

## 1) Inclusive excellence in teaching and learning philosophy statement

### Teaching as Empathy Activism: Teaching Philosophy

My teaching philosophy is grounded in the belief that empathy is at the heart of education. This philosophy is shaped by 1) my experience as an interdisciplinary teacher/scholar, who teaches socially and culturally sensitive- and often controversial, topics and 2) by bell hook's *Teaching to Transgress* in which she describes education as the practice of freedom, and maintains that education should encourage critical thinking, promote open dialogue, and cultivate a sense of agency and empowerment among students. So, the goal of teaching is not just the acquisition of knowledge, but the development of the capabilities to question, to analyze, and to challenge. Education, through this lens, emerges as an essential tool in the struggle against systemic injustices and for the pursuit of social change. I believe that to usher students into becoming champions of justice in their daily lives, empathy must walk in tandem with critical thinking. Empathy, the bridge that collapses the divide between self and the "other", permits us to comprehend the unknown or little-known other and to be moved by their plight. Empathy is not just an innate quality; it is a skill that can be learned and thus, should be taught. With this belief firmly rooted, teaching transforms into activism for me: Empathy Activism. The classroom becomes a stage where challenging themes and topics that often lurk in the shadows are thrust into the spotlight. Topics I have taught include "Islam and Feminism," "Sexuality and Desire in Islam," and "Literature of War and Trauma in Muslim Societies". In my classes a key strategy for teaching empathy is through exposure to the diverse perspectives and experiences of others. Specifically, marginalized others whose voices and experiences have not always been included in Western academy and scholarship. At its core, my philosophy of "Teaching as Empathy Activism" is an expression of love. It is my ongoing endeavor to foster a learning environment committed to students' intellectual growth, emotional maturity, and personal development. If the classroom does not emerge as an inclusive space and does not exemplify empathy in action, students are likely to dismiss these values as high-sounding theories. I strive for a space where every student feels seen, heard, affirmed and I find this is best achieved when my teaching embodies the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). By acknowledging diverse learning styles and obliterating as many barriers to learning as possible, I can reach out to each student, appreciating their unique abilities and untapped potential. A teaching philosophy anchored in empathy translates to two major teaching strategies for me: the first, is creating courses and syllabi on topics that give precedence to the voices of the marginalized; and second, applying the principles of UDL in the teaching and delivery of these courses so that the teaching and learning experience exemplifies empathy in action.

## 2) Descriptions of specific practices, initiatives or strategies

**Award Criterion 1:** (The nominee) has had a significant impact on student learning within an academic course or program or student learning experience through promoting and demonstrating UCalgary's commitment to establish equitable, diverse, and inclusive learning environments that are accessible to all.

**My contribution:** As an interdisciplinary scholar with a joint appointment in the Gender and Sexuality Studies program (Department of Philosophy) and Arabic Language and Muslim Cultures program (School of Languages, Linguistics, Literatures and Cultures) I stand at the confluence of two dynamic and compelling academic disciplines. Some of the courses that I have designed and teach are "Islam and Feminism," "Sexuality and Desire in Islam," "Literature of War and Trauma in Muslim Societies," "Literature of Muslim Diaspora," and "Literature of Muslim Women." Not many universities in North America offer courses of the same nature. All my courses offer inclusivity in two respects: 1) They are largely attended by students from ethnic and religiously minority background as well as LGBTQA2S+ students making the classroom a very diverse and inclusive space for everyone. 2) The topics and the material in these courses are inclusive in essence since they bring to the fore the knowledge, literatures, and life experiences of peoples at best marginalized in Western academy, but most often ignored or misrepresented.

In all of these courses I deal with highly sensitive and controversial topics including but not limited to: orientalism, the discourse on hijab, female genital mutilation, Israel/Palestine, the war on terror, and (neo)colonialism. I can categorize the impact of these classes on student learning experience around three themes: Orientalism, Gender and Sexuality, and War and Trauma. In the following paragraphs I want to briefly explain how I approach these themes in class while also always staying mindful of the principles of Universal Design for Learning in the strategies for bringing these topics to class. I focus more specifically on UDL strategies when discussing the third criterion.

