

# Awareness of Islam in the Post-9/11 American Workplace: A Study of Educational Instructors' Comprehension

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## Abstract

Political unrest in Islamic nations, worldwide terrorist attacks, and the western media's coverage of these events might be contributing to a distorted and biased perception of Muslims. This article analyzes the responses of vocational college instructors to a nineteen-question survey regarding Islam. It was intended to evaluate the 100 participants' knowledge and understanding of Islam in the aftermath of the 9/11 tragedy. An evaluation of their answers suggested that the majority of them lacked basic knowledge about Islam. Although some of the responses indicated that the instructors would treat Muslim students with sensitivity, only a few understood how to respond to certain classroom situations. The results show that vocational instructors urgently need diversity training programs that focus on the similarities, as opposed to the minor differences, of views and religions. Interpersonal training should address the importance of respecting differences in the workforce by emphasizing professionalism and conflict management techniques. Training implications are presented and explored.

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## Introduction

As institutions of higher education become more diverse, the need for instructors to learn more about our global society's different religions and beliefs becomes imperative. American organizations have done a good job of managing diversity compared to their European counterparts, where about 52% of the companies reported having no diversity management-related policies.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly enough, in Europe "the business case for investing in workforce diversity remains embryonic."<sup>2</sup> The world has become humanity's global backyard as we learn from one another, collaborate, and communicate for work, socialization, and cultural understanding. Education and learning is common ground for all countries and, as a global community of learners, we must think what proactive change needs to occur in order to equip learners for the needs and requirements of a future world.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the fact that most companies are doing something about their employees' diversity, more needs to be done in a proactive manner to prevent the inappropriate and unethical treatment of minorities based on stereotypes, biases, and misinformation. In 2003, class action lawsuits increased by more than 100% and "discrimination lawsuits now rank among the leading types of crises faced by American business leaders."<sup>4</sup> Major companies such as Walmart, Publix, Home Depot, Texaco, Coca-Cola, and Boeing have faced discrimination lawsuits and spent millions of dollars to argue and settle their cases. Furthermore, due to the events of 9/11, religious discrimination has been on the rise and business leaders therefore need to help their companies avoid falling victim to such forms and patterns of harassment.

Workplace discrimination occurs when employers engage in actions, whether deliberate or unintentional, that fundamentally favor one group over another. Managers and business leaders can take preventive actions to make sure that their employees treat each other fairly and with dignity, regardless of their personal religious philosophies. But despite the existence of rules and policies, sometimes even customers are mistreated due to their religious affiliations. No customer or employee wants to be treated differently because of his/her religious beliefs. Furthermore, people of all major religions seem to have similar values, for their ultimate goal is to live peacefully and do good deeds so that they will be happy both here and in the afterlife. Muslims have the same goals. However, a great deal of misinformation about Islam and other religions is spread to people through anger and emotional events associated with war.

## Post-9/11 American Media Coverage

The 9/11 attacks on New York's Twin Towers had a major impact on the lives of thousands of people in the United States and abroad. These horrific events have caused more misinformation about Muslims, since people have a difficult time separating governments and military objectives from religious affiliations. After 9/11, Muslims were used as scapegoats and found themselves caught in the middle of a clash of civilizations.<sup>5</sup> Just because a person or a leader is linked to a specific religious view does not mean that his/her political objectives are the same as others who adhere to the same faith. It should be understood that people associated with al-Qaida and the Taliban express their own views for political reasons and are not representatives of Islam.

Due to a lack of education about Islam, many westerners were confused in the aftermath of 9/11. Instead of making an effort to understand it and the factors and history that have shaped its many modern forms and expressions, American politicians and the media remain obsessed with any and all signs of extremism.<sup>6</sup> For example, President George W. Bush's initial response was to divide the world into good and evil. In the days immediately following this event, he declared a "crusade" against the evil scourge of terrorism. What is sad is that some people now inappropriately associate such terms as *evil* and *terrorism* with Muslims.

