a teacher at RGS, I was able to present at other places where most of the audience was non-Muslim. I was able to reach to communities beyond Muslims, beyond my own religious community. And it's a learning on both sides, I learned a lot from them. I get to see them. I get to know/learn them, and then I can also contribute to them from what I know and to make them add to some meaningful conversations.

Other respondents believed that their efforts to promote intercultural and interfaith

dialogue would begin to lessen anti-Muslim sentiments as well as false conceptions of

Islam and its followers.

> **Ian:** I believe that the Muslim community needs to not only agree on what it means to be Muslim in America, but they also need to then share this with the rest of the non-Muslim population, because unfortunately there is a segment of the American population that is completely ignorant about Islam and needs to be educated. This is another area in which Respect Graduate School further separates itself from other institutions offering programs in Islamic studies. We have many students who are active in inter-faith dialogue, and it is through courses such as "The Bible and the Quran and the Communities that Use Them" and "Religious Diversity and Inter-Religious Dialogue," which are offered as a

joined class with Moravian Theological Seminary, that our students learn about building friendly relationships with other communities and establishing an accepted place in the larger society.

Ian would also add that through these exchanges, Jews, Christians, and Muslim can

begin to appreciate the commonalities between the Abrahamic religions:

> **Ian:** There is so much that we have in common, and there is a rich history between Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, and people should be aware of this. It's something that unites us all as a community, so to have this program, it just makes us stronger that way—as a community, as a society, as human beings. Personally, it's always nice to make new friends.

The Diversity of Islamic Studies

During the data collection process, I also had the opportunity to observe all the

classes that were being offered. Through these observations, I was able to view classes

that have not been typically offered in US colleges or universities. Some of these courses

include: Quranic Arabic, Hadith, Qira'at, and Fiqh. The inclusion of these courses

alongside conventional courses, such as Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methods,

Theology and Philosophy makes RGS's initial course offerings distinctive but it also

highlights the diversity of Islamic Studies. RGS has intergraded elements of both Eastern

and Western traditions as it relates to the field of Islamic studies. One respondent

elaborated on this quality:

> **Aiden:** Yes. I think what we would find is, again, the concentration on *hadiths* and Quranic studies. The memorization and recitation of Quran, which is part of the professional track. The other schools don't have that kind of professional track with it. The classical Arabic, the Quranic Arabic, *hadiths* materials, so you're not just doing the Arabic side. It would seem to me that knowing that many of our students already—well, we try to be quite academic. On the other hand, we recognize that of *taqwa*, we recognize that we must treat the other positions

with great respect and to honor them, as well as to provide insight into those traditions. My feeling is that in a lot of the other institutions where it's purely academic, that side of understanding the heart relationship might not be as prominent.

Caleb added that the school is striving to present Islamic studies in a

nonsectarian manner which is different from classes that are offered at most Islamic

centers.

> **Caleb:** Some schools just want to educate Muslims more deeply about Islam and make them better Muslims, in their terms. But I think this school tries to create bridges because there are lots of mosques. There are lots of Sunday schools people can learn more about their religion. They can even read books to learn their religion. But it's very hard to find an institution that you can go and talk to people in equal grounds in a non-biased platform. That was their idea.

Interestingly, several respondents stated that although the nonsectarian concept was

easy to explain to non-Muslims, Muslims would regularly ask "*What kind of Islam are*

you teaching?"

> **Aiden:** There were visits in mosques and in organizations to tell the story and it depends then on whether the mosque supervisors—the mosque officials, I think—wondered. We were asked frequently, "What kind of Islam are you teaching?

Bella also elaborated on this reaction from prospective students:

