DEPARTMENT OF AMERICAN CULTURE
ARAB AND MUSLIM AMERICAN STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Islamophobia Working Group
2017-2018 End-of-Year Report
Submitted by Evelyn Alsultany
April 2018

The Islamophobia Working Group (IWG) emerged out of AMAS in January 2016 to address the national crisis of Islamophobia and its impact on our campus community. The purpose of this group of faculty, staff, and students is to study the climate and its impact on Arab, Muslim, and MENA-identified students and the campus community at large and to strategize on how to create a safe and more inclusive campus environment for those who are impacted by anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiments. We have become actively involved in the University's strategic plan for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and gained visibility across the university.

We are a group of approximately 100 faculty, staff, and students from across the campus; on average 25-30 members attend each meeting. In addition to undergraduate and graduate students from various schools and faculty from American Culture, History, Islamic Studies, Near Eastern Studies, Anthropology, and Communication Studies, our staff members include representatives from the Department of Public Safety and Security, the LSA Associate Dean's Office, the Dean of Student's Office, Counseling and Psychological Services, Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center, Office of the Vice Provost for Equity, Inclusion, & Academic Affairs, Office of Multi-Ethnic Student Affairs, English Language Institute, and the Office of the President.

In the 2017-18 academic year, Ashley Bates arranged for the Conflict and Peace Initiative to give the Islamophobia Working Group $1,000 to develop our FaceBook presence. Those funds were used to pay Haleemah Aqel to be the Islamophobia Working Group's Social Media Intern. Haleemah also served as the Student Coordinator. During the 2017-2018 academic year, in addition to developing our social media presence, we have continued to focus on three priority areas.

First, we have sought to increase the number of reflection spaces on campus in order to facilitate prayer for those Muslim students who pray 5 times per day. Ali Aboubih's end-of-year report for the Islamophobia Working Group details this work.

Second, we have been advocating for a Middle Eastern/North African (ME/NA) category on undergraduate applications so that we can know now how many ME/NA students there are on campus and better serve their needs. In the fall term, various student governments on campus passed resolutions to support a ME/NA box, faculty and staff signed a petition of support, and we had meetings with the Provost, the President, and presented on the ME/NA box to the Regents. There is widespread support for the ME/NA box and we will

continue to work with the administration towards implementation. Jad Elharake's end-of-year report for the Islamophobia Working Group details this work.

Third, we have been advocating changing the Arabic language textbook used at UM, al-Kitaab (The Book). This textbook is internationally recognized as the standard in Arabic language teaching. However, students at the University of Michigan, Stanford University, Tufts University and other campuses have noted that the textbook prepares students to work for the U.S. State Department and is thus taught differently from other languages. Students have reported that they learn terms like terrorism, army, and United Nations long before they learn colors. The textbook had been criticized for politicizing Arab culture and portraying it as exotic and violent, and promoting Orientalism and militaristic approaches to the Middle East. As a result a few students have been working on raising awareness about the issues with the textbook with the goal of changing it. In the fall 2017 semester, Near Eastern Studies created a taskforce to begin discussions about the textbook and the IWG received funding from the National Council for Institutional Diversity (NCID) to send two students to the Middle East Studies Association convention in Washington, DC to present on the issue.

Given Professor Evelyn Alsultany's departure from the University of Michigan, the Islamophobia Working Group will be relocated in the 2018-19 academic year from Arab and Muslim American Studies (AMAS) within the Department of American Culture to the Center for Middle Eastern and North African Studies (CMENAS) at the International Institute and Professor Samer Ali will take a leadership role with the group. Evelyn and Samer will work together in fall 2018 to ensure a smooth transition in leadership. Silan Fadlallah will become the IWG's Student Coordinator.

Reflection Rooms
End-of-Year Report for the Islamophobia Working Group (IWG)
Submitted by Ali Aboubih

The following is a write up of all the work that has been done on behalf of the reflection room initiative.