The spread of negative perceptions and misinformation about Muslims is not conducive for teamwork and effective diversity management. Therefore, educational institutions and diversity management trainers should include factual information about Islam and other religions in their programs. As vocational colleges become more prevalent and diverse, instructors are expected to learn more about different cultures and beliefs. The growth of the Muslim population in the West has been on the rise as more people become familiar with the concepts. Awareness, knowledge, and understanding are now crucial for success in managing diversity in the classroom. The concept of understanding the other has become critical for instructors who emphasize "professionalism" in each program.

The post-9/11 experiences for vocational college instructors have been challenging due to their limited knowledge of Islam, students with questions and concerns, and personal biases. Some of the most important and controversial questions facing teachers include: (1) What should American students be taught about Islam's role in history? (2) What are its core beliefs, values, and practices? (3) Is it compatible with democracy? (4) What attitudes should students have regarding American and non-American Muslims? (5) Is Islam

a threat to American national security? With animosity, uncertainty, and confusion emerging in classrooms, instructors are faced with questions concerning the very nature of Islam.

## **Research Focus and Methodology**

This century's organizations bring people of diverse religions into one team, department, and/or organization to work side-by-side toward a common purpose. These religiously diverse colleagues are likely to have different beliefs and philosophies influenced by their spiritual upbringing and values. While some of these workers might associate themselves with one religion, others will associate themselves with a second and/or a third. At the same time, many of them are not likely to feel any such affiliations. As such, an understanding of religion in the workplace has become important, especially since it has been estimated that 82% of the world's population follows a religious and spiritual tradition.<sup>7</sup>

The last decade has witnessed a substantial increase in the popular and scholarly interest about religion in the workplace. The need for a spiritual connection to carry over into the workplace is important to many partly because of an ongoing upheaval in organizational structure, which often results in feelings of insecurity regarding one's place in the system. Moreover, as society becomes more fragmented due to the increased pace of change and mobility, it loses its hold on people's lives. In the absence of external societal controls, greater emphasis is now being placed on internal organizational and cultural controls. This appears to have led to a revitalization of religion in the workplace.

It is particularly important for people who perceive themselves as religious or spiritual beings to lead congruent lives by enacting their values in all areas of their lives, because a sense of commitment to the Higher Being leads to being energized through work. It is also about experiencing a real purpose and meaning at work, one that goes beyond a person's salary and performance. This purpose involves people sharing and experiencing some common attachment, attraction, and togetherness with each other within their work unit and the organization as a whole. The importance of the world of work has grown to the point where it has now become the central activity of our lives and a "primary community" for many workers. Therefore, understanding personal religious beliefs and working effectively with the differences is important in today's workplace. Assessing everyone's understanding requires a study of existing knowledge and attitudes toward religions so that proper educational programs can be implemented.

Researchers can use the schema theory to understand how vocational college instructor's schemata would have a direct effect on the instructors' ability to answer questions regarding Islam and to diffuse misconceptions about Islam, one of the world's fastest growing and most dynamic religions. Schema can simply be defined by organizing existing knowledge and providing a foundational framework for future understanding. It is basically an outline, a plan, a diagram, or a systematic arrangement of information perhaps for scientific analysis, interpretation, and decision making. This study's schema is a survey consisting of diverse questions designed to assess the responder's attitude toward Muslims and his/her general knowledge of Islam. A copy of the survey is presented in Appendix A.

This study's most important research questions focused on the participating vocational college instructors' pre-existing knowledge of Islam. Approximately eight years after 9/11 the study's participants, whose educational levels varied from associate's degrees to graduate degrees, completed a nineteen-question survey. The researchers explained that the survey would be thoroughly analyzed and conducted to better understand what they knew about Islam and how to implement continuous diversity training effectively. Instructors understood that the survey answers would be presented to academic administrators and used as additional resources to support diversity training programs for all educational facilitators.

This study proposes the following hypotheses as research statements for analysis and interpretation:

1. Higher educated respondents (those with bachelor and master degrees) will see Muslim students differently because of September 11, 2001.
2. Females will look at the Muslim students differently than males because of September 11, 2001.
3. Terrorism is respected/acceptable in Islam.
4. Muslim women have fewer rights than men.
5. Muslims believe in Jesus.
6. Education is recommended for all Muslims.
7. Knowledge of Islam comes from media and/or news sources.