> **Bella** I think you might find this somewhat interesting—especially potential Muslim students, a lot of times their first question was, "What type of Islam are you teaching?" And to explain to them that our goal is not to teach one version of Islam, but rather to expose all the students to different perspectives of Islam that is today, what are the rebuttals from different groups towards one idea versus another? Being able to explain this, and the need for this, I think was somewhat of a challenge because the Muslims in America value institutions that have an established person, or persona, behind the name. For instance, they might call them sheiks or imams, religious leaders that they believe are vouching for that institution and, specifically, are leading that institution so it's under their guidance. Those types of institutions it would seem, from our perspective, might

seem more trusting in their eyes. Whereas an institution with no names, no prominent scholars—and when I say scholars, I don't mean academic, I mean religious scholars—is not understood by certain Muslim communities in America. So that, I would say, as a person who actually tried to recruit and looked for those students, getting those questions and answering it, and seeing the blank stares that they didn't understand the significance of having somewhat a neutral study of Islam—for a lack of a better way to put it—that was a pretty big challenge from my perspective.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to uncover the social factors that led to the creation of the Respect Graduate School. Parallel to the creation of MSIs and religiously affiliated colleges founded by religious minorities, the founding of RGS was shaped by a group's desire to create an educational institution that featured the history, language, pedagogical practices and religion of Islam. Clauss, Ahmed, and Salvaterra (2006) explained in their work that while the development of Islamic schools may be a recent phenomenon in higher education, other religious denominations share similar development histories. They cite the example of Catholic schools which were created in order to counteract anti-Catholic bigotry in the 19th century. While Nativists of the 19th century feared the influx of European Papists who would usurp the Protestant majority, Nativists today fear the influx of Muslims who would usurp the Christian majority with Islamic laws and practices.

O'Brien and Zudak's (1998) and Gasman, Nguyen and Conrad's (2015) work on MSIs informed my understanding of the historical and demographic context in which

MSIs were founded and the ways in which they function in today's higher education landscape. The works of Park (2007); Fontenot (2009), Tittensor (2012); Tee and Shankland (2013); Wook and Keskin (2013); Dohrn (2014); Jassal (2013); Lacey (2014); Barton (2015); Baskan-Canyas and Canyas (2016) enabled me to gain an understanding of the Gülen Movement, its history and theory of education. This literature also enabled me to understand and contextualize several unexpected findings that emerged during the data collection process.

Although there is literature on the history of Islamic primary and secondary schools, the history of Islamic postsecondary institution in the US have remained relatively unexplored. This study sought to document the establishment of one institution and its initial offerings. The founding of this school was shaped by historical, political, and social conditions within the Muslim American and Turkish American communities and by philosophical conceptions of service and education.

Discrepancies

The major discrepancy was the inconsistency in the founding narrative. A single individual or group of individuals who could be attributed as the "founders" was not established. Instead the founding was attributed to a community that was living in the Lehigh Valley area of Pennsylvania. Participants did link the founding to the communities' philosophical understanding of the Gülen Movement and its teaching concerning the importance of higher education and interfaith dialogue.

Missing Data

Student participation would have provided valuable data. The study only included one student who served as a student representative on RGS's Board of Trustees. While the student provided valuable data on the role of the board, he also spoke to his experiences as a student of the college. Additional interviews with other students would have provided additional insight on the institution and its students. This missing data may have also provided insight as to why students choose to attend RGS's over other graduate schools that offered Master's degree programs in Islamic Studies. This data may have provided insight on student's needs and their levels of satisfaction with the current state of Islamic education in the US. Future studies on students' decisions to attend Muslim Colleges such as RGS, Bayan Claremont, or Zaytuna is also suggested.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The recommendations are not intended to serve as a recommendation for the institution or the participants of this study. Rather, it is to compare the findings of the study with the literature, and to discuss the ways in which future studies may be conceptualized.

First, I recommend a comprehensive and comparative case study of other second-wave Islamic postsecondary institutions, such as Zaytuna College or Bayan Claremont. As I noted throughout the study, there is lack of information on the history and founding of both first-wave and second-wave indigenous Muslim American colleges. A study of any of these schools would add to the topic, and greatly benefit future researchers.

Second, a comprehensive history of the efforts to establish postsecondary Islamic institutions is also necessary. During this process, securing a comprehensive account of the first wave of Islamic Colleges was challenging. What is known from the literature is that early attempts to establish Muslim colleges emerged between the period of the late 1980s and the mid-1990s. Some were satellite campuses of Saudi universities, one was a teacher's college for an established Islamic primary and secondary school system (SCMS), one was created by the Department of Defense to train military chaplains, and none of these schools were able to offer accredited degrees

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from a national accrediting body. Thus, a comprehensive history of these institutions is needed in order to gain a better understanding of the earliest attempts to create indigenous Muslim American colleges in the US. There is also a gap in the literature on Shi'a postsecondary schools that were created in North America. Niyozov and Menon (2011) and Grewal and Coolidge (2013) mention the existence of a Shi'a postsecondary schools, but there is not a detailed study of the creation and existence of these schools. A study on Shi'a primary, secondary and postsecondary schools would also be valuable.