### **Orientalism:**

This theme is discussed thoroughly in my Islam and Feminism class but touched upon regularly in all my other classes. I start by asking students to write down what words come to their mind when they think of Muslim women. Pre-pandemic, the students would write what came to their mind on a piece of paper (their names not included) and leave it on my desk, now they write on the google Jamboard. We go back to this Jamboard in the last day of the class and revisit our answers.

Then I introduce the concept of orientalism with the help of visual material, which are often controversial but thought provoking. Material such as Malek Alloula's [The Colonial Harem](#) and the 19<sup>th</sup> century painting "[The Snake Charmer](#)" by Jean-Léon Gérôme.

We also watch parts of Sut Jhally's (Professor of Communication at the University of Massachusetts Amherst) Documentary [Edward Said – On Orientalism](#). Jhally's documentary links the concept of orientalism to the current issues of race and identity. I encourage the students to explore this connection further and to think of examples of orientalism in contemporary cultural products. In their group and class discussion, reflection papers, D2L discussions, and individual emails to me I often see a pattern of students drawing connections between the concept and their personal experiences. It helps that I also use more contemporary examples such as Cardi B's "[Bodak Yellow](#)," and Lady Gaga's "[Aura](#)", leaked initially as "[Burqa](#)". These examples provide the students with instances of how the orient is presented as a place of fantasy and desire, and how the Muslim woman-specifically the hijabi woman, becomes simultaneously the object of desire and the subject of (neo)colonial freedom missions.

### **Gender and Sexuality:**

My main goal in teaching the courses "Islam and Feminism" and "Sexuality and Desire in Islam" is to show the complexity and intertwined nature of issues of religion, power, and representation.

When I walk into the first session of any of these classes and start introducing myself, I can see the anticipating questions behind the students' eyes: is she going to be an apologist, blaming it all on colonization and imperialism? Or is she going to blame it all on Islam and the Muslim cultures and be a native informant? I understand their suspicions. After all, what the representation of the "orient" in the aforementioned videos as samples of our contemporary culture has led us to see is, that the Muslim woman as an object of fantasy and desire (Bodak Yellow) or the subject of violence and oppression (Aura-Burqa) is oppressed by Islam and Muslim men and is in need of saving. Central to the US invasion of Afghanistan was the rhetoric of saving Afghan women from the Taliban. And in analysing that pretext, Lila Abu-Lughod posed the question "[Do Muslim Women Need Saving?](#)"

This is an article we read in class. The conversation around it has always been vibrant and interesting with at least some of the students in each class pointing out to the advantages that the occupation has had for Afghan women and how the US occupation finally gave them a "say" in things. We look at statistics provided by the [UN](#), and other organizations to test these claims.

Closely connected to the rhetoric of salvation and the Muslim women is the fetishization of hijab. As I mentioned above, the representation of the Muslim women in the West continues into contemporary times. For students to understand the complex social, political, religious, and identity context of hijab, I found it best to supplement the

readings with visuals. We have the rhetoric of the “veiled unpressed women” at the heart of [US’s discourse](#) surrounding the War on Terror, and then we see how the rhetoric slowly but surely switches into [hijab as a fashion](#) item of haute couture when new affluent markets of some Muslim countries become the focus.

The complexity of the discourse on hijab is perhaps nowhere as pronounced as when it comes to discussions on Iran, where hijab is compulsory by state law. Last year, 2 weeks into our “Islam and Feminism” class, the “Women, Life, Freedom” revolutionary movement in Iran started. Iranian women protesting state oppression started burning their hijabs in the streets of Tehran and other cities in Iran. For every theoretical text that we read in the class, we could see examples in real time. The volume of the state violence that Iranians were facing (and continue to face) was incomprehensible and I admit that this was the hardest class I have taught so far. I have friends and family in Iran, and as some of them were active in the streets, they also graciously shared messages and observations with my class. Teaching as empathy-activism reached a new level for me in this class. I believe it had a profound effect on the students and their understanding of the subject matter and its urgency in our time.

We start the term by orientalism to understand our own positionality in a Western country and in Western academy. What happens in the course of the term is that by recognizing our own positionality towards the “other” and learning the “other’s” context and listening to the diverse voices of Muslim women we come to see the uses of Islam as a construct for both the West and the Islamic societies/states. We walk away from the binary of cultural relativism (It’s their culture, we can’t judge them)/ cultural imperialism (Such backwards practices! We must stop it!) and see how social justice is a collective responsibility, and the prerequisite of it is empathy and mutual respect.

