2012 Annual Report

Institute of Islamic Studies
Faculty of Arts
McGill University

Submitted by

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Report Summary

2012 marked the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the Institute of Islamic Studies in 1952 and as such was a very active year in the life of the Institute.

In March the Institute received a generous $1.25 million gift from the State of Qatar. The gift was presented to Principal Heather Munroe-Blum during a visit to the University by His Excellency Salem Al-Shafi, the first Ambassador from Qatar to Canada. These monies have been and will be used to fund a series of conferences, special events, and other activities to celebrate 60 year of Islamic Studies, to be held from 2012 through until early 2014. In addition, the H.E. Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassim Bin Jabr Al-Thani Fellowship in Islamic Studies was established as a permanently endowed Fellowship using a portion of these funds. The first fellowships will be awarded in 2013. More details of the gift can be found on the McGill Reporter website: http://publications.mcgill.ca/reporter/2012/03/strengthening-our-understanding-of-islam/

During his visit to the University, His Excellency Al-Shafi remarked that “we believe this contribution will further assist the Institute in carrying on the distinguished role it has played, since its establishment in 1952, in advancing research related to Islam and the history and civilization of the Islamic world. We also believe that the Institute shares our vision that knowledge and education are key to meet the challenges of our changing world and provide the tools to better understand the ever-evolving relationship between religion and mankind and how it has contributed to our well-being and the coexistence of peoples.”

Also during 2012 the Institute participated in the Academic Unit Review process in April with a site visit on April 19-20, 2012. This provided the Institute with the opportunity to reflect on past achievements and highlight plans for future goals going forward during discussions with the review committee members, which included two distinguished external examiners from the field.

Research and Publications

Conference Presentations and Scholarly works published in the 2012 calendar year


———. “Islamicate History: Multiple Actors and Heterogeneous Sources,” Invited Discussant for the Second Annual Institute of Islamic Studies Student Council Graduate Symposium (MISSC), McGill University, April 2012.


———. “Astronomical Treasures from Golius’s Collection(s),” invited paper presented at Leiden University, 28 February 2012.


**Teaching and Learning**

The Institute of Islamic Studies continues to undergo a major expansion of its teaching mission. Until the 2005-06 academic year, the IIS focused almost entirely on providing graduate education for our MA and PhD students. It is true that we have traditionally offered introductory, intermediate and advanced courses in Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Urdu, all of which are open to undergraduates, and that a small number of 400-level lecture courses have also been attended by undergraduates. However since 2005, the Institute has continued to expand the number of courses offered to undergraduates at the 300 and 400 levels.

The Institute has built upon the success of these new undergraduate courses with a Minor Concentration in Islamic Studies, the first undergraduate program in this field in McGill’s history. The Minor Concentration in Islamic Studies is built around our two “anchor” courses, ISLA 200 (“Islamic Civilization”) and ISLA 210 (“Muslim Societies”). We also continue to respond to the demand for Arabic language instruction, including in programs such as International Development Studies (Arts) and International Management (B.Comm). In fall 2012 we taught three sections of Introductory Arabic, two sections of Lower Intermediate Arabic and two sections of Higher Intermediate Arabic.

As for graduate studies at the doctoral level, a total of 3 PhD degrees were awarded in 2012:

Walter Edward Young, PhD (May 2012), “The dialectical forge: proto-system juridical disputation in the Kitāb Ikhtilāf al-‘Irāqiyyīn” (2 vols.)

Supervisor: Robert Wisnovsky
Involvement in the community

April 2012 saw the organization of the second graduate student symposium, organized by McGill University's Institute of Islamic Studies Student Council. Our students were successful in inviting a number of graduate students and scholars from Canada, the United States, and Europe. Institute alumnus, Professor Todd Lawson from the University of Toronto, was the keynote speaker.

Fall 2012 saw the launch of the official celebrations of 60 years of contributions by the Institute to the field of Islamic Studies. The Institute of Islamic Studies gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the State of Qatar for these events.

In October we welcomed distinguished professor of ethnomusicology Dr. A.J. Racy (UCLA) as our Visiting Musician in Residence for two weeks. Professor Racy conducted daily workshops for McGill students and local musicians; on Friday, October 12th he presented a public lecture at Redpath Hall entitled “Art and Ecstasy in Arab Music”; and on Friday, October 19th Professor Racy presented a free public concert in Redpath Hall with fellow musician Souhail Kaspar, which was well attended by members of the wider Montreal community, including several representatives from Montreal’s diplomatic corps.

In November the Institute co-hosted a day-long Indonesian Cultural Event with the Schulich School of Music, attended by Her Excellency Dienne H. Moehairio, Indonesian Ambassador to Canada. The day’s events included an afternoon Gamelan workshop and an evening pre-concert reception with the artists, representatives from the Montreal Indonesian community, Institute alumni, McGill faculty and staff, and Ambassador Moehairio. The festivities concluded with an evening gala concert of Gamelan music and dance. The Institute has played a leading role in the McGill Indonesia Social Equity Project, which trained academics from Indonesia beginning in the 1970s, with co-sponsorship by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

Partnerships

Two major ongoing collaborative research projects were at the forefront of the Institute’s activities in 2012, namely: the Rational Sciences in Islam: An Initiative for the Study of Philosophy and the Mathematical Sciences in Islam (Canada Foundation for Innovation, 2008-2013); and Transmission, traduction et transformation dans les cultures médiévales...
2012 saw the appointment of two new tenure-track faculty hires and the well-deserved reappointment of Faculty Lecturer, Mr. David Nancekivell. In the fall of 2012 we began a search in the field of Ottoman and Turkish studies after the retirement of long-time Associate Professor A. Üner Turgay in 2010, which has led to a successful hiring.

Assistant Professor Ahmed Fekry Ibrahim joined the Institute in August following his appointment as Fellow in “Europe in the Middle East—The Middle East in Europe” (EUME) program at the Forum Transregionale Studien of the Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin, Germany in 2011-2012. He received his PhD in Islamic law from Georgetown University, Washington D.C. (2011). His dissertation, entitled “School Boundaries and Social Utility in Islamic Law: The Theory and Practice of Talfiq and Tatabbu’ al-Rukhaṣ in Egypt”, traces the pragmatic use of Sunni legal pluralism in 20th-century Egypt to developments that took place in the Mamluk and Ottoman periods in court practice and legal theory.

Assistant Professor (Special Category) Mohamad “Pasha” Khan also joined the Institute in August, following the completion of his doctoral dissertation in Columbia University's Department of Middle East, South Asian and African Studies and its Institute for Comparative Literature and Society. Mr. Khan successfully defended his dissertation entitled “A Broken Spell: The Romance Genre in Late Mughal India” in the Fall of 2012; it deals with the premodern romance, often inhabited by fantastic events and creatures, and how it was eclipsed by the more “realistic” Urdu novel, which was claimed to be better suited to modern Urdu readers living in colonial India.

Honours, Awards and Prizes

Graduate
State of Kuwait Graduate Prizes Pascal Abidor, Fadia Bahgat
Wilfred Cantwell Smith Fellowship Kamran Karimullah
Cedrik Goddard Memorial Award Katherine Kalemkerian
Ingrid Semaan Prize Fadia Bahgat
J. Jeffrey Semaan Prize Jonathan Dubé
IIS Dissertation Completion Award Nathan Spannaus

Undergraduate
State of Kuwait Scholarship Jennifer Provost
Nayab Jahan Wali Scholarships Rachel Carita Mulbry; Sadaf Munir