



INTERNATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY

# INSIGHTS

MAGAZINE

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An **Islamic**  
**Coursera**

**Liberia**  
Welcomes  
**IOU** to Pioneer  
University  
Education

**Agricultural**  
**Economics**  
with an Islamic  
Insight

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## MEET THE TEAM

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## EDITOR'S DESK

# COVID: Inspiring New IOU Courses

The worldwide epidemic of COVID-19 and its subsequent variants had a devastating effect globally upon almost every element of the world – governments, institutions, common people, and even the environment.

Amid an atmosphere of chaos and helplessness due to the life-altering virus, the International Open University (IOU) saw the necessity for the introduction of new courses that would have the potential to empower individuals to work diligently towards building self-reliant, capable, and God-fearing societies.

To continue to fulfill its mission of educating people around the world by offering them contemporary education with an Islamic insight, the University is expanding its course offerings to launch new programs of study that will In sha Allah help solve some of the crises exacerbated by the virus.

Currently, food production is slowing instead of growing along with the rising demand of an increasing population! In the agricultural industry, the world faces a deficit of dedicated professionals who can utilize economic principles to optimize food production, especially in developing countries. The IOU will be launching a program on Agricultural Economics to help bridge this gap by producing graduates who can work towards improving rural and urban livelihoods.

One of the most pressing challenges the pandemic exposed was the dire need for better public health education. Millions of people died when their lives perhaps could have been saved with adequate information on the virus, rapid dissemination of information, and other effective measures to slow its growth.

The IOU's new program on Public Health will follow a preventive perspective to address the complex issues affecting community health and welfare, in keeping with Islam's focus on prioritization of prevention over cure and its emphasis on people living healthy and productive lives.





The International Open University, like many other universities around the world, realized that there was a significant void in educating the public not only about COVID but in relaying valuable knowledge on everything that the people needed. In many cases, useful information did not reach the Muslim world and the information they received was not from an Islamic perspective.

The IOU is working to change this picture by offering a new program on Mass Communication and Journalism. With media organizations' new concern about cultural diversity in their newsrooms, there is no better time for Muslim media professionals to occupy newsrooms and media outlets worldwide.

Alhamdulillah, it is a great blessing from Allah that the IOU is offering these programs, all of which will empower the Ummah to contribute to and positively benefit human society, In sha Allah.



### **By G. Adilah Shabazz**

G. Adilah Shabazz is a former Mass Communications Professor from the University of South Carolina at Sumter & Benedict College, Columbia. She is a freelance writer and community newspaper publisher. She has a Masters degree in Mass Communication from the University of South Carolina and was a former staff writer for the Associated Press and CBS-TV Newsfeed division.





## Embarking on an Educational Expansion

Following our intense efforts to create a Center of Excellence in online education, and with success registered in our accreditation efforts for both the programs and the institution, the International Open University has embarked on its expansion drive under the guidance of the Chancellor.

### The Gambia as a Pilot for Expansion

In the Gambia, where the Global Headquarters is based, the IOU has entered into agreements with many leading institutions to ensure that students who have completed non-degree professional programs can now obtain their first degrees.

The IOU has also offered a thousand scholarships through its One Million Scholarship for deserving African youth project to His Excellency President Adama Barrow. Fifty scholarships will be awarded to youth across the country every semester.

To effectively implement the project, the IOU has already begun its efforts to establish learning centers at strategic locations in the country. The Chancellor inaugurated the first learning center in Jarra Soma, about 200 kilometers from the IOU Headquarters.

The upcoming prison project is also an initiative in collaboration with National Assembly Members to provide Muslim prison inmates with educational and psychological support.

### Scanning the African Horizon

For more than a year now, the IOU has been reaching out to other countries to establish itself and bring

higher education to deserving African people. It is a daunting task, expensive, and full of challenges.

East Africa is considered a region where education has expanded considerably, and policymakers embrace the concept of online education. However, most regulations for online education recommend that institutions establish offline centers as well. The IOU has successfully established itself in Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, Malawi, Zambia, and Mozambique (the only Lusophone country).

Following several meetings with senior government officials in Liberia, the IOU will now establish its first center there and expand subsequently. Efforts are underway in Guinea Bissau to establish a presence and seek recognition.

The IOU has found it judicious to strengthen its base in many countries, seek recognition in some of the key African countries and international bodies, develop its alumni base, and expand its cooperation with local and international institutions in Africa to ensure that every learner has access to affordable contemporary education.

**Dr. Cherno Omar Barry**  
Vice-Chancellor  
International Open University

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# *Courses* on the Horizon



Mass Communication  
and Journalism

Public Health

Agricultural  
Economics



## COURSES ON THE HORIZON

# World of the Writer

I'm writing this article half asleep, pre-breakfast, in a hotel room of Batman (yes, really) in Southern Turkey. I'm here for the launch of my memoir in Turkish, *Al ham dulillah*. Welcome to the world of writing.

There is a limiting idea that journalism automatically and only refers to politics and news. This beat is getting louder in this age of online shouting. Sadly, this narrative has had the power to put off so many potentially great writers, especially from the Muslim community.

Add to this the image of the right-wing editor, yelling expletives at rookie journalists and the "bar culture," and you have a potent recipe for Muslim families to dismiss journalism as either "indecent" or an "unrealistic career." This view is outdated, and far from the full story. I am here to invite you, and even your parents, to the world of the writer.

**Journalism is writing what you know, or what you have researched, to a deadline, for a publication. Simple as that.**

When we look at it through this lens, well, the world is our story - and you are automatically an expert in some area. You can begin to write anywhere, any time you like. My work motto for the past quarter of a century has been, "Has laptop, will travel."

And this is my first piece of advice to you.

**"A writer is someone who writes." Wait, backspace on that!**

**"A writer is someone who reads."**

Much as I may love to flood the market with stories from all areas of Muslim life and expertise, firstly, please consider journalism, if you love to read. And I mean LOVE it.

Imagine hopping between the writing tones of the Sunday Mirror, the Indie Travel section, the Family supplement in the Times, then Femail, via a column in The Spectator. This is wholly possible, once you know the "sound," the beat, of a good piece of writing.

You see, the real technique, a hidden secret, is having a voice. Your voice. And you can only recognize



what a “voice” means by having writers you love and then writing differently to them - your voice.

In 1998, I was taken to lunch by Christina Odone, then Deputy editor of the important political magazine, “The New Statesman.” I had written about 10 pieces by this point for the Evening Standard, mostly on binge drinking and spending money. I wasn’t Muslim, so I did not have the hijab question.

My insecurity was still being an “outsider” with little to no experience. I have no degree, I went to drama school, not a university. But, Christina’s words, have pushed me forwards ever since. Apply this to yourself: Your passion for the story makes you unique. Your newness to this world makes your words ‘fresh.’ You let your thoughts flow - and it works!”

***None of this happens overnight. But rest assured, if your heart is beating hard reading this, if there is a feeling of excitement in there at the thought of writing a piece on your passion - then that is positive proof you can be a journalist.***

And it is awful, it is gut-wrenchingly cringe, it is float to the ceiling exhilaration. Way too many peaks and troughs for a normal day at work, I know. But maybe, maybe that’s you. And certainly, the world then needs your words, your unique outlook.

It doesn’t matter if you are on a law degree right now, or studying flower arranging (is that still a thing? Bad example!). Begin reading today. Read far away from academic writing. Read everything you can get your hands on which gets your heart moving. Study the words, love them.

Why are you enjoying or hating reading this piece right now? Is this too irreverent, annoying, enjoyable, amusing - what? Spend your free time analyzing how and why words impact you.

Then-then write. And never stop.

You have a passion and perceive the world in a way nobody else ever has. You have a unique voice. I am writing this to invite you to discover it and then to use it.



**By Lauren Booth**

Lauren Booth has been writing stories and articles for a quarter of a century. An internationally recognized motivational speaker, broadcaster, and presenter, she draws upon skills from a 20-year career on stage and TV.

