

Approvals to date:

Religion Department: Approved by RELS faculty, 12/10/21, 9-0-0 (See Appendix B below, or attached EPC application for vote record.)

A&S Dean: Endorsed on February 14, 2022 (See Appendix D below, or attached EPC application)

Catholic Studies Program (for course inclusion): Approved 5-0-0 on 2/22/21 (See Appendix B below, or attached EPC application for vote record.)

College of A&S Faculty: Voted in favor, unanimously, on 3/25/22 (See Appendix E below)

Library Dean: Pending

Senate APC and Senate: Pending

NEW PROGRAM PROPOSAL: INITIAL CONCEPT

This proposal is for brand new program and certificate proposals. Please try to keep your proposal to no more than four pages.

Program Sponsor: RELS

School/College: A&S

Title of Proposed Program: Muslim-Christian Relations Minor

Date Submitted to Dean: 2/1/22

OVERVIEW

Summarize the rationale for this program. Explain its relationship to the vision and mission of Seton Hall University and your program's School/College. What will be the distinctive qualities of this program? Why is it essential for Seton Hall University at this time?

Overview:

A curricular strength of Seton Hall University is in the area of interfaith studies, anchored by the pioneering work of the Department of Religion's Jewish-Christian Studies Program (JCST). The graduate program in JCST was founded by Monsignor John Oesterreicher who played a pivotal role in the drafting of Vatican II's *Nostra Aetate*, which revolutionized the Church's relationship with Judaism. Since then, Seton Hall via JCST (and the Sister Rose Thering Fund) has been nationally and internationally known as the place where church leaders, as well as teachers and community members, come to study to promote interfaith understanding and the common good.

While the new curriculum, as an undergraduate minor, in Muslim-Christian relations will be distinct from our JCST graduate program, it is a natural extension of it given *Nostra Aetate*'s concurrent encouragement for the Church to also engage other venerable religious traditions, particularly, Islam. This new minor begins the realization of that work here at Seton Hall, especially given the increasing number of students who identify as Muslim and their expressed interest in and support for such a minor

program. (See Appendix A below.) Furthermore, as *Nostra Aetate* intimates, given the historical intersections/relationships among Christians, Jews, and Muslims (in addition to the intertwining of antisemitism and Islamophobia), Jewish-Christian relations requires the advancement of Muslim-Christian relations.

Currently, the Department of Religion offers a number of courses in Muslim theology and spirituality and many courses in Christian theology and ethics. In the spirit of *Nostra Aetate*, this new minor aims to bring these two sides of the curriculum together in dialogue in the recognition that deeper engagement and understanding between the two traditions can only be accomplished if each tradition's faith commitments are taken seriously. Thus, this new minor focuses primarily on the theological dimensions of each tradition, how they are lived out in various arenas of human life, and critical and constructive comparative theological methodologies that foster deeper understanding and appreciation for each tradition's religious and ethical distinctiveness and contributions to public life.

STANDARD 1

While supporting data from Market Research and Benchmark Comparisons will be expected later in the process, identify how this program will compare with and be different from similar programs at peer and aspirational institutions, including any at Seton Hall. Please consider consulting the University Libraries' reference and subject specialists for assistance in this and other background research to support your proposal. <https://library.shu.edu>

Reputable programs in Muslim-Christian relations are small in number. The two more prominent programs are at Georgetown and Oxford Universities: see <https://acmcu.georgetown.edu/> and <https://www.cmcsoxford.org.uk/>

While our resources cannot match the kind of programs that GU and OU provide, rather impressively, the Religion Department already offers a number of courses that, if organized together within a structured degree, easily goes toe-to-toe with the curriculum offered at an institution such as GU's Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center. And with a growing number of Muslim students on campus, we have a potential base of student support for this new minor, and a reason for Muslim students especially in the NYC/Northern NJ area to consider staying closer to home and pursuing studies at Seton Hall. (See, again, Appendix A and Appendix C below.)

STANDARD 2

How does this program's strategic goal/objective link to your School/College plan and the University's strategic plan? <https://www.shu.edu/strategic-plan/index.cfm>

The new minor in Muslim-Christian relations bolsters the values and goals of both the College of Arts & Sciences's new strategic plan and the University's.

