Addressing Islamophobia in Greene County, Virginia

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Addressing Islamophobia in Greene County, Virginia

An Honors College Project Presented to
the Faculty of the Undergraduate
College of Arts and Letters
James Madison University

by Kayla Barker
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Accepted by the faculty of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors College.

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Introduction

This paper provides a summary of a day-long seminar organized in a rural community following another local seminar endorsed by the community’s Sheriff concerning the “Muslim Threat.” The Sheriff’s event was held just days before the 2016 U.S. presidential election. During the campaign and in the aftermath of the election, many politicians employed anti-Muslim rhetoric. This seemed to bring to the surface many Islamophobic opinions of elected officials and their electorates which were grounded in fear and misinformation.

A report published by the Pew Research Center states, “Older Americans and those with relatively low levels of educational attainment…tend to be more negative than others in their views about Muslims and Islam” (2017). The researchers found that Americans age 65 years and older were nearly twice as likely as those ages 18 to 29 to agree with the statement that “Islam encourages violence more than other faiths.” The report says that only 14% of college graduates think that “half or more U.S. Muslims are anti-American,” while 31% of respondents with a high school degree or less agreed with the statement (Pew Research Center, 2017).

However, the report also states that “the share [of Americans] who associate Islam with violence has declined by 9 percentage points”—from 50% in September 2014 to 41% in December 2016 (Pew Research Center, 2017). Progress has been made and needs to continue. Seminars addressing the supposed “threat” of Islam are fear-mongering and dehumanize Muslims. Efforts are needed that emphasize the common humanity among Muslims and non-Muslims to help quell extreme views of Islam.

A friend and I set out to offer the community an alternative to the Sheriff’s Islamophobic event. We organized a seminar that provided the community a space to learn about Islam from Muslims. This paper includes information about the community we organized in as well as
background about the Sheriff’s event. It also contains detailed information about our organizing efforts from start to finish followed by reflection on the results.

Greene County

“Gateway to the Blue Ridge. Gateway to your Heart.” This saying is found on signs as you enter Greene County, Virginia. While the signs use lofty words to describe the rural county, I simply use one: home. Out of the 95 counties in Virginia, Greene comes in 58th place with regards to population, with roughly 19,371 citizens in 2016, according to the United States Census Bureau’s projections. The county also weighs in as the second-smallest geographically in the state. This small county gave me all my formal education from pre-school through twelfth grade and is where I lived from ages six to eighteen.

Greene is full of open fields, beautiful views of the Blue Ridge Mountains, and southern hospitality. However, after leaving Greene to live in a more urban setting, I have discovered a negative aspect of rural communities is shortage of exposure to diverse populations, which can produce a fear of such groups. Such insulation can partly be attributed to Greene County’s lack of racial diversity and educational attainment among its citizens.

It doesn’t take much more than looking around the local Walmart or through the halls of the county’s public schools to see that the population is overwhelmingly white. The U.S. Census Bureau’s projections state that Greene County’s population was 88.6% white¹ in July 2016, which is high compared to the 70.0% of Virginia’s population. Greene is not the least diverse county in the state, though, with 31 of the 98 counties in Virginia having populations that are 88.6% white.

¹ For the 2010 national census, the U.S. Census Bureau defined someone who is white as “a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa,” including “people who indicate their race as ‘White’ or report entries such as Irish, German, Italian, Lebanese, Arab, Moroccan, or Caucasian.”
over 90% white (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). This means that while there are concentrations of non-white populations throughout the state, many Virginians live in areas where they do not interact with communities of color on a regular basis.

Virginia’s population is rather indicative of the racial makeup of the entire United States, which was projected to be 76.9% white in July 2016. In the U.S., eight states have a population that is over 90% white (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Therefore, Greene County’s lack of racial diversity is not a unique scenario.

Looking at racial demographics can help us understand the amount that white Americans are interacting with people from (potentially) different cultural backgrounds. For example, during my four years at William Monroe High School, the county’s sole public high school, I had many classes and often ate lunch with one of the school’s only Muslim students, Najeeha Khan. As we grew closer and shared family stories, Najeeha ended up teaching me about her religion and Pakistani background. Had I not gotten to know Najeeha, though, I would have only learned about Islam through the media until after graduating high school and attending James Madison University, where there are many more Muslim students and Muslim professors than in Greene County.

Statistics concerning educational attainment can also be an indicator of interactions with diverse populations. The Census Bureau’s projections say that only 23.7% of Greene County residents age 25 years and older have attained at least a Bachelor’s degree, compared to the 36.3% of Virginians who have (2016). Once again, Greene is not an anomaly. Of the counties in Virginia, 57 rank lower than Greene County with regards to educational attainment. Many

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2 The 2010 U.S. census did not include data regarding religious demographics. While statistics concerning race are not directly indicative of religious identities present in a community, racial origin is the best set of data currently given to analyze an area’s religious makeup.
counties in Southern Virginia have only 9% to 15% of residents who have at least a Bachelor’s degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016).