Third, a comprehensive study on the history of Gülen-Inspired Schools (GIS) in the US is recommended. While there is substantial literature on the Gülen Movement and its educational institutions in the Balkans, Turkey, Central Asia, and Africa, there has not been an in-depth study on Gulen Inspired primary, secondary, and now postsecondary schools that have recently developed in the US. Literature on Gulen inspired schools have focused on the rapid expansion of primary and secondary charter schools whose curriculums emphasized science, technology, and mathematics. There is no data on its effort to expand into the post-secondary market. During data collection, a respondent identified, North American College and Virginia International University, as examples of Gülen inspired colleges and universities that are currently operating in the US, but the accuracy and validity of this statement could not be confirmed.

While the primary limitation of this study is that it is not generalizable to other institutions since the study focused on a single institution, which is the first of its kind in

the United States, it adds to the literature on Religious-affiliated Colleges, Islamic

Studies, and Muslims in higher education, and Muslim Colleges and Universities.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The following table describes the significance of various abbreviations and acronyms used throughout the dissertation. The page on which each one is defined or first used is also given.

Abbreviation	Meaning	Page
CAIR	Council on American Islamic Relations	8
DUM	Darul-Uloom Al Madania	21
FOIA	Freedom of Information Act	34
GED	General Education Diploma	21
GIS	Gülen-Inspired School	VI
GPA	Grade Point Average	45
GRE	Graduate Record Examination	45
ICNA	Islamic Circle of North America	70
IIE	Institute of Islamic Education	21
IIIT	The International Institute of Islamic Thought	22
ISNA	Islamic Society of North America	70
LDC	Lehigh Dialogue Center	46
MAS-ICNA	Muslim American Society-Islamic Circle of North America Annual Convention	70
MSCHE	Middle States Commission of Higher Education	1
MSIs	Minority Serving Institutions	VI
MSTA	Moorish Science Temple of America	9
NOI	Nation of Islam	9
RGS	Respect Graduate School	IV

Abbreviation	Meaning	Page
SCMS	Sister Clara Muhammad Schools	20
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language	45
WASC	Western Association of Schools and Colleges	1

APPENDIX B: KEY TERMS

Ahmadiyya: The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community or the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at is an Islamic religious movement founded in British India near the end of the 19th century. It originated with the teachings of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835–1908). The adherents of the Ahmadiyya movement are referred to as Ahmadi Muslims or Ahmadis

Alim/Alima: A scholar of Islam, who may also be referred to as a Faqeeh, Mujtahid, or Šuyūh; a person who has significant Islamic education in various Islamic sciences and can derive formal legal rulings based on their knowledge of Islamic *fiqh* (law)

Adhān: A prayer call that consists of a series of invocations in Arabic with the purpose of announcing the beginning of each new prayer time

Allah: The Arabic name for God

Dhabiha: In Islamic law, the prescribed method of ritual slaughter of all lawful (*halâl*) animals (i.e. cow, chicken, goat, sheep, fish, camel, buffalo, deer, antelope, rabbit, duck, quail, rooster, and goose)

Eid al-Adha: The celebration marking the culmination of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca and a commemoration of the sacrifice of the Prophet Abraham

Eid al-Fitr: The feast marking the end of the fast of Ramadan

Fiqh: Islamic Jurisprudence, the understanding and application of Shari'ah (Islamic law)

Hadith: *Ahâdeeth* (*hadiths*); the sayings, the tradition and deeds of approval by the Prophet Mohammad

Hafiz: The literal translation is "guardian" or "translator." This is a term used by Muslims for someone who has memorized the Quran and has been formerly tested on their knowledge and memorization by other Islamic scholars. *Hafiza* is the female equivalent. *Huffaz* is the plural form of the word. *Huffaz* are highly respected within the Islamic community. They may use the title "*Hafiz*" or "*Hafiza*" before their names and are addressed as such

