

# BECOMING AN EDUCATOR

Muslims need to contribute to society and community through teaching.

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**T**he Roman orator, lawyer, politician, and philosopher Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BC) asked: "What noble employment is more valuable to the state than that of the man who instructs the rising generation?"

Many parents, however, discourage their children from pursuing a career in teaching for three main reasons: poor pay, stress, and lack of respect. In no time and place is there such a great need for teachers as now in the U.S. Whether it be teaching in Islamic, public, or private schools, having Muslim teachers as positive role models is vital to our community's success. With the increasing number of Islamic schools opening around the country, and with the decrease in morals and values, it becomes even more necessary to have Muslim teachers.

Those who enter the field of education are not necessarily limited to being classroom teachers. Although the rewards associated with that position may be innumerable, there are other available careers: administration and educational leadership, school counselors and psychologists, careers in higher education as professors or researchers, curriculum and resource specialists, librarians, or in other staff member jobs. In addition, qualified people can teach distance education or online courses from their living rooms while being superb housewives or mothers. So, education is not just a rewarding field but also a very wide one.

The 21st century has pushed education to the top of America's political and social agenda as millions of dollars have been allotted towards school improvement plans and the opening of new schools. In order to produce a highly educated society that can be better prepared to meet the demands of a rapidly changing, diverse and technologically competent world, the teacher education colleges are now held on the spot light. As more politicians,

faith-based organizations, concerned parents, business and other key people in the community realize that it is time to "fix" our schools, one fact that remains undebatable is that the key to improve schools lies in the hands of the teacher.

At no time in the history of American education has there been a greater need for Muslim teachers and educational leaders as there is today. After the tragic event of September 11, Islamophobia has become a common topic in schools and colleges and in the society at large. Muslim educators can greatly help in combating the prejudice, stereotypes, and misinformation against Arabs in particular and Muslims in general. Muslim curriculum specialists and educational leaders can impact the publishers, correct the biased information in social studies texts,



Muslim academicians launch intensive degree program to link modern social sciences to traditional classical Islamic sciences.

## The New Cordoba Rising

**I**n the tenth century, the Andalusian city of Cordoba was the site of Islamic and scientific scholarship in Europe. At the dawn of the last millennium, it attracted the world's most brilliant Muslims, Christians, and Jews—fostering an intellectual exchange that paved the way for the Renaissance.

Several years ago, a small group of Muslim American intellectuals began planting a seed in Leesburg, VA: the Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences (GSISS). Proud followers of academic excellence in their respective fields, they continue

to position their school as a bridge between two distinct cultures by offering a classical Islamic education framed within the North American experience. This effort to link modern social sciences to traditional classical Islamic sciences in a serious academic experience will help to reveal an intellectual direction bridging any potential paradigmatic conflicts between Western civilization and the classical Islamic legacy. In the end, insha' Allah, this will help revive the Islamic sciences.

This fall, GSISS introduces an intensive 10-month Master of

Arts in Islamic Studies degree program for social science academicians interested in exploring the broad possibilities offered by an Islamic paradigm and philosophy in leading their respective disciplines toward new territory. It is also intended for Muslim and non-Muslim practitioners of Islamic social disciplines, such as Islamic schoolteachers, counselors, imams, social workers, and activists. This dual purpose seeks to broaden the participants' academic base and enrich their educational experience.

Students will take only one degree course at a time, for 3



Educators at Universal School, Bridgeview, IL

and influence and shape policies at boards of education.

Teachers can be role models for children. Research shows that minority children have an even greater need for positive role models. Even more rewarding is educational leadership, as in being a principal or serving on the school board. In an age where character education has been lost, morals and values have been reduced to insignificance, and Muslims are portrayed in a negative and hostile manner, it is even more vital to provide Muslim educators for Muslim children, as this latter group could shape the future and thus reform society to "enjoin good and forbid evil." To teach is to touch a life forever, and building strong and confident Muslims can be a rewarding experience both in this world and the Hereafter.