First, CAS's SP asserts the commitment to inclusion, dialogue, and partnership: "In partnership with our neighboring communities and the diverse individuals that comprise them, we, in the College of Arts and Sciences, prioritize the Catholic intellectual tradition's emphasis on the common good and the necessity for dialogue and understanding among all faiths, cultures, and socio-economic backgrounds" (Value #3).

Second, the University's SP commits to the following goal, to "Further cultivate and nurture a trusting and collaborative Seton Hall community that educates and empowers all its members to advance equity,

inclusion, and social justice on campus and in the wider world” (Goal 4). This goal is concretized in the following two objectives: “1. Foster a collaborative and inclusive campus culture that values and builds trust and facilitates all members’ engagement, participation, and commitment to providing a transformative experience for every Seton Hall student. 2. Increase the cultural competency and ability of students, faculty, and staff to engage with difference across the University.” And then there is Goal 1 of the University SP, to “Educate the whole person, drawing deeply upon the humanizing and liberating Catholic intellectual tradition, while respecting other religious identities, values, and points of view, in both undergraduate and graduate curricula.” Both goals, #4 and #1, coincide with the fifth guiding principle of the SP: “Seton Hall welcomes individuals from all faith traditions and from none. Seton Hall’s Catholicism is an enabling vision, not a basis for exclusion.”

As the above values, goals, and commitments indicate, the College and University are committed to curricula that speak to the intellectual aspirations of its diverse student body and programming that fosters dialogue among diverse communities. These strategic commitments are precisely the goals of this new minor in Muslim-Christian relations. That is in part why we are focusing on “relations” rather than simply “studies” in the identity of the minor.

STANDARD 3

How does this proposed program embody the Catholic identity of Seton Hall University <https://www.shu.edu/mission.cfm> as well as the overall vision of both the University and the program's school/college?

As noted under standard 1, *Notra Aetate*, a central Vatican II document defining contemporary Catholicism, enjoins engagement and dialogue with all major faith traditions, including Islam. Such interfaith dialogue and learning is also reiterated in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, the apostolic constitution that guides the academic life of Catholic universities and colleges (paragraphs 45-47). Furthermore, Pope Francis’s recent outreach to Muslim communities reminds us of the importance of cultivating constructive relationship with Islam (e.g., <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2021-03/pope-francis-islam-iraq-magisterium-cairo-baku-ur.html> and see specifically his 2020 social encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*). We see this new minor as our way of participating and expanding this trajectory in modern Catholicism, which is a trajectory that has been central to Seton Hall’s Catholic identity since at least Vatican Council II.

The University’s mission includes advancing the “academic and ethical development” of students (<https://www.ppri.org/research/2020-census-of-american-religion/>). Correlatively, the College of A&S’s strategic plan places a premium on fostering “respect for difference, public service and global citizenship, and solidarity in the spirit of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton’s social ministry.” If we are to be true to such values, then it will be imperative for students to gain multiple religious competencies. This new minor in Muslim-Christian relations provides a critical means to that end.

STANDARD 4

How will this program's curriculum be known for its exceptional quality, and how will student learning be assessed?

First, the courses for this minor are currently taught by fulltime faculty who are subject-area experts.

Second, other than the two introductory courses that are part of the curriculum, all courses included in the minor are seminar-style in format, leading to close faculty and student intellectual engagement.

Third, most if not all of the minor's courses are text-centered, which will facilitate close reading abilities, critical thinking skills, and analytic writing habits.

Fourth, in terms of assessment, we will expect content-knowledge-skill development over time. Students taking the minor will be expected to participate in a student-faculty review of work completed after core courses (for the minor) are finished and then to do so again after their electives are completed. In essence, we will consider a portfolio model for assessment in this minor.

STANDARD 5

How will this program directly impact students in terms of marketability and job opportunities?