While a college education is not a direct indicator of intelligence by any means, it can be an indicator of opportunities to have interactions with diverse people and ideas. In a rural community lacking in racial diversity, such as Greene County, college can especially be a time for such experiences. Otherwise, residents can live in a sheltered, insulated world with limited exposure to the lived realities of diverse populations. Over the years I lived in and visited Greene, I have witnessed the fact that this kind of ignorance can breed misunderstanding and dehumanizing people different from yourself.

“Understanding the Muslim Threat”

It is in this context, lacking in racial diversity and educational attainment, that the sheriff of Greene County hosted an “educational” seminar for community members that was originally titled, “Understanding the Muslim Threat.” It was held Saturday November 5, 2016 (three days before Election Day in the U.S.) in Stanardsville, Virginia and was free for the public to attend. On his personal Facebook page, Sheriff Steve Smith called the seminar, “a very interesting and informative class on the muslim (sic) religion” (see Appendix A). He went on to say that after attending, “[y]ou will have a very clear understanding of events happening in the world.”

After some investigation, I found the for-profit company Sheriff Smith organized the training through, Understanding the Threat (UTT). On their website, UTT’s founder, John Guandolo, describes the organization as “dedicated to providing strategic and operational threat-focused consultation, education, and training…and designing strategies at all levels of the community to defeat the enemy” (About, 2017). On their “Training” page, it is clear many of
UTT’s courses are targeted at law enforcement personnel. The course that most closely aligns with what Sheriff Smith advertised is called “Understanding the Threat to America.” It is described as a “program tailored for civilian audiences to detail the threat from the global Islamic Movement and the jihadi threat to their particular area/state” (Training, 2017).

There were two speakers advertised for the seminar in Sheriff Smith’s Facebook post. One of the speakers, Chris Gaubatz, went “undercover” as an intern with the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR), an experience which is featured in a book titled *Muslim Mafia: Inside the Secret Underworld That’s Conspiring to Islamize America*. In an interview with a local Charlottesville news station, Gaubatz stated, “What we do for people is break down what Islamic law is, where it comes from and help them understand the jihadi network here in America” (Wresilo, 2016). The other advertised speaker, Suzanne Shattuck, was described as “a very informed citizen” in Sheriff Smith’s Facebook post (see Appendix A). He said that she was to be “speaking about the refugee resettlements.” Shattuck is a podcaster and is described on a conservative talk radio station’s website as having been involved with efforts “to educate the American public about the active Islamic movement in America” (Suzanne Shattuck, 2017).

Gaubatz and Shattuck’s backgrounds aside, there were no Muslims advertised to be speaking at this seminar about Islam. Because of the one-sided nature of this event’s publicity, some residents of Greene and the surrounding area pushed back. Many left comments on the sheriff’s Facebook post saying that they disagreed with the proposed substance of the seminar. After the initial pushback by community members, the sheriff changed the name of the seminar to “Understanding the Jihad Threat.” However, this name change came with seemingly no change in the seminar’s content. The night prior to the event, Sheriff Smith changed the name one more time to simply “Understanding the Threat.”
In an interview with *The Daily Progress*, the sheriff defended his decision to endorse this event saying, “Nothing was said about bashing Muslims or anything. It’s an educational tool here for the citizens of Greene.” He goes on to say, “This is the world we live in now, and you’d be naïve to stick your head in the sand and say it doesn’t exist” (Fitzgerald, 2016). It appears that Sheriff Smith decided to bring this seminar to his hometown because he thought it was in his community’s best interest. He wanted to give his constituents the opportunity to be educated on the dangers he perceived the U.S. to be facing as a result of Islam. In a county that’s nearly the size of a town and in which there is no mayor, the sheriff, an elected county official, serves as a core leader in the community. Because of the power and respect many Greene residents have for Sheriff Smith, the community often trusts the information he disseminates. In other words, when the sheriff talks (or endorses the speech of others), the community listens.

On the day of Sheriff Smith’s seminar, I joined around 30 other community members for an oppositional event called “Speaking for Truth and Love” hosted by a Charlottesville Unitarian Universalist church. The event took place outside the doors of the building where the sheriff’s event was being held. We held signs about loving your neighbor and attempted to hand out sheets that presented “What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam” and “Defeating Violent Extremism and Terrorism” to the approximately 60 seminar attendees as they left for a lunch break (see Appendices B and C).