The survey was distributed to 100 vocational college instructors in California. The instructor's level of education, course of instruction, gender, and ethnicity were identified through a post-questionnaire. Instructors were from various departments: medical assisting (21), pharmacy technician (18), vet-

erinary technician (8), nursing (16), dental assisting (7), criminal justice (15), and graphics (15). Their levels of education were as follows: associate degrees (56), bachelor degrees (35), and master degrees (9). Of the 100 participants, 49 were female and 51 were male. There were 40 Caucasians, 4 African-Americans, 9 Hispanics, 15 East Asians, 13 South Asians, 7 Southeast Asians, 3 Middle Easterners, and 9 Pacific Islanders.

Table 1: Demographic Data from Respondents

Gender	Department	Education	Ethnicity
1 Male (49)	1 Medical Assisting (21)	1 Assoc. degrees (56)	1 Caucasian (40)
2 Female (51)	2 Pharmacy Tech. (18)	2 BA degrees (35)	2 Afr.-Amer. (4)
	3 Veterinary Tech. (8)	3 MA degrees (9)	3 Hispanics (9)
		4 Nursing (16)	4 E. Asians (15)
		5 Dental Assisting (7)	5 S. Asians (13)
		6 Criminal Justice (15)	6 SE. Asian (7)

The survey consisted of multiple choice, true or false, and “yes” or “no” questions. All multiple choice questions had only one correct answer. True or false and “yes” or “no” questions were used simply to determine the instructors’ knowledge of specific topics and issues. All instructors were informed that their participation was anonymous and voluntary.

## Study Results

As can be seen from the analysis presented in tables 2 and 3, the first two predictions are not supported. First, “Higher educated respondents (those with bachelor and master degrees) will see Muslim students differently because of September 11, 2001” is not supported, as there are no statistically significant differences between the groups ( $\alpha$  of  $0.179 > 0.05$ ). This means that a higher level of education did not lessen stereotypes and biases, since respondents with bachelor and master degrees saw students the same way as did those with associate degrees. Overall, in this study, 66% of the respondents said that they do not look at students differently because of 9/11.

Table 2: Crosstabs Analysis by Educational Degree

### 2A - Case Processing Summary

	Cases				Total	
	Valid		Missing		N	%
	N	%	N	%		
Education * Q18	100	90.1%	11	9.9%	111	100.0%

## 2B - Education \* Q18 Cross Tabulation

Count		Q18		
		1	2	Total
Education	1	15	41	56
	2	16	19	35
	3	3	6	9
Total		34	66	100

## 2C - Chi-Square Test

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.441 <sup>a</sup>	2	.179
Likelihood Ratio	3.402	2	.182
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.629	1	.202
N of Valid Cases	100		

a. 1 cells (16.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.06.

## 2D - Symmetric Measures

		Value	Asymp. Std.	Approx.	Approx.
			Error <sup>a</sup>	T <sup>b</sup>	Sig.
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	-.128	.099	-1.280	.203 <sup>c</sup>
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	-.151	.099	-1.513	.134 <sup>c</sup>
N of Valid Cases		100			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

c. Based on normal approximation.

Next, the hypothesis "Females will look at the Muslim students differently because of September 11, 2001" is not supported, as demonstrated by the analysis in table 3 (alpha of 0.571 > 0.05). This means that gender differences did not lessen stereotypes and biases, since both male and female respondents saw students the same way as a result of 9/11. In this study, only 44% of the respondents said that they look at students differently because of 9/11.

Table 3 – Crosstabs Analysis by Gender

## 3A - Case Processing Summary

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Gender * Q18	100	90.1%	11	9.9%	111	100.0%

## 3B - Gender \* Q18 Cross-tabulation

Count	Q18		
	1	2	Total
Gender 1	18	31	49
2	16	35	51
Total	34	66	100

## 3C - Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.320 <sup>a</sup>	1	.571		
Continuity Correction <sup>b</sup>	.126	1	.723		
Likelihood Ratio	.320	1	.571		
Fisher's Exact Test				.674	.361
Linear-by-Linear Association	.317	1	.573		
N of Valid Cases	100				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 16.66.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

## 3D - Symmetric Measures

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error <sup>a</sup>	T <sup>b</sup>	Approx. Sig.
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	.057	.100	.561	.576 <sup>c</sup>
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	.057	.100	.561	.576 <sup>c</sup>
N of Valid Cases		100			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

c. Based on normal approximation.