### **War and Trauma:**

The Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), the US and NATO invasion of Afghanistan (2003), The US/ UK invasion of Iraq (2003), The Iranian revolution (1979), the green movement of Iran (2009) the Arab uprising that started in Tunisia and swiped over north Africa (2011), the Syrian civil war (2011)...there is no shortage of traumatic events in contemporary SWANA (Southwest Asia and North Africa), and there is literature produced on these topics both in the original languages of the SWANA region as well as by Muslim diaspora.

There are two major aspects to this theme, that while very difficult in teaching are also exactly the points where empathy, critical thinking and learning happen: The first is dealing with students from opposing sides of a conflict being present in the same class, and the second is talking about torture and terror that immediately follows any discussion on texts that are related to the US war on Terror. A major point being the complex issue of the graphic imagery of the texts, as well as actual pictures of for example Abu Ghraib prison.

On the first issue, it is very common to have students from various sides of these conflicts present in my literature classes. Take the Iran-Iraq war for example. With myself being of Iranian background there is a complexity when students of Iraqi background are present. Similarly, when reading literature from Arab countries that have complicated and contentious relationships with Iran. The approach is always empathy-first and an emphasis on understanding the human experience of the catastrophic events. Once more it starts in the syllabus: choosing texts that emphasise the human experience of an event, and distancing from the nationalist or political propaganda rhetoric put forward by the relevant states.

The second issue regarding the images of war or of torture. I do show clips of documentary nature when it comes to war, however it is my ethical choice not to show any images that involves the killing or torture of a person or groups of people. I think through reading the novels and stories, students make deep connections with characters and their lives. Showing graphic images does not add anything to their sense of empathy.

I tell students that sharing and looking at images of death and torture is a reproduction of the violence done on those bodies. Explaining the choice of not showing graphic images often brings up one of the most difficult to navigate discussions. In this age of Instagram, TikTok and short clips where visuals rule, speaking of the ethics of sharing graphic images bring about very heated debates in the classroom. The discussions are energy consuming to navigate, yet I think that it would be a disservice to the students and their learning experience if I avoid the theme of Trauma in Contemporary Muslim literatures. Given how the last two War and Trauma classes that I have taught have nominated me for the Students Union teaching excellence awards, I think that the students also appreciate the learning experience.

**Award Criterion 2:** Creates equitable, inclusive, and accessible pathways to learning and removes barriers within a formal or informal learning environment, that have been, and continue to be, encountered by equity deserving persons, including women, Indigenous peoples, visible minority persons and racialized persons, persons with disabilities, and LGBTQ2S+ persons.

My first strategy in this regard is creating courses based on students' needs. I created the course "Sexuality and Desire in Islam" specifically because of the increasing number of Queer Muslim students that attended my courses and wanted to learn more about the historical and theoretical matters around queer Muslim lives in various Muslim cultures. I created "Muslim Women's Literature" specifically because students wanted to learn more about Women's literature written in the original languages of the SWANA region as opposed to diaspora literature.

I have seen how more and more students are taking my courses in Gender and Sexuality Studies, and Muslim Cultures simultaneously in the same term, and while courses in each program can be taken individually, I have managed to make connection between the material in courses so that students who take for example both my "Islam and Feminism" class and "Muslim Women's Literature" in the same term, will benefit from synergies and cross-over themes.

My second strategy is to give students the option to incorporate their own lived experience and positionality into their learning process. For instance, in my literature classes, the students can write or produce audiovisual and artistic material about the texts discussed. They can also take the main issues discussed in class and apply it to a text that they particularly resonate with. For example, in my "Women's Literature of the Global South" which I teach in the School of Languages, Linguistics and Cultures, the students read a variety of texts written by women from South America, to Southwest Asia, to Africa, to East Asia. If a student can find thematic and theoretical relationship between the texts we read and a text outside the syllabus that they feel better connected to, then they are encouraged to pick that external text for their final project. It has been a very positive experience, not just because the students often pursue what they most connect with, but also it is a learning experience for me as an instructor as I learn about texts, experiences, and artwork that I was not familiar with before. Through this I also learn more about the students and their interests, and this enables me to further diversify my courses and improve them.