She is the author of the memoir ‘Finding Peace in the Holy Land’ and the play ‘Accidentally Muslim’ which she toured at the 2019 Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

COURSES ON THE  
HORIZON

# Why Muslims Need to Take Up Careers in Journalism





Journalism is a great career; but in the 21st century, we are living in uncertain times where telling the truth or trying to expose lies can cost you your liberty or even your life. Having said that, there is nothing more noble or satisfying than delivering the truth to the breakfast table of readers, listeners or viewers. But, I wonder how many of you are dismayed at the lack of diversity in the world of journalism?

The big news stories today often come from the Muslim world but the messengers are mainly middle-class white men of other faiths or none who, with the best of intentions, struggle to report accurately events unfolding in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa.

Ignorant of Islam, cultures, and practice some journalists make schoolboy errors in their reporting, creating a lack of trust in those receiving the news. So, what is holding Muslims back from launching a successful career as journalists? Also, does diversity really matter? Yes! Of course, it does.

Young Muslims have got to stop blaming their parents who want to push them into becoming doctors, lawyers, or engineers and start seeking the knowledge of Islam and using it to show how our great faith will bless those intending on a career in the media.

Traditional Western-based newsrooms are waking up to the fact that they no longer represent the multicultural society they want to reach. So, in many ways, there isn't a better time than now to enter the media professions which are many and varied.

Islam tells us there is nothing more important than speaking the

truth. Allah instructed us to speak the haqq no matter how complex or precarious the situation.

One of the many important lessons I learned when I first reverted to Islam in 2003 was that God not only rewards Muslims for having the courage to speak the truth but, also opens the gates of Paradise to those who do so.

*"This is the Day when the truthful will benefit from their truthfulness. For them are gardens [in Paradise] beneath which rivers flow, wherein they will abide forever, Allah being pleased with them, and they with Him. That is the great attainment." (Al-Maidah: 119)*

Not only is delivering the truth incumbent on all journalists but there is a special responsibility for Muslim journalists to write without fear or favor, regardless of the subject.

Our beloved Prophet Muhammad, (ﷺ) said, as narrated by Abu Dhar Ghifari: **"Speak the truth even when it is bitter."** Some of my most difficult reports have exposed the wrongdoings of Muslims and that is a bitter pill to swallow but, the truth outweighs all other considerations.

As journalists, we must try and remain balanced and impartial in our dealings with most stories; unless I would argue, it is by giving voice to the voiceless and standing up to oppressors. There are also times when the facts speak for themselves and are there for all to see.

Journalism is a powerful weapon, which is why most tyrants and despots like to either control or ban the media. Even in so-called democracies, governments are

**Allah instructed us to speak the haqq no matter how complex or precarious the situation.**

well aware of the power and influence that the media can have on voters. Critical front pages and commentaries can win or lose elections, garner the backing of the public, and even start wars.

Delivering the news, educating, and informing, should not be left to others. We as Muslims should step up to the plate and deliver honest reports, especially about what is happening in the Muslim world today.

As I wrote at the beginning of this article, telling the truth is an honorable, noble thing to do. If you do decide to become a journalist, do it for all the right reasons because, despite all the terrible things that happen to journalists, delivering the truth can also bring peace.



**By Yvonne Ridley**

Yvonne Ridley is a British journalist, author, and politician. She was nominated for the Muslim Woman of the Year award at the British Muslim Awards and was also nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. Ridley reverted to Islam in 2003.

## COURSES ON THE HORIZON

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# Do You Have a **Public Health** Perspective?

**Public health's preventive approach aids in  
problem-solving many health issues**

Imagine this scene: members of a small village are gathered at a riverside when they suddenly see a helpless child in the water screaming for help. Someone quickly dives in and pulls the child out. Soon after, another child is seen being pulled by the current, floating helplessly down the river – then another, and another. More children keep appearing in the river, needing rescue. The village is exhausted from keeping watch and taking turns to save as many children as possible. Amid all this, one person finally takes a moment and realizes that this reactive approach is not sustainable. Instead, they ask, “Why are so many children falling into the river in the first place?”

Using a public health perspective, this person gathers a team and travels upstream along the river to determine the root cause of the problem. Researching the issue upstream, they find an old

broken bridge that children have to cross to reach their homes. Some children who were not as strong as others fell into the river when they tried to cross it. Working quickly to prevent any more children from falling in, the team cordons off the area and gathers the necessary experts and materials to fix the bridge, making a safe path for all the children to reach home.

This simplified story of “upstream thinking” illustrates the significance of using a preventative public health perspective to address complex issues affecting our communities health and welfare.

***This upstream thinking model is also applicable to Islam's strong emphasis on and prioritization of prevention, seen throughout***

## ***our Islamic way of life, from the wisdom of Islamic rulings to the daily recommended acts of worship.***

The overall purpose of public health is to improve the collective well-being of a population by preventing harmful conditions and promoting the conditions that allow people to live healthy and productive lives.

The role of public health encompasses a broad range of aspects that affect every part of our daily lives. This includes the nutrients in the food we eat, the chemicals in the air we breathe, or the safety condition of the roads on which we drive and commute.

***Additionally, many public health interventions that have helped save lives and improve human health have formed an integral part of the Islamic tradition since its conception. These include, for example, the repeated emphasis on purification and cleanliness in the Ahaadith, the early understanding of quarantine during a plague, or the detailed Islamic guidelines for consuming pure and nutritious food.***

To comprehensively address the broad range of systemic health challenges affecting our world today, communities need public health professionals who can use critical thinking and systems-based skills for researching, developing, and implementing sustainable prevention-focused solutions.

Whether working to prevent deaths from the next potential global pandemic, improving lifestyles through healthy nutrition and physical activity, or mitigating the effects of natural disasters on their communities, public health professionals can take a variety of career paths. Their work ranges from scientific researchers to urban city planners across government, private, non-profit, or academic settings.

Public health professionals may choose to work within their local communities or at the provincial, national, or international level and can find roles as data analysts, policy researchers, hospital administrators, behavioral educators, program coordinators, environmental inspectors, and many more.

Public health interventions are an immensely intertwined part of our daily lives and have an enormous impact on keeping our communities safe and healthy. To address the new health challenges of our time and effectively improve the health of our global community, a collaborative approach across numerous disciplines, fields, and industries is required to apply an Islamic public health perspective to develop well-planned, sustainable solutions.

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**By Dr. Rishtya Kakar**

Dr. Rishtya Kakar has a Ph.D. and MPH in Public Health, with a specialization in Health Promotion & Behavior from the University of Louisville. She received her MBBS degree from Shifa College of Medicine and works as a consultant and program coordinator for Muslim non-profit organizations.





COURSES ON THE  
HORIZON

# Importance of Agriculture in the World's Economy

Agriculture holds a pivotal position in the global economy. All other spheres of endeavours to man revolve around it. Food provision for the increasing world population of 7.5 billion today, projected to be 10 billion by 2050, is the goal of agriculture. In the same vein, a vast global web of farmers, traders, food manufacturers, retailers, and many others are

involved in getting this food from farm to fork, leading to improved income for all in the food production chain and the government. Based on the factors mentioned above, there are some emerging challenges. Although modernity in technology is addressing some of them, others still need to be considered.

According to the Food and Agri-

culture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in 2021, the global value generated by agriculture, forestry, and fishing increased by 73% in real terms between 2000 and 2019, reaching \$3.5 trillion in 2019. Total production of primary crops, of which sugar cane, maize, wheat, and rice take half, increased by 53 percent between 2000 and 2019, hitting a record high of 9.4 billion tonnes in



2019. Livestock contributed 40% to total global agricultural production. Besides, agriculture also employed 874 million people in 2020, totaling 27 percent of the global workforce.

It is thus the expectation of the planet that agriculture in its global food system becomes sustainable to such an extent that safe and nutritious food will be made available per capita. However, food production is only one aspect of the food system. The agro-food sector also provides a livelihood for millions of people. Worldwide, most of those living in extreme poverty are in rural areas, where food production is often the most important economic activity. There are roughly 570

million farms worldwide today, and millions of other people work in food-related jobs.

Agriculture thus has challenges just as there are prospects in it. Some of the challenges result from other human activities that are essential for living. Some are even agricultural activities-imposed such as irrigation of crops and water use, greenhouse gas emission, fertilization of crops, grazing of animals, etc.