Hajj: An annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca, it is also one of the five pillars of Islam. A Muslim must perform the pilgrimage at least once in their lifetime if they can afford it

Halâl: Anything that is considered permissible and lawful; things permitted by the Shari'ah (Islamic law)

Harâm:	Anything that is forbidden and punishable; things forbidden by the Shari'ah (Islamic law)
Hijâb:	Covering or veil; an Islamic dress code
Hijabi:	A woman who wears a head covering and dresses modestly; a woman who observes an Islamic dress code. Also commonly referred to as Muhajaba.
Hizmet:	Turkish for service; also refers to a social movement inspired by the teaching of Imam Fethullah Gülen
Imam:	Leader; may refer to the person who leads others in prayers, or to the ruler or leader of an Islamic state; also used as a title of respect for eminent scholars
Iman:	Faith in one God
Islam:	The religion of Muslims; a monotheistic Abrahamic religion as revealed by the prophet Muhammad in 610 C.E.
Madhab:	A school of thought within *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence)
Madrasa:	A traditional place of learning; in Arabic, translates to "places for studying"
Muhajaba:	A woman who wears a head covering and dresses modestly; a woman who observes an Islamic dress code. Also commonly referred to as *Hijabi*
Mahram:	Unmarriageable kin such as a parent, grandparent, or sibling
Muslim:	A person who follows the religion of Islam
Quran:	Islam's holy book as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad
Ramadan:	The ninth month of the Muslim calendar, this is when the Quran was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. Muslims fast and abstain from food, beverages, and sexual relations from sunrise to sunset during the month of Ramadan
Rushidun:	This is the notion in Sunni Islam that there were four *Rushiduns* or *Rightly Guided Leaders* in Islam. The *Rushidun* are the first four Sunni Caliphs who ruled during the first 30 years of Islam. They include Abu Bakr as-Siddiq, Umar ibn al-Khattab, 'Uthman ibn 'Affab, and 'Ali bin Abi Talib
Salâh:	This refers to formal obligatory prayers and/or optional prayers. There are optional Sunnah prayers and five obligatory prayers: *Fajr* (morning),

Dhur (noon), *Asr* (late afternoon), *Magrib* (sunset) and *Isha* (night). Supplication prayers are called *duas,* are less formal acts of worship, and are not obligatory

Sawm:	Fasting; a devotional act in which Muslims abstain from food, water, and sexual relations from sunrise to sunset
Shahada:	The Muslim declaration or testament of faith, which states "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is his prophet"
Shari'ah:	Islamic Law
Shi'a:	This is the second-largest denomination of Islam. Adherents of Shi'a Islam are called Shi'as or the Shi'a as a collective or Shi'i individually. Its adherents are referred to in Arabic as "Shia-ne-Ali, Shī'atu ʿAlī." Shi'a is the short form of the historic phrase Shī'atu ʿAlī, meaning "followers," "faction," or "party" of Muhammad's son-in-law and cousin Ali ibn Abi Talib, whom the Shi'a believe to be Muhammad's successor in the Caliphate
Shirk:	Polytheism or the act of associating anything in worship to God; also a person claiming to be God; a major sin in Islam
Sunni:	This is the largest denomination of Islam. Its adherents are referred to in Arabic as "ahl as-sunnah wa l-jamāʿah," which translates to mean "the people of the tradition of Muhammad and the consensus of the Ummah" or "ahl as-sunnah"
Tawhid:	The concept that there is one single creator, who is the source of the universe
Wudū:	Ablution; a ritual washing or process of purification one must perform before any acts of prayer in Islam
Zakat:	A monetary gift of charity that is paid to the poor

APPENDIX C: SAMPLE RECRUITMENT LETTER

Greetings,

I am writing to ask your help in participating in a research study I'm conducting on Respect Graduate School and the emergence of Islamic postsecondary education in the US. I am a doctoral student from the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education, and my dissertation focuses on the recent emergence of Islamic post-secondary institutions in the US.

You have been asked to participate in this study because you are an administrator, board member, faculty member, or other key stakeholder. Your participation is confidential and voluntary and you are free to answer any questions you'd like, to withdraw your consent, and/or to discontinue participation at any time without consequence. The general purpose of the study is to examine the emergence of Islamic higher education in the US as well as document the emergence of a new genre of religiously affiliated and Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs). It is estimated that there will be at least 15 participants interviewed.