My third strategy involves applying the principles of Universal Design for Learning in every aspect of the course, from syllabus to the ways that student learning is evaluated. More on this in the next section.

**Award Criterion 3:** Demonstrates inclusive, equitable, respectful, and diverse teaching and learning practices.

My strategy: I design all my courses with the three principles of Universal Design for Learning in mind: Representation, Action and Expression, and Engagement.

- 1) Strategies for providing multiple means of Representation: a) It starts in the syllabus. The contents are by diverse writers that represent many backgrounds and perspectives. All classes I teach deal with difficult and sensitive topics and the diversity of approaches in discussing these topics is important; b) most of the readings and material for the classes are offered through direct link to Open Educational Resources (OER) or other resources freely available to students. It is important to me that students who struggle economically are not falling behind because they cannot afford textbooks. In literature classes where we read novels, I often have extra copies of the staple texts that students can borrow from me. The students are also allowed to use the audio version of the books as it is a better option for some neurodiverse students. c) when possible, the material is presented through relevant video, podcast episodes, and music; and d) There is always PowerPoint slides for each class which are uploaded to D2L.
- 2) Strategies for providing multiple means of Action and Expression: I give students the choice for the mode to present what they comprehend and demonstrate their skills. They always have the traditional options of standard tests or writing an essay- whichever is applicable in their class. But they are given the option to present multimedia essays, creative work, or take tests individually or in groups. In these times of Covid, the deadlines for assignments have been very flexible.
- 3) Strategies for providing multiple means of Engagement: My classes involve multiple ways of engagement: each class starts with an introduction to the material and our goal for that day, then I follow with presenting the students with multiple questions regarding the material, which they discuss in groups. If the student is not comfortable in group discussion for any reason, they are encouraged to email me their thoughts. Each class also has a discussion forum on D2L where students can share their thoughts and questions with other classmates. Given how the classes I teach are highly influenced by what is happening in the world everyday, students often connect the class material and discussion to real world affairs and discuss them in the forum. Every few sessions if the forum discussions require it, we bring those discussions to class and let students present their arguments and ask their questions. The students are also provided with rubrics for assignments so that they know what is expected of them regarding each assignment. When they submit assignments through D2L they are provided with feedback in the boxes next to their submission.

**Award Criterion 4:** Recognized as someone that inspires meaningful change within the teaching and learning community.

As a teaching faculty, I am in a special position in the intersection of teaching Gender and Sexuality Studies and Muslim Cultures. Although teaching the sensitive and often controversial topics that I teach is very challenging and at times even dangerous, I believe that I am very privileged to be in this position. I use this privilege in favour of empathy activism.

I am known as someone who inspires meaningful change in teaching and learning community. In my 4 years at the University of Calgary, I have won the Student Union Award for teaching excellence three times (I was on parental leave for 1 year). I have been nominated by more than one class in a single term.

I am also regularly invited for lectures and workshops by student organizations and Iranian community groups in Canada and Europe to talk about the various topics I teach in the classes at the University of Calgary. These talks are often in English, but sometimes in my native Persian to make the knowledge accessible to Persian speakers in Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan.

Most recently and following the start of the “Women, Life, Freedom” revolutionary movement in Iran, I was invited by the university of Saskatchewan to give a talk on the topic in a panel that consisted of 2 more Iranian Canadian and Iranian American scholars. When I arrived in Saskatoon, the organizers informed me that the community tensions are so high that due to security concerns they were thinking of cancelling the event the night

before. They told me that given what they knew of me they hoped that I could bring down the tension. When I entered the auditorium of the event, some community members belonging to ethnically marginalized groups were there and were visibly upset. One approached me to say how disheartened he was at the general rhetoric that seemed to overlook them. I told him that I understand his concern and that he can ask any question regarding these issues after my talk. As is my scholarly conviction, and my firm belief in Empathy Activism, I had already prepared a talk that focused on the sacrifices and resistance methods of the most vulnerable and marginalized ethnic and gender groups in Iran. By the end of my talk the tensions had disappeared, and a very robust but kind and constructive Q and A session followed. I have been asked to go back in late September 2023 to give an educational talk regarding the history of Iranian women's schools.