1. In conjunction with Jeanne Murabito and John Keedy, we successfully opened a reflection room in the Electrical Engineering Computer Science Building on North Campus. The reflection room in Pierpont is a great space that is frequented by our community, but it is in the South-West corner of North Campus, which can be a 10 minute walk if you are in the North East corner, and is very inconvenient between classes, and in the harsh winters, so a reflection room needed to be opened in the North East corner. After looking at different rooms, we settled for a 400 square-foot space in the third floor of the EECS building (Room 300), with a sink, cabinets, and within a 3-5 minute walk from all buildings in that vicinity on north. It is actually right before the connector to the G.G. Brown building, which, alongside the EECS building, is the most frequented building in that side of North. The space was cleaned, carpeted, and prepared over the summer, and was ready for use by Fall 2017. It has been getting exceptional feedback and is seeing a very good amount of

traffic- as expected. It is open to everyone during building hours, and is open to engineering students 24/7. It is not handicap accessible. This effort was done in collaboration with Adam Mageed, a 2017 graduate, and the previous co-chair of the Muslim Coalition.

2. During the winter 2017 semester, Ali was contacted by Fadi Musleh from the Provost office, in regards to a desire to open up a reflection space in North Quad. We immediately reviewed some spaces, and work started on having the room ready for sometime in the Fall (2018). The room is now open for use, during North Quad building hours (after Hours, see LRC front desk, room 1500 North Quad, to have the door unlocked). It is room 1120 North Quad, and it can house 6 people for group prayer. This effort would have not been possible without Marjorie Horton, who was the exclusive lead on the project, and the main point of contact for the majority of its duration.

3. The success of the reflection room initiative is at a point where it almost goes without saying (in terms of the need of reflection rooms), and a reflection room was opened in the Weiser (nothing to do with the initiative, just came with the building fortunately) expansion, in room 653. We saw a little bit of a hurdle in the beginning of the year with the room, due to the lack of translucent covering on the clear glass front, which caused some discomfort to those using the room, as they felt they would rather not feel like any passerby can see them pray.

4. Last year was clearly a good year for reflection rooms, but unfortunately, it didn't go without any unfortunate incidents. We have seen multiple cases of defiling of the reflection rooms, which required a cleansing (in collaboration with the Muslim coalition and the felicity foundation) to make them usable again by Muslim students.

5. Multiple incidents happened in the reflection rooms in Hatcher and the undergraduate library, and this saw a serious need to reevaluate security, access, and keeping track of who actually uses these spaces. We are in the process of having card readers installed in reflection rooms; this way all students have access but we'll have a temporary record of who entered so that in the event of another incident we can better determine whether they really are bias-driven or otherwise. For non-students who need access, or people who don't have means to swipe, there will be keys at the front desk for them. This effort was lead by the Muslim Students Association and the Muslim Coalition.

Implementation of a Middle Eastern/North African (ME/NA) Category on University Documents
End-of-Year Report for the Islamophobia Working Group (IWG)
Submitted by Jad Elharake

During the 2017-2018 academic year, members of the Islamophobia Working Group (IWG) met with key administrators such as President Mark Schlissel, Provost Martin Philbert, Vice

Provost for Enrollment Management Kedra Ishop, Vice President for Student Life Royster Harper, Vice Provost for Office of Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Robert Sellers, and members of the general counsel (including Maya Kobersy and Christine Gerdes) to advocate for the need of a Middle Eastern/North African (ME/NA) category on university documents. The members of the IWG who participated in various meetings included:

- Dr. Evelyn Alsultany (Director of the Arab and Muslim American Studies (AMAS) Program and Associate Professor of American Culture – Ann Arbor)
- Dr. Marjorie Horton (Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education for the College of Literature, Science, & the Arts – LS&A – Ann Arbor)
- Jad Elharake (LS&A Undergraduate Student – Ann Arbor)
- Nadine Jawad (Ford School of Public Policy Undergraduate Student – Ann Arbor)
- Yahya Hafez (Graduate Student in American Culture and AMAS – Ann Arbor)
- Ibtihal Makki (Graduate Student in Pharmacy – Ann Arbor)
- Dr. Daniel Birchok (Assistant Professor of Anthropology – Flint)
- Abby Chien (Program Manager of Office of Multi-Ethnic Student Affairs – Ann Arbor)
- Nadia Bazzy (Director of Office of Multi-Ethnic Student Affairs – Ann Arbor)
- Sara Alqaragholy (Undergraduate Student – Dearborn)
- Dr. Sally Howell (Director of the Center for Arab American Studies and Associate Professor of History – Dearborn)

