Letter from the President

DEAR FRIENDS,

Salam alaykum. I hope this letter reaches you in the best of health and spirits.

As we approach the tenth anniversary of the establishment of Zaytuna College, I want to thank you for your support throughout this historic journey. We have high aspirations to make the coming year a great year for Zaytuna, in sha Allah.

By the grace of God, we have had many major milestones this past year, beginning with moving our undergraduate program into our idyllic new upper campus, which now also houses all our female students. Our male students have a dormitory in our lower campus building, which we previously acquired. We have begun to secure faculty housing near our campuses, so teachers and students can both benefit from proximity and accessibility.

This fall, we also launched our distinctive Master’s degree program in Islamic texts, which was accredited before launch through a substantive change granted by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. We also accepted our first international students, thanks to the accreditation and State Department approval.

We have other exciting new developments to report, including the restart of the Zaytuna College Curriculum Series, which will soon publish high-quality academic books related to the Islamic and Western classical traditions. We also recently launched the Zaytuna Center for Ethical Living and Learning, an important initiative that is focusing on programs and research related to sustainable living and ethical lifestyles. Coming soon is a center that will uniquely confront the many widespread misconceptions about Islam and Muslims.

Alhamdulillah, you contributed, through your prayers and your financial support, to each of these milestones. That makes Zaytuna College your college. It’s the American Muslim college. With God’s help and your continued support, we hope in the coming decades to reach new heights that will make our future generations proud.

Yours sincerely,

HAMZA YUSUF
Students Get Top Scores on Medical College Tests

We saw the first fruits of our STEM partnership with UC Berkeley and the rigorous intellectual training the Zaytuna curriculum provides when two of our juniors scored, respectively, in the 98th and 97th percentile on the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT), scores that are above the average for students entering Harvard Medical School.

To continue attracting bright and motivated students, Zaytuna has ramped up its recruiting strategy, which included a weeklong program last summer that introduced prospective students to the liberal arts curriculum and holistic approach of the college. New programs are being planned for 2019.

M.A. Program: Teaching Islam as a Living Tradition

The Zaytuna M.A. program in Islamic Texts is completing its inaugural semester this month with a small cohort of students. The program presents students a unique opportunity to formally study some of the foundational works of the Islamic tradition in two tracks: either Islamic Law or Philosophy and Theology.

“Teaching Islam as a living tradition is intellectually exhilarating”

Through a core curriculum, students read the primary teaching texts used throughout the Muslim world, thereby initiating them into Islam’s rich intellectual tradition. The courses are taught in a tutorial setting, allowing faculty to provide individualized attention to students and to serve as their mentors, guiding them in their quest for knowledge.

“When, we not only think about the Islamic tradition, but, more importantly, we think with the tradition,” says Jawad Qureshi, a member of Zaytuna’s graduate faculty. “Teaching Islam as a living tradition is intellectually exhilarating, and I look forward to the coming semesters, as we dig deeper into the Islamic disciplines and get to study the best of our tradition.”

Zaytuna College: A Site for Civic Engagement

On November 6, the day of the 2018 mid-term elections, Zaytuna’s new upper campus served as a hub for four different electoral precincts, accommodating hundreds of voters, who streamed through the front gate to fulfill their civic duty.

Preparation for Election Day began a few weeks earlier, with detailed planning by Zaytuna’s operations and building staff to ensure classes and operations would not be disrupted throughout the day.

As voters entered the campus to cast ballots, students, faculty, and staff served as guides. Hosting the polling place helped the broader community see Zaytuna College as a friendly and open institution for civic engagement.
New Campus Becomes a Resource for the Muslim Community

Community building is rapidly becoming a benefit of Zaytuna’s new upper campus on Marin Avenue in Berkeley. Already, the campus has hosted several events—some organized by the college and some by groups outside the college—designed for the broader community.

In May, Zaytuna hosted a successful Permaculture Design Certification Course, taught by permaculture expert Rhamis Kent, that drew participants from all parts of the country and proved to be a rich theoretical and practical experience.

A month later, Zaytuna’s campus again buzzed with activity as the site of the Deen Intensive’s annual Rihla Program, which attracted about one hundred fifty Muslims from across the nation and abroad to Berkeley to learn the foundation of their religion. Also during the summer, Zaytuna’s campus hosted a retreat for the Ta’leef Collective.