Succinctly put, the challenges of agriculture in the world today can be encapsulated as threefold;

✓ **Feeding the growing population,**

✓ **Providing livelihood for farmers, and**

✓ **Protecting the environment.**

To achieve the desired prospects and sustainability of agriculture worldwide, the challenges identified above need consideration. These would require some synergies among other proactive steps with expected positive outcomes. There would, however, be some forms of trade-off in the process.

We can take a clue from the lessons imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic hampering national capacities to collect timely, accurate, and high-quality data and statistics to inform timely responses and monitor trends in agricultural production, importation, exportation, marketing, delivery and consumption. One cannot agree less with José Rosero Moncayo, Director of FAO's Statistics Division. He empha-

sized that data collection and statistics are the cornerstones of solid policy design and development plans and agendas.

It is high time we produced well-trained personnel that could create the required blend of all in the line of agricultural production to delivery and consumption. This will enhance the growth of the economy and sustain its potential for the future.

Agricultural professional experts are needed and expected to get involved in making policies that address the interconnectedness amidst the threefold challenges mentioned earlier. It is common sense to do this. In making efforts to produce needed professionals in tackling the world's agricultural challenges, the International Open University (IOU) is ready to launch its Agricultural Economics degree program, which would hopefully help to explore the unlimited positive prospects



**By Dr. Rasheed Adekunle Adebayo**

Dr. Rasheed Adekunle Adebayo (Ph.D.) is a lecturer and a course facilitator with IOU. He is an Animal Scientist and Researcher with publications in local and international conference proceedings and academic journals. He is an expert Agro-consultant, livestock producer and forage grower.



COURSES ON THE  
HORIZON

# Agricultural Economics with an Islamic Insight



The utilization of agricultural techniques, evolving over centuries, has been pivotal in the growth and expansion of human civilization to this day. During the Islamic Golden Age in Andalusia, North Africa, and the Middle East, Muslims transformed agriculture into science and revolutionized it. It was during this time farmers learned new skills such as crop rotation and sakia water wheel for irrigation.

Every new era brings different populations of people and agricultural needs. Some rely heavily on the produce directly harvested, while others benefit from trading the harvest for a return. This ultimately plays a major role in the agricultural industry developing into a pivotal link between the agricultural sector and the rest of the economy.

To show an appreciation for the

mastery of these abilities, one must spend a great amount of time in the field and apply these skills in ways that will manage and develop society. In order to apply the sciences of agriculture directly to the socioeconomic impact it has on society, a student is required to explore the study of Agricultural Economics.

Agricultural Economics is a field within the agricultural industry that uses economic principles to optimize food production, especially in less developed countries while also improving rural livelihoods. In this field of study, attention is given to all aspects of problems related to agriculture from an economic perspective.

Following the mission of the International Open University (IOU), the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences offers a one-year course that introduces students to the basics of Agricultural

Economics. The aim of the program is not only to produce graduates who are well-equipped to extend the frontiers of knowledge in this discipline but also to enhance the Islamization of knowledge in the field of Agricultural Economics.

***In this course, they offer a unique opportunity to study agricultural microeconomics, agricultural macroeconomics, farm management, rural sociology, agroclimatology, livestock management, introduction to fisheries, and more.***

It combines contemporary knowledge with Islamic insight to produce God-fearing agricultural policymakers, farm managers, and agribusiness persons.

Upon successful completion, students can further pursue their Diploma, and then their Bachelor's degree in Agricultural



## Philosophy and Goals: Agricultural Economics Program

The main objectives of the Certificate Program in Agricultural Economics are as follows:



**1.** To expose students to the science and practice of agriculture and the management of the agricultural business.



**4.** To train versatile graduates who can meet the challenges of self-employment as farmers or as employees of public and private institutions/ establishments.



**2.** To produce graduates who can respond to the varying challenges of day-to-day existence.



**5.** To produce graduates who are trained to extend the frontiers of knowledge in the discipline of Agricultural Economics.



**3.** To enhance the Islamization of knowledge.

Click the link below to view the course description - <https://iou.edu.gm/stream/aeco>

Economics. Learning about agricultural practices can be used variably throughout one's life for personal requirements or the needs of the community and to better help society. In many areas of the world, agriculture is of great importance as it contributes to the generation of revenue and is a source of income for many families. As such, it becomes an obligation among individuals of society (Fard al-Kifayah) to acquire knowledge in this field. Furthermore, it is an honorable endeavor, since the person is not only looking after themselves but also the community at large.

*Anas ibn Malik (may Allah's*

*Mercy be upon him) said: "Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said: 'There is none among the Muslims who plants a tree or sows seeds and then a bird or a person or an animal eats from it but is regarded as a charitable gift for him.'"* (Sahih Bukhari, no: 2320).

As a biological scientist myself and having attained knowledge about the relationships between plants, animals, genetics, and the world at large, I find this course in agricultural economics to be extremely rewarding and informative. God willing, this will pave the way for students to take up skills that were very sought after, and still are, throughout Islam's entire history.



**By Dalal Haouchar**

Dr. Dalal Haouchar holds a Ph.D. in Molecular Biology. She completed the BMAIS with IOU and is currently working towards completing her intermediate level in Tajweed and taking Tafseer courses to strengthen her understanding of the Quran.

# Headquarter's Highlights







## Chancellor Inaugurates IOU E-Learning Center in The Gambia's Jarra Soma

In its quest to make authentic, quality education readily available, affordable, and accessible to the masses, the International Open University (IOU) launched an e-learning center at Jarra Soma to complement the government's efforts to decentralize tertiary education in The Gambia.

In a great breakthrough for the university, it inaugurated its first extension of the institution in The Gambia.

A high-powered delegation of IOU's staff and students headed by Chancellor Professor Bilal Philips, presided over the launch of the IOU Jarra Soma Center on October 20th, 2022.

The Chancellor remarked that IOU is the future of education in The Gambia, demarcating IOU's curriculum as being unique in providing education with a moral foundation, in complete contrast to purely secular education that has been stripped of all moral deliberations.

The representative of the village head of Jarra Soma expressed his delight and appreciation to the entire IOU administration for selecting his community out of the many towns and villages in The Gambia.

The Chief of Jarra East, Alhagie Yahya Jarjusey, thanked Professor Bilal Philips for bringing quality university education to his district, and for being the first university to open an e-learning center in the region.

Representing the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MOBSE) at Lower River Region (LRR), Ebrima Sowe said the center will go a long way to improve education in the region. "We have been longing for this, and made a series of requests to the Office of the President to have a university at LRR", he said.

Almamo Ceesay, Deputy Chairman of Mansakonko Area Council, expressed his gratitude to IOU for making education readily available, flexible, and affordable for every Gambian child. "This

initiative will also equip teachers with quality education and train them professionally to educate the next generation", he said.

Representing the Director of Human Resources at MOBSE, Ebou Colley highlighted IOU's significant contribution to increasing teacher education in The Gambia and committed MOBSE's full support to the IOU.

IOU Jarra Soma e-learning center is the first of its kind in The Gambia, but will certainly not be the last, in shaa Allah.

Embarking on the mission to expand IOU's e-learning centers across the country, the Chancellor and Vice Chancellor also visited Basse town in The Gambia to set up a new learning center.



### By Bubacarr Jawo

Bubacarr Jawo has a Bachelor of Business Administration from IOU. He is currently working with the UN's International Organization for Migration (IOM) on Displacement Tracking Matrix as a Team Supervisor.





**Prof. Dr. Bilal Philips,**  
IOU Chancellor



**Imam Abdoulie  
Fatty**

## IOU's Mega Islamic Conference in the Gambia on “The Challenges of Being Muslim Today”



**Dr. Cherno Omar Barry,**  
IOU Vice Chancellor



**Omar Bojang**  
Representative of the Supreme  
Islamic Council





## IOU Chancellor Meets the President of The Gambia

The International Open University officials were invited to meet the President of The Gambia, where our headquarters resides, on Wednesday, October 19th, at 3 PM UTC.

Dr. Cherno Omar Barry, the IOU Vice Chancellor, suggested that we pray Salat-ud-Dhuhr there. So, we entered the presidential compound along with Chief Engineer of The Gambia Transport Service Company Khalifa Ceesay, IOU's Director of Administration Ismaila Bojang, and my son Abdullah Philips, who along with his wife and mother-in-law had just recently made Hijrah to The Gambia.