As can be seen from tables 4 and 4A, the third hypothesis, "Terrorism is respected/acceptable in Islam" is supported, since 90% of the respondents believe that this statement is true. There are statistically significant differences in the responses (alpha of  $0.00 < 0.05$ ). The hypothesis stating that "In Islam women have fewer rights than men" is supported by table 4B, since 86% of the respondents mentioned that this statement is true. There are statistically significant differences in the responses (alpha of  $0.00 < 0.05$ ).



**Table 4 - Test Statistics and Criteria: Pearson Chi-Square Coefficient**

	Q7:	Q9:	Q2:	Q4:	Q19:
	Terrorism	Women	Jesus	Education	Media
Chi-Square	64.000 <sup>a</sup>	51.840 <sup>a</sup>	84.640 <sup>a</sup>	46.240 <sup>a</sup>	64.000 <sup>a</sup>
Df	1	1	1	1	1
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 50.0.

#### *4A – Terrorism is Respected in Islam*

Q7	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
1=True	90	50.0	40.0
2=False	10	0.0	-40.0
Total	100		

#### *4B – Women Have Fewer Rights than Men in Islam*

Q9	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
1=True	86	50.0	36.0
2=False	14	50.0	-36.0
Total	100		

#### *4C – Muslims Believe in Jesus*

Q2	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
1 – Yes	4	50.0	-46.0
2 – No	96	50.0	46.0
Total	100		

#### *4D – Education is Recommended for All Muslims*

Q4	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
1=True	16	50.0	-34.0
2=False	84	50.0	34.0
Total	100		

#### *4E – Knowledge of Islam comes from Media*

Q19	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
1 – Knowledge from Media	90	50.0	40.0
2 – Not from Media	10	50.0	-40.0
Total	100		

The hypothesis “Muslims believe in Jesus” is rejected (table 4C), since 96% of the respondents did not know that Muslims believe in Jesus. As can

be seen from table 4, there are statistically significant differences in the responses ( $\alpha$  of  $0.00 < 0.05$ ). The hypothesis "Education in Islam is recommended for all Muslims" is rejected (table 4D), since 84% thought that this was not the case. As can be seen from table 4, there are statistically significant differences in the responses ( $\alpha$  of  $0.00 < 0.05$ ). The hypothesis "Knowledge of Islam comes from media and/or news sources" is supported (table 4E), since 90% responded that these were the sources of their knowledge of Islam. As can be seen from table 4, there are statistically significant differences in the responses ( $\alpha$  of  $0.00 < 0.05$ ).

These results were predictable and, at the same time, sad. The majority of responses were stereotypical. A significant number of participants (96%) did not know that Muslims believe in Jesus as one of their prophets and that the "People of the Book" include Christians, Jews, and Muslims (94%) alike. Furthermore, respondents did not know that the Qur'an tells Muslims not to drink or gamble (78%), that terrorism is not respected or accepted in Islam (90%), and that Muslims believe in one God (60%). Interaction with westerners show that some think Muslims only worship "Allah," which is an accurate perception because "Allah" means "the God" in Arabic. However, there is an attached misperception: Some people mistakenly believe that "Allah" is a person or something that possesses human qualities.

In addition, the fact that Islam is one of the world's fastest growing religions was not well-known by the majority of respondents (78%). Only three knew that some of the Africans brought to the United States as slaves were Muslim (3%). Interestingly, less than 3% answered correctly, indicating that in Islam paradise lies at the feet of each individual's mother (viz., men must respect their mothers and women highly if they want to have a chance at entering heaven) and that Muslims pray five times a day.