The interview will consist of a series of open-ended questions about Respect Graduate School and your thoughts on Islamic higher education, Islamic studies, religiously affiliated colleges, and MSIs. The interview will be scheduled at a time and place that is most convenient for you. If you are available, I may also get in touch with you to cover any follow-up questions, although you are free to decline at any stage of the research. Other than potential discomfort in answering these questions, risks will be minimal, given these interviews are strictly voluntary and confidential and interview questions are open-ended.

If you are interested in participating in this study, you may either contact me directly or give me permission to contact you by filling out the information below. I greatly appreciate your help and look forward to meeting you.

Sincerely,

Ginasophia Altieri
galtieri@gse.upenn.edu
Mobile: (XXX) XXX-XXXX

Please fill out the following information below and return to Ginasophia Altieri.

Preferred method of contact (circle one):

home / cell / office phone / e-mail

Contact info:

_____

(phone)

_____

(e-mail)

I give permission for Ginasophia Altieri to contact me at the above phone/e-mail contact:

_____

Signature

_____

Print Name

APPENDIX D: SAMPLE CONSENT FORM

Respect Graduate School: A Case Study on Islamic Higher Education

Please consider this information carefully before deciding whether to participate in this research study.

What you will do in this research: If you decide to volunteer, you will be asked to participate in one interview. You will be asked several questions. Some of the questions will be about Respect Graduate School. Others will be about the emergence of Islamic higher education, Islamic studies, religiously affiliated colleges and universities, and Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs). With your permission, I will record the interview. You will *not* be asked to state your name on the recording. The interview will be transcribed, and the audio recordings and transcriptions will be kept in a secure location. All publications and presentations will ensure your confidentiality. Recordings will be destroyed after the final publication of the accepted dissertation.

Time required: The interview will take approximately one (1) hour.

Risks: No risks are anticipated.

Compensation: Although your participation is greatly appreciated, there will be no payment for your participation.

Confidentiality: Your responses to interview questions will be kept confidential. At no time will your actual identity be revealed. You will be assigned a random numerical code and/or a pseudonym. Anyone who helps me transcribe responses will only know you by this code and/or pseudonym. The recording will be destroyed after the final publication of the accepted dissertation. The transcript, without your name, will be kept until the research is complete. I will not use your name or information that would identify you in any publications or presentations.

Participation and Withdrawal: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled. You may withdraw by informing the researcher that you no longer wish to participate (no questions will be asked about your decision to withdraw from this study.) You may skip any question during the interview but continue to participate in the rest of the study.

To Contact the Researcher: If you have questions or concerns about this research, please contact: Ginasophia Altieri, XXX- XXX-XXXX or galtieri@gse.upenn.edu. You may also contact the faculty member supervising this work: Dr. Marybeth Gasman, Professor of Education and Director of the Penn Center for Minority-Serving Institutions, Higher

Education Division, Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania, Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX, Email: mgasman@gse.upenn.edu

For information about your rights in this research, for questions, concerns, suggestions, or complaints that are not being addressed by the researcher, or research-related harm, contact: ***The Institutional Review Board at The University of Pennsylvania, 3624 MARKET STREET, SUITE 301 S., PHILADELPHIA, PA 19104-6006***. Phone: XXX-.XXX-XXXX. Email: irb@pobox.upenn.edu

Agreement: The nature and purpose of this research have been sufficiently explained and I agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time without incurring any penalty.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name (print): _____

APPENDIX E: SAMPLE FOLLOW-UP LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS AFTER

INTERVIEW

Greetings,

As part of the member checking process, I attached a copy of the transcript from our interview. You can review the document and edit, clarify, elaborate, and/or delete any statement that you wish to modify. Member checking allows you to ensure that your statements are in harmony with your experience and that it reflects what you wished to communicate during the interview.

If you have no changes, you can simply reply to this email with a "no changes" response. If you have changes, you can submit them to me in the body of the email or you can make the changes in the transcript and send the revised document to me. Once again, thank you for your assistance!