Many people we encountered when trying to give out this information responded with the general sentiment that, “We’re getting all the information we need in there.” Several Muslims were holding signs and attempting to engage in conversations with attendees and give them a chance to get questions answered from people practicing the religion they were supposedly learning about. One of the Muslims in attendance was my friend Najeeha.
Sheriff Smith refused our information sheet twice, even though many of us took the sheet he was handing out to attendees inside. This sheet was insight into what was being taught in the seminar. It is a page scanned from a book, which I found to be titled *Shariah Law for Non-Muslims* by Dr. Bill Warner—a non-Muslim who has written several books about Political Islam. It defines Sharia as “based on the principles found in the Koran and other Islamic religious/political texts,” and goes on to specify that “there are no common principles between American law and Sharia” (see Appendix D; Warner, 2010). It also asserts that principles under Sharia law include: “no freedom of religion, no freedom of speech, no equal rights for women, no democracy, and no Golden Rule.” After reading over the page, a member of the Muslim community expressed that she had been raised in a Muslim family her entire life and had never been taught about Sharia law. I found this to be a powerful sentiment because it showed just how far removed the seminar’s teachings were from the lived realities of the Muslim community.

Watching so many members of this community receive a one-sided “education” about a complex, often beautiful religion broke my heart. Najeeha left the space in tears after we attended a short segment of the seminar, which claimed that verses from the Quran encourage violence against non-Muslims. As a non-Muslim who has always found incredible warmth and kindness in Muslim-majority spaces, it was disgusting to watch the group’s faith be slandered. We knew we had to do something.

“Engaging Conversations with the Muslim Community”

Najeeha and I decided to organize another educational seminar about Islam for the public in Greene County but this time to feature Muslims in the conversation. We wanted to give the community an opportunity to learn about Islam from scholars and people practicing the religion.
Having grown up in Greene, I know first-hand how easy it is to succumb to the prejudices and stereotypes that come from the unintentional ignorance inherent in rural, insulated communities. I understand that it is a privilege—which takes resources not everyone has access to—to expand one’s interactions with diverse ideas and populations. Najeeha and I wanted to bring back to our hometown the type of educational opportunities we had been offered at James Madison University.

Planning

From the beginning of the planning process, we did not want our seminar to be lecture-heavy; instead we wanted community members to be talking to each other. We wanted to encourage discussions between Muslims and non-Muslims and emphasize story-telling. We wanted attendees to walk away knowing more about the realities of Islam in America and feeling a sense of common humanity with the Muslim members of their community.

To start planning the event, Najeeha and I made a document articulating our specific objectives with our target audience in mind. We knew we would be happy to have any community members attend, but we especially wanted to reach people who did not often interact with members of the Muslim community. We also wanted to focus on community members who were out of school and, therefore, had fewer opportunities to learn about a religion other than their own. Overall, we wanted to give whoever would listen the tools to be vocally supportive of the Muslim community, rather than complacent about issues surrounding Islamophobia. We listed four objectives:

- Attendees will hear stories from Muslims in the community
- Attendees will feel a sense of common humanity among diverse communities in Greene County
- Attendees will learn that a majority of Muslims are nonviolent
- Attendees will receive a fact-based, realistic, and historic understanding of Islam in America
It proved crucial to have clear objectives to keep us on track and to communicate our goals with those willing to help in our efforts. They also informed the format and content of the seminar.

My advisor for this project, Dr. Stephen Poulson (a Sociology professor at JMU), suggested I look into group mediation techniques when searching for the format that best aligned with our objectives. Najeeha and I started by meeting with someone from the FairField Center, a mediation center in downtown Harrisonburg. After hearing our objectives, Sue Praill—the Director of Restorative Justice Initiatives at the FairField Center—told us about the circle process which she has used with prisoners of all ages to create meaningful dialogue. She explained to us the benefits of using a method that gives all attendees a chance to have their voice heard and to listen to their fellow community members’ perspectives in an organized, respectful manner. Sue also referred us to the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding (CJP) at Eastern Mennonite University.

In CJP’s description for their course on circle processes, they state that this dialogue process “offers a highly accessible and flexible approach for discussion of the most fraught topics…in a way that maintains respect and nurtures understanding of one another” (Circle Process, 2017). This was exactly the format Najeeha and I were looking for to build community and create a sense of common humanity, but neither of us had any experience facilitating this type of discussion. We reached out to CJP for help finding facilitators trained in the circle process. Kathy Evans, an Education professor at Eastern Mennonite University, graciously stepped forward to assist us in planning and executing this portion of the seminar.

