**Challenges in Teaching Islamic Studies in Western Universities:**

**The Problem of Streamlining Islam for Undergraduates**

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When teaching a religion such as Islam to new undergraduates, the question of pedagogy is crucial. Modules and lesson plans must be designed to capture the breadth of Islam from its ethics, spirituality, worldview, and role of holy figures to its intellectual history, scientific disciplines, cultural formations, and contemporary developments. Muslim (advanced) schools *(madāris*, pl. of *madrasah*) or theological seminaries *(hawzāt, pl. of hawza)* employ a text-based, primary source, and language-based approach to these areas while Western universities employ a thematic, summative, and largely secondary source approach. While Western universities should be commended for introducing Islamic Studies to undergraduates, they streamline Islam to the extent that it is reduced to Islamic history. This means that Islamic philosophy or Islamic law are not taught from their conceptual foundation; rather, they are taught descriptively so that Islamic philosophers and their ideas are seen more as contributions of the past than as living contributions capable of creative intellectual engagement with current world philosophies. Many other problems can be cited that arise from this streamlining process, which include the treatment of Islamic spirituality, interpretation of revelation, and contemporary issues, such as human rights.

In this chapter, I will adopt a theoretical as well as experiential tone and share the challenges I have faced as a tutor in Islamic Studies at King’s College London. These challenges are framed within two pedagogical issues: how Islamic Studies modules could be designed more effectively and secondly, how effective learning environments can be created for undergraduate students of Islamic Studies. Both issues are framed within the socio-political narrative that exists about Islam in Western media and academia. My focus will be on the United Kingdom but the discussions I engage in may be applicable to Western universities generally. The fundamental aim of my chapter is to give a critical analysis of the challenges one faces while teaching Islamic Studies in a university environment and highlight significant pedagogical issues that need to be considered in designing an Islamic Studies course.

**The Problem of Categorising and Structuring Islamic Studies**

Teaching any discipline at a university, particularly those categorised under Arts & Humanities, Law, Politics, and Social Sciences, is inevitably connected to the wider contours of private and public life. The study of religion is a good example of the unavoidable connection between scholarship and lay religious followers. Whatever one researches about a religion necessarily has some connection, implication, or even impact to the life of its adherents. It may be comforting to think that actually there is little connection between a scholar and lay person and certainly, some scholars would not wish to define themselves as having any connection with grassroots religious believers. Rather their role is merely to investigate a theoretical problem and remain within the confines of their educational establishment. It may be possible to operate in this way for a period of time but the demands of a media-orientated, globalized and technologized world suggest otherwise. The reality is that the study of religion is intimately connected to the lives of its followers because scholarship, whether in the Muslim seminary or Western academic tradition, is seeping into the inboxes, mobile phones, Facebook pages, and YouTube channels of the average person. The average person will be exposed, even if very generally, to the ideas of scholars. This is a positive trend – it gradually removes people’s ignorance about a variety of concepts and ideas. However, there is a concomitant responsibility on scholars to genuinely and critically investigate the very discipline they are researching. This is in order to study the discipline in accordance with its own worth, philosophical frameworks, and for the correct dissemination of both old and new religious interpretations. It is here that tension emerges as to exactly what a discipline is, how it should be structured, and what its potential impact on wider society is.

The field of Islamic Studies is no different; in fact, it is all the more crucial that this tension be investigated thoroughly because Islam has occupied an uneasy space within Western media, politics, and public thought. The accusations levelled at Islam by the majority of Western media and politicians that it is barbaric, terrorist, extremist, uneducated, helpless, threatening, demeaning to women, isolationist, and out of place in “modern” society have had a hugely negative effect on the way in which Islam is studied.[[1]](#footnote-1) This immediately makes Islamic Studies a difficult discipline to categorise which is why there are many names for it (most of which incorrectly compartmentalise or blur the religion and the study of it): the Study of Islam, the Study of Muslims and the Islamic World, Islamic Studies, Traditional and Contemporary/Modern Islam, Spiritual and Political Islam, Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies, Islamic and Arabic Studies, Oriental Studies, and more. In short, Islam becomes a highly politicised affair even before it enters the university.