Sincerely,

Ginasophia

APPENDIX F: SAMPLE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

CASE STUDY PROTOCOL FOR RESPECT GRADUATE SCHOOL

<u>Purpose</u>: to elicit data and information from administrators, board members, faculty, or other key stakeholders who are affiliated with Respect Graduate School

This protocol consists of three sections containing questions that capture both general and specific information regarding:

1. The origin of Respect Graduate School;

2. The process of creating an Islamic post-secondary institution; and

3. The origin of a new category of religiously affiliated and Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs).

Origin

- What is the origin of Respect Graduate School?
- Who were the originators of this idea?
- What was their vision?
- Who did the originators hope to educate and serve with the creation of this institution?
- How does RGS as a religiously affiliated institution and MSI fit into the current higher education landscape?
- Were the originators cognizant that they were creating both a new genre of religiously affiliated college and an MSI?
- In what ways is Respect Graduate School different from other seminaries or post-secondary institutions?

Process

- How would you describe the planning phase of RGS's creation?
- How would you describe the first year of operation?
- What were the achievements in the first year?
- What were the challenges?
- How would you describe the recruitment process for the inaugural administrators, faculty, staff, and students?
- Is there a Board of Trustees?

     o   If so, what was the criteria for the selection of board members?

     o   If not, what criteria will be used to select board members?

Creation

- Why was interdenominational/interfaith dialogue or discourse significant to the creation of RGS?
- How is RGS fostering this dialogue?
- What about intrafaith discourse? For example, the Harford Seminary recently created an Imam Ali Chair for Shi'a Studies and Dialogue among Islamic Legal Schools. In what ways is Respect Graduate School incorporating different Islamic sects or schools of thought into the curriculum? How is RGS fostering intrafaith dialogue?
- How is the current curriculum similar to or different from existing programs in Islamic studies?
- How were the inaugural course offerings envisioned?
- How are these courses being received by the students?
- How do you think it will evolve in the future?

Questions for Faculty

- Can you describe your academic background?
- What are your academic areas of specialization and research interests?
- Can you describe your Islamic education?
- Do you hold an *ijazah* in any Islamic sciences? Are you a *hafiz/hafiza*?
- How long have you been teaching? What courses have you taught in the past?
- Why did you decide to teach at a religiously affiliated college/university?
- How long have you been teaching at RGS?
- How were you recruited for your position?
- How is RGS similar to and/or different from your previous teaching experiences?
- What course(s) do you currently teach at RGS?
- Can you tell me more about this course/these courses?
- Can you describe your teaching and/or working experience at RGS?
- What do you find most fulfilling about teaching at RGS?
- What are the challenges?
- How do you think it will evolve in the future?

Questions for Board members

- How did you become involved with the board?

- Do you have any prior experience with other boards? If so, what other board service do you have?
- Why did you agree to serve on RGS's board?
- How long have you been a board member?
- What is the board's strategic vision?
- What are the two most important issues currently facing RGS?
- What are the two most important governance issues facing RGS's board?
- What do you find most fulfilling about serving on this board?
- What do you find most frustrating about serving on this board?
- Are there any serious points of contention within the board?
- What is the most important contribution this board has made in its inaugural year?
- What will be this board's legacy—its crowning achievement for which future boards will be most grateful?
- How does RGS as a religiously affiliated institution and MSI fit into the current higher education landscape?

Questions for Library Staff

- Can you briefly describe your academic and professional background?
- What is your academic area of specialization or research interest as a librarian?
- How long have you been a librarian?
- How long have you been at Respect Graduate School?
- How is Respect Graduate School similar/dissimilar to your previous positions as a librarian?
- What have been your successes in this inaugural year in creating this collection?
- What do you see as the role of a librarian in this school setting?
- What do you hope to bring to RGS's library (i.e. collections, works, exhibits, or administrative practices)?
- How do you go about developing and maintaining a library collection that meets the needs of both RGS's faculty as well as its students?
- What role has technology played in the creation of RGS's library?

"Thank you for your participation. As part of the member checking process I will send you the transcript of this interview which you can amend. If there are any points that you want to clarify, edit, or delete, this will give you the opportunity to modify the final transcript. Finally, would it be okay if I contact you in the near future, if I have additional questions?

Are there any additional people you think I should contact for this study? Thank you. "

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