It was clear that Dr. Evans was very experienced in facilitating the circle process and strongly believed in its ability to create meaningful, constructive dialogue. She helped Najeeha and I outline a plan for our circle that specified the prompts for each round (see Appendix E).
She explained that she would bring a talking piece to pass around the circle, which would denote the speaker at any point. Our main objective for the circle process was to create a sense of common humanity among the diverse populations in attendance. This is why we decided that one of the rounds would ask attendees to share a story about their name; names often carry meanings and stories that transcend cultural differences.

Najeeha and I wanted another portion of the event to take a more educational format with stories from Muslims being the focus. We decided on a panel discussion, which we were familiar with due to its common use in university settings. Our idea was to have a panel made of Muslims from Greene and the surrounding community along with religious scholars. They would each tell stories, teach about Islam, and answer audience questions. Our next step was to secure panel members.

We met with Dr. Jaclyn Michael, the Islam scholar at JMU at the time, and she agreed to be on the panel and briefly talk about how Islam came to America and the long, rich history of Muslims in the United States. Another panel member was a CJP graduate student, Nourah Al-hasawi. Dr. Al-hasawi is from Saudi Arabia, where she is a professor of Islamic Studies at Princess Nora bint Abdul Rahman University. She agreed to tell her story of moving to America from a Muslim-majority nation. Dr. Al-hasawi wears a niqab which also gave her the opportunity to share her reasons for and experiences with covering. Imam Farhan Ali from the Harrisonburg mosque also was on the panel. He was able to offer the perspective of a leader in the Muslim community in a highly conservative area. The fourth and final member of the panel was Najeeha. She wanted to share stories of growing up in a Muslim family in Greene County. Dr. Rob Alexander, a Political Science professor at JMU, offered to serve as moderator during the panel
portion of our seminar. He said he felt comfortable ensuring the panel ran smoothly by giving each panel member equal speaking time and taking audience questions in an organized manner.

Dr. Alexander also helped Najeeha and I nail down an agenda for the day of the seminar (see Appendix F). Putting an agenda on paper helped us feel prepared and gave us an organized schedule to send to everyone volunteering to help with the event. It solidified our decision to have the circle process portion before the panel discussion and to dedicate more time to the circle process. Dr. Evans explained that the circle process would be key in establishing the tone of our event from the moment attendees enter the space, and we didn’t want to rush this portion.

Writing an agenda also helped build in time for audience reflection as well as set-up and clean-up. Due to financial restraints, we only reserved the community room for four hours. With the seminar being advertised as three hours, it was essential to delegate tasks in order to set up and clean up efficiently.

Promotion

Dr. Alexander was incredibly encouraging throughout the planning process and helped Najeeha and I make decisions concerning how to reach out to stakeholders in the community and how to frame our event for promotion. As young college students, we were familiar with the use of social media in marketing campaigns. However, with our target audience primarily being community members out of college, we did not think social media would be appropriate as our main vehicle for outreach. Rather, we turned our attention to local newspapers and television news networks.

With Dr. Poulson’s guidance, Najeeha and I sent press releases to local news stations and letters to the editors of local newspapers (see Appendix G). This led the editor of the *Greene County Record*, Pat Fitzgerald, to reach out for an interview (Fitzgerald, 2017). When answering
Mr. Fitzgerald’s questions, we intentionally chose inclusive language to frame our event. We wanted to communicate, as Najeeha put it, “the motivation and purpose have been driven by one thing—our passion for education, storytelling, and the community just loving each other” (Fitzgerald, 2017). This article, which was also published in the Charlottesville paper *The Daily Progress*, was our most powerful promotional tool.

Another main source of outreach came via an invitation to promote our seminar at a meeting for the regional Democratic Party. We were invited by a preacher from a local church who we met at the “Speaking for Truth and Love” event. Najeeha attended the meeting and gave a brief overview of the topics and format of our event. We also relied on flyers and personal outreach to advertise. Using a directory of churches in Greene County, we reached out via email to many church leaders and invited them and their congregations.

Najeeha and I sought support from local political leaders as well. Dr. Alexander assisted us in drafting an email to Bill Martin, a member of Greene’s Board of Supervisors. We were careful to emphasize that our seminar was a stand-alone educational opportunity. We wanted to make it clear that while the Sheriff’s seminar was the spark that gave us the first idea for this type of event, our seminar was being organized with no antagonistic intentions. Mr. Martin politely let us know that in order to not politicize an educational, community building event he did not feel it was appropriate for himself to publicly promote or attend. Nonetheless, he was very encouraging and offered advice regarding partnering with church communities and inviting the Sheriff.

We sent Sheriff Smith an email invitation that also included a request to encourage his deputies to attend. He responded saying that he would be out of town the day of our seminar. We then asked if a deputy would drive by the building where our seminar was being held during the
event to ensure the safety of everyone involved. We did not intend for there to be a safety risk but wanted to be prepared. The Sheriff said he would have someone drive by.