One of the ways to understand this political narrative and the interest it has generated in Islam is to streamline the religion for undergraduates in Western universities into the discipline known as Islamic Studies. Streamlining education is the process of making education simpler and faster so that it is digestible for a student with the aim of fulfilling teaching and learning outcomes more effectively. Islamic Studies streamlines Islam by giving an overview of its history, key figures, ideas, debates, and political conflicts which are usually categorised as follows: historically investigating Islam’s origins and the political conflicts that arose thereafter, its so-called empires and dynasties, its philosophical, spiritual and legal heritage, its relationship with conflicts in the Middle East, revaluating its position in contemporary issues such as human rights, women’s rights, politics, modernity, bioethics, pluralism and social cohesion, and finally, sociological and anthropological analysis of Muslim diaspora around the world. As I will show, King’s College London follows this same pattern but the majority of UK and US universities employ the same approach within their Islamic Studies modules and/or departments.[[2]](#footnote-2) All these areas are taught in a summative fashion using mainly secondary sources in the English language with a non-Muslim audience in mind. The goal of streamlining is an attempt to present an objective, outsider account of Islam to all learners usually done by non-Muslim scholars.

Subject-areas are grouped together under one module – so, for example, Islam’s Origins would include several major themes (which are actually disciplines in their own right) such as, religions before Prophet Muḥammad (comparative religion), authenticity of the Qur’an (Qur’anic studies), emergence of Shi’ism and Sunnism (Islamic history) and their theological doctrines (Islamic theology), and political and military conflicts surrounding the caliphate (Islamic politics). It matters little whether these modules are options as part of another bachelor’s degree or taught in a fully-fledged Bachelors of Islamic Studies – the aim is to deliver content to undergraduates as quickly and concisely as possible. The question is: can the streamlining approach in Islamic Studies overcome the various mindsets and socio-political narratives about Islam that exist within and outside Western academia? Does it help an undergraduate learn Islam effectively? Finally, how does it affect one’s teaching methods in Islamic Studies? In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to outline the socio-political factors that exist behind the streamlining approach to Islamic Studies.

**Challenges in Studying Islam in Western Academia: Underlying Mindsets and Intellectual Trends**

At the outset, there is a tendency by some scholars in Islamic Studies to think in terms of “Islam” and “the West”; that these two terms indicate on opposition, conflict and separation.[[3]](#footnote-3) The late Mohammed Arkoun comments on this arguing:

the book by Bernard Lewis, entitled *What Went Wrong?,* whose phenomenal sales attests to its mass appeal, is an excellent case in point . . . it will suffice to point out that both its title and its contents betray the intellectual impasse born of a frame of mind intent on thinking in terms of the polarity of an imaginary “Islam” and its equally imaginary counterpart of the “West.” So long as this fictional dualism remains in place, the intellectual impasse which is thereby engendered is destined to remain irresolvable.[[4]](#footnote-4)

When Islamic and Western civilization are framed as monolithic opposites, it is difficult for Islamic Studies scholars and students to think in terms of commonalities, balanced criticism and progressive solutions. The worst effect of this dualistic thinking is having an Islamophobic attitude which according to the Runnymede Report 1997 refers to the “dread or hatred of Islam – and, therefore, to fear or dislike of all or most of Muslims.”[[5]](#footnote-5) This “fear” colours a scholar’s and student’s approach to Islam. Saied Reza Ameli, in his extensive bibliographic analysis of the type of discourses present in 23,872 academic items in Western academia from the period 1949 - 2009, concluded that 13.4% of books and articles in Western academia exhibit or purposefully try to paint a negative picture of Islam.[[6]](#footnote-6) For undergraduates in the United Kingdom who are exposed to daily newspapers and news websites that present Islam as fundamentally linked with terrorism, the appropriate textbook and being taught in a fair manner are further hurdles to overcome at the university level.