One of the most interesting experiences related to my role as an educator was when I was contacted by the principal of an all-girls high school in Japan. He had heard me talk on CBC Radio about my work, and asked me to give a talk about Iranian women's movement for their students through zoom. Preparing this talk was a new challenge in my Empathy Activism philosophy and one of the most rewarding experiences as an educator for me. The talk had to be 1) in very simple English as the students were non-native speakers in the process of advancing their English language skills; they were also very young and not quite familiar with events and concepts that university level students often are; and 2) placed in the context of the global youth culture so that students could understand, connect, and empathize.

After the talk, the principal emailed me again and said that some of their teachers were interested to know more about the topic, but "alas those most keen on the content do not have the language ability to keep up," so I suggested to send them the script of my talk and the slides, and some online resources. He gladly agreed and said that they had already set up a date for another session to discuss the talk, what they had learned, and what they liked to know more about.

This past summer (2023) I have been awarded the Faculty of Arts Fellowship in Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility for my proposal to create a course on Women, Life, Freedom, with the help of undergrad students at UCalgary. The goal is to make the course available through social media to everyone for free, but with people in Iran and Afghanistan being our specific target audience. I am currently planning different sections of this course with the help of academics and artists in the larger Iranian diaspora community.

### **3) Evidence based on the perspective of others**

#### **Awards:**

During my time at the University of Calgary, the first two years as a sessional, I have been nominated for the Student Union Teaching Excellence Award 4 times and won it 3 times. I was on parental leave in the academic year 2021-2022. In 2019-2020 and 2022-2023 academic years I was nominated by more than one class for this award.

2022-2023 Teaching Excellence Award

2020-2021 Nominated for Teaching Excellence Awards

2019-2020 Teaching Excellence Award,

2018-2019 Teaching Excellence Award (Honorable Mention)



#### **Student Evaluations:**

Please note that the USRIs and the teaching evaluation format at the university of Calgary changed after 2018. Since the start of the pandemic not enough students take part in online evaluations to make it meaningful enough to be released to the instructor. I have included two of them here.

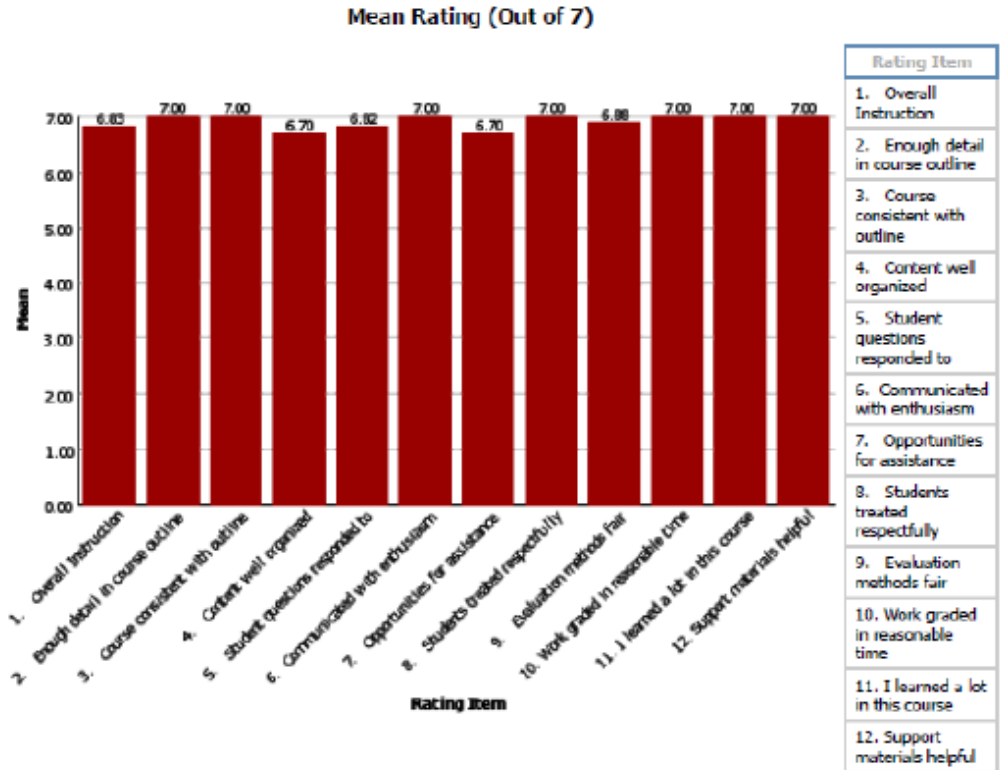
## ALMC 359 LEC 01-Literature of Muslim Societies-Fall 2018