As we drove and walked through the presidential compound, many staffers greeted Dr. Barry warmly as he had worked there in the capacity of Permanent Secretary in 2018.

After praying Salat-ud-Dhuhr, we were ushered into the presidential meeting room and awaited his Excellency's arrival. After joining us, President Adama Barrow expressed his gratitude for the positive role that the IOU has played in The

Gambia's development.

I further emphasized the vision of the IOU in taking the university to the people rather than the people to the university, and elaborated on the many learning centers which the IOU has established in the past four years to make higher education more accessible to underprivileged youths in most of the English-speaking countries of Africa, beginning with The Gambia.

The Vice-Chancellor spoke on the many collaborative projects which IOU has embarked on with the Ministry of Higher Education and Lower Education, among which were the programs of intensive English for madrasa graduates and the provision of Bachelor of Education degrees for Teachers and College graduates, to upgrade the teaching qualifications of instructors in the country.

The President was very supportive of online education and expressed his view that it was the obligatory future direction of education, to fulfill the dream of higher education for all, to which he was committed.

Following the discussion, the

IOU delegation presented a symbolic cheque to the President for 1000 scholarships to be given to underprivileged Gambian youths, expressing IOU's desire to contribute substantially to the progress of the country.

I also presented copies of two of my published works, *Usool-at-Tafseer* and *Ibn Taymiyyah's Essay on the Jinn*, to his Excellency and thanked him for the Ministry of Education's recent issuance of accreditation to all of IOU's undergraduate courses as well as our Masters of Science in Islamic Psychology, after four long years of intensive efforts to bring our curricula in line with the high standards set by the National Accreditation and Quality Assurance Authority (NAQAA).

The IOU delegation returned to the headquarters jubilant and in very high spirits thanking Allah for His abundant mercies and IOU's continued successes.

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**By Prof. Dr. Bilal Philips**

Prof. Dr. Bilal Philips is the founder and Chancellor of the International Open University.



# Sailing Down *the River*

## Staff Boat Trip With The Chancellor

At IOU, we value the importance of building strong relationships and fostering a positive work culture. One way we do this is by organizing retreats and social events for our staff. It's a great opportunity for us to come together and brainstorm ways to further the development of our organization's mission.

The IOU Chancellor and his acquaintances, the Vice Chancellor, staff and student committee members had the opportunity to visit Lamin Lodge in The Gambia on October 29th, 2022. The time spent at the boat trip was a memorable and enjoyable experience for all.

### HEADQUARTER'S HIGHLIGHTS



Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, and the IOU staff at Lamin lodge, The Gambia.







# IOU *inFocus*

## IOU IN FOCUS

# One Million African Scholarships: 1MAS Highlights



Undoubtedly higher education in Africa is crucial to its development. As the world depicts herself as a global village, education is the key to its sustainability. Primarily, investment in education defines the penultimate paradigm shift - building sustainable growth across the continent and producing an educated and skilled workforce adaptive to the challenges of this era.

Keeping the need for education in mind, the International Open University (IOU) pioneered the 1 Million African Scholarship (1MAS) project, cruising at beacons of scholarship and educational financial aid to 1 million Africans to secure graduation.

## A Thousand Beneficiaries in the Last Year

The fiscal year 2021-22 saw over a thousand new African students enrolled into various degree programs at IOU through the 1MAS project.

## Leading Beneficiary Country

The 1MAS Project, initiated in September 2017 at The Gambia, has so far expanded to over 17 African countries awarding roughly 4000 scholarships till now. Nigeria, as the lead beneficiary, benefitted 950 continuing students, while 692 new beneficiaries were inducted in 2021/22.

## Graduates from 1MAS

Incredibly, 60 students sponsored through the 1MAS project have graduated with a bachelor's degree in various programs including BA Islamic Studies, BSc Psychology, BA Arabic Language, BA Business Administration, BSc Islamic Economics, Banking and Finance and B. Education, among others. Indeed, it is an accolade worth mentioning which we could only achieve by the help and mercy of Allah.

## IOU Established Four New 1MAS Centers in Africa Between 2021-2022

With our quest to reach a larger population in Africa and provide accessible and flexible university education, an additional four 1MAS

centers were established across West, East and South African countries between 2021 and 2022. Specifically, these centers of excellence are located in Eswatini, Zambia, Ethiopia, and Nigeria. Establishing them led to an amazing recruitment of over 150 students.

## Action Plan for the Next Year

The aim of the 1MAS project is to educate one million Africans within a decade. To commemorate this noble mission, we will be expanding and establishing more centres in Africa. By 2023, we intend to establish centers in Gweru, Zimbabwe; Soma, The Gambia; Zanzibar, Tanzania and Ilorin, Nigeria. Additionally, we will be producing a detailed documentary of the 1MAS.







## Testimonials From 1MAS Beneficiaries

### From Nigeria:

I am Yusuf Ademola Adesina from Lagos State, Nigeria. I completed the General Diploma in Islamic Studies and BSc Psychology at IOU between 2014 to 2018. Now, I am a 5th semester student of the BA in Arabic Language Studies program under IOU's 1 million African Scholarship initiative.

Studying with the IOU over the past 8 years has been a wonderful journey, and I would like to extend my profound gratitude and appreciation to its founder Dr Bilal Philips, for facilitating the delivery of quality education and authentic knowledge at no cost and with absolute diligence.

So far on the journey of seeking knowledge at IOU, I have gained immense authentic knowledge about Islam from the right sources. Studying with IOU has introduced me to a wide ocean of knowledge and experience on academic and research skills which was made possible because of the university's high academic standard. IOU has given me the opportunity to meet with different people across the globe, sharing knowledge and experiences.

Currently, I work with IOU at the bursary office under the Bursary and

Community Outreach Department. I appreciate all the individuals who are contributing to and sponsoring the 1MAS initiative at IOU.

### From Eswatini:

I am Nompumelelo Kunene from Swaziland. I am a fourth year BBA student under the IOU scholarship programme. Alhamdulillah, I really appreciate the scholarship and the opportunity granted to me to grow academically and spiritually as a Muslim. It has been a great journey over the years with all the support from the dedicated staff of the university.

IOU has strengthened my Islamic knowledge, inspired and enabled me to become an active member of my society through its community project initiative. During my studies at IOU, I aspire to develop enormous professional skills including but not limited to operating digitally through enhancement of IT skills and compiling scholarly work. I wish for more of my fellow Swazi-citizens to have access to this opportunity that I am currently enjoying. May Allah the Almighty generously bless our donors and increase for them provisions in this world and the akhirah.

### From The Gambia:

I am Rainatu Koroma, a former student of the International Open University (IOU). I was blessed to

be a part of the 2016 IOU student scholarship program. I studied in the bachelor's degree program in Business Administration and graduated with a first-class honours in the class of 2022. I will forever be grateful and thankful for the IOU scholarship that was granted to me, greatly impacting my academic career. Alhamdulillah IOU made my academic dream come true.

This wonderful opportunity provided by IOU also had a great impact on my religious goals. It gave me the opportunity to learn more about my religion - Islam. Both contemporary and religious studies are gelled together, greatly strengthening our deen, increasing our iman and expanding our knowledge in Islam.



### By Usman Amjad Qazi

Usman Amjad Qazi is the Director for the Bursary and Community Outreach Department at IOU. He has a Bachelor of Business Administration and a Master of Arts in Management Studies from the University of Hertfordshire. He also acquired a Masters in Business Administration from INTI International University.



## IOU IN FOCUS

# IOU's Corporate Relationship Program: Bringing Students and Employers Together

In a recent Forbes magazine article 'Not Even Inflation Can Kill the Job Boom' highlighting the state of the economy, companies report higher inflation rates while the demand to fill vacant positions continues to rise. Industry experts observe that even though workers are being laid off, the job market is so red hot, that companies can't hire suitable applicants fast enough.

## What's the reason behind this?

Increased energy costs of raw materials and supply chain barriers present additional burdens for companies, but the labor market is so competitive that the demand for workers entering and re-entering the workforce post-pandemic is at an all-time high. Companies are

hiring and holding on to valuable staff. The pandemic has forced many corporations to reinvent themselves, and the transformation, although hitting them where it hurts, has created opportunities that didn't exist before. This is good news for graduates and those with strong in-demand skill sets.