There are positive contributions by Muslim and non-Muslim scholars to counteract this dualistic narrative but even then, one must be careful of what Saied Reza Ameli argues as having an “Islamoromic” attitude to knowledge. Islamoromic works“contextualise Islam in the bosom of the Roman tradition (embodying the West in general and from a historical perspective)” and “try to compare Islamic ethos with Western values; while the jury is still out on the debate, many works in this category-- thinking, evaluating and comparing Islam with and in a Western mindset, pronounce their favour for Western values and norms as superior, the more practical and less ornamental side of the binary.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

According to Ameli, works in this section represent the highest percentage out of all the discourses Western academia uses to analyse Islam.[[8]](#footnote-8) 48.4% of works are Islamoromic which constitute 11,563 items out of the total 23,872 academic items Ameli analyses. This significant number shows that a notable amount of scholars, Muslim or non-Muslim, may “try to present . . . the desirable domesticated Islam which poses no threat to the Western value system, on the one hand, and does not, as a result, engage in the clash of civilisations, on the other.”[[9]](#footnote-9) The key issue, according to Ameli, is whether the majority of works in this section represent “the post-colonial approach to the Orient” which shows “a gradual shift from hard colonisation *in* the East to soft colonisation *of* the East.”[[10]](#footnote-10) Ameli’s analysis is intriguing; it shows that despite some sympathies of presenting a fairer picture of what Islam is in Western academia, there is still a major mindset of considering Islam as inferior to Western values or not being studied for its own merit. In order to escape this mindset, it is crucial for Islamic Studies scholars to break free from this dualistic paradigm and give an honest appraisal of both Islamic and Western knowledge and value systems. According to Wael B. Hallaq, we still have a long way to go in achieving this balance in the study of Islam. In critiquing the paradigm of Orientalism and the role of scholars, Hallaq argues,

If I am granted the proposition that scholars should lead, as scholars, an ethical life (and I doubt that many would disagree), then the proposition must encompass a discursive ethical involvement in their social order, research, publication, and teaching. Their work, in its totality, must be conscious of itself, its place and its implications in the “strategies” of power. It must consciously exert the utmost intellectual effort to foresee these implications, and must work toward subverting them. It must resist domination (at least) as a knowledge system, which means it must at a minimum be aware of any possible complicity with a modernist theory of progress, and of subordinating the image of the Other to one’s own narrative or to one’s own larger cultural space.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Hallaq’s statement is important because it shows a scholar always needs to be aware of how a particular knowledge system views an idea and the need to evaluate whether that narrative adequately brings out the truth of that very idea. Several books exist on the historical interaction between Islam and the West on the production of philosophical and theological ideas in the classical and post-classical periods.[[12]](#footnote-12) However, very few works look at the philosophical potential of the Islamic intellectual tradition to create concepts that can be amalgamated, change, or influence contemporary Western intellectual frameworks such as human rights, economics, education and sociology.[[13]](#footnote-13) There is still an underlying Orientalist ethos that Islam and Muslims should be studied as a historical and sociological project, concerned only with its history and problem-areas. There is rarely if ever a worldview that considers Islamic intellectual tradition as having a place within global academic discourse and being able to equally create new frameworks for current problems facing humanity.

For example, the mere mention by the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, that Islamic law could work with British law had everyone fearing a Muslim takeover in Britain[[14]](#footnote-14); the idea that ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661), the cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Muḥammad, first Shīʿī Imām and fourth Rightly-Guided caliph of Islam (whom virtually all Muslim mystics and scholars of Islamic mysticism in Western academia regard as the root of *‘ilm al-irfān* – the science of gnosis),[[15]](#footnote-15) could actually contribute to a framework of spiritual education in the West is a foreign idea and the possibility of ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn (d. 95/712), the great grandson of Prophet Muḥammad, in contributing a theory of human rights based on the self’s relationship with biological organs as per his seventh century rights charter, *Risālat al-Ḥuqūq* (the Treatise of Rights), is an alien thought.[[16]](#footnote-16) It is far easier to “streamline” Islam into the discipline known as Islamic Studies so that undergraduates study Islam as Islamic history with various compartments that are rarely connected to a holistic understanding of Islam’s intellectual heritage and its creative value in today’s society. It is, as Nasr argues, a “religion seen in constant conflict and war”:

To these factors were added the age-old distortions of Islam as the “religion of the sword” or the “dry” religion of the desert, whose blindingly clear spirituality was supposedly somehow borrowed from foreign sources and grafted upon the body of Islam. As a result, the teaching of Hinduism used such sublime texts as the Baghavad- Gita, not laws of inheritance in various castes and sub-castes, and Hindu art rather than social and commercial conflicts. In the case of Islam, only the most external aspects of the religion came to be taught along with a distorted history of a religion seen in constant conflict and war.[[17]](#footnote-17)

It is therefore important for scholars to escape both Eurocentric worldviews and study Islam as an intellectual tradition in its own right. Having outlined some of the key elements of the socio-political narrative in which the discipline of Islamic Studies is constructed and streamlined, I can now go on to share my pedagogical experiences as a tutor of Islamic Studies at King’s College London.

**Pedagogical Issues: Designing Learning Activities and Developing an Effective Learning Environment for Islamic Studies Undergraduates**

The two pedagogical issues I will examine directly stem from the UK Professional Standards Framework, which all institutions in British higher education are meant to follow. The first is “designing and planning of learning activities and/or programmes of study” and the second is “developing effective learning environments and approaches to student support and guidance.”[[18]](#footnote-18) There are three other standards but I cannot comment on these in just one chapter. The Higher Education Academy is responsible for these standards and aims to promote excellent learning and teaching in higher education. My goals in teaching at King’s College London were not only underpinned by these standards but as per the Higher Education Academy’s ethos, I intended to enhance the student’s learning experience of Islamic Studies. The standards only provide a broad framework for the teacher; it is the teacher that defines what an effective learning environment should be based on his/her approach to teaching. It is here that tension emerges between educational standards and one’s personal teaching approach, particularly in light of the aforementioned socio-political context of Islamic Studies.

My teaching values stemmed from a cross-fertilisation of my academic background – my PhD in Theology andReligious Studies, Islamic seminary education, and studies in Western law. In part, I used Burton’s and Clark’s definitions of teaching; Burton states “teaching is stimulation, guidance, direction and encouragement of learning”[[19]](#footnote-19) and Clark argues, “teaching refers to activities that are designed and performed to produce change in student (pupil) behaviour.”[[20]](#footnote-20) These definitions encapsulate the core components of teaching – “stimulation and guidance” but also a “change in student behaviour.” The role of a teacher is not merely a communicator of knowledge but a holistic educator that imparts values, even acting as a role model for his/her students. In this regard, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib has beautifully stated, “the lowest [type of] knowledge is that which remains on the tongue and the highest is that which manifests on the limbs and organs [of the body].”[[21]](#footnote-21) It is for this reason I define teaching Socratically as, “the process of learning whereby the teacher learns by engaging with the student and vice versa in order to positively enhance each other’s knowledge, values, worldviews, behaviour and ultimately, potentiality.” This echoes Carl Rogers’ approach to teaching whereby the educator of the future, must know, at the deepest personal level, the stance he takes in regard to life. Unless he has true convictions as to how his values are arrived at, what sort of individual he hopes will emerge from his educational organization, whether he is manipulating human robots, or dealing with free individual persons, and what kind of a relationship he is striving to build with these persons, he will have failed not only his profession, but his culture.[[22]](#footnote-22)

Most definitions of teaching highlight the teacher as holding a position of authority and influence and so his/her personal values will consciously or sub-consciously seep into his/her teaching methods. The idea that a teacher is an objective educator is a myth – it’s impossible to completely detach ourselves from our natural biases, interests, and worldviews. The goal is to constantly re-evaluate our ideas and values so that we are always painting a more truthful and fairer picture than the one we had before. It therefore follows that the distinction pertaining to being an “insider” or “outsider” in Islamic Studies (and Religious Studies in general) is highly misleading and gives the simplistic impression that an insider will naturally carry biases about Islam or be uncritical of it and an outsider won’t.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Once I decided my approach to teaching, my next task was to contribute to the designing and planning of learning activities and/or programmes of study in Islamic Studies. The Theology and Religious Studies department at King’s had already devised the programme of study which followed the same pattern as virtually all Islamic Studies modules in other universities. Under the sub-title of “Islam’s Beginnings,” undergraduates had to study,