Number of times the instructor has taught this course (last 10 years including the current term): 1

USRI enrolment: 22

Valid instruments received: 12

Response rate: 54.55%



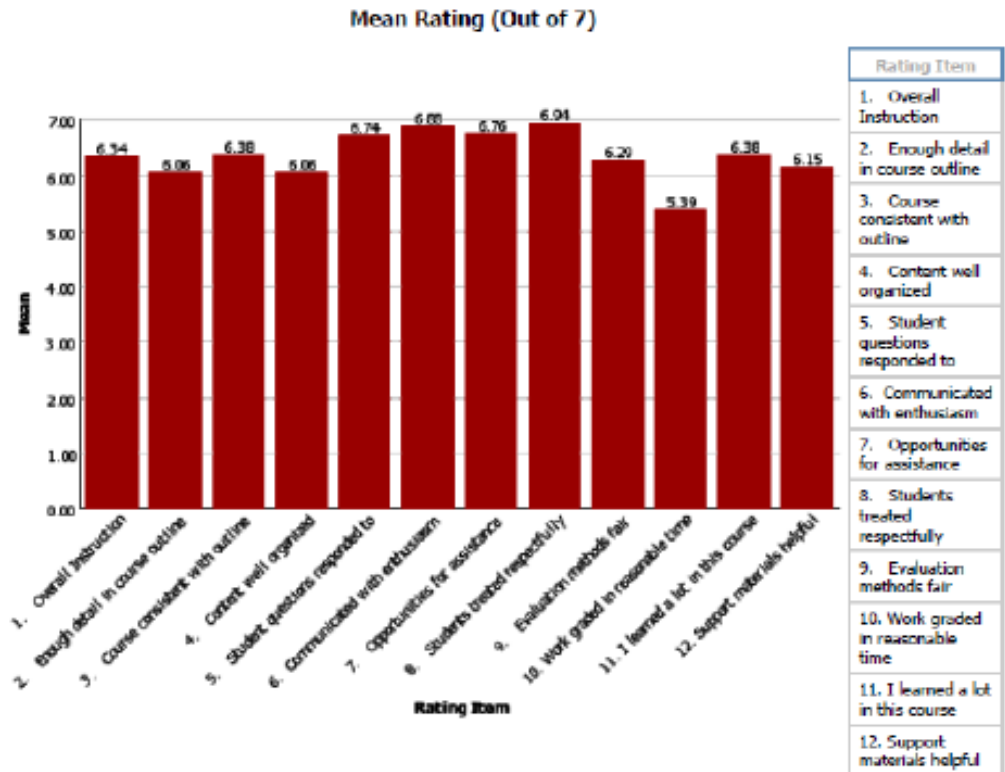
## WMST 303 LEC 1-Islam and Feminism-Winter 2018

Number of times the instructor has taught this course (last 10 years including the current term): 1

USRI enrolment: 44

Valid instruments received: 34

Response rate: 77.27%



**Students' Support Correspondence:** Shared here with the students' permission. I am only sharing the emails of those students who have graduated, or who no longer have classes with me.

