

For Immediate Release

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Educators Immersed in Islamic Studies and More at PIER Summer Institutes

August 23, 2004. New Haven, CT ♦♦ Twenty-seven educators from nine states attend the intensive professional development program, Understanding Islamic Societies, while others study Brazil, China, and the Cold War at the Yale Center for International and Area Studies' Programs in International Educational Resources (PIER).

Understanding Islamic Societies, an intensive summer institute offered through Programs in International Educational Resources (PIER), the outreach arm of the Yale Center for International and Area Studies (YCIAS), brought twenty-seven elementary through post-secondary educators from nine states to the Yale University campus from July 6 - 13. The program featured lectures by leading scholars and experts from Yale and other institutions together with films, site visits, cultural activities, and resource and strategy sessions for teaching about the Muslim world. Offered through the YCIAS International Affairs Council in collaboration with the Council on Middle East Studies and supported by a grant from the Connecticut Geographic Alliance, the primary goal of the institute was to enable participants to develop an understanding of the breadth and diversity of Islam and the diversity within Islam that exists in the US. Using geography and diversity as underlying themes, the program traced the geographic scope and influences on the global spread of Islam. In-depth insights into the Islamic faith enabled participants to begin to grasp the complex issues of Islam's historical presence, socio-cultural influences, contributions, gender issues, and politics.

While the institute provided in-depth content from some of the world's most renowned experts representing US, Muslim, and Arab perspectives, it also reinforced concepts with real-life experiences and best teaching practices. "I loved the variety of activities and speakers," declared one participant. A visit to the local mosque to speak informally with the Imam, a chance to view early Qur'anic manuscripts at Yale's Beinecke Rare Book Library, and the opportunity to speak with a panel of Yale Muslim students enlivened the program. Karim Nagi Mohammed, a native Egyptian currently teaching at the New England Conservatory of Music, celebrated the conclusion of the weeklong session with a lively presentation on Arabic music, dance, and culture. His opening statements captured the atmosphere set by the institute: "The words 'Islam', 'Muslim' and 'Arab' probably bring to mind images of a very serious culture. If you take nothing else back from my program today, I am here to tell you that as a Muslim and an Egyptian, we do like to have fun!" A day long field trip to New York City provided added dimensions through visiting the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Islamic Cultural Center of New York, sampling Afghani and Pakistani foods, and exploring an Arab cultural street fair. The trip concluded with a visit to Alwan for the Arts, a Middle Eastern cultural center in lower Manhattan, where participants viewed the forthcoming film About Baghdad, and discussed it with one of the filmmakers. "It was a wonderful week - very high quality - the instruction, information, and organization!"

PIER is uniquely positioned within YCIAS to offer a wide range of concurrent programs. While the International Affairs Council and Middle East Studies program focused on Islamic societies, concurrent institutes led by PIER directors in European, East Asian, and Latin American studies included the Cold War in Context, China in Transition, and Portraits of Brazil. During the same period, fourteen teachers departed on a six week Fulbright-Hays Group Project Abroad to Ghana. Still another group set out for China as part of a five week Freeman field study on Chinese ethnicities.

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