Over 85% did not know that Islam stresses gender equality and that women have equal rights with men. Also, most respondents were unaware that Islam recommends education for all Muslims (84%). Surprisingly, the majority of respondents answered correctly that the Qur'an prohibits the consumption of pork (76%), that Muhammad is the final prophet of Islam (79%), and that Ramadan is the Muslim holy month (62%). When participants were asked to select what came to mind when they heard the word *Islam*, a large number selected Osama Bin Laden (54%), while other frequent answers were 9/11, evil, and oppression. The majority of the instructors said they would not excuse a student's absence because a religious holiday fell on a school day (76%). The good news is that when asked if they look at Muslim students differently due to 9/11, many instructors responded that they do not (66%).

## Discussion and Training Implications

The current situations in Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Palestine, Iraq, Iran, and Egypt, as well as the American media's post-9/11 coverage of terrorism, are likely to contribute heavily to a negative attitude toward students who come from Islamic countries and who look Middle Eastern. Much of this unfounded and stereotypical hostility tends to reflect the historic lack of knowledge about Islam in the United States.<sup>8</sup> The combination of insufficient knowledge and preconceived notions raises many ethical concerns for all educators, for they are expected to treat all students equally and expect each of them to do well. Consequently, students who are being prepared for a vocation are entering the workforce without a rudimentary knowledge of the world's fastest growing religion. Perhaps a mandatory course in theology would help students acquire this knowledge. For educators, perhaps some training in the power of expectation would help eliminate or reduce their biased attitudes toward students who are different.

Overall, in terms of this research, it is recommended that educators focus on the similarities, as opposed to the minor differences, among all religions. Addressing the contributions of Muslims to western civilization would also be beneficial. For example, it is important for a vocational math instructor who teaches algebra to explain that Muslim mathematicians developed algebra and made important contributions to geometry and trigonometry. As regards geography, Muslims invented the astrolabe (an instrument that calculates altitudes and locations) and contributed significantly to physics, architecture, and astronomy. Moreover, vocational instructors' responses showed that understanding and learning more about different cultures and religions would make their students more employable, as they are being trained for a career in a diverse workforce. Also, a majority of the instructors said they would not excuse a student's absence due to a religious holiday. However, roughly 10% of them neglected to answer the question, and 8% believed that religion should not be addressed in vocational schools. Ultimately, the first step is for instructors to become better acquainted with Islam through diversity training programs that help them address difficult questions in the classroom.

In terms of implications, the West's perception of Islam is dominated by misrepresentation and distorted images, all of which derive largely from past misunderstanding and ignorance.<sup>9</sup> It is imperative to implement diversity training programs that can modify vocational instructors' inaccurate schemata regarding Islam. This course of action should be undertaken for all religions, because the social consequences of not doing so can be detrimental. For the

purpose of this study, the consequences of not addressing misconceptions about Islam can lead to instructors misinforming students about a rapidly growing religion. The concept of instructors misinforming students due to their own ignorance regarding such a sensitive and important topic is disappointing, especially in the aftermath of 9/11. As vocational schools prepare individuals for the workforce, instructors are responsible for providing accurate information to those who will be working with Muslims.

In order for vocational colleges to address this issue, the instructors' schemata should be evaluated and then diversity training must be implemented to correct fallible notions about Islam. Due to its historical importance and contemporary relevance, teaching about Islam provides teachers with excellent opportunities to transmit knowledge, stimulate critical thinking skills, and help students develop tolerant attitudes based on historically accurate information instead of stereotypes, myths, and rumors.<sup>10</sup> Regular diversity training should become the norm for all vocational colleges that teach professionalism in the classroom. Focusing on such concepts can hopefully bring about and encourage professionalism in conflict resolution and behavior alignment with company standards.

The majority of the study's questions measured basic factual knowledge about Islam that should have been taught to all participants in secondary school. The survey clearly showed that many of the study's participants have either forgotten or do not have a basic knowledge about the nature of Islam or of its profound impact on human civilization. The increasing Muslim American population emphasizes the importance of school educators taking the religion seriously and presenting accurate information about it. Moreover, the analysis of the results suggested that many of the participants associated Islam with terrorism and oppressing women. Perhaps these results are due to socialization, of many years of seeing glimpses of cultural or political practices in some Muslim-majority countries. The stereotypical results are consistent with previous research studies.