In February of 2017, a resolution in favor of creating a ME/NA category was unanimously passed by Central Student Government (CSG) (Authors: Jad Elharake, Nadine Jawad, Devin Jones, Ibtihal Makki, and Silan Fadlallah). During September/October of 2017, a similar resolution was unanimously passed by 15 other student governments (including LSA Student Government, Rackham Student Government, and Engineering Student Government). The IWG then launched a campaign on social media called #WeExist and developed a petition letter, which was signed by over 700 faculty and staff members from all three campuses (Ann Arbor, Dearborn, and Flint). The letter describes the necessity of including a ME/NA category on official University documents, especially pertaining to academic disparities (drop-out rates, recruitment, etc.), bias incident reporting, and identifying trends in hiring faculty, staff and the administration. The letter identified the gap in demographic data collection, explaining how ME/NA students are expected to identify as White when filling out documents when many do not have lived experiences as White in a post-9/11 United States. During the months of October and November, UM-Dearborn's Student Government and Faculty Congress also unanimously passed the addition of a ME/NA box on university documents.

On December 7th, 2017, Jad Elharake, Dr. Evelyn Alsultany, Yahya Hafez, Sara Alqaragholy, and Dr. Sally Howell presented to the UM Regents about the #WeExist campaign and the importance of creating a ME/NA box on all University documents. After this meeting, Provost Martin Philbert set a meeting on January 25th, 2018, to discuss the ME/NA box and the concerns the University may run into if the box was to be implemented. The conclusion of the meeting was that **UM has agreed to implement the ME/NA box** and Provost Philbert then assigned Vice Provost Robert Sellers to figure out the implementation process and next steps.

In the meantime, the IWG have identified key constituencies on campus, such as all Student Life Offices and scientific research, to implement the ME/NA box on all demographic surveys. In addition, Vice President of CSG, Nadine Jawad, presented the ME/NA box at the annual Association of Big Ten Students winter 2018 conference at Michigan State University. The body unanimously passed a resolution to include a Middle Eastern/North African checkbox on all university documentation, including applications and registrations. The resolution included a letter of support to the administrations of the student governments represented at the conference. Furthermore, on March 14th, 2018, a resolution urging UM administration to incorporate Middle Eastern/North African students into demographic research was passed by CSG authored by Nadine Jawad, Jad Elharake, and Ibtihal Makki. This resolution was then sent to the Provost office, LSA Dean's office, and Student Life.

On April 12th, UM-Dearborn's Center for Arab American Studies organized a ME/NA forum, which was a panel discussion on the ME/NA box, who it includes, how and why it was created, and how it will be implemented. The panel included Ahmad Abuznaid, Director of National Network for Arab American Communities, Sara Alqaragholy, Jad Elharake, Yahya Hafez, and Ray Metz, Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management and Student Life at UM-Dearborn. It was a productive, informative conversation with one another and an audience of 40 students, faculty, and interested community members. We were able to answer questions and engage one another on next steps, both in terms of the UM implementation plan and in terms of our efforts to share our advocacy on this front with others. Ray Metz made it clear that the box will be implemented for UM-Dearborn starting in 2019 admissions cycle.

Media coverage during this initiative (ordered by date):

1. Cheeti, Rhea. *Resolution to recognize ME/NA as a racial category passes unanimously by CSG*. Michigan Daily, February 21st, 2017: https://www.michigandaily.com/section/student-government/resolution-recognize-mena-racial-category-passes-unanimously-csg
2. Harmon, Matt. *New University Provost emphasizes academic initiatives, respecting budget restraints*. Michigan Daily, September 7th, 2017: https://www.michigandaily.com/section/administration/new-provost-martin-philbert-welcomed-students-and-faculty
3. Hiyama, Andrew. *One year later: A look at the progression of the DEI plan*. Michigan Daily, October 5th, 2017. https://www.michigandaily.com/section/administration/look-how-dei-plan-has-progressed-one-year
4. Baker, Jordyn. *University Council discusses academic policies for students targeted by racial bias*. Michigan Daily, October 9th, 2017: https://www.michigandaily.com/section/student-government/university-council-meets
5. Goldman, Maya. *LSA SG passes resolution to add Middle Eastern/North African option to University forms*. Michigan Daily, October 29th, 2017: https://www.michigandaily.com/section/student-government/lsa-student-government-votes-resolution-add-middle-easternorth-african