**Lessons Learned**

Throughout the planning process, I discovered that people are often very willing to volunteer their time and expertise to help put together this type of community-focused event. No doubt, our seminar would not have been successful were it not for the generosity of experienced volunteers. However, people also can take a while to respond to your request for advice and assistance, which is why these kinds of efforts take a while to organize. Najeeha and I had almost five months to put together our event, and we could have used a few more.

These efforts also require financial resources. We had the support of a Foundation Award from JMU’s Department of Anthropology and Sociology. This allowed us to hold our event in the same space Sheriff Smith held his. To use the community room, there is a fee for a four- or an eight-hour reservation. To afford food and other resources for the seminar, Najeeha and I elected the shorter reservation. We planned the seminar to take three hours, which allowed us thirty minutes each for set-up and clean-up. This made the time before and after the event rather hectic. We were only able to get set up and cleaned up on time due to the work of our friends, family, and other volunteers.

We wanted to use the same space as the Sheriff for practical and symbolic reasons. The room was able to accommodate a large group of people and is a well-known place in the community. Additionally, using the same space as the Sheriff allowed us to make a statement that while some in the community had used the room for closed-minded events, it could also be used to host community-building, truth-seeking events. However, in hindsight, I am not sure this
symbolism was worth having to rush people out of the space when our reservation time ended. In the future, it may be more important to choose a location where people can stay to ask questions and continue discussions after the official event has ended.

The money that did not go towards the room fee was used for food, drinks, and small notebooks to provide for attendees as well as a modest stipend for volunteers. Based on past experiences with community-based events, Najeeha and I decided that having snacks and coffee would help ensure the comfort of attendees and could aid in potential conversations; people are accustomed to talking over food. We also wanted to encourage personal reflection in addition to the group discussions, so we gave each attendee a place to write their reflections.

The decision to not have attendees RSVP was spearheaded by me. I did not want interested community members to be deterred from attending because they did not want to commit themselves through an RSVP. This decision made it difficult to plan such things as how many circle process facilitators we would need, how much food and coffee to provide, and how many chairs to set up. In the future, I would encourage interested community members to RSVP but make it clear that there are no consequences for not showing up.

Since we could only estimate how many people would attend our seminar, Dr. Alexander and Dr. Evans helped Najeeha and I formulate alternative plans for the circle process portion. Dr. Evans told us that the ideal size for a circle is no more than 25 people. Since she was our only facilitator who expressed feeling comfortable leading a circle on her own, we came up with plans that could accommodate a crowd larger than 25. One suggestion was having Greene residents participate in a circle facilitated by Dr. Evans and have attendees from outside the community participate in a less formal discussion facilitated by Dr. Alexander. Another suggestion was
having Greene residents participate in the circle and attendees from outside the community sit outside the circle and watch.

On the day of the event it became clear that most attendees were from Greene and there were around 40 people present. We decided to have one big circle, which had its pros and cons. While it was effective to have all attendees listening to one another in the same circle, we went over the allotted time for the circle and were only able to get through three out of the five planned rounds (though many participants addressed the fourth prompt during an earlier round). Nonetheless, beginning our seminar with the circle process set the tone of listening to one another and showing up for our community. The third round, which asked participants to tell a story about their name, proved to be very effective at establishing a sense of common humanity among the diverse groups present. It also got attendees talking to one another about the positive capabilities of the community and its diverse populations.

The panel portion of the event complemented the community-building aspects of the circle process very well. It served as a factual, educational opportunity that offered scholarly and experience-based perspectives on Islam. It was an effective vehicle for Muslim voices to be heard in a receptive environment. Having a moderator who ensured the speakers moved at a good pace and who took audience questions in an organized manner was key to the success of the panel. Community members asking questions sparked productive discussion about the media’s portrayal of Islam. However, because we had to vacate the building after our four hours were up, we had to cut off many of these conversations.

As participants were leaving, we had them fill out feedback forms (see Appendix H). Many shared their thoughts with us in person as well, and I noticed that women tended to praise the circle process in particular while men expressed that they found the panel portion more
beneficial. It isn’t surprising that different types of learners and processers like different formats of discussion. We learned that’s why it is important to accommodate various preferences.

Since Najeeha—as a Muslim student of Religious Studies—had more contacts and knowledge relevant to our seminar’s content, it made sense for me to take the lead concerning promotion for the event. I found that taking on this task allowed me to not speak for or over the Muslim community but rather to use my privileged status—as an American-born white person—to garner attention for less privileged voices. It is important that Muslim voices get the opportunity to be heard.