The West generally regards Islam as anything but tolerant, as a religion of the sword and belligerency. Certain participants would be surprised to learn that Islam rejects terrorism and promotes peace, elevates the status of women, and protects and respects them, all of which are contrary to the respondents' beliefs. For example, Ms. Megawati Sukarnoputri ruled Indonesia (2001-04), the world's largest Muslim country (Indonesia); Dr. Massouda Jalal, a woman, ran for the presidency of Afghanistan in 2004 and subsequent elections; and Ms. Benazir Bhutto served as prime minister of Pakistan (1988-90 and 1993-96). In fact, Islam stresses gender equality and that women have equal rights with men. Also, because of its contemporary relevance, specialized diversity

trainings would provide instructors with tools that would assist them in the classroom when teaching professionalism and answering questions about Muslims in the workforce and in society.

It has been said that many Americans are profoundly ignorant about Islam and often conflate it with terrorism and political regimes that unjustly conscript Islamic law to justify their oppressive policies and practices.<sup>11</sup> As a result, diversity training must address foundational knowledge about Islam and provide the relevant historical context. Perhaps the training could cover the influence of high and equal expectations from all students in the classroom. Also, educators should become familiar with the concept of the Pygmalion effect, otherwise known as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Jane Elliot's focus and experimentation is a great start for the effective training and development of educators for an inclusive workplace.<sup>12</sup>

A video titled "The Eye of the Storm" was produced and released in 1970 in an actual classroom setting in Riceville, IA. The children were actual third-grade students, not actors. Jane Elliot, their teacher, conducted an activity that allowed her students to experience firsthand the effects of conditioning and discrimination. Both she and the students discuss the impact of the experiment on all of the students involved. It appears to have had positive results on her students' lives. The actual experiment demonstrates how discrimination and stereotypes can be created in a very short time. On the first day, she gave the blue-eyed children special privileges (e.g., second lunches, taking longer breaks, and going to lunch first) because, she told the class, blue-eyed people are better than brown-eyed people since she and many other intelligent people have blue eyes. She further required the brown-eyed children to wear large collars that distinguished them from the blue-eyed children. She kept reinforcing statements like "blue-eyed children are smarter than brown-eyed kids," "blue-eyed children learn faster than brown-eyed children," and "brown-eyed children are wasteful, forgetful, and lazy."

Pretty soon, the superior group (actually about 90% of them) seemed very willing and helpful when it came to devising ways to punish the inferior group if they got out of line and did not follow the rules. The children on top (smart and privileged) consistently did better on the exams and exercises than those who were on the bottom or deemed inferior. When the children were wearing collars, the results were very negative: the loss of self-esteem and/or self-confidence, the loss of performance, mutual conflict, and others. The superior group wanted revenge. It was "survival of the fittest." The superior group liked its superiority and also sought hierarchy.

In accordance with a self-fulfilling prophecy, students are likely to produce results in accordance with their educators' expectations. Expecting less

from minority or Muslim students and evaluating them based on different standards would be both unethical and unfair. Therefore educators should avoid expecting less, or even expressing the perception that they expect less, from students based on preconceived notions and stereotypes associated with their religion, nationality, race, or other such characteristics. In fact, they should expect great commitment and high quality work from all students.

## Conclusion

In the months after 9/11, there were hundreds of incidents involving violence, intimidation, and discrimination against Muslims or those who looked like Muslims. Nearly three out of four Muslims know someone who has experienced religious prejudice since 9/11 or has suffered abuse themselves. Many American Muslims doubt whether they are accepted as “real” Americans.<sup>13</sup> This reality has also impacted Muslim students who have suffered from discrimination, isolation, and alienation. The aftermath of 9/11 has been a gloomy experience for Muslims, and many feel that on that day their religion was hijacked.<sup>14</sup> Opinion polls taken in 2004 showed that about one quarter of those responding held a negative stereotype of Muslims: that Muslims value life less than other people or teach their children to hate “unbelievers.” Nearly half said that Washington should limit Muslims’ civil liberties.<sup>15</sup> In 2010, a young Muslim woman was fired from Abercrombie’s Hollister Co. store in the Hillsdale Mall in San Mateo, CA, for refusing to remove her headscarf.<sup>16</sup> In a more recent case, a Muslim woman won a \$5 million discrimination lawsuit against AT&T for what she called repeated harassment due to her Islamic beliefs.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, in March 2005 she called an employee help line and asked the company to provide sensitivity training for her co-workers.