## Ride the wave

In Bangladesh, for example, symbolic of what's happening across many nations, the unemployment rate, which measures the number of people looking for a job, was as low as 4.3 % pre-pandemic. It drastically increased to 5.3% in 2020. However, in 2021 it decreased to 5.2%. This confirms that companies have started to look for, hire, and re-hire qualified and skilled workers.

Lower unemployment rates should lead to lower inflation. This is good news for companies but this trend is not sustainable.

Our advice? Position yourself to take advantage of this trend now, sooner than later.

## How IOU's Corporate Relationship Program Initiative helps with job placement

IOU's Corporate Relationship Program (CRP) bridges the gap between companies that need staff, and students and graduates who need jobs, even if they have no experience in a particular field. IOU recognizes the challenges our students face in finding employment. With the current



economic climate, it makes it easier for potential employees to land decent jobs. The cherry on the cake is IOU's CRP which acts as a medium that helps our students find placements and internships.

Furthermore, it helps employers connect with the highly diversified student population that IOU produces and mentors through our accredited degree programs. Take a look and learn more about our programs here.

Current students as well as alumni in our programs also benefit from our career planning opportunities which showcase their talents, and our skill development sessions through intensive case studies. In addition, the program offers training in:

- **Personal brand building**
- **Effective communication and soft skills**
- **Resume writing**
- **Corporate Connect Sessions, where they interact with and learn from industry professionals from different parts of the world**

Experts also predict that by 2024, this job status trend may end, as unemployment continues to decline.

Now is the time to take advantage of the increased demand for labor. It may never be too late, but what better time than now to get started? And what better place to do so than at the International

Open University?

The International Open University is a complete experience that offers certificates and degrees, in a welcoming, judgment-free environment, that seeks to uplift and promote its graduates. Here students and alumni can obtain internships that can lead to permanent employment.

**Join the IOU, take advantage of our Corporate Relationship Program, and start YOUR journey to a brighter tomorrow, today.**

## IOU IN FOCUS

# The Rise of the Student Committees

The concept of the Student Committee (SC) stemmed from the idea of efficient peer-to-peer integration to assist and guide the freshmen into the IOU system. In 2012, this dream project of Dr. Bilal was implemented by Mohammed Shajiuddin and SCs were formed in 27 countries around the world. The initial plan was to help students get organized and be able to focus on their studies.

Thereafter, the Committee saw many developments that enabled it to grow and flourish over the years. Awareness Months was launched for an extended outreach, the Student Committee Manual gave an incentive of 25% reduced fees for the most active members and the Student Committee Global Conference served as a massive platform for all our committee members across the globe to interact with each other.

The efforts paid off and we were able to expand to over 43 countries with 58 committees and around 600 members, Alhamdulillah.

## The Present and the Future of IOU Student Committees

With the help of Allah, we were able to design an activity plan and choose various community-based activities for each day. These activities were later divided among committee members, with the president supervising, overseeing, and engineering the process and strategic implementation of the set plans which are occasionally enhanced as required.

The SC has been a remarkable avenue for self-development. It's been an opportunity for me to realize my hidden and real potential and equally granted me the space to explore them and learn from my mistakes in my journey of becoming a better person, a cooperative and national leader.



"Promoting IOU, or rather displaying the treasures within reach by becoming an IOU student is a 24-hour duty for me. I know with certainty that IOU has what it takes to transform every nation into greatness through its education system. I thank God that a week does not go by, to date, except that someone would call to enquire about IOU or the IEC program."

The SCs must not reduce themselves to mere student groups organizing Islamic events here and there. Instead, we must program the SCs as ambassadors of Islamic reformation and global influencers.

### Kawsu Darboe

*Former Chairperson of The Gambia 5th Executive Student Committee*

## What is Awareness Month?

Learning must be fun, interactive, and engaging. That's when true understanding takes place. Memorizing without interest and comprehension will never allow knowledge to enter the hearts of students.

Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) taught us that seeking knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim, and guiding someone to a good deed brings the same reward as doing the good deed. Learning and helping others to learn is a double reward and an excellent source of Sadaqah Jariyah.

Awareness Month was initiated with the noble intention to spread awareness about IOU by holding events in their communities. This is perfectly aligned with the vision of IOU which was launched as a beacon of knowledge for the Ummah to get the best worldly education through an Islamic lens from authentic sources, taught by credible and professional teachers.



# A Decade of Building a Global Community: The Student Committee Conference 2022

The Student Committee commemorated its 10th anniversary with a Student Committee (SC) Conference this year. The guest speaker, IOU's Chancellor and Student Committee founder Prof. Dr. Bilal Philips, addressed members, leaders, and chairpersons of the SC and gave them an opportunity to raise questions and find solutions.

Many key topics were discussed at the conference, including the creation of the SC, its aims, responsibilities, and future plans.

The SC was established to assist freshman students of the IOU by rendering comprehensive internet skills attuned to online studying. During the conference, Dr. Bilal reflected on the convenience of pre-acquired knowledge of computers and the internet. While some students are well acquainted with the functionality of the internet – they simply enroll and start studying right away, there are others for whom adjustment to distance learning is a process that requires time.



The idea of a student board was thereby conceptualized to serve the needs of students in a way similar to what representatives do, but on a much larger scale. What distinguishes the IOU Student Committee from others is that it is not bound by traditional university methods; for instance, a conventional university does not have representatives if they establish campuses in other countries. This makes the IOU Student Committees stand in a league of their own.

Setting up the Student Committee was also an attempt to give students a taste of university life, as well as a chance to partake in activities like offline socialization. This was an opportunity for students to participate in this interactive workshop, and learn how to collaborate with others, especially other Muslims. The SC, therefore, created space for the students to embrace the university spirit without the interference of the corrupting elements often found in western universities. Students would, however, still be exposed to other cultures and have the opportunity to work with international peers.

The same year, Dr. Bilal introduced the Student Community Service, which takes students out of their ivory towers and into the community to serve. He discovered the value of community service while working as an Imam in Toronto, where high school students were required to do volunteer work. He would confirm the hours spent by students who came to the masjid and helped out.

The Student Community Service at the IOU provides an outlet for students to serve the community and pass on their knowledge.

The SC wishes to eventually expand its program globally. At the moment, SC has representatives from 43 countries. The individualistic distinctiveness rooted in various cultural backgrounds within the student committee is noteworthy.

The Student Committee at the IOU is an exemplar of this, Alhamdulillah!

*"And among His wonders is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the diversity of your tongues and colors. For in this, behold, there are messages indeed for all who are possessed of innate knowledge!"*

Quran 30: 22



**Rupali Saha**

Rupali Saha is a volunteer at IOU. She is pursuing a BA in Islamic Studies from IOU. Rupali has completed her studies in Economics at St. Joseph's College, India. She is an avid reader and a freelance writer.



## Journal of Integrated Sciences

### An Open-Door to Academic Publishing

One of the marks of a university dedicated to excellence is its establishment of an exceptional Research and Publication department. As part of its commitment to facilitate and encourage Islamic scholarship, the International Open University (IOU) has instituted the Directorate of Research and Publications department for the benefit of faculty, students, alumni, and the academic community. Our academic publication, the Journal of Integrated Sciences (JIS), is a peer-reviewed, multi-disciplinary periodical featuring articles focusing on different topics under the auspices of Islamic sciences related to contemporary concerns. The first issue was published in December 2020 by the IOU Press and is available quarterly in the English language.

Multiple benefits come with having a regularly published academic journal like the Journal of Integrated Sciences. As the IOU becomes known as a hub for research opportunities and publications, the university will inevitably attract the attention of international students, faculty, grants, media coverage, and even philanthropic organizations

receiving greater institutional visibility and an enhanced academic reputation.

The Journal of Integrated Sciences displays research and scholarship opportunities coupled with Islamic sciences, and thus enables people to learn about our history, understand the present context in which we live, and plan for the future. It is essential to address the challenging problems Muslims face globally.

Visit the website ( <https://jis.iou.edu.gm/> ) for more details. Faculty members who wish to discuss a potential editorial may email the Editor-in-Chief ( [editorinchief.jis@iou.edu.gm](mailto:editorinchief.jis@iou.edu.gm) ).