Sent on May 23, 2020

Dear Dr. & forever brilliant Professor Neyshabouri,

I have enrolled in and am currently taking the last two courses for my degree, meaning I will unfortunately be unable to enjoy anymore of the wonderful classes you teach. I'm sad that we did not get a proper hug goodbye. I'm sad that I won't be able to enjoy more of your classes, and happy for but also really jealous of the students that will get to learn the most epic life changing content to be offered at U of C. But, thank you for everything. There's no non-cheesy way of me saying this but you and your classes have changed my life and become a beautiful part of my journey. And I'm so so grateful that I was lucky enough to observe your contagious passion for your field, and learn things that I never conceived would become so integral to my life and identity, and offer me so much meaning and fulfillment in learning about. I think I've talked about (anyone who, really will listen to me) one of your courses and yourself as a professor and person at least once to everyone in my life, but for my close friends I've said enough that they could probably describe who you are (not in a creepy way, more on the admiration, and respect I have for you and the lasting impact the courses have had on me 😊). I've told my friends who graduated before me about yourself and the class, who wished they also had the chance to take these courses, and who like me fundamentally agree that this type of subject matter is so so difficult to replicate and attain outside of university. I still worry about what I'm going to do, and how I can remain immersed in this space beyond university. Thank you for being a Rockstar example of following your passions, choosing to be just and better than you were yesterday, and an overall feminist queen. Thank you for being a kind listening ear with a willingness to understand and support other young Muslim women of colour struggling with the intersectionality and complexities of being someone from that group. Thank you for helping me feel understood and helping me grow throughout your courses, and allowing me to discover my love and passion for this subject matter, and become more confident in writing and less afraid to express my thoughts. Most of all, thank you for teaching me and showing me that I have a duty to analyze, and a right to question anything that doesn't make sense or sit well with me. My friends just yesterday asked me what the most memorable moment of my university experience was, and I said that by far the one that to this day, and I believe forever will have a lasting impact on me was one of the Islam and Feminism lectures. In that lecture we happened upon the discussion of the Muslims belief that among the names and attributes of God, one of them is "The Most Just." That was one of the most empowering moments I have experienced. This reminds me to fearlessly question anything that is said by any person (mostly a man, but occasionally a woman who has internalized the patriarchy), that seems wrong, unjust, or doesn't sit well with me. It reminds me that I have a right to question and understand anything, specifically when it comes to religion especially given the power religion has over people, and the injustice that has occurred in the name of it. I will miss you, your energy, enthusiasm and passion, and your excellent classes beyond measure or bounds, and I am eternally grateful that I was fortunate to have my paths cross with yours. I'm happy for you, and looking forward to seeing the many more lives and accomplishments you will attain in your professional and personal journeys, and I'm looking forward to continue to see you blossom and shine as you do. Thank you.

P.S. I cried a little writing this.

P.P.S. if its okay, I would love to keep in touch.

P.P.P.S. Eid Mubarak! Hope you and your loved ones have a safe, and enjoyable Eid.

Kind Regards,

Zoonee

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Sent on February 17, 2021

Dear Dr. Safaneh,



Now that I have graduated, I just wanted to write this email to let you know how much I appreciated your classes. After the first week of my ALMC class with you, I knew that this would be my personal standard for classes going forward in my own pursuit of education. You curated an expansive list of different perspectives, to make sure that you covered all the unique cultures within the Middle East, even though this was not required. However, this was just one of the many reasons why I believe you should be seen as a role model for your fellow colleagues. I really appreciated how you consistently showed up to class ready to not only engage with us as your students, but to connect with us on a human level. I will never forget the day I was walking with you from our WMST class to our ALMC class, and I opened up about my struggles regarding whether I would be good enough to pursue a career in law. You looked me dead in the eye and said "Mustafa, your attention to detail, your engagement in class, and your critical thinking would make you more than suited in the legal world.", you quickly followed it up with a joke regarding future legal advice you would want, as we were nearing the classroom. As a lost 4th year first-generation Kurdish-Canadian those words stuck with me and impacted me in ways that are not quantifiable. Furthermore, I know that I am not the only former or current student who feels this way about you. Upon learning I was Kurdish, you took it upon yourself to include a book regarding the Kurdish struggle in your next semester's class, and it made me feel like my experience mattered. Kurdish people have a hard time advocating for themselves because of how spread out the diaspora is, so to have someone who wasn't even Kurdish advocate for my people also had a profound effect on me. Your classes were always brimming with the upmost enthusiasm, and every class I've taken has brought so many students out of their shells and made the classroom a fun experience. The critical thinking skills I gained through class discussions are invaluable. Your meticulous selection of class materials allowed students from all walks of life to engage, and they open the horizon for students to grow their intellectual understanding, while sharing their opinion in a safe space. Nothing in your classes was cookie-cutter or basic, everything was done with a purpose to promote academic learning through unique and original ways. I was always amazed at your ability to engage the entire classroom consistently! I think you are an intellectual fertilizer to any kind of student in the classroom. I hope to have the same impact on the people around me, that you do on a consistent basis inside and outside the classroom.