Hadith of Gabriel and the three dimensions of Islam, the five pillars of Islam, the life of Muḥammad and the early Muslim community, the Qur’an and Hadith, Sunnism and Shi’ism, the Islamic approach to monotheism (tawhid), Prophecy and the purpose of human life and various intellectual schools (e.g., dogmatic theology, philosophy and Sufism).[[24]](#footnote-24)

As per the streamlining process, none of these subjects were meant to be studied in-depth; rather the aim was to give a summary of key events and ideas in Islam. My goal was to aid the main lecturer by reviewing the subjects to twelve students in a classroom for one hour per week for about three months. This was in addition to e-mail contact with learners and marking essays.

As per my remit, I summarised the main ideas for undergraduates from the module reading list, clarified their understanding from textbooks and acted as an intermediary between students and the main lecturer since I had more contact time with the students. Beyond this, I was free to plan my lesson as I wanted and designed learning activities that would enhance undergraduates’ understanding of Islam. The first thing I did was introduce excerpts of *aḥadīth* (narrations) which were in Arabic and English to acquaint undergraduates of primary accounts of the historical events they were studying. For example, the emergence of Shi’ism and Sunnism is often examined from so-called political disputes over the successor of Prophet Muḥammad. Rarely are students given an insight into grassroots perceptions of the event, linguistic debates over Prophet Muḥammad’s words at *Ghadīr al-Khum* and the intellectual status of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib in both the Shi’i and Sunni tradition. Introducing *aḥadīth* added greater depth to historical events and gave students access to primary historical sources – the use of which also result in higher marks in coursework and examinations.

The second learning activity I introduced was doing a reading of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib’s sermons and sayingsfrom the 10th century Shi’i compilation, *Nahj al-Balāgha* (the Peak of Eloquence). Since students were studying Sufism and scholars such as al-Ghazālī and Rūmī, it was important for them to understand how their spiritual worldview was inspired. The readings provoked a contemplative understanding of spirituality in Islam as opposed to a historical and descriptive one. I was also open about my background as a Muslim in order for students to ask me questions about common spiritual practices in Islam. Lastly, I used visual aids such as a *tasbīḥ* (rosary beads) to acquaint students with practical tools that Muslims use for *dhikr* (remembrance of God).

With regards to the second issue of pedagogy, developing an effective learning environment for Islamic Studies undergraduates in order to support and guide them, I drew from my seminary background and gave my personal time to students. In the Islamic seminary tradition, the relationship between a teacher and student is extremely close – the teacher is an exemplar of moral behaviour, wisdom and like a father-figure. In Western universities, delivery of content is emphasised more than cultivating the teacher-student relationship. I knew that for many undergraduate students, the Islamic Studies module was the first contact they had with Islam. Therefore, I created a tutor-student time for them and several students came to see me regularly about structuring their coursework. Secondly, I was forthcoming in my e-mail communication and received many queries about the reading list and discussions in the classroom. The result was that I did my best to be a supportive mentor to them, not just a transmitter of knowledge.

Both my learning activities and learning environment were based on reflective practice and critical self-reflection, which Taubman defines as,

reflective practice and critical self-reflection generally refer to one of two approaches to understanding one’s teaching. The first approach consists of reflecting on one’s teaching in terms of the effect or lack of effect it is having on students’ learning . . . did I make the learning experiences meaningful for my students? Could I have found a better approach to teaching the subject matter? . . .The second approach . . . is what is often referred to now simply as diversity. For example one might ask: was my teaching culturally sensitive? Was my teaching inclusive? Did I enact any prejudices in my teaching or choice of curriculum? How does my social identity e.g race, class, gender, influence my teaching?[[25]](#footnote-25)

What was important for me was enabling undergraduates to have a meaningful connection with Islam as well being sensitive to their needs as first-time university students. I became aware that in order to keep students interested in their work, they should feel their learning experience is holistically transforming their outlook on Islam--hence the inclusion of spiritual supplications and visual aids. Overall, my approach to the two pedagogical issues in Islamic Studies was in accordance with holistic learning theory where “the individual personality consists of many elements . . . specifically. . . the intellect, emotions, the body impulse (or desire), intuition and imagination.”[[26]](#footnote-26) Learning activities and the learning environment, therefore, must appeal to whole being of the learner.

