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<th><strong>Title</strong></th>
<th>Communication education in the International Islamic university, Malaysia (IIUM) : responding to media needs in the Muslim world.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td><strong>Rights</strong></td>
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Communication Education In The International Islamic University, Malaysia (IIUM) : Responding To Media Needs In The Muslim World

By

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&

S Shaukat Ali
COMMUNICATION EDUCATION IN THE
INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY, MALAYSIA (IIUM):
RESPONDING TO MEDIA NEEDS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

YUSUF HUSSAIN *
S. SHAUKAT ALI **

INTRODUCTION

The International Islamic University, Malaysia was established in 1983 in order to materialize the aspirations and hopes of the Muslim Ummah (World Muslim Community) expressed in the First World Conference on Muslim Education held in Makkah al-Mukarramah, 1977. In this sense, IIUM is a unique centre of learning where knowledge is regarded as a trust from the creator of earths and heavens - the Almighty Allah (swt). The basic philosophy of this institution can best be translated in the words of its President, Dato' Sri Anwar Ibrahim, "The International Islamic University, Malaysia is founded upon a renewed awareness of the perennial value of the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah and is dedicated to the re-orientation of the Ummah and Mankind."

The University, consequently, stands for a holistic approach in which revealed knowledge (ma'arif al wahy) plays a dynamic role in the development and production of knowledge based on the Islamic values. The University regards this exercise, the quest for Islamized Knowledge which encompasses both professional and ethical excellence in various fields of human life.

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At present, the University offers 13 programmes of study leading to the degrees of Bachelor of Human Sciences, such as Communication, Arabic Language and Literature, English Language and Literature, History and Civilization, Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage, Philosophy, Political Science, Psychology and Sociology and Anthropology, Business Administration, Economics and Laws. It also offers programmes leading to the Bachelor's degrees in Business Administration, Economics, Laws, Engineering in Computer and Information Systems and Engineering in Mechatronics. Apart from the Bachelor's degree programmes, ITUM offers postgraduate and professional degree programmes in 13 different Social Science areas.

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

The Department of Communication was established on the 1st of July 1990 as one of the departments in the Kulliyyah (Faculty) of the Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences.

The establishment of the Department of Communication in the ITUM was an outcome of the realization that communication plays a vital role in the life of the Muslims. The Holy Qur'an specifically states that Muslims are the best nation ever evolved and that we are enjoined to invite "to ma'aruf and forbid munkar." To play this role effectively, the Ummah has to equip themselves with the knowledge as well as to master the skills and technology of modern communication.
OBJECTIVES OF THE DEPARTMENT

The Department has six objectives

1. To produce communication professionals who are endowed with iman and taqwa, committed to the Islamic way of life; knowledgeable in communication concepts, principles and theories; skillful in utilizing various communication technologies; and able and willing to infuse Islamic values in media and other professional organizations.

2. To produce graduates who have a sound academic and professional groundings to pursue specialized study at the post graduate level.

3. To conduct research in different areas relevant to the field of communication.

4. To provide consultancy services in communication training, research and media production.

5. To produce audio-visual and video materials to support teaching, training and da’wah work.

6. To conduct short courses and in-service training in Communication.
THE MUSLIM WORLD

The Muslim world consists of forty eight countries where Muslims form the majority of the population. These countries stretch from Morocco to Indonesia. All are members of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC).

The number of Muslims is estimated to be more than 1.5 billion. Two third of them live in OIC countries and about one third live countries where Muslims are minorities.

The Muslims belong to about 300 ethnic groups speaking diverse languages. The largest ethnic groups are the Arabs, numbering about 135 millions. There are also the Indonesians, the Pakistanis, the Turks, the Iranians, the Kurds, the Hausan, and the Berbers. All are bound by their faith in Allah, the one and only God.

MEDIA IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

The Muslim world today posses their own media which provide both information and entertainment. In all the OIC countries the Government is directly or indirectly in control of the media, both electronic and print.
Media ownership is comparatively low, especially for print media. Television ownership is confined to the middle class and to people living in cities and towns. Only radio ownership is widespread.