Sincerely,

Mustafa Said

#### 4) Reflective summary statement

A reflection statement that provides a summary of the context for your contributions, the impact of these contributions to the teaching and learning environment, and future areas for growth.

My commitment to Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility principles permeates my curriculum design, pedagogical approaches, and interactions with students. It has led me to a philosophy of inclusive teaching which I call "Empathy Activism." This model of educational philosophy not only values and respects EDIA, but sees the classroom, in both content and delivery as where EDIA should be applied. Hence, teaching becomes activism.

The courses that I have designed such as "Islam and Feminism," "Sexuality and Desire in Islam," "Literature of War and Trauma in Muslim Societies," "Literature of Muslim Diaspora," and "Literature of Muslim Women," have provided students with the unique opportunity to explore, understand and critically engage with multifaceted narratives and discourses. By presenting a wealth of perspectives within these domains, I have encouraged students to question their preconceptions, challenge dominant narratives, and understand the value of diversity in the pursuit of knowledge.

My work within the Muslim Cultures program and the Gender and Sexuality Studies program has offered students a unique interdisciplinary approach to learning. By bridging together these two fields, I've provided a platform for

students to explore the intersectionality of gender, sexuality, and culture within a Muslim context. The resulting dialogue not only enriches the academic discourse but also reflects the lived experiences of many students, promoting a sense of belonging and validating diverse identities. The popularity of these courses together with my public engagement has also had an emotional cost for me. I have been the target of online trolls, rape and death threats by anonymous users, to the point that I have quit public online platforms due to concerns for myself and my family's safety. Although I have so far refused interviews with Persian speaking radio and television channels (public television based outside Iran such as BBC Persian) due to the scope of trolling that I may have to suffer afterwards, I have continued to present my work in academic and local settings, as well as on Canadian media. I also continue to present my work in Persian in more targeted online channels, specifically academic channels with interested audience from Iran and Afghanistan.

In the past, as part of a "Calgary Institute for Humanities Interdisciplinary Working Group" with colleagues from Communication and Media Studies, and Haskayne School of business, I worked to explore the "Ethics and Politics of Social Media" when it came to social movements shaped around social justice and equity. As part of our interdisciplinary group activity, we had an essay contest for undergraduate students exploring the relevant topics. More recently I have won the Faculty of Arts fellowship in Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility. In line with my continuous commitment to EDIA, I will use the funds and opportunities offered by this fellowship to hire equity seeking undergraduate students for the creation of a course on the Women, Life, Freedom revolutionary movement. The goal is to look at the history as well as the broader regional and intersectional feminist and justice-seeking influences of this revolutionary movement. In accordance with my empathy activism philosophy and with keeping accessibility to knowledge for equity seeking communities in the foreground, the course material will be available for free to anyone interested. We will be making it specifically available on platforms that are easier to access for people in Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

One thing that I hope to accomplish once the course creation for "Women, Life Freedom" is done by the end of the next academic year, is to start on writing a course book on the topic. To recruit help on research for the course book, as well as to create opportunities for undergraduate students in the SWANA region to become familiarized with Western academy, I applied for Mitacs Globalink Research Internship. My project was approved, and I hope to start working with two students next summer.

More recently myself, two colleagues from the department of computer science, and one colleague from Haskayne school of business have been awarded a Transdisciplinary Scholarship Connector Grant for the project of "Understanding the Generative AI Disruption." My role in this team is to explore the significance of social and cultural dimensions of generative AI and highlights how AI impacts minorities and marginalized communities specifically in discussions around algorithmic bias, cultural representation, and its broader impacts on social justice, equity, and accessibility.

The individual award for inclusive excellence's criteria indicates that examples for an individual award can be a) Designing a course and learning experiences using Universal Design for Learning principles, b) Creating inclusive and anti-racist learning environments, and c) Ensuring diverse and multiple perspectives are included in course content. In this application I hope to have demonstrated that my work matches all of the three criteria. In addition, I have aimed to demonstrate that my "Empathy Activism" approach has tangibly influenced the broader community. Finally, the fellowships and grants I have secured for upcoming projects show my continuous commitment to EDIA, and my potential for future growth.