The Islamophobia Working Group (IWG) was assembled in January 2016 to address the national crisis of Islamophobia and its impact on our campus community. We -- a group of faculty, staff, and students -- have become actively involved in the University's strategic plan for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and gained visibility across the university.

Islamophobia has become the recognized term to describe bias against Muslims, though many scholars and activists prefer the term, anti-Muslim racism. Islamophobia/anti-Muslim racism is more than an individual's bias fueled by ignorance or irrational fear. It is rooted in the history of racism in the United States and perpetuated by long standing government policies and institutional practices in the United States - for example, from the FBI's targeting of the Nation of Islam in the 1960s to Trump's more recent "Muslim ban." Islamophobia does not only impact Muslims of various ethnic and racial backgrounds, but also impacts those who are "perceived to be Muslim." This has included Sikhs and other non-Muslim South Asians, non-Muslim Arabs and Middle Easterners, non-Muslim Latinos, non-Muslim African Americans, and those who are ambiguously racialized and perceived to be Muslim, Arab, or Middle Eastern. Furthermore, given that Arab and Muslim identities are often conflated in U.S. discourses, anti-Arab and anti-Muslim racism often overlap and become indistinguishable from each other.

Since September 11, 2001, there has been a rise in anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiment across the nation and more awareness about this form of racism. Post-9/11 domestic and foreign policies, from the USA PATRIOT Act to invading Afghanistan and Iraq, to the NYPD's surveillance of mosques and Muslim Students' Associations on college campuses, have positioned Arabs, Muslims, and those who appear to be Arab or Muslim as suspected potential terrorists. The recent Super Survey published by the Bridge Initiative at Georgetown University reveals two decades of Americans having an unfavorable view of Arabs and Islam. Notable in recent statistics is that 4 in 10 Americans view Islam unfavorably; 47% of Americans said that Islam was more likely to encourage violence than other religions; and 43% percent of American Muslims have faced hostility, been racially profiled, or attacked. At the University of Michigan, a 2015 survey of 200 students who self-identified as Muslim American revealed that 63% have experienced discrimination based on their religious identity. Another 2015 survey of 110 students who identify as Muslim at the University of Michigan indicated that 50% have witnessed the perpetuation of Islamophobia on campus by staff, faculty, and students.

Given the recent increase in anti-Muslim and anti-Arab/Middle Eastern sentiment internationally, the purpose of this group is threefold: 1) to study the climate's impact on the campus community at large as well as students, faculty, and staff who are Muslim, Middle Eastern or North African (MENA), or others who are perceived to be such; 2) to

strategize on how to create a safe and inclusive campus environment for those who are impacted by anti-Muslim and anti-Arab/Middle Eastern sentiments, regardless of identity; and 3) to create a set of resources for community members -- students, staff, and faculty included.

The IWG is open to any student, staff, or faculty member at UM who is interested in collaborating on making this campus as inclusive as possible given the increased national and international climate of anti-Muslim and anti-Arab/Middle Eastern racism. The group is comprised of students, staff, and faculty who volunteer their time to identify and address issues that impact our community. We seek to advise and work with the administration on DEI initiatives as they pertain to Muslims of all backgrounds and others impacted by Islamophobia.

Our work is driven by issues brought to the group by any student, staff, or, faculty member. The group strategizes as a collective to figure out the best approach to a given issue. Thus, if you encounter a pertinent issue, we want to know about it and we welcome your participation in the group.

If you would like to join our email list or come to a meeting, please contact professor Evelyn Alsultany (alsultan@umich.edu) or student Haleemah Aqel (aqelhs@umich.edu). Likewise, please contact either to unsubscribe from the list.
For more information, visit our website or FaceBook page.