**Critical Assessment of the Streamlined Approach to Islamic Studies**

My assessment of Islamic Studies at King’s College London in light of my pedagogical experiences was that the streamlined approach of the discipline, at the least, gave an overview of Islam. Students were allowed to clarify any misconceptions they had in an open learning environment, which acted as a good counter-narrative to the simplistic and negative interpretation of Islam presented in the media. The module also sparked interest in a few students to study Islam further at a Masters level. However, the drawbacks to the module’s streamlined structure were numerous.

Firstly, I found that I was under a great deal of pressure to compress major issues of Islamic history and intellectual development in the space of three months. I only had one hour of learner contact time to explain the subject-matter which was meant to follow on from student’s own reading before the class. Many appreciated that the topics were interesting but struggled with key Arabic terminologies, the hermeneutical background of debates in jurisprudence, philosophy, and theology, and failed to connect key figures of history and their ideas together within the overall development of Islam’s intellectual tradition. The result was a patchy understanding of Islam.

Secondly, the pedagogical issues I experienced were underpinned by failings within the design of the course itself --failings which have been outlined in an extensive report commissioned by the then Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education in the UK, Bill Rammell. The author of the report, Ataullah Siddiqui, found that,

There is a realisation that there is a need for the study of Islam and contemporary Muslim societies but that the universities in England and their departments are not addressing the need either adequately or properly. There are very few qualified scholars in the core subjects of Islamic sciences outside the Islamic world who can teach and supervise Islamic subjects confidently.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Moreover,

(3) Islamic Studies courses currently being offered at Universities in England should adopt a greater focus on theological and civilisational aspects of Islam which are relevant to practising Muslims. As a result courses will also provide non-Muslim students with the opportunity to gain a greater insight into the issues within Islamic doctrine that are particularly pertinent to Muslims…. There is also a need for Islam to be offered as an elective option, and wherever it is possible departments should be fully resourced to provide such add-on modules. (4) Students at universities should be given the opportunity to study under competent scholars of Islam who have been trained via traditional Islamic routes and in subject areas which are of particular relevance to Muslims.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Nasr has made as similar observation about Islamic Studies in US universities,

Even to this day, however, in many of the major centres of Middle Eastern studies, everything is taught seriously except Islam itself. One sees often in such centres numerous courses on history, anthropology, languages, sociology, political science, and similar subjects pertaining to the Islamic world, but little in-depth study of Islam as the religion that forms the heart and arteries of the body of the society and civilization being considered.[[29]](#footnote-29)

The Siddiqui report has generated more discussion in the UK about the state of Islamic Studies which is a positive sign but there is still a lack of attention given to core Islamic sciences, its key doctrines and the teaching of Muslim seminarians that result in several failings of Islamic Studies courses in the UK. The streamlined approach to the discipline, as in the case of King’s College London, negates the rich classical intellectual heritage of Islam, which is vibrant in major Muslim centres of learning--the Qum Hawza in Iran and Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt being well-known examples.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Thirdly, even if one intends to streamline Islamic Studies, it is better to select one area only such as Islamic Theology or Islamic Philosophy based on a primary classical text that is translated in English which would make it accessible for undergraduates as well as give them a detailed understanding of a figure or concept in the short space of three months. Otherwise one can criticise the streamlining approach for failing to include many other important ideas and figures in Islam and this makes Islamic Studies subjective, random or, at its worst, political. Therefore, it is difficult to call Islamic Studies a “discipline” with a clear methodology and this has a negative domino effect on teachers and learners who are both under pressure to navigate through a new territory without a road map.

**Concluding Thoughts: Broadening the Teaching and Learning of Islam in Western Universities**

There is a rising interest amongst Islamic Studies scholars to critically evaluate the way Islam is taught at Western universities.[[31]](#footnote-31) I argue the streamlined approach of Islamic Studies is by far not the most effective method of teaching Islam to undergraduates. The desire to give an overview of Islam to first-time students is commendable. However, when there is a lack of structure, depth, creativity, and primary sources within Islamic Studies, not to mention the existence of problematic intellectual trends towards Islam, the discipline does more harm than good. My own pedagogical experiences confirm this and lead me to the following suggestions in order to broaden the teaching and learning of Islam in Western universities.