### By Dr. Afroza Bulbul Afrin

Dr. Afroza Bulbul Afrin is an Associate Professor and the Director of Research And Publications at IOU. She holds a Ph.D. from the International Islamic University, Malaysia. She has over 30 publications and has taught for over 20 years at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.



## IOU IN FOCUS



## A Peek Into IOU's Gargantuan 400,000 Ebook Library

Welcome to the International Open University Libraries.

In the last two decades, a great number of digital library and repository systems have been developed by universities worldwide. The International Open University (IOU) is a young and fast-developing university providing affordable online quality education to a large number of students spread all over the globe.

This situation demands that the university needs to have an excellent digital library that would fulfill the requirements of its students and staff spread out in many countries.

We are proud to say that the IOU library, is now equipped with modern state-of-the-art technology

including an international-level integrated library management system and a digital library management system. In order to make it easy to access our colossal database of 400,000 e-books, e-journals, and other reference sources we also have an interactive library webpage.

The IOU Libraries are the academic town square of the university and form an essential component of the academic and research pulse of the institution. It supports students, researchers, and faculty members in the preparation for courses, assignments, and research through its resources and services.

The on-campus library is located at the university headquarters in The Gambia.

## IOU Libraries Resources

- 400,000 E-Books: E-Books available on-campus, online e-book database, and online open access e-books.
- Research Database: Millions of established free online research databases and journals
- Online Video Database: Video resources of various renowned universities and educational Institutions
- Theses and Dissertations: Free online open-access graduate theses and dissertations published around the world
- Free Digital Libraries: Free online open-access best digital libraries
- Open Access Journals: Free access to reputed international journals
- E-Reserve: Access to course material online through the library website
- IOU Libraries OPAC: Books, library collections, and materials held by the IOU Libraries worldwide
- Dictionaries & Encyclopedias: Online sources to reference tools
- IOU Online Library for registered students
- On-Campus internet and Wi-Fi facility
- IOU Library Search Portal: Allows users to cross-search across the vast print and online collections
- IOU Libraries International Standard Union Catalogue Database (Koha)
- International Standard Institution Repository Management System (DSpace)

## IOU Libraries Services

- Circulation services in the HQ library
- Digital library access
- Library catalog access
- IOU free journals database
- Library resource guide
- E-Books, articles, and journals help and support
- Searching methods
- Research help services
- Books, journals, and research database recommendation
- IOU training and research assistant
- Reference services
- Guide to citing & referencing
- Endnote, Zotero, Google Scholar, and other important database and citation management software access.
- Chat with Librarian
- Email Services
- Facebook page of IOU Libraries



### By Sher Afzal Khan

Sher Afzal Khan is a Member of the University Senate and the Director of Libraries at IOU. He has conducted over 150 training workshops at government and private institutes. He is the President of the Koha library software in Pakistan, country ambassador for DSpace MIT USA, and the Vice Chairman of the Read Pakistan trust.



The background of the page is a dark blue-tinted photograph of a wooden desk. On the desk, there is a round wooden clock with black hands and numbers. A multi-colored pencil (yellow, green, and purple) lies diagonally across the desk. In the upper right corner, a calendar is visible, showing the month of April with days of the week and dates. The title 'Events 2022' is overlaid on the image in a white script font for 'Events' and a light blue sans-serif font for '2022'.

# Events 2022





# Convocation Ceremony in Kenya

## *Batch of Spring 2022*

The 8th Convocation of the International Open University (IOU) was held in Nairobi, Kenya, at Islamia College for graduates from East Africa and Somalia.

The event was presided over by renowned dignitaries including the Chairman of the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM), Alhaj Hassan Ole Nado, who was

also the chief guest, Dr. Ali Said Sunkar, VC of the Islamic University of Kenya (IUK), with whom IOU had recently signed an MOU, the Chairman of Muslim Education Welfare Association (MEWA), Dr. Abdalla Muhammad Khatwib, Dean of Munawwar College, the DVC of the Technical University of Mombasa, Mwenye Baba, a prominent and well-known scholar from Kenya's Coast, the Mufti of

Tanzania, who was awarded an Honorary Doctorate on the same day, the Mufti of Rwanda and some members of parliament.



Scan the QR code to watch the convocation ceremony



*To the right: Indonesia Head of Business Evan Indrawijaya; center: former student committee leader Rahmat Faishal; to his left: IOU sales executive Herry Arjuna along with Indonesia student committee members.*

# Jakarta, Let's Meet Up!

## First In-Person Student Orientation in Indonesia Fall Event

The International Open University (IOU) and the Indonesia Student Committee organized a student orientation for the first time in the beautiful city of Jakarta, Indonesia on September 18, 2022.

This special in-person gathering was held in the meeting hall of Al Falah Mosque, Benhill, Central Jakarta, and hosted nearly 100 students from IOU, most of whom had just joined the Fall 2022 semester.

The event provided an excellent opportunity and a platform to connect the IOU students living in the Greater Jakarta area to build relationships and share experiences among the new students of IOU. The occasion brought the students, teachers, and staff members together in the mosque hall, away from the virtual platform of IOU for the first time.

Ustadh Abu Salma Muhammad, a prominent local scholar graced the occasion and delivered an engaging lecture on "Staying steadfast (istiqamah) to finish the study" to motivate the students to stay on track with their studies at IOU.

Ustadh Bambang Apriyanto and Ustadha Isma Sarah, both IOU teachers, and Br. Budi Setiawan, a senior BAIS student, also shared their wisdom and advice on keeping the intentions sincere and strengthening the effort of acquiring knowledge from IOU effectively.

During the event, an expert trainer conducted team-building exercises. These interactive ice-breaking activities encouraged student participation and helped them bond with other students creating a sense of community and belonging.

Br. Evan Indrawijaya, Head of IOU Indonesia Development, and Br. Rahmat Faisal, Head of the Organizing Student Committee, mentioned in their speeches that similar in-person gatherings and study groups will be organized in other cities across Indonesia so that the ukhuwah (brotherhood) of IOU students can be strongly established. In sha' Allah.

As for the Indonesian students, they will be sure to look forward to many more events like this!



# Alumni

## *Spotlight*





Center: Lassana M. Tunkara; to his left: Dr. Cherno Omar Barry along with IOU alumni

## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

# IOU's First Offline Alumni Meet in The Gambia

In the wake of a challenging two-year pandemic hiatus, the International Open University Alumni Association (IAA) successfully organized its first in-person meet at its headquarters in The Gambia.

Re-visiting the journey that was last made while writing their final semester examinations, alumni from across the country now stepped into campus grounds as accomplished graduates, brimming with the potential and eagerness to give back to the university, and function as change-makers in society.

In keeping with the IOU's noble goal of changing the nation through education, the IAA believes that its alumni play an important role in bringing about positive societal change. The reunion, themed 'IOU Alumni's Contribution to The Gambia in the Next 365 Days', was aimed at encouraging alumni to network and collectively deliver tangible contributions through their lofty knowledge in various fields.

They deliberated on a well-structured road map lined up with projects in diverse sectors of economics, business, education, da'wah, and spiritual development. Zahra Fathima, Assistant Director of the IAA believes that the alumni can bring about

substantial progress by imparting Islamic knowledge, teaching, and research.

She remarked, "As IOU's ambassadors, alumni possess the aptitude to launch new avenues of Islamic work and projects beneficial to the Muslim Ummah."

IOU's Vice-Chancellor Professor Cherno Omar Barry expressed his admiration for the alumni's Islamic morals and characteristics, which he believes is a true reflection of exemplary education.

An institution's alumni are a true reflection of its past, a representation of its present, and a link to its future. In The Gambia, they have blossomed exceptionally well under IOU's guidance, and stand as true representatives of the esteemed institution.

***Mohammed Sonko, a graduate of IOU's Bachelors in Islamic Banking and Finance, is a Sharia Auditing expert, and among the first in the country to hone the field. He has tirelessly tried to influence banking companies to desist from collecting and operating with riba.***



Sonko is employed at the Islamic MicroFinance department in the Central Bank of The Gambia.



"There exists a deficiency of personnel who are experts in Islamic banking, finance, and auditing," he said, emphasizing the advantages of a strong alumni network to drive professional growth.