Our rapidly changing world requires mutual understanding and effective communication among all people. The West’s perception of Islam and Muslims is, in general, so negative that one could call it Islamophobia. Many Muslims have lived with this fact on a daily basis.<sup>18</sup> There is a need for a new, more encompassing worldview as well as an understanding and respect for all religions and cultures. Prejudice, racism, and Islamophobia are tangible expressions of the hard reality of western societies, and Muslims must not naively think that these will simply disappear as they become citizens settled in their societies.<sup>19</sup>

This study’s overall conclusion is that most educators could benefit from the inclusion of factual knowledge about Islam in their diversity and sensitivity training programs. They could use such knowledge effectively to create aware-

ness about Islam and other major religions in the minds of thousands of individuals who are misinformed through media outlets and other sources. Many of the actions taken to create an inclusive workforce can be summarized in “signing a diversity charter, promoting goodwill intentions in company mission statements, developing zero tolerance policies, aligning company policies with anti-discriminatory laws and directives, investing in the recruitment of scattered disadvantaged/minority groups, and offering employee awareness training.”<sup>20</sup> This inclusive workforce can be created through continuous education regarding diverse values and perspectives. “Education is the action or process of training or providing information for a change in skills, knowledge and behaviors.”<sup>21</sup> By implementing effective educational workshops and other strategies, companies can expect and encourage professionalism and an inclusive work environment for all.

## **Appendix A – Islam Awareness and Attitude Survey**

1. Who is the final prophet of Islam?  
A) Jesus B) Moses C) Mohammad D) Abraham
2. Do Muslims believe in Jesus?  
A) Yes B) No
3. In Islam, for each individual, paradise lies at the feet of their \_\_\_\_\_?  
A) Father B) Mother C) Grandparents
4. Education in Islam is recommended for ALL Muslims?  
A) True B) False
5. Muslims Pray how many times a day?  
A) 1 B) 3 C) 4 D) 5
6. Muslims have been directed in the Holy Qur’an to not drink alcohol or gamble?  
A) True B) False
7. Terrorism is respected/acceptable in Islam?  
A) True B) False
8. Some of the Africans who were brought to America as slaves were originally Muslim?  
A) True B) False
9. In Islam, women have fewer rights than men?  
A) True B) False

10. Muslims are advised not to eat pork in the Qur'an?  
A) True B) False
11. Ramadan is Muslim's holy month?  
A) True B) False
12. Islam is the second largest religion in the world and also the fastest growing religion?  
A) True B) False
13. In Islam, "People of the book" include all Christians, Jews, and Muslims?  
A) True B) False
14. Islam is a monotheistic religion?  
A) True B) False
15. What is the first thing that you think of when you hear the term "Islam"?  
A) Osama Bin Laden B) September 11th C) Evilness D) Oppression  
E) Other
16. How would you as an instructor handle situations where students need to miss class for religious purposes? Do you excuse the absence if it was because of a religious holiday?  
A) I would not excuse students for religious holidays.  
B) I would excuse students for religious holidays.
17. Do you think it's fair that some religions' holidays fall on school days and other religions have certain holidays off?  
A) It is fair that some religions' holidays fall on school days and other religions have certain holidays off.  
B) It is not fair that some religions' holidays fall on school days and other religions have certain holidays off.
18. Do you look at Muslim students differently because of September 11, 2001?  
A) I do look at students differently because of September 11th.  
B) I do not look at students differently because of September 11th.
19. Does the majority of your knowledge of Islam come from media and/or news?  
A) My knowledge of Islam is from the media and/or news source.  
B) My knowledge of Islam is not from the media and/or news source.

## Endnotes

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