

# **BRIDGING DIVIDES: THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF SOCIO-POLITICO-CULTURAL COMPETENCIES IN INTER AND INTRA-FAITH DIALOGUE**

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**T**his semester, Dr. Adnan Rehman and I had the privilege of teaching an exceptional group of students here at the Boston Islamic Seminary (BIS) in our Interfaith and Intrafaith Engagement course. Spanning three months, this course was designed to impart the foundational principles and significance of interfaith dialogue in American society. Students were introduced to the fundamental teachings of the world's major religions—Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity—as well as the principal Muslim sub-traditions of Sunnism and Shi'ism. The curriculum delved into the challenges and opportunities present in Islam's interfaith and intrafaith dialogue and engagement with these religions and within its sub-traditions.

A critical aspect of these dialogues is the context in which they occur. Effective dialogue and engagement require an in-depth understanding of the society in which one is communicating, the cultural backgrounds of the individuals involved, and the political environment in which these interactions take place. The course comprehensively covered various religious traditions and equipped students with methods and techniques to navigate socio-political factors, leveraging these factors to effectively convey the message of Islam.

In the intrafaith section, we focused on combating sectarianism by enhancing literacy in Islamic sub-traditions. This included an exploration of the historical roots of Sunni-Shi'ite divisions and strategies for fostering dialogue between these groups. Students presented on core Shi'ite texts, thereby increasing each other's foundational knowledge, and we explored common ground and methods for addressing contentious issues.

The course also examined demographic factors such as race and ethnicity and their influence on dialogue. Students investigated the Black American Muslim tradition, the spread of Islam among Latinos, and the challenges of dawah among Whites in both the United States and the United Kingdom.

Our pedagogical approach was multifaceted, incorporating articles, lectures, videos, and active class participation. Class discussions were integral, significantly enriching the learning experience. Students were not passive recipients of knowledge; rather, they demonstrated their potential for leadership in the field.

Interfaith and Intrafaith Dialogue and Engagement synthesized approaches to religion through scholarship. The course integrated insights from the humanities and social sciences, utilizing research on religious beliefs, behaviors, and institutions to establish a robust theoretical framework that guided our exploration of these critical issues.

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**FRANK BEANE (USTADH SHAREEF MUHAMMAD)**, a dedicated historian and educator, has taught U.S. and World history, as well as African-American and religious studies for over a decade at institutions like Georgia State University and Spelman University. He holds a Bachelor of Arts and Sciences in History from Central State University and a Master's in History from Kent State University. As a member of the Black Dawah Network's think-tank, Shareef provides insightful research highlighting the significance of Islam in the African-American community. He is well-versed in various historical periods, showcasing skills in critical analysis and pedagogical support. Currently, Shareef is an ICNA Da`wah Academy instructor and has authored three books on political and social theory.