In the fall, the college welcomed a contingent of Muslim scholars who were in nearby Pleasanton, CA, for the annual Muslim Scholars’ Retreat. President Hamza Yusuf joined the participants for the retreat’s final session, in which the scholars discussed some of the most challenging issues facing our North American Muslim community. In October, Zaytuna hosted a remarkable conference that examined the journey of the Nation of Islam, from the teachings of Elijah Muhammad to Sunni Muslim teachings, under the leadership of Imam W.D. Muhammad.

And in November, Zaytuna hosted a delegation of media personalities from Malaysia, including a number of high-profile Muslim preachers who are popular on Malaysian television. The group visited a class taught by faculty member Mashyuk Yamac and expressed how impressed they were with the level of the discussion. They also discussed strategies for mitigating the appeal of random violence as a political tool for advancing a Muslim agenda.

Conference Announced: Halal and Tayyib: Rethinking the Ethical

The Zaytuna College Center for Ethical Living and Learning, an initiative dedicated to connecting students with the natural world through experiential learning and education about contemporary ethical challenges, has announced its first academic conference, titled *Halal and Tayyib: Rethinking the Ethical*, planned for March 8 and 9, 2019.

The conference will bring together prominent scholars grappling with theoretical and applied ethics in the context of Muslim intellectual culture, including Dr. Ingrid Mattson of Huron University College, Dr. Othman Llewellyn of the Saudi Wildlife Authority, Dr. Sarra Tlili of the University of Florida, Dr. Nurcan Atalan of Skidmore College, and Adnan Durrani, CEO of American Halal Company/Saffron Roads.

The panels will explore how Muslims should approach sustainability practices in the ever-changing world, ethical entrepreneurship, and animal husbandry practices according to Islamic sources. Keep an eye out for more details regarding the panels, topics, and additional speakers.

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Renovatio Explores the Enigma of Language

Renovatio’s editorial team published its fourth issue, centered on the broad theme of “The Enigma of Language,” this month. This issue features returning writers, such as Dr. Mark Delp, Dr. Eva Brann, Dr. Caner Dagli, and President Hamza Yusuf (who also serves as editor-in-chief), who have all contributed significant and original reflections on aspects of language, and also exciting voices new to Renovatio, including Dr. Garry Wills, a Pulitzer-Prize–winning historian; Dr. John Walbridge, an expert on Islam’s rational tradition and a member of Renovatio’s advisory board; and Dr. Marwa al-Sabouni, an architect in Syria who has written compellingly about the relationship between architecture and the breakdown of society.

Renovatio also organized several public events during the fall semester, including The End of Hope, with Chris Hedges, Imam Zaid Shakir, and President Hamza Yusuf in conversation about the place of hope in a world full of suffering and despair, and has just released videos from the event on the publication’s website (renovatio.zaytuna.edu) and on its YouTube channel.

Master Calligrapher Visits Zaytuna

Fusing the distinct arts of the Arabic and Chinese calligraphic traditions, Haji Noor Deen Mi Guang Jiang has created a calligraphic style of his own. In September, Haji Noor Deen visited Zaytuna College, which hosted an art exhibit of his work at the lower campus building on Le Conte Avenue in Berkeley. While at Zaytuna, he also gave a talk and conducted a workshop for beginners.

A world-renowned master calligrapher, Haji Noor Deen has calligraphed work that graces galleries and museums across the globe, from the British Museum to the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco. His art exhibition and visit were the first in a series of art exhibitions planned at Zaytuna College. The exhibits, organized through the Zaytuna Bookstore, aim to inspire students and the wider public to engage with the rich history—and the current practice—of Islamic art.

The Bookstore also continued its popular monthly book club, led by Imam Zaid Shakir and Imam Dawood Yasin. This semester’s readings featured books related to American history and the social sciences. In September, the book club was honored to host Arlie Hochschild, author of Strangers in Their Own Land. The book club also discussed Fire in the Lake, by Francis Fitzgerald, in October, and Servants of Allah, by Dr. Sylvianne Diouf, in November.