

“Islamic Studies in the Rocky Mountains and Great Plains: Scholarship and Pedagogy” Conference

AAR Regional Development Grant | One-Time Funds with Potential for Ongoing Impact
Andrea L. Stanton, University of Denver | andrea.stanton@du.edu

Narrative description

This grant proposal seeks to bring faculty members and graduate students from around the Rocky Mountains-Great Plains (RMGP) region to the University of Denver for a one-day conference on Islamic studies scholarship, highlighting a historically marginal field in this region. The conference aims to benefit AAR members and the work of the region by showcasing the research on Islam and Muslims being done in the region; presenting pedagogical and research strategies for teaching about Islam and Muslims, globally and locally; and building community among faculty and graduate students. It will include at least one pedagogy session, one research methods session, and one session on Islam and Muslims in the RMGP region, as well as scholarly panels showcasing work on Islamic studies globally.

The conference will be held in June, historically a fallow period for those on an academic calendar, in order to attract participants whose teaching, coursework, or administrative commitments might make academic-year participation more difficult. It focuses on Islamic studies to highlight the scholarship and pedagogy of those working on this field around the RMGP region, showcasing the work being done while offering an opportunity to build community and foster future collaboration among faculty, graduate students, and independent scholars living and working in this geographically sizeable, low population-density region. At the moment, the primary opportunities for such interactions come via the national and regional AAR-SBL meetings, in which Islamic studies (particularly at the regional level) plays only a minor role. Scholars working on Islamic studies topics are often farmed out into comparative or generalist panels, and comprise a small minority of the overall cohort of presenters: only three at the 2016 regional AAR-SBL meeting, and three at the 2015 meeting, for example. By foregrounding the Islamic studies work being done around the region, this conference also hopes to encourage a more robust level of participation in future regional conferences.

As part of the University of Denver’s commitment to inclusive excellence, conference sessions will feature participants from a range of academic and practitioner backgrounds, as well as from a range of career positions and stages. Conference organizers will also pay careful attention to the gender, race / ethnicity, and age balance of conference participants, and will particularly encourage graduate students, lecturers, adjuncts, and those working in non-traditional academic positions to participate, with targeted emails and the goal of including at least one graduate student and/or non-tenured/tenure track scholar per session.

To extend the conference’s reach beyond those physically attending and participating, conference organizers will film the keynote speech, and will make the edited, final version available on the conference website and religious studies departmental YouTube channel. Organizers will promote the video on relevant listservs (IslamAAR, Sociology of Islam, H-Levant)

and other sites (the Pedagogy Group for Teachers of Islamic and Religious Studies' Facebook page). Conference organizers are exploring whether the University of Denver's IT staff could provide audio recording of the conference sessions, which if made will be uploaded to the conference website. Similarly, conference organizers will solicit the Wabash Center's "Teaching Islam" blog, inviting it to carry a series of posts from conference participants, extending discussions of pedagogy beyond conference sessions.

By underwriting the cost of this conference, AAR Regional Development funding will make participating in or attending the conference less cost-prohibitive: there will be no conference registration fee, a light breakfast and lunch will be provided, and the Religious Studies Department will cover the parking cost for participants as well as of a small welcome reception. These cost offsets will particularly benefit those least likely to be able to cover the cost of an expensive summer conference: graduate students, adjunct faculty, and junior faculty, thus encouraging greater career and career-stage diversity.

Adaptability to other regional groups

This project is both region-specific and adaptable to other regional groups. Islamic studies as a field has historically maintained a miniscule presence in the RMGP region when compared with coastal regional groups, with Islamic studies papers bundled into comparative or "catch-all" panels at the regional AAR-SBL conferences. This conference seeks to both raise the profile of Islamic studies in the region and support scholars doing research on Islam and Muslims, and teaching on Islam and Muslims, around the region. While the conference is a one-time event, the organizers hope that participants will leave with a greater sense of regional cohesion, potential collaborative research initiatives, and new ideas for teaching about Islam and Muslims to undergraduate and graduate students.

This conference may serve as a model for those regional groups in which Islamic studies has played a marginal role. It may also be adapted to highlight those sub-fields within religious studies that are marginal to a particular regional group. The conference organizers will willingly share their conference planning and execution experiences with interested parties in other regions.

Timeline

8/15/16: regional grant awards announced

9/1-30/30: book Lindsey Auditorium, "green room" spaces for participants

10/15/16: begin promoting conference application through relevant networks

12/15/16: abstract submission deadline

1/13/17: notification to applicants

3/15/17: check in with accepted participants

4/15/17: begin promoting conference through relevant networks

5/15/17: order food and review final checklist; final check in with accepted participants

6/2/17: evening keynote and welcome reception (funded by the Religious Studies Department)

6/3/17: conference

6/6/17: send thank you to keynote speaker and participants, others as appropriate

6/8/17: review conference performance and assess successes and failures

6/30/17: submit final report to AAR

Budget narrative

The budget includes funding to bring a regionally-based keynote speaker, including \$-- honorarium, \$-- for two nights' hotel stay, \$-- for airfare, and \$-- for per diem expenses. It includes \$-- to film, edit, and disseminate the keynote speech via YouTube, email blasts, list serve announcements, and other digital means. It also includes \$-- for a light breakfast and \$-- for lunch for conference participants. It includes \$-- for printed conference programs, \$-- for conference publicity, and \$-- for 40 hours of student assistance (\$--/hour plus \$-- for fringe costs).

The University of Denver will contribute to this initiative by providing parking for participants (estimated at \$--), providing a small welcome reception (estimated at \$--), and donating the cost to produce any audio recordings of conference sessions.