Increasing multicultural and multireligious competencies will be critical for many professionals (healthcare, law, accounting, sales/marketing/journalism/international affairs/etc.) in order to navigate successfully an increasing diverse client-consumer-market base. In the NYC area, for instance, the Muslim population has risen substantially. According to a Pew U.S. Religious Landscape Study, it estimates 3% of persons living in NYC identify as Muslim, or approximately 603,000. Other studies put the count higher, to above 700,000 (<https://nycreligion.info/muslims-nyc-area/>; cf. <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/07/26/demographic-portrait-of-muslim-americans/> and <https://www.prii.org/research/2020-census-of-american-religion/>)

For students who are interested in graduate study, especially in Islamic studies, religious studies, and comparative theology, this minor would provide a solid foundation or preparation. It would also provide a solid foundation for graduate study in foreign affairs/service, international relations, especially for those interested in Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African affairs. Consider that presently, 55% of the global population identifies as Christian or Muslim (60% by 2050); 76% of all migrants in the world identify as Muslim or Christian; by 2050, 70-75% of the global Christian population will be living in Latin America, South America, the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Asia-Pacific, and 96% of the Muslim population will be living in Asia-Pacific, Middle East and North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa.¹ These demographic trends underscore the fact that Islam, Christianity, and Muslim-Christian Relations will be a necessary feature for any globally oriented career attentive to matters of religion, culture, and justice.

For NJ-specific Muslim demographic trends, please see Appendix C.

STANDARD 6

Identify by name the current full-time faculty in your college who have expressed a desire and commitment to teaching in this program. Please indicate if this program requires new faculty and admin/staff positions; if so, how many? Please indicate if these will be part-time, contract, or full-time tenure-track, and for which years these faculty/admin/staff will be hired. In addition, please briefly describe if the program requires any other additional resources, e.g., start-up funding, equipment, facilities, etc. To the extent that is possible, we encourage program proposals that take advantage of existing capacity and resources (faculty, admin/staff, facilities, equipment, etc.).

¹ See "Epilogue: Religious Demography and the Future of Christian-Muslim Dialogue," in Charles Tieszen, *Theological Issues in Christian-Muslim Dialogue* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2018), and "Faith on the Move: The Religious Affiliation of International Migrants," Pew Research Center (<https://pewrsr.ch/3rfi8K7>), and "Why Muslims are the world's fastest-growing religious group," Pew Research Center (<https://pewrsr.ch/3B0QdkB>).

Faculty who will teach in this program will hail from the current roster of Religion Department professors. The following faculty currently teaches all courses proposed for the minor and thus no additional resources would be needed at this time:

- Dr. Axel Takacs, Assistant Professor (term faculty)
- Dr. Issam Aburaya, Associate Professor (tenured)
- Dr. Charles Carter, Professor (tenured)
- Dr. Anthony Sciglitano, Associate Professor (tenured)
- Dr. KC Choi, Professor and Chair (tenured)

STANDARD 7

Please describe the delivery format for the proposed program (e.g., traditional, campus-based program; hybrid program --some face-to-face and some online courses; fully online program) and any new/emerging pedagogical strategies that may be employed in the program (e.g., flipped courses, competency-based learning, active learning strategies, etc.). Please briefly describe the rationale for the selected delivery format and pedagogical approach(es).

Currently, we are planning for a traditional, face-to-face program. However, since two of the three core courses for the minor are available via online format, if we were granted approval to develop the third core course for the minor for online delivery, we would be well positioned for a hybrid degree in the future (50% online/50% face-to-face). A hybrid format would certainly offer greater flexibility to students and make the minor more attractive and obtainable for them.

For a proposed course sequence, see Appendix B below.

Appendix A

Community Support for the Proposed Minor (3 letters).

Letter 1:



4475 South Clinton Ave. #202, South Plainfield, NJ 07080 | 908.668.5900

To Whom It May Concern:

Please accept the following letter as an ardent endorsement from our CAIR-NJ office for the Muslim-Christian Studies Minor at Seton Hall University.