The media in the OIC countries share the following characteristics:

1. Dependence on the West for its news and information needs as well as for its entertainment programs.
2. Sensational reportings on sex, rapes and obscenities.
3. Bias reportings on the Islamic movements opposing the ruling powers.
4. Lack of reportings on science, technology and commerce.
5. Lack of quality articles, features and programs on Islam.
6. Lack of quality reportings championing the poor and the disadvantaged groups.
8. Glorification of expensive and high-class life styles.
10. Lack of quality editorials championing the mission of Islam.
THE MEDIA NEEDS

The media needs of OIC countries could be summed up as follows:

1. The need to free itself from over dependence on Western news sources.
2. The need to free itself from dependence on Western television programs.
3. The need to free itself from Western values and media ethics.
4. The need to free itself from Western concepts of news values.
5. The need to free itself from Western concepts of a good advertisement.
6. The need for publishers and editors to free themselves from fear of antagonising the West when championing the Islamic cause.
7. The need to provide relevant and useful information and entertainment to the readers, listeners and viewers.

RESPONDING TO MEDIA NEEDS

In developing the academic program of the Department we give serious consideration to the media needs of Islamic countries. At present the University admits students from all over the Islamic world including countries such as the United States, Russia, Britain, China and Australia where Muslims form the minority.
The Muslim countries has been following the Western trends, even if they are not consistent to their value systems. We felt that influx of indecent communication contents via powerful waves, beams and screens, have also proven successful in shaping individual behaviour patterns and in affecting traditional cultural setups. Within the media and information rich nations, the issues of obscenity, distrust, pornography, fabrication of truth, cultural invasion, disinformation, and the issue of freedom and responsibility have become the growing concerns. In such a situation, to our view mankind needs to look into the phenomenon with a new approach in order to change the "self-serving" communication order into a "human-serving" communication system. But what would be the starting point? The starting point lies in the commitment and understanding that human beings are not the economic beings. Human being in nature are ethical being- are good and have worth and occupy a unique position and status in the whole system of creation. And all communication systems and processes are the outcome of human communicative ability.

The Department offers specialisation in three areas i.e. Print Media, Public Relations and Organizational Communication. Students may also opt to take a general, non-specialised degree in communication.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS

An undergraduate student of the Department is required to take at least 130 credit hours of undergraduate courses divided as follows:

- Communication courses: 54 credits
- Introductory Human Science Courses: 15 credits
- Elective courses: 27 credits
- Minor courses: 27 credits
- Language courses:
  - Malaysian student: 10 credits
  - International student: 8 credits

COMMUNICATION COURSES

Of the 54 credit hours of communication courses, 15 credit hours comprise of core courses. The courses are:

- COMM 1010: Introduction to Mass Communication (3 credits)
- COMM 1120: Introductory Statistics for Communication Research (3 credits)
- COMM 2310: Foundations for Communication in Quran and Sunnah (3 credits)
- COMM 3110: Communication Theory (3 credits)
- COMM 4050: Communication Research Method I (3 credits)
For their specialized area of specialization courses the students have to take 15 credit hours of the following:

COMM 1030 : Computer Skills for Communicators  1 credit
COMM 2210 : Reporting and Writing for Mass Media I  3 credits
COMM 2211 : Reporting and Writing for Mass Media II  3 credits
COMM 3250 : Communication Law and Ethics  3 credits
COMM 4310 : Publication Production  3 credits
COMM 4610 : Advanced Reporting and Writing for Mass Media  3 credits
COMM 3998 : Practicum  3 credits

Besides these, students have to take another 24 credit hours of Communication courses chosen from the following:

COMM 1110 : Media and Society  3 credits
COMM 2020 : Managerial Communication : Principles and Practices  3 credits
COMM 2220 : Introduction to Organizational Communication  3 credits
COMM 2040 : Interpersonal Communication  3 credits
COMM 2050 : Intercultural Communication  3 credits
COMM 2220 : Introduction to Organizational Communication  3 credits
COMM 2510 : Principles of Advertising  3 credits
COMM 3510 : Principles of Public Relations  3 credits
COMM 4410 : Public Opinion & Persuasion  3 credits
COMM 4460 : Thinking Techniques for Communicators  3 credits
ELECTIVE COURSES

Students have to take 27 credit hours of courses from other Departments and Kulliyyahs chosen from the following:

MGT 2010: Principles and Practices of Management 3 credits
MGT 4020: Personnel Management 3 credits
MGT 4110: Organizational Behaviour 3 credits
MKTG 3010: Marketing Principles 3 credits
INFO 2010: Information Technology 3 credits
INFO 3010: Management Information System 3 credits
PHIL 3110: Modern MUslim Thinkers 3 credits
PSCI 3510: Communication and World Order 3 credits
PSYC 1020: General Psychology 3 credits
PSYC 2210: Psychology of Personality 3 credits
PSYC 2410: Social Psychology 3 credits
PSYC 3550: Industrial and Organizational Psychology 3 credits
PSYC 4620: Theories of Motivation 3 credits
PSYC 4650: Psychology of Communication 3 credits
LE 3060: Effective Public Speaking 2 credits

Other courses could also be taken on the recommendation of the academic advisor.