Alumni believe that the Islamic foundation and principles instilled in them are of benefit in this world and the hereafter. They gladly testify that the knowledge gained at IOU has equipped them with outstanding interpersonal and time management skills, Islamic ethics, and morals that contribute to exceptional performance in their workspaces.

***"IOU equipped me with Islamic principles that changed my interpersonal skills in interacting with colleagues and empowered me to abstain from corrupt acts" Kemo Samateh - BSc IT graduate***

Commending IOU's online learning methodology, the chief guest Lassana M. Tunakara, Deputy General Manager at Q Network, emphasized how this form of learning has taken over conventional forms of education. "The advent of technology has made it easy and possible to learn anything online. I encourage youngsters to use this platform and opportunity to learn", he said.

Muhammed Al-Amine K. Sanneh, a graduate with a bachelor's in education, has never been to a conventional school. He learned English from IOU's offline Intensive English Course and went on to pursue a BEd in English medium. He reflected, "When Corona hit in 2019, I was thankful. I said Alhamdulillah for choosing IOU. The entire world was confused, and all universities were shut down. The only university that was running with no difficulty in this country was IOU".

Deputy Administrative Director Sediki Ceesay is also an alumnus of the Masters in Islamic Studies program. A scholarship student, Ceesay was raised in a Sufi family, and IOU introduced him to life-changing knowledge and opportunities. He is notably among those who have relentlessly contributed to establishing IOU in The Gambia.

Held in early September, within arm's reach of the commencement of the Fall semester, the reunion depicted the strong bond between the alumni and their alma mater. IOU Alumni have proven to be great mentors to current students as they assist, counsel, guide them through their courses, and share insights about the market and its opportunities.

The event was put together under the guidance of the Chancellor, through the efforts of the IAA, coordinated by its Director, Ayesha Khattak, Assistant Director Zahra Fathima, and alumni volunteers. The student committee members also played an instrumental role in organizing the event. IOU's first alumni reunion – a successful landmark event -- also received news coverage in The Gambia's leading broadcast channel, QTV.

Leaving with a taste of Gambia's favorite meat pie, and a heart full of zeal, the alumni who had gathered from various walks of life, forged seamless connections, uniting with the Islamic spirit of brotherhood that bonds all alumni, students, and fellow Muslims across the globe.



Scan to Explore



## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT


 A portrait of Shaykh Abdenasser Zouhri, an elderly man with a long, full white beard and mustache. He is wearing a white thobe and a yellow and white patterned kumma (headband). The background is a light-colored wall with intricate Islamic geometric patterns.
 

# Shaykh Abdenasser Zouhri

## A Proud Product of the IOU

Not only are students and laymen interested in Islamic Studies or one of the other Courses of Study offered by IOU, but even experts or scholars in their particular field who want to enhance their education or extend it.

One such student was Shaykh Abdenasser Zouhri, a longtime Imam and U.S.-based student of knowledge, who chose the IOU for his extended education.

Born in Morocco during the war of independence of Algeria, Shaykh Zouhri came to the United States in 1975 on a scholarship to study engineering. He obtained his B.S. degree in Industrial Engineering from the University of Massachusetts.

In 1989, he moved to Durham, N.C. where he has been serving as a Triangle area (Durham, Raleigh, and

Chapel Hill) Imam since 1993. He became a founding member of the Carolina Islamic Council (CIC) and delivered numerous lectures in masjids throughout North and South Carolina in the U.S.

Well-liked and highly regarded as an Imam and speaker, one would think him satisfied to rest on his laurels, but Shaykh Zouhri is not one to just rest or be satisfied with his current status.

He decided to continue his Islamic Studies education by choosing IOU and obtaining both a Bridge to Masters in Islamic Studies - BMAIS (Postgraduate degree) in 2014 and MAIS in 2016.

Answering a set of questions about his experience at the IOU, Shaykh Zouhri said it was generally a very satisfying and beneficial experience.



"The IOU team made learning easily accessible, absorbable, and adaptable," he said.

"Alhamdulillah, studying at IOU was extremely simple and easy," he continued. "After listening to the lectures, if the students have doubts or seek further clarification, they can join the study sessions or even consult the teaching assistant allocated to each course. Lectures are recorded and students can view them multiple times."

Being such a busy Imam with responsibilities beyond and including in the masjid, having flexible time to study was important for him. "You can set your hours and learn from the comfort of your home," the IOU alumnus added.

Learning at IOU, said the husband and father of four, and Imam of Ibad Ar-Rahman Masjid in Durham, NC, also came with greater character development, which is a hallmark of every great citadel of learning.

"All the knowledge acquired during my studies (at IOU) helped me give better khutbas (sermons), answer questions from the community, and enriched my ability to help my fellow Muslims," he continued.

Though richly rewarding and a privilege to be an Imam and slave of Allah in this way, too often Imams are not highly paid, so attending a university or college or any Islamic Studies program could be out of financial reach for many.

Shaykh Zouhri noted that IOU's tuition – a fraction of what many other online programs offer -- was a blessing, while IOU still manages to dignity itself as an illustrious fountain of knowledge.

"It is affordable," commented Shaykh Zouhri, when asked about

the cost of running a program at IOU in comparison to other universities.

He advises that all who want to study Islam should not be hesitant about starting and they should try to begin as soon as possible. "I also encourage anyone interested in learning more about Islam to attend the IOU," he said. "It is convenient; you can study at your own pace, and it is an excellent institution," he added.

***Having passed through the system, Shaykh Zouhri believes IOU fulfills the criteria for a graduate college, and its students only need to be diligent and meticulous to learn from and leverage the institution.***

"Anyone who is struggling in their studies should think about the words of Imam Shafi'ee (may Allah have mercy on him)," he said. "Imam Shafi'ee stated that 'to acquire knowledge, you need six things: Intellect, Desire, Ambition, Be content, Good Teacher, and Time'."

As Shaykh Zouhri implied, a strong network of IOU alumni is rapidly growing across the world and helping others tap into the IOU's value system through sponsorship, recommendations, and most importantly by serving as living precedents of the illuminating touch of IOU, which is transforming people across borders.

Shaykh Zouhri is one such alumnus and Alhumdulillah, now there are countless others.



## By Ridwan Adelaja

Ridwan Adelaja is a journalist and poet. He is the Tech Editor of Ripples Nigeria, and publisher of Quillcastle Nigeria and Techparley.com. 2017 Gold Winner of Ken Egbas Poetry Prize and 2018 Bronze Winner of Korea-Nigeria Poetry Prize, Ridwan uses storytelling and poetry to amplify voices of minority communities.

&

## By G. Adilah Shabazz

**INTERNATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY**  
*"Changing the Nation through Education"*

**MASTER OF ARTS**  
**(M.A.) in Islamic Studies**

AFFORDABLE FEES | LEARN ANYTIME  
 STUDY ANYWHERE

*"Are those who know equal to those who do not know?" Qur'an 39:9*

[www.iou.edu.gm](http://www.iou.edu.gm)

The background of the page is a blue-tinted photograph showing several hands of different skin tones reaching in from the edges to hold together large puzzle pieces. The puzzle pieces are interlocking, symbolizing collaboration and global unity. The overall tone is professional and collaborative.

# Global *Collaborations*

# The IOU Buzz in Indonesia

## Social Media Campaigns by Top Influencers

Prominent Muslim influencers and Da'wah pages in Indonesia have been promoting the International Open University (IOU) on Instagram in the run-up to the 2022 fall semester. A plethora of creative and informative content was posted by top influencers, with follower counts ranging from 12,000 to two million, in order to encourage enrolment in courses at IOU.



A leading page for scholarship information @info\_basiswa with nearly two million followers posted a series of slides sharing information about IOU's courses and curriculum.



Beauty Advisor @Wideratna with 12,000 followers posted a video advocating the IOU as "The most attractive & relevant system of education for the modern era."