With the inauguration of this auspicious minor Seton Hall University would join countless other universities across America in hosting intentional spaces for the joint academic study of the Islamic and Christian traditions. A minor in Muslim-Christian Studies would prove beneficial for the diverse communities of New Jersey and wider tri-state area as a center for professional learning and contribution to the timely discourse of religious studies. Its existence will be a testament to the diverse, equitable, and inclusive nature our nation is inching towards. The minor will, more importantly, provide an opportunity for intellectual growth and cultural maturity for the surrounding communities.

Based on our understanding of the current demographics in New Jersey, we earnestly believe a minor of this nature would find no shortage of interested students, scholars, and professionals eagerly willing to participate and contribute to its success. New Jersey is home to well over 300,000 Muslims, with over a million more in the surrounding states. With the growing population and increased engagement of the American-Muslim communities comes the demand for higher education in this specific discipline. American universities increasingly find themselves introducing the academic study of the Islamic tradition to accommodate the growing demand coming from the increasingly diverse population.

The minor in Muslim-Christian Studies would furthermore advance CAIR-NJ's mission of enhancing the understanding of Islam. By providing a professional platform for the exchange of ideas Seton Hall will be facilitating and promoting mutual understanding between communities. Such joint critical conversations, thinking, and dialogue are essential for the advancement of our society.

Overall, our CAIR-NJ office has every reason to believe this minor would provide nothing but educational, social, and cultural benefit not only to the Seton Hall community but also New Jersey at large, further serving in the greater good of our nation.

Sincerely, Selaedin Maksut

Selaedin Maksut

Executive Director

Letter 2:

To Whom It May Concern:

It has been brought to the attention of the Middle Eastern North African Club (MENAC) Executive Board that a minor in Muslim and Christian Studies is seeking approval in the College of Arts and

Sciences. The E-Board unanimously supports the creation of this minor and see it as a possible minor for future Middle Eastern and North African students that choose to attend SetonHall.

The Middle Eastern North African region's largest religious populations are Christians and Muslims. The MENAC E-Board is of the opinion that there would be a great interest in seeking to better understand the two different religions not only from members of our club, but also from Diplomacy, Political Science, and Religious Studies students looking to understand the different implications religions may have in the religiously involved geopolitics of the region.

We hope that you take this letter of approval with great consideration and seek approval of this minor as soon as possible.

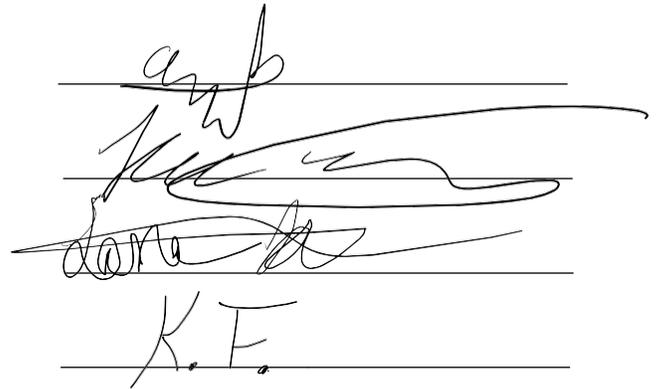
Sincerely,

Anita Baloukji, President of MENAC

Hedaya Freij, Vice President of MENAC

Lana Hannineh, Treasurer of MENAC

Kareem Fakry, Secretary of MENAC



The image shows four handwritten signatures, each on a horizontal line. The first signature is 'anb', the second is 'Hedaya', the third is 'Lana', and the fourth is 'K.F.'.

Letter 3

To Whom It May Concern:

The Muslim Student Association (MSA) endorses the motion to request a Muslim and Christian Studies minor, and we believe that the inclusion of this minor will serve as a positive influence for Seton Hall University.

This minor is designed for students interested in the societies, cultures, intellectual history, and politics of the Islamic world and its relation to the Christian world. It offers students the opportunity to study the many societies that have significant Muslim populations. These societies are not just in the Middle East as they stretch from North Africa to Southeast Asia and beyond, including Europe and North America. The courses provided through this minor will equip students with a broad and well-rounded understanding of Muslim and Christian relations throughout history.

The minor will enhance students' opportunities for future study and employment, specifically for students in the Diplomacy, Political Science, Religious Studies and Theology departments; however, students of all disciplines can certainly benefit from this minor.