Najeeha and I originally had the idea to promote our event by going into classrooms at the public high school in Greene (which we both graduated from) as well as attending meetings of community organizations and churches. The thought was to get people to come to our space by first going into theirs; a way to start building community prior to the event. We reached out to the high school’s principal and several teachers we thought may be interested in having us moderate a discussion pertaining to Islamophobia in their class. We, ultimately, were unable to get permission to do such work in the schools, which was a lesson in how to specifically and strategically frame our event. We learned to never state that we were aiming to “counter” any person or organization but instead to use inclusive language that focused on our seminar as a stand-alone educational and community building opportunity.

Such was our focus when answering the reporter’s questions for the article in the Greene County Record. We asked Mr. Fitzgerald if we could email him our responses instead of conducting the interview over the phone. He allowed this, which made it possible for us to choose our words carefully and frame our event with utmost intentionality.
In the end, Najeeha and I did not allow enough time to promote by going to others’ spaces. We discovered that it is difficult to get in touch with many community organizations, in part because not many meet regularly and in part because their websites are often not up to date with contact information. Attending meetings at local churches would have been more successful had we started reaching out to churches earlier than we did.

The lesson to “go with the flow” seems to come up any time an event is organized that has many moving pieces. The ability to calmly think on your feet as unforeseen obstacles arise is a must. For example, the day of our seminar, Najeeha and I had to make alternative travel arrangements for Dr. Al-hasawi after some confusion of carpool plans left her without a ride with minutes until our seminar began. The generosity of people volunteering their time and resources made it possible for Dr. Al-Hasawi to make it in time for the panel discussion.

Friends, family, and other volunteers were crucial to our event’s success. They helped us get set up and clean up on time. They took on responsibilities that allowed Najeeha and I to be more present at our seminar. They exhibited a community-helping-community framework with selflessness and positivity. This is why attendees reported our event was effective; at its core it was community members educating and supporting fellow community members. While we originally wanted to have elected officials or deputies in attendance, not having such figures present allowed the space to feel more low-key and personable rather than feeling charged or defensive.

We did not know what kind of turnout to expect, so when there were 40 to 50 receptive and engaged attendees, we were overjoyed. We were successful in reaching our intended audience; most people who attended were middle-age Greene County residents interested in learning about the Muslim community. During the circle process, many community members
expressed their grievances with the Sheriff’s “Understanding the Threat” seminar and shared their gratitude for an opportunity to show the positive, supportive capabilities of the community. Two community members who attended even wrote letters to the editor of the *Greene County Record* the following week. In them they express their appreciation for an “enlightening” message “delivered with honesty [and] grace” (Cangiolosi, 2017; Clarke, 2017).

Najeeha and I had attendees provide their names and email addresses on a sign-in sheet. The sheet also asked if they were Greene residents and if they were interested in receiving emails from Greene Residents for Dialogue—an “organization” I created to possibly organize our future efforts. Najeeha and I have kept in touch with people who attended and other community members who expressed interest through several email newsletters. One newsletter included a document of resources—including videos, articles, and essays—related to misconceptions and frequent questions about Islam. Another was a lesson about Ramadan, the Islamic month of fasting, with information about “meet and greets” at the Charlottesville mosque.

Events like ours should not be one-offs. Community-building and educational work, especially in rural communities, take time to successfully change public opinion and shape appropriate legislation. Until a majority of Greene County residents have learned facts about Islam from scholars and people practicing the faith, elected officials can continue hosting Islamophobic events and endorsing Islamophobic content. Long-term efforts are necessary to truly shape the future of this community. These efforts take time and money, but they are important. Najeeha and I hope to bring more of these types of opportunities to our hometown, perhaps pertaining to subject matters like the LGBTQ+ community in Greene or sexual education in the public school system. Whether or not we are directly involved in the planning process, we hope to keep and build momentum with the interested community members we have
garnered to make Greene an example of how rural communities can be agents for positive growth and acceptance when given proper educational resources.
References


Appendix A

Steve Smith
Friday at 10:31 AM · ☀️

Saturday November 5th from 8am to 5pm community room at PVCC in Stanardsville, the Greene County Sheriffs Office will host a seminar free to the public. The seminar is: UNDERSTANDING THE THREAT, a very interesting and informative class on the muslim religion. Chris Gaubatz will be the speaker. Also Suzanne Shattuck (a very informed citizen) will be speaking about the refugee resettlements. This is a seminar that everyone should try to attend. You will have a very clear understanding of events happening in the world. If you want to attend please call the office 985-2222 and register. If you have any questions please call me at the same number thank you.
Appendix B

What Everyone Needs to Know ... About Islam

• The 5 Pillars of Islam are the basis for living as a Muslim. These are:
  1. **Profession of Faith** - Believe and state that there is only one God and that Muhammad is His prophet.
  2. **Prayer** - Pray at five specific times a day.
  3. **Charity** - Give to those less fortunate, especially the poor.
  4. **Fasting** - During the month of Ramadan, do not eat or drink anything during daylight. There are several reasons for this, including learning compassion for those who suffer poverty and hunger and developing a closer connection with God.
  5. **Pilgrimage to Mecca** - Make a pilgrimage to Mecca, if possible.