1. Islam must first be taught as a holistic religious tradition rather than as a historical, sociological, political or anthropological subject. This means greater attention must be given to its spiritual and ethical worldview, place within human history and its connections with other intellectual sciences and human problems.
2. Seminary styles of learning should be incorporated with Western academic approaches to Islam to give an in-depth, rounded learning experience to undergraduates. Undergraduates should also be taught by Muslim seminary teachers, be acquainted with spiritual techniques in Islam, classical Islamic sources and basics of the Arabic language.
3. Figures such as Prophet Muḥammad or ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, often compartmentalised as holy personalities only relevant to Muslims, should be studied to see how their intellectual, moral and spiritual influence continually pervades both the Islamic and Western intellectual tradition.
4. Specific disciplines such as Islamic Philosophy of Religion, Islamic Ethics, Islamic Bioethics, Islamic International Law, Islamic Sociology, Islamic Education, Islamic Psychology, Islamic Art & Architecture and more should be created to give due credit to the vibrancy of Islam’s intellectual tradition in offering solutions for current human problems, specific Muslim issues as well as nurturing revaluation of its own epistemological methods.

More can be suggested but from my pedagogical experiences, the above suggestions may spark discussion on how alternative models other than streamlining Islam can be created for the benefit of undergraduates and break the dualistic narrative that looms over Islamic Studies. The Siddiqui report stated, “you have either university-based departments which study the Muslim world without the participation of Muslims or you have Islamic centres which provide religious service to the Muslims but without reaching out to the wider society. You have two parallel universes . . . .”[[32]](#footnote-32)

I believe the goal in teaching Islam is to create a fluid teaching context that aims to transcend boundaries, race and cultural divisions so that a positive society is created from a classroom. As Rogers states, “out of such a context arise true students, real learners, creative scientists and scholars and practitioners, the kind of individuals who can live in a delicate but ever-changing balance between what is presently known and the flowing, moving, altering problems and facts of the future.”[[33]](#footnote-33)