We live in a time of controversy and it is important to share proper and accurate information. Oftentimes, Islam is portrayed incorrectly in the media and it is our job as global citizens to correct those misunderstandings. The inclusion of this minor will help further SHU-MSA's mission of enhancing the understanding of Islam not only on campus, but to the surrounding communities.

We believe that Seton Hall University will benefit as there are only a few Islamic studies minors in the state of New Jersey. If the Seton Hall wishes to take advantage of the growing Muslim population, then the establishment of this minor is critical as it will certainly attract a more diverse selection of students to the University.

We hope that you will move forward with the development of this project.

Sincerely,

The Executive Board of the Seton Hall Muslim Student Association

Appendix B

Proposed Course Sequence (Approved by RELS faculty, 12/10/21, 9-0-0. CAST course inclusion approved 5-0-0 on 2/22/21.)

Muslim-Christian Relations Minor (18 credits)

Core/required: (9 credits)

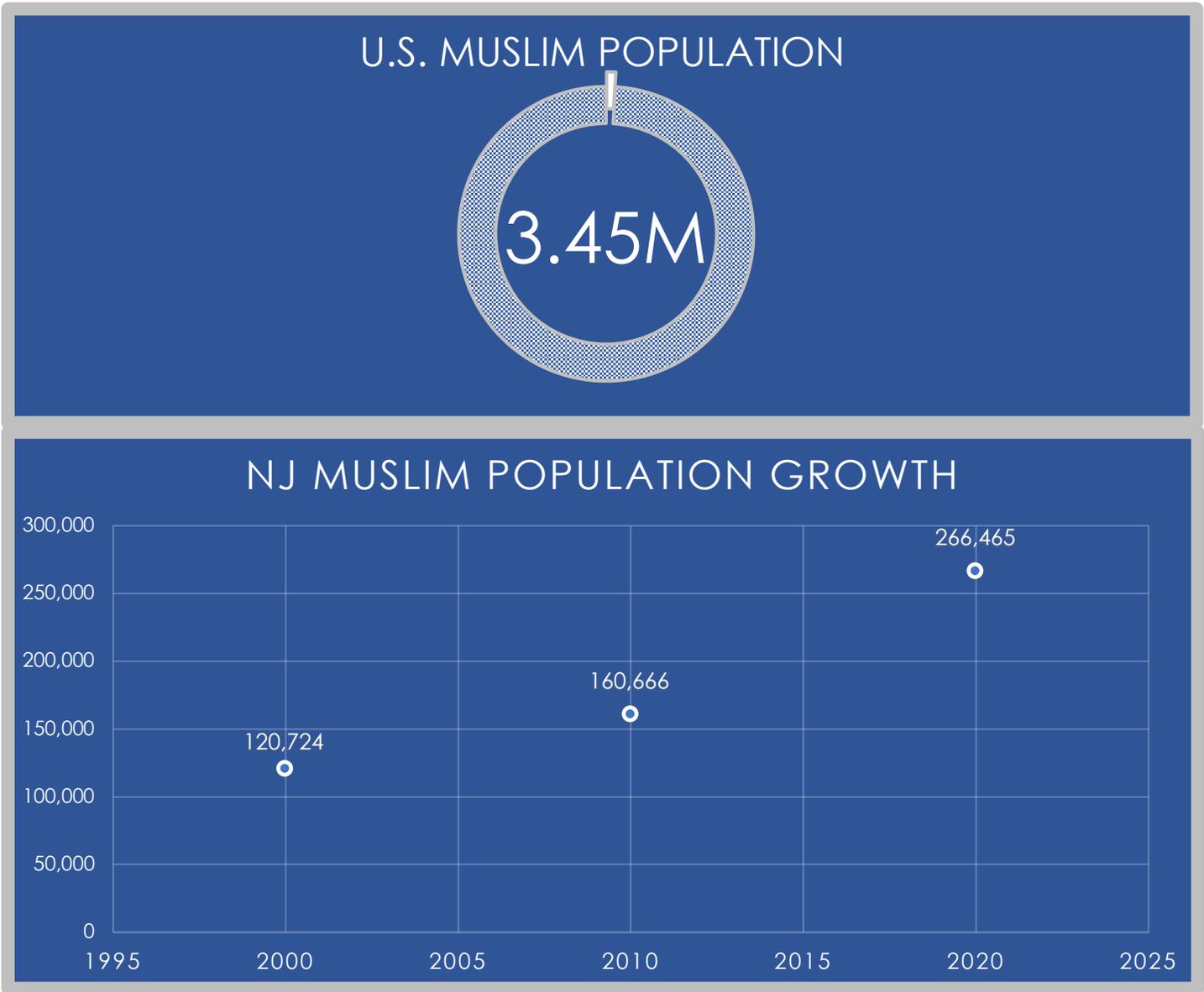
- RELS 2415 Intro to Islam
- RELS 1202 Christian Belief and Thought
- RELS 3435/CORE 3757 Muslim-Christian Perspectives on Faith and Reason, Theology and Ethics