• There are about 1.2 billion Muslims, 80% of them outside of the Arabic-speaking world.

• There are over 3 million Muslims in the United States.

• Prophets of Islam include Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus. Muhammad is considered the final Prophet.

• Islam, Judaism and Christianity are considered the Abrahamic faiths. Muslims offer Christianity and Judaism special honor as “People of the Book.”

• The U.S. Founding Fathers repeatedly included Islam when making the case for freedom of religion.

• Following 9/11, Islamic leaders from within the United States and around the world condemned the attacks. This condemnation even included leaders from Iran, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Hezbollah.

• Every major American Muslim organization has condemned ISIS.

• Jihad in Islam means to strive to truth and justice.
Appendix C

Defeating Violent Extremism and Terrorism

Violent extremism and terrorism is a problem around the world. Today most terrorism takes place in majority Muslim countries whose people abhor and fear such violence.

Terrorism is a way of fighting for political gains. ISIS and al Qaeda terrorist leaders manipulate religion and use terror to promote fear and division for their political purposes. They want to provoke verbal and physical attacks by the United States and by Christians against Muslims. Those attacks become fodder for recruiting young people. Terrorists want us to fear each other; they want Muslim Americans and Muslim immigrants to be targeted and attacked; they want to see anti-Muslim events and speech. That makes their job easier.

Don’t attack the very people that ISIS and other terrorists are trying to recruit. You only play into the terrorists’ hands.

Instead, build bridges. Show that as an American you do believe in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and our core value of freedom of religion.

You would not want to learn about Christianity or Judaism from those who hate Christianity or Judaism, so learn about Islam from Muslims. Their mosques are open and welcoming spaces, and many sponsor open houses on a regular basis. You will learn that Muslims are people with a strong faith in God, people of generosity, people of community spirit, and people of peace. They are our neighbors. They may be found in all occupations, including many who come to the United States to study the healing professions and who remain to become citizens.

The story of Muslims in America is the story of the best of America, of the shared search for freedom and liberty.

To deny Muslims the same human rights as others, to deny them their place in America, is truly to be un-American.

Written by Frank Dukes (efdukes@gmail.com)
Appendix D

INTRODUCTION

SHARIA: Sharia is based on the principles found in the Koran and other Islamic religious/political texts. There are no common principles between American law and Sharia.

Under Sharia law:

- There is no freedom of religion
- There is no freedom of speech
- There is no freedom of thought
- There is no freedom of artistic expression
- There is no freedom of the press
- There is no equality of peoples—a non-Muslim, a Kafir, is never equal to a Muslim
- There is no equal protection under Sharia for different classes of people. Justice is dualistic, with one set of laws for Muslim males and different laws for women and non-Muslims.
- There are no equal rights for women
- Women can be beaten
- A non-Muslim cannot bear arms
- There is no democracy, since democracy means that a non-Muslim is equal to a Muslim
- Our Constitution is a man-made document of ignorance, jahiliyah, that must submit to Sharia
- Non-Muslims are dhimmis, third-class citizens
- All governments must be ruled by Sharia law
- Unlike common law, Sharia is not interpretive, nor can it be changed
- There is no Golden Rule

THE SOLUTION

This book uses a fact-based approach to knowledge based upon analytic or critical thought. When you finish reading, you will know what Sharia law is. More importantly, you will know the basis of Sharia. You will achieve an understanding of Islam that most in the West do not have. Islam will begin to make sense.

THE THREE VIEWS OF ISLAM

There are three points of view relative to Islam. The point of view depends upon how you think about Mohammed. If you believe Mohammed is the prophet of Allah, then you are a believer. If you don’t, you are a non-believer. The third viewpoint is that of an apologist for Islam. Apologists
Appendix E

Greene County Circle Process
As they are entering – make a name plate and write out their values
The prompt – What is important to you in this conversation? What do you need in order to safely engage in the conversation? Write one value per card. Model: Respect

Centerpiece
   Branches, flowers, etc – to represent the connected nature of our work – earth
Talking Pieces
   Geodes – denotes outside assumptions

Round 1 – Introductions and values
   Name and the value(s) that you consider important. As you share place your value card(s) in the centerpiece.