MINOR COURSES

Students opting for a specialization in Print Media, Public Relations, Organizational Communication or General Communication are required to take 27 credit hours in Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage.
Students are advised to take some of these courses in Arabic in order to complete the University requirement that every student in the Human Sciences has to complete 20% - 40% of his total credit hours in courses taught in Arabic.

The courses should be chosen from the following:

IRKH 1010 : Science of Al-Quran 1  
IRKH 1020 : Science of Hadith 1  
IRKH 1110 : Islamic Da’wah  

Group A

Two of the following:

IRKH 1120 : Islamic Aqidah  
IRKH 2110 : Islamic Ethics  
IRKH 2150 : Introduction to Fiqh  
IRKH 3110 : Contemporary Islamic Thoughts  

Group B

Two of the following:

IRKH 1050 : Biography of the Prophet  
IRKH 1210 : Man in the Qur’an and Sunnah  
IRKH 1220 : The Early Ummah  
IRKH 1230 : Tawhid and the Methodology of Human Sciences  

Two more courses are to be selected from the list of IRKH courses after consultation with the advisor.
LANGUAGE COURSES

Malaysian students have to take 10 credit hours and International students have to take 8 credit hours of the following:

LE 3010 : Advanced English I 2 credits
LE 3014 : Advanced English II 2 credits
LE 3015 : Advanced English for Human Sciences 2 credits
LE 3016 : Advanced English Writing 2 credits
LQ 1010 : Elementary Arabic I 0 credit
LQ 1020 : Elementary Arabic II 0 credit
LQ 2010 : Intermediate Arabic II 0 credit
LQ 3011 : Advanced Arabic I 0 credit
LQ 3021 : Advanced Arabic II 0 credit
LM 1010 : Bahasa Malaysia for Foreign Students 0 credit
LM 1011 : Bahasa Malaysia for Foreign Students 0 credit
LM 2010 : Bahasa Malaysia for Malaysian Students 1 credit
LM 2011 : Bahasa Malaysia for Malaysian Students 1 credit

PRACTICUM

It is important to note at this point that undergraduate students specializing in Print Media, Public Relations and Organizational Communication are required to work with and are inducted into the relevant organization for a period of 2 months, usually during the last two semesters.
During this period of internship training, students get familiar with the working of their respective field and also learn practical know how in the profession. Apart from the internship training, the same students are also required to publish their own magazine as house journal which include at least basic understanding of how to write and publish material in the areas of their specialization. For this purpose, the students have a complete computer lab.... they use for computer skills including composing and page-making of their own magazine.

EVALUATION

The first batch of our students (29 in number) graduated on 21st August 1994. Therefore it is too early to evaluate the success of our programs in producing skill media practitioners of "taqwa". However reports from the media organizations that employed them are very encouraging.

FUTURE PLANS

The Department intends to include Photo Journalism, Advertising and the Electronic Media as areas of specialization within next two to three academic years. Home work in this direction has already been done.
CONCLUSION

In order to respond to the media needs in the Muslim world, Department of Communication, IIUM was established under the concept that all communication systems and processes are basically the outcome of human communicating ability. Communication media are only the carriers of what an individual or a group of people perceives, produces, transmits, and receives. To our view, existing communication system and contents are heavily influenced by the secular and crude materialistic views of life. Moreover, prolonged socio-cultural, political, economic and technological suppression has made the Muslims passive followers of the alien secular intellectual culture. Islam is basically different from the secular materialistic civilization, which certainly dominates the present-day world. The two are completely varied in their description and purpose of human life as well as in the fundamentals on which they base such description. Contrary to the crude materialistic secular views, the basic subject of revealed is man, not the machine.

The Department of Communication was established in the same conceptual framework to produce communication professionals who could exert their abilities not only as good professionals but also as God-fearing self-responsible excellent professionals. Its academic and non-academic programmes are also framed with the same view.