



Islamic Studies

New certificate program draws on Mānoa's Asia expertise

by Tracy Orillo-Donovan

During his 2007 deployment in Iraq, UH Mānoa student and Army reservist Valentino Pase was very wary of the local people and of Muslims in general. “The media sometimes portray Muslims as violent people and fanatics,” he explains. “Before we deploy, we are briefed on the culture, but it’s more on what to do and how to do it and not so much on why certain things are the way they are.”

Fast forward to January 2010. Pase enrolled in Assistant Professor James Frankel’s Understanding Islam religion class because, as a possible long-term reservist, he expects to deploy to the Middle East again. “Before I took this class, I didn’t think Islam was a religion, I thought it was a way of life. But it allowed me to view Islam as a peaceful religion,” reflects the 24-year-old sergeant who was born and raised in American Samoa. “I’m definitely interested in taking more classes.”

Students like Pase are part of the reason Mānoa’s College of Arts and Humanities introduced the Undergraduate Certificate in Islamic Studies Program. The certificate combines classes from religion, philosophy, history and art. “It’s been several years in development,” says Associate Professor of Philosophy Tamara Albertini, who spearheaded efforts to establish the program. Last year’s hiring of Frankel in religion and Assistant Professor Paul Lavy in art history rounded out the courses needed to launch the 15-credit undergraduate certificate.

In addition to the religion course, students must take Islamic Philosophy, Introduction to Islam and six credits from a list of elective courses, which can include an Arabic language, and complete a research project. Students can apply for a paid one-month internship to work on some aspect of the Islamic art collections at the Shangri La estate through the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art.

Since 9/11, there has been much more interest in Islam and the Middle East, notes Elton Daniel, a history professor who teaches about Islam and the modern Middle East. Initially, students wanted to know

Hawai‘i could be profoundly affected by developments in Muslim Asia



Deployments to Iraq triggered a desire to understand Muslim culture in Army Reserve Sgt. Valentino Pase, left, with a furniture shop owner he met while assigned to Camp Scania, south of Baghdad

what could have produced such an event. “The fact that the interest level has continued for some years now is a good indication of a growing awareness of just how intertwined the relationship between America and the Islamic world has become,” he says.

Senior Mary Lundquist’s interest was piqued when the United States declared war. “I felt, as a responsible citizen, I should become knowledgeable about a culture that is directly affected by the decisions of U.S. politicians and military.” A history and philosophy major, she is poised to become the first recipient of the Islamic studies certificate.

“Hawai‘i is in a unique position to promote a fair and balanced understanding of Islamic religion and values,” says Albertini. “In Hawai‘i, individuals of different religious convictions not only live side by side, but also interact with one another on a daily basis and, as a result, participate in each other’s celebrations.”

Hawai‘i’s strategic location between East and West has long promoted interest in East Asia, Buddhism and related topics. “The first Gulf War and 9/11 altered that considerably,” says Daniel. People were reminded that Islamic civilization permeates Asia and that Hawai‘i could be profoundly affected by developments in Muslim Asia, he explains. Hawai‘i is in a good position to teach the importance of Islam in places like Fiji and Southeast Asia.

Knowledge about Islam is helping Mānoa senior Bill Urquhart prepare for a career. The 21-year old from Upland, Calif., expects to graduate in spring 2011 and list the certificate in his credentials when he re-enters the military. Urquhart was in the Air Force for a year when his job was eliminated, allowing him to leave the military without penalty and enter college. An Air Force



Compelled by current events to understand Islamic culture, Mary Lundquist finds inspiration in the Islamic philosophers and poets she's discovered

recruitment officer provided a list of top Asian studies programs nationwide with strong Indonesian culture and language programs. He chose Hawai'i. "Sure beats going to northern Illinois," he laughs. Urquhart plans to enlist in the Army and become a Green Beret stationed in Southeast Asia.

Fellow certificate student Lori Harting is considering several possible career paths, all of which require extensive knowledge of Islamic religion and culture. "I have been exposed to the history, religion, politics and culture—beautiful and ugly—of an ancient and amazing people. To truly appreciate it would be to live it—and I plan to," the anthropology major says, adding that the courses will help her integrate into a foreign community.

Plans for the Islamic studies program extend beyond the academic classroom. Albertini hopes to expand offerings to outside agencies, such as the military and companies that conduct business in Muslim countries. "There are many businesses, engineering companies and political situations where we all have to collaborate," she says.

Non-UH students can register for certificate program courses through Outreach College without having to enroll in a degree program. But you don't have to be headed to the region to benefit.

"The Islamic philosophers I have studied have been as inspiring as any Western ones," reflects Lundquist. "The Sufis have left me awestruck. Anyone

can read their poetry, relate to it and grow from it." She recommends Hāfiz, the 14th century Persian poet who inspired Ralph Waldo Emerson and Queen Victoria. ❁

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Support Islamic studies with a donation to the UH Foundation; designate "Fund for the Promotion of Islamic Life and Studies" when you call 808 956-8849 or visit www.uhfoundation.org.



Web extra: At Honolulu's Shangri La, Tamara Albertini talks on video about the Islamic influence on art, www.hawaii.edu/malamalama. View highlights from the collection of 3,500 objects collected by Doris Duke from throughout the Muslim world at www.shangrilahawaii.org.

Meet the Faculty

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Elton L. Daniel is a professor of history specializing in Islamic history and civilization and Middle Eastern history. He was a Center for Arabic Study Abroad fellow at the American University in Cairo and has traveled in Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Iran. His research focuses on the history of early Islamic Iran (7th–10th centuries) and Qajar (19th century) Iran.

Ned Bertz is an assistant professor of history teaching undergraduate and graduate classes on the history of South Asia, the Indian Ocean world, Indian popular cinema and Africa. His published research focuses on themes of race, nationalism and diaspora as they intersect in travel, trade and cultural exchanges across the Indian Ocean world.

Paul Lavy is an assistant professor of South and Southeast Asian art history. He investigates the links between art/architecture and politics in early Southeast Asia history with primary interests in the Hindu-Buddhist artistic traditions associated with Mekong Delta and Preangkorian Khmer civilizations and their relationships with the art of South Asia.

James D. Frankel is an assistant professor of religion interested in the comparative history of ideas and religious and cultural syncretism. His forthcoming book, *Rectifying God's Name: Liu Zhi's Translation of Monotheism and Islamic Ritual Law in Neo-Confucian China* (UH Press) examines Chinese Islamic scholarship and literature of the early Qing (1644–1911) period.

Tamara Albertini is an associate professor of philosophy specializing in Renaissance and Islamic thought. She is working on *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Philosophy*. Previous writings address Muslim intellectual contributions from the classical period. She has served on the steering committee for two East-West Philosophers' Conferences and the editorial board for *Philosophy East and West*.