Electives: (9 credits)

- 3 or 6 credits from the following:
 - RELS 3436 Islamophobia: Theology, History, and Contemporary Contexts
 - RELS 3430 Pluralism in Multireligious America: Politics of Inclusion
- 3 or 6 credits from the following:
 - RELS 3492(ST)/JCST 7549 Bible and Quran
 - CAST 3019/CORE 3756: Catholics and Muslims in Dialogue: A Catholic Perspective
 - RELS 2416 Islamic Mysticism/Sufism
 - RELS 3434/WMST 3318 Women, Gender, and Islam
 - RELS 3### Art and Literature in Islam (Proposed for Development)

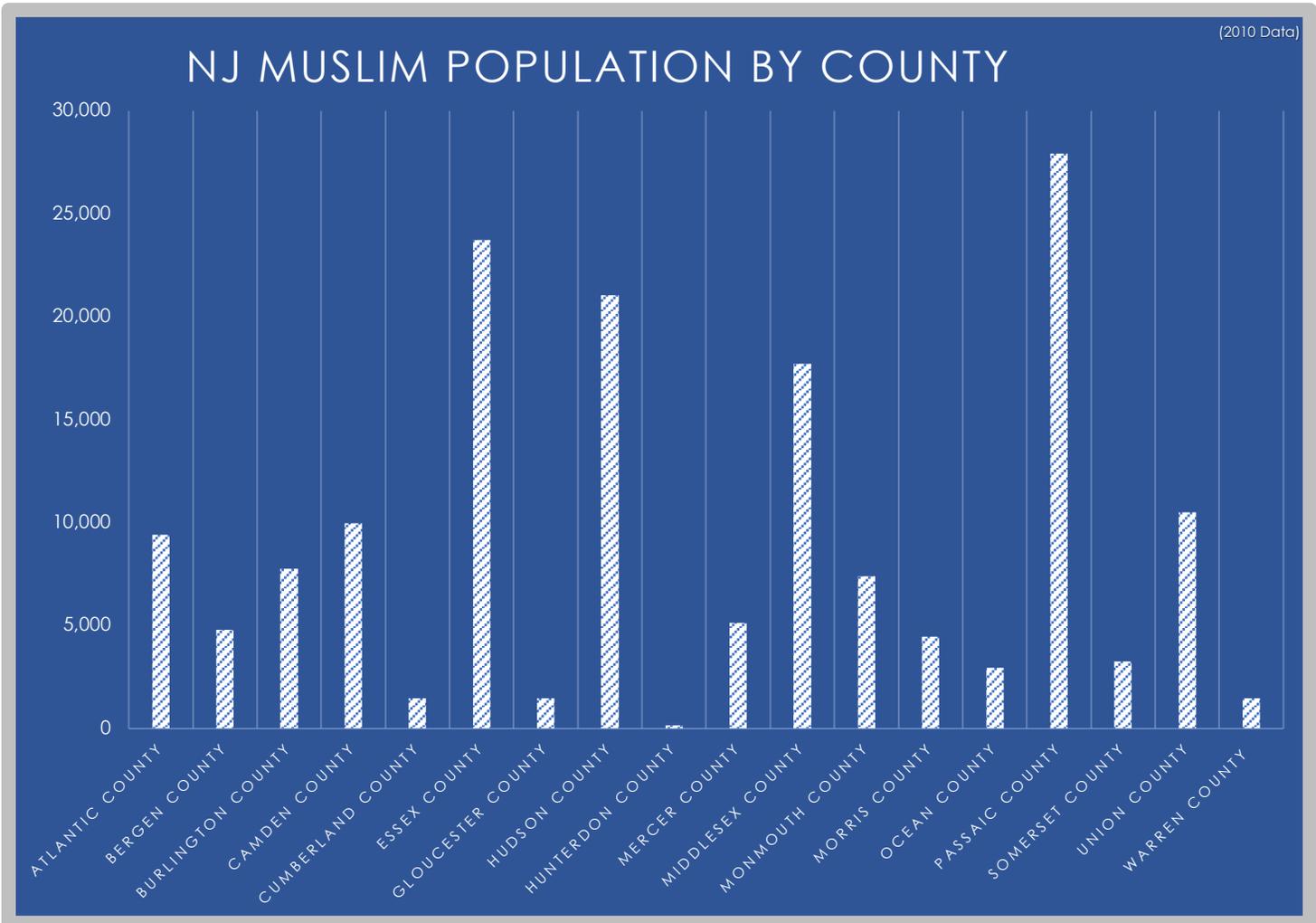
Honors Student Option: After completing Honors Colloquia, an additional 9 credits, 3 credits must be RELS 3435. This option, developed in consultation with Fr. John Ranieri, Director of the University Honors Program, capitalizes on the substantial immersion into Muslim and Christian theological texts in the four Honors colloquia. After completing these colloquia, Honors students will be well positioned to complete the third core course for this minor, RELS 3435, and electives thereafter.