6. Harmon, Matt. *#WeExist campaigns for ME/NA category*. Michigan Daily, November 20th, 2017: https://www.michigandaily.com/section/campus-life/weexist-campaign-launches-support-adding-mena-category
7. The Michigan Daily Editorial Board. *From The Daily: Support #WeExist*. Michigan Daily. November 29th, 2017: https://www.michigandaily.com/section/editorials/daily-support-weexist-mena
8. Theut, Kaela. *#WeExist campaign calls for recognition at Regents meeting*. Michigan Daily, December 7th, 2017: https://www.michigandaily.com/section/administration/weexist-campaign-calls-recognition-regents%E2%80%99-meeting
9. Slagter, Martin. *Middle East, North African students want University of Michigan recognition*. Michigan Daily, December 11th, 2017: http://www.mlive.com/news/ann-arbor/index.ssf/2017/12/um_students_want_new_identity.html
10. Hiyama, Andrew. *E. Royster Harper discusses Spencer, ME/NA*. Michigan Daily, December 11th, 2017: https://www.michigandaily.com/section/administration/if-given-choice-thats-not-where-i-would-spend-my-time-e-royster-harper
11. Samuel, Alon. *Big Ten student governments unanimously pass ME/NA resolution*. Michigan Daily, January 13th, 2018. https://www.michigandaily.com/section/student-government/big-ten-student-governments-unanimously-pass-mena-resolution
12. Kubersky, Refael. *Anti-Islamophobia group celebrates second anniversary, reflects on current issues*. Michigan Daily, March 22nd, 2018: https://www.michigandaily.com/section/campus-life/anti-islamophobia-group-celebrates-second-anniversary-reflects-current-issues

Al-Kitaab
End-of-Year Report for the Islamophobia Working Group (IWG)
Submitted by Ibtihal Makki & Ryan Gillcrist

I. Purpose/Overview

A. In 2016, we initiated a petition to quantify the prevalence of dissatisfaction with the use al-Kitaab and Arabic instruction at the university
B. We published an op-Ed in the Michigan Daily enumerating concerns with the problematic nature of the textbook in terms of cultural inaccuracy, politicization of Arab culture, and orientalist portrayal of Arab culture.
C. In 2017, LSA Student Government unanimously passed a resolution encouraging the Arabic department to review the use of al-Kitaab
D. After discussions with key stakeholders, we formed the Al-Kitaab Exploratory Committee with the Director of CMENAS and the Director of Arabic Instruction which held its first meeting in September of 2017.

II. MESA

During the Summer of 2017, IWG submitted an application to the National Center for Institutional Diversity for funding for two students to attend the annual Middle Eastern Studies Association in Washington, D.C. The purpose of attending this conference would be to participate in a student research workshop in which we presented a paper on the al-Kitaab project, gained feedback, talked to other students who would potentially be interested in the topic, and raise awareness.

After receiving the grant, we wrote a paper on the problems associated with the textbook, the research that we had conducted (including qualitative data that we had collected from students who had previously studied Arabic with al-Kitaab). The paper was well-received by the other people who were participating in the workshop. They agreed with what we were arguing and had heard similar complaints at their institutions.

We later attended a poster session and gained feedback from a number of students, faculty members, and administrators from the field. Overall, people were glad that we were raising awareness about the many problems with al-Kitaab. We only met one person who was somewhat unsure if what we were saying was completely valid. Later, a faculty member (Bryn Mawr College) and a student (Macalester College) asked if we could share the paper with them.

III. Al-Kitaab Exploratory Committee

In addition to attending the MESA Conference, we participated in the al-Kitaab Exploratory Committee, headed by Samer Ali, Director of CMENAS, and Dris Soulaimani, the Director of Arabic Instruction in the Near Eastern Studies Department. During the initial meeting, we discussed problems with al-Kitaab. It was great to hear positive feedback from the Arabic Program, which is something that we had only experienced in a couple of conversations with faculty within the Program.

During our monthly meetings, we continued to discuss our advocacy efforts, future steps, possible departments that we could contact, and how we could move forward in the future considering the difficulty of finding a new textbook. Our biggest action item was developing a survey to disseminate to students that have previously taken Arabic at U of M. This information would be more helpful, as it would be more quantitative and illustrate potential shortcomings with the textbook more explicitly.

IV. Future Action Items

We hope to continue being part of the al-Kitaab Exploratory Committee and disseminate the survey. After we receive more data, we hope to identify some alternatives to al-Kitaab or supplemental material that students can use in the future. In addition, we hope to expand the network of students and faculty members who can raise awareness at other universities in order to broaden the scope of this project.