Expectations
   Kathy will bring these
   Speak from the heart – first person
   Respectful listening - non-judgmental
   Say just enough
   Respect the talking piece
   You can always pass

Round 2 – Clarify/Confirm the Expectations and Values
   Go around and let each person voice agreement

Before we continue – let’s take a moment to breathe and show up for one another as our best selves. Reflect on the guidelines and the values – what do you need to do to honor those values? Maybe you need to breathe, maybe you need to put some concerns away, maybe you need to remind yourself to not be afraid or angry. Do what you need to do to show up.

Round 3 – A story about your name. Our names are part of our identity; maybe you tell a story about what your name means or who you were named after. Be brief, but share as you will about your name.

Round 4 – What brought you here today?

Round 5 – How do you orient to faith, religion, or spirituality and how does that impact your life?

Closing reading – moment of reflection

Before we move to the panel discussion, we’re going to take a break, but before you break, take a minute to do some reflection. 3 things you heard that you resonated with; 2 questions you have; 1 thing you might do in response to what you heard thus far.

Details – Cardstock cut in quarters; markers. As people are entering someone needs to prompt them to do a name card and value cards. We need to have notebooks and pens available for the reflections.
### Appendix F

#### April 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 2017 Greene Residents for Dialogue

**Process Agenda**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:30 – 10:00</td>
<td>Facilitators, panelists, contributors arrive</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Circles set up – 15 to 25 chairs each (Kathy)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Food station set up (Najeeha’s family)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Computer set up for overhead technology and music (Kayla)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Greeting table set up (Najeeha)</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:00 – 10:15</td>
<td>Informal checking-in, social time, food</td>
<td>Najeeha and Kayla at table</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Voluntary sign-up sheet set up at a table to welcome, answer questions, have materials</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Name tags labelled with ‘A’ and ‘B’, with one group being loaded with Greene County residents</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:15 – 10:20</td>
<td>Welcome on behalf of Najeeha and Kayla</td>
<td>Rob</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Themes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Respectful dialogue and storytelling</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o Greene County first</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Logistics</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Overview of day</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Introduce Kathy to explain circles</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:20 – 11:45</td>
<td>Circle Process</td>
<td>Kathy leads</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Includes all participants – panelists, facilitators, guests</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:45 – 12:00</td>
<td>Reflection Break</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12:00 – 12:55</td>
<td>Panel</td>
<td>Rob moderates</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Dr. Jaclyn Michael (JMU)</td>
<td>2 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Najeeha Khan (Greene County)</td>
<td>2 minutes each</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Nourah Al-hasawi (EMU)</td>
<td>8 minutes each</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Farhan Ali, Imam</td>
<td>25 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Framing of panel</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. Agenda</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. How Q&amp;A will work</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Introduction of each panelist with name, how came to be in room, initial prompt of ‘tell a story that informs us about your perspective’</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Each panelist then provides their presentation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4. Questions and answer period</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:55 – 1:00</td>
<td>Thank yous and aspirations</td>
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</table>
Appendix G

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ENGAGING CONVERSATIONS WITH THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY
A Free Educational Seminar for the Public

All community members are invited to attend a free educational seminar “Engaging Conversations with the Muslim Community” on April 22nd from 10 to 1 at the PVCC Giuseppe Center in Greene County. Members of the Muslim community in and around Greene will be sharing stories, answering questions, and participating in dialogue with attendees. Scholars from James Madison University will also be present to offer a fact-based, historic understanding of Islam in America. Coffee and finger foods will be provided. Please join us at this community-building event for all ages! No RSVP necessary. Contact Residents for Community Dialogue at barke2ka@dukes.jmu.edu with any questions.

###
Appendix H

Please provide feedback regarding your experience at the “Engaging Conversations with the Muslim Community” event

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

1. I felt listened to at today’s event.

   Strongly Agree  Moderately Agree  Slightly Agree  Slightly Disagree  Moderately Disagree  Strongly Disagree

2. As a result of today’s event, I have a greater understanding of the facts and information surrounding the Muslim faith.

   Strongly Agree  Moderately Agree  Slightly Agree  Slightly Disagree  Moderately Disagree  Strongly Disagree

3. The panel was beneficial for well-rounded information and perspectives.

   Strongly Agree  Moderately Agree  Slightly Agree  Slightly Disagree  Moderately Disagree  Strongly Disagree

4. I have a greater understanding of the diverse experiences of Greene residents.

   Strongly Agree  Moderately Agree  Slightly Agree  Slightly Disagree  Moderately Disagree  Strongly Disagree

5. The circle process was useful for engaging in conversation.

   Strongly Agree  Moderately Agree  Slightly Agree  Slightly Disagree  Moderately Disagree  Strongly Disagree

Please use the reverse side of this page to write additional suggestions, comments, and ideas as well as dialogue topics you would like to be covered in the future.