Appendix C
Demographic Data of NJ Muslims



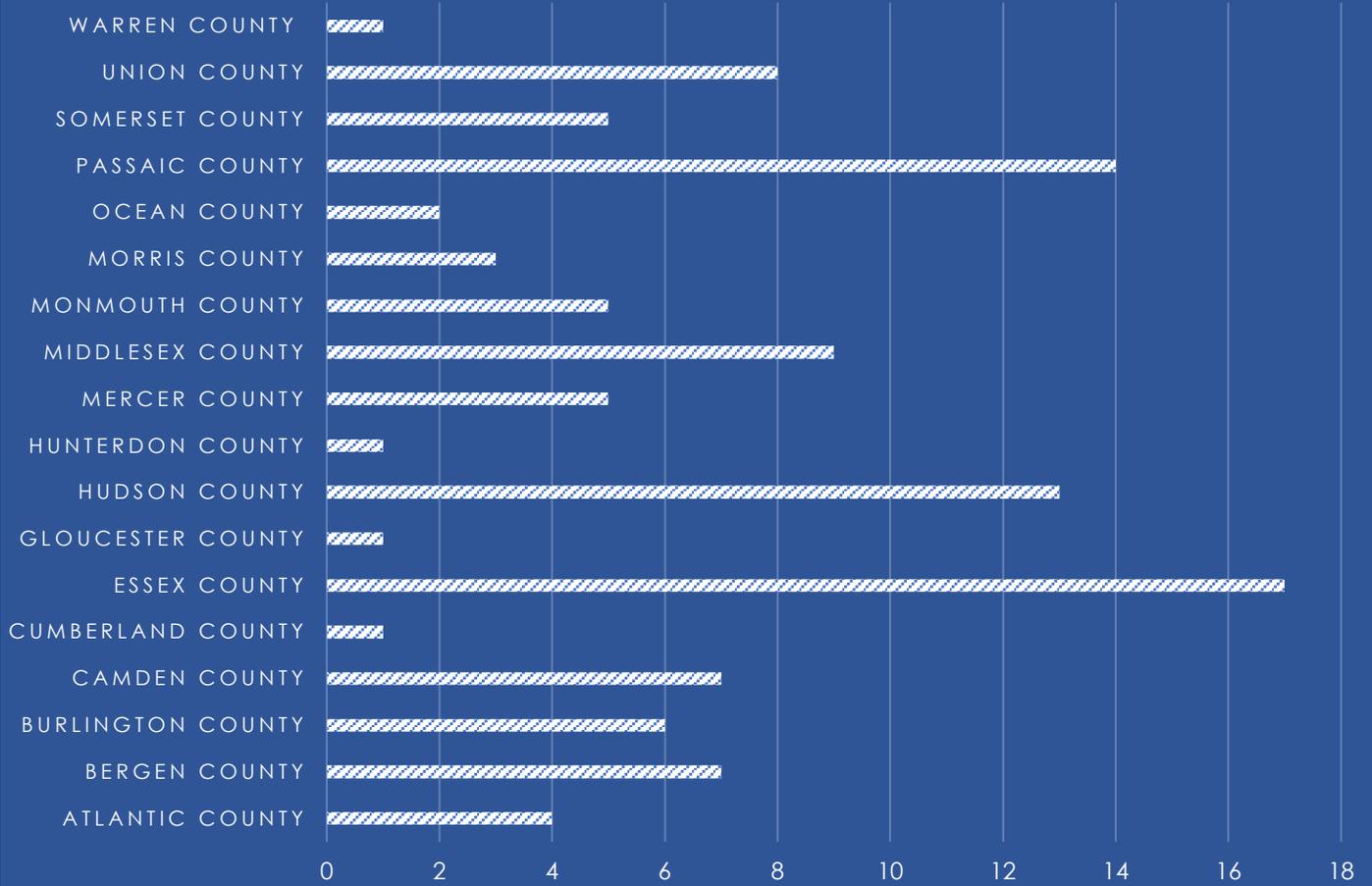
“New Jersey ranks No. 1 in the nation in the percentage of its population that is Muslim”