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1. For an examination of these accusations and the culture of Islamophobia that has been created, see: Arun Kundnani, *The Muslims are Coming Home!: Islamophobia, Extremism and the Domestic War on Terror* (London: Verso Books, 2014) and Saied Reza Ameli, Marandi, Mohammed Syed, Sameera Ahmed, Seyfeddin Kara, and Arzu Merali, *British Muslims’ Expectations of the Government - The British Media and Muslim Representation: The Ideology of Demonisation* (Wembley: Islamic Human Rights Commission, 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For the development and state of Islamic Studies in UK universities, see Ataullah Siddiqui, *The Siddiqui Report – Islam at Universities in England* (2007), accessed June 3, 2014, <http://www.mihe.org.uk/the-siddiqui-report>.For the state of Islamic Studies in US universities, see Mumtaz Ahmed, Zahid Bukhari, and Sulayman Nyang (eds), *Observing the Observer: The State of Islamic Studies in American Universities* (Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The works of Robert Spencer are a pertinent example of this dualistic approach,see, *Religion of Peace? Why Christianity Is and Islam Isn’t* (Washington, DC: Regnery Press, 2007) and *The* *Truth about Muḥammad: Founder of the World’s Most Intolerant Religion* (Washington, DC: Regnery Press, 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Mohammed Arkoun, *Islam: to Reform or to Subvert* (London: Saqi Books, 2006), 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Runnymede Report, *Islamophobia – A Challenge for us all* (London: Runnymede Trust, 1997), 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Saied Reza Ameli, *Bibliographical Discourse Analysis: The Western Academic Perspective on Islam, Muslims and Islamic Countries (1949 – 2009), volumes 1 - 4* (Wembley: Islamic Human Rights Commission, 2012), vol. 1, 43 and 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ameli, *Bibliographical Discourse Analysis,* vol. 1, 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. These discourses are Islamophobia, Islamophilia, Islamoromia, Islamoverita, and Neutral. For elaboration of these discourses, see: Ibid,vol. 1, 11 – 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid., 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid., 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Wael B Hallaq, “On Orientalism, Self-Consciousness and History,” *Islamic Law and Society* 18 (2011): 387-439 at 438-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Nasr’s works examine the interaction between Islamic philosophy and Western philosophysee, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy from Its Origin to the Present: Philosophy in the Land of Prophecy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006) and George Saliba, *Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance* (Boston: MIT Press, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Humberto Garcia has made a step in this direction by examining Islam’s influence on the English Enlightenment and its implications on Western modernity: *Islam and the English Enlightenment 1670-1840* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See Jonathan Petre and Andrew Porter, “Archbishop Williams Sparks Sharia Law Row,” *The Telegrah*, February 7, 2008, accessed June 4, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1577928/Archbishop-Williams-sparks-Sharia-law-row.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. SeeCaner K Dagli, “Ali bin Abi Ṭalib and Sufism,” (Tehran: Sadra Islamic Philosophy Research Institute, 2006), accessed June 4, 2014, <http://www.mullasadra.org/new_site/english/Paper%20Bank/Gnosis/Caner%20K_Dagli%20@.htm> and Reza Shah-Kazemi, “Ali b. Abi Ṭalib,” in Josef M Meri (ed), *Medieval Islamic Civilization, An Encyclopaedia*,(New York-London: Routledge, 2006), volume II, 36-37. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See:,Al-Harrāni, Hasan ibn Shu’bah, *Tuḥāf al-‘Uqūl*, (Qum: Mu’assasa al-Nashr al-Islāmī, 1984), 255 and al-Ḥusayn, ‘Alī ibn., *Treatise on Rights (Risālat al-Ḥuqūq),trans. William Chittick,* accessed June 4, 2014, <http://www.al-islam.org/treatise-rights-risalat-al-huquq-imam-zain-ul-abideen> . [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Mumtaz Ahmed, op. cit, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. *The UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education* (Higher Education Academy, 2011), accessed June 5, 2014, <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ukpsf> . [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. A. R. Rather., *Essentials of Instructional Technology* (New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House, 2004), 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Ibid., 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Abī Ṭālib, ‘Alī ibn, *Nahj al-Balāgha* (compiled by Sharīf al-Raḍi) (Qum: Mu’assisāt Dār al-Hijrah, 1967), 483, ḥadīth no. 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Carl Rogers, *Freedom to Learn: A View of What Education Might Become* (Columbus OH: Charles E. Merrill, 1969), 218. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. For a discussion of this distinction, seeKim Knott, “Insider/outsider perspectives,” in John Hinnells, *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 243-58. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. See “4AAT1001 Islam's Beginnings,”

    <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/depts/trs/modules/level4/4aat1001.aspx>. Other modules were designed in a similar fashion, see “4AAT1951 Islam: Later Developments,” <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/depts/trs/modules/level4/4aat1012.aspx> and “5AAT2003 Modern Islam I: History & Politics,” <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/depts/trs/modules/level5/5aat2003.aspx>. All accessed June 5, 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Peter M Taubman, “The Beautiful Soul of Teaching: The Contribution of Psychoanalytic Thought to Critical Self-Reflection and Reflective Practice,” in Mordechai Gordon and Thomas V O’Brien (eds.), *Bridging Theory and Practice in Teacher Education* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2007), 2-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Dugan Laird, *Approaches to training and development* (Boston MA: Addison-Wesley, 1985), 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Siddiqui, op. cit., 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Ibid., 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Mumtaz Ahmed, op. cit., 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. For the nature of education in Shi’i seminaries, seeWerner Ende and Rainer Brunner (eds.), *The Twelver Shi‘a in Modern Times* (Leiden: Brill, 2001) and for Sunni seminaries: Donald Malcolm Reid., *Cairo University and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. See: Paul Morris, William Shepard, Paul Trebilco and Toni Tidswell (eds.), *The Teaching and Study of Islam in Western Universities* ( Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2014) and Mumtaz Ahmed, op. cit. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Siddiqui, op. cit., 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Carl Rogers, op. cit., 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)