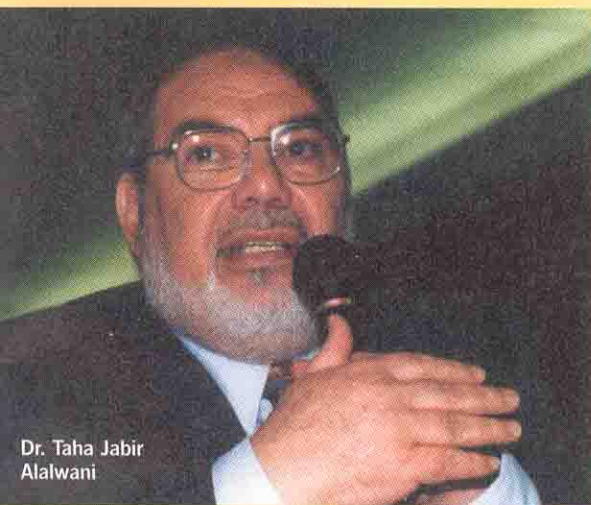
Educational leadership is another highly important area, because a growing number of Islamic schools lack qualified and experienced educators. Most Islamic schools are run by non-educators who are learning, by trial and error, the art of supervising and administering schools. Professors from engineering and economics departments, medical doctors, and even veterinarians are filling leader-

ship positions. Sometimes, board members or imams who have no experience with the American educational system are called upon to fill these positions.

The absence of principals who are both effective and have the suitable leadership skills is very detrimental to the future of Islamic schools in this country. As more and more people challenge Islamic schools' curriculum and standards, along with their professionalism, the need to provide educational leadership becomes even more vital. Islamic school leaders should not be limited to the Muslim community; rather, they should be able to represent Islamic values and standards to the general population in order to influence the education system's policies and procedures. Educational leaders should keep abreast of all relevant current and innovative practices and be able to present scholarly papers and Islamic models of education.

Islamic school principals also can be community builders, for establishing a school is central to establishing a Muslim community. For nearly half a century, Islamic schools have struggled with issues related to hiring teachers, curriculum development, Islamic studies, and Arabic. It is now

## NO OTHER CAREER CAN DO AS MUCH DA'WAH, FOR TEACHING IS AT THE HEART OF A COMMUNITY, AND RAISING A MUSLIM COMMUNITY IN THE U.S. TODAY IS MORE NECESSARY THAN EVER BEFORE.



Dr. Taha Jabir Alalwani

full tuition waiver for Islamic studies and Arabic plus a living stipend of \$1,000 a month for 10 months, are available for outstanding students who wish to pursue the intensive MA in Islamic studies degree program and Arabic without the diversion of work obligations.

Faculty members in the new intensive program include Dr. Ahmed Abadi, Dr. Mona Abul Fadl, Dr. Akbar Ahmad, Dr. Taha Jabir Alalwani, Dr. Ihsan Bagby, Dr. Eltigani Abdelgadir Hamid, and Dr. Ali A. Mazrui.

GSISS ([www.siss.edu](http://www.siss.edu)), the first Muslim-governed, campus-based institution of Islamic graduate studies in America, has graduates serving as imams, academics, nonprofit directors, and military, hospital, and prison chaplains. ■

time for these schools to refine themselves in order to shape a true Islamic community free from ethnic differences and cultural practices. Educational leaders need to be very competent so they may have an impact on the future of Islam in this country.

### Stepping Toward Leadership

As with everything else, a successful educational leader of an Islamic school can be produced only through a step-by-step process, such as that presented below:

- Enroll in a 4-year bachelors degree in education.
- Gain field experience by substitute teaching, volunteering, or working part-time in a full-time school.
- Go the extra mile during your junior and senior internships. Do not limit yourself to classroom experience, but try to learn about the total school structure and policies.
- Choose your specialization after acquiring an in-depth understanding and experience of that area.
- Join such educational organizations as

hours a day 5 days a week, and complete all work for that course in 2 to 5 weeks, depending upon the number of credit hours involved. Then, they will

begin the next scheduled course. In conjunction with this program, students can take intensive Arabic classes. Competitive scholarships, including