“Likewise, certain states, such as New Jersey, are home to two or three times as many Muslim adults per capita as the national average”

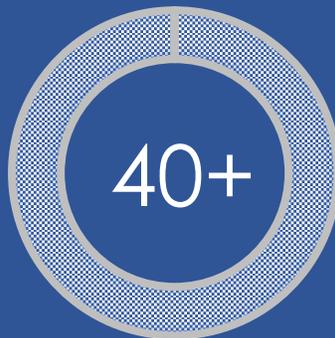


NJ MOSQUE BREAKDOWN BY COUNTY

(2010 Data)



NJ MUSLIM ELECTED OFFICIALS



“The surge in Muslim seeking office is part of a national trend, with New Jersey leading the way”

References

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/03/new-estimates-show-u-s-muslim-population-continues-to-grow/>

https://www.thearda.com/rcms2010/r/s/34/rcms2010_34_state_name_2000.asp

https://www.nj.com/news/2018/03/njs_most_popular_religions_ranked.html

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/NJ>

<https://www.northjersey.com/story/news/2021/04/12/ramadan-2021-nj-mosques-open-pandemic-restrictions-place/7131796002/>

<https://www.northjersey.com/story/news/2021/02/16/muslims-rise-political-power-nj-nation-after-trump-presidency/4392347001/>

<https://www.ict.org.il/UserFiles/IRI-in-NJ-Fleisher-Mar15.pdf>

Appendix D

Re: Initial Concept Form for New Minor in Muslim-Christian Relations

[Jeffrey Togman](#)

Sent: Monday, February 14, 2022 2:06 PM

To: [Ki Joo Choj](#); [Georita Frierson](#)

Cc: [Dawn H Apgar](#)

Dear KC,

The Dean asked me to thank you and your colleagues for your work on this proposal. Based on the strength of the proposal, I am providing you with an initial concept for a new minor in Muslim-Christian Relations.

If you need anything else, please let me know.

Regards,
Jeff

Appendix E(the following is the relevant section of the March 25, 2022 A&S faculty meeting minutes, draft version—the full set of minutes will be up for approval at the May 6, 2022 A&S faculty meeting)

a. Consideration of EPC motion for minor in Muslim-Christian Relations

The minor was approved by voice vote.