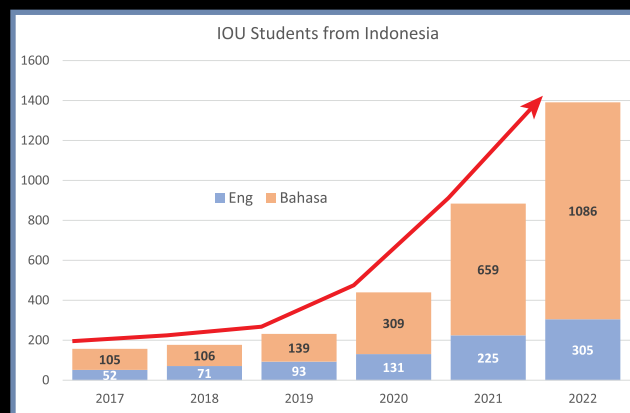


A young professional, @anakmagang.id with 263,000 followers, also posted a video advocating IOU as being "The most attractive & relevant system of education for the modern era."



A popular Islamic comic page @litleakhwat with 190,000 followers ran an integrated comic campaign on "Is it permissible for a wife to work in Islam?" and shared details of IOU's programs.

Instagram Da'wah page @nadwaabukunaiza with 12,000 followers reposted much of IOU's social media content. Its Telegram channel with 2,800 subscribers was dedicated to answering a massive array of questions about IOU.



The Indonesian social media campaigns contributed to a massive increase in enrollments for Fall 2022, Al hamdu lillah.





Meeting Imam Ali Krayee, the chief Imam of Liberia



Meeting the Director General Prof. Dr. Edward Lama Wonkeryor, and National Commission of Higher Education officials

## Liberia Welcomes IOU To Pioneer University Education



Meeting representatives of the National Muslim Students Association of Liberia



Meeting United Dawah Ummah - one of the biggest Islamic institutions in Liberia



Visiting the Muslim Congress High School - the oldest and biggest Islamic high school in Liberia



Interview on Prime FM 105.5 - one of the most popular radio stations in Liberia

# IOU To Strengthen Growth of Islamic Finance Industry in Ethiopia

The IOU Founder-Chancellor, Professor Dr. Bilal Philips, was invited as a representative of the International Open University (IOU) and the Interest-Free Banking and Finance Institute (IBFI) to participate in a noteworthy conference on Islamic banking organized by the Halal Promotion Company in August 2022 in Ethiopia's capital city of Addis Ababa.

The "Interest-Free Finance and Economy Summit" brought together numerous leading banks in Ethiopia that have embraced interest-free banking.

The summit highlighted the importance of cooperation among Islamic banks, Islamic finance, educational institutes, and government authorities for the sector's survival and sustainable growth.

It also reflected the acute shortage of Human Resources as a primary barrier to expansion in Islamic banking. The IOU and its partner, the IBFI in Ethiopia, are committed to contributing significantly towards solving the manpower crisis in the country. Master's and Bachelor's level courses in Islamic Banking and Finance have already begun at the IBFI and the IOU.

Dr. Bilal Philips and IBFI officials also visited Abdullah Adem, the CEO of Awash Bank, to sign an MOU regarding the training of their employees. Similar MOUs were also made with newly-launched Islamic Banks such as Zam Zam Bank and Hijrah Bank.

The IOU looks forward to an optimistic future for Islamic banking in Ethiopia during the coming years.

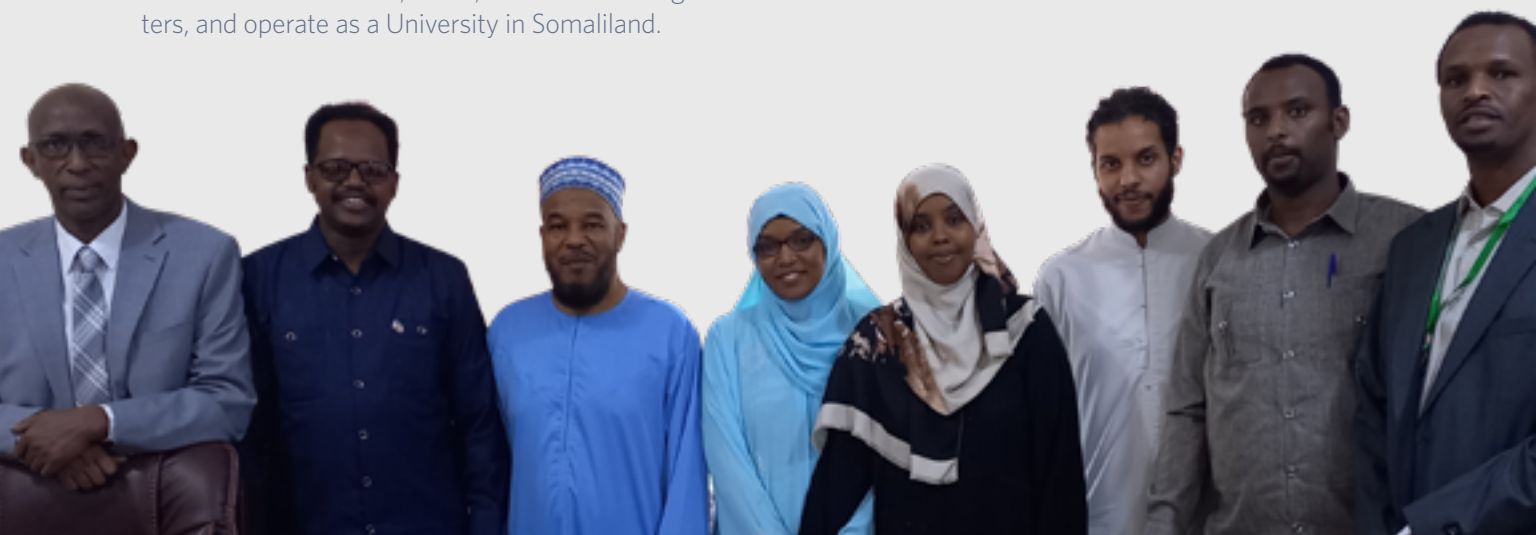


## GLOBAL COLLABORATIONS

# IOU Renewed University License in Somaliland

The IOU founder and chancellor, Prof. Dr. Bilal Philips, and his wife visited the Minister of Education, Mr. Ahmed Toorno (far left), in the Ministry of Education, on July 25th, to renew IOU's license for operation in Somaliland. The IOU is legally authorized to advertise, teach, establish learning centers, and operate as a University in Somaliland.

IOU Rep., Sister Ummul Khayr (4th from the right), accompanied Dr. Phillips along with the members of the IOU Alumni and the head of the IOU media department, Usamah Philips (3rd from the right).



## IOU in Strategic Alliance with Grandeur Academy

The International Open University (IOU) has continued to strengthen its collaborative strides through strategic alliances with several leading academic organizations across the globe. The recent signing of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with Grandeur Academy on 3rd August 2022 promises to achieve laudable achievements, including wider international expansion of IOU's educational services and the dissemination of functional Islamic education to the younger generation of the Ummah.

This MOA sets the terms and understanding between the IOU and The Grandeur Academy (TGA), a global online academy in the UAE.

The overall aim of the partnership is to worship Allah by serving the needs of the Ummah and securing new markets for the growth of both Islamic organizations as well as to share mutually beneficial resources.

The major deliverable of this pact is the creation of an accredited online learning school that would ultimately provide home schooling for students from KG to Class 12 (A levels). Furthermore, it aims to provide affordable Islamized K12 education to those who currently have no access. In this agreement, IOU provides the certification for teachers who complete the Lesson Plan Islamization (LPI) courses. Grandeur Academy, on its part, provides the Cambridge syllabus, teachers, recorded classes, as well as online supervision for each level and class. It would also promote the K12 Academy.

IOU and Grandeur Academy would benefit immensely from this agreement by leveraging them to expand their current reach beyond existing territories.



# University *Features*



UNIVERSITY  
FEATURES

# A Reflection on IOU's Quality Assurance Strategy

The International Open University is one of the most comprehensive providers of online learning, based on its learning methodologies and assessment tools used to gauge the progress of students, which in turn enhances their learning capabilities and successful career outcomes.

According to many educational experts and scholars, education is a fundamental human right revolving around availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability. In its quest to advance this right, IOU provides accessible, attractive, and affordable education to anyone desirous of a higher education no matter where they reside and at a time convenient to learners. Several Certificate, Diploma, Bachelor, and Master's degree programs are offered at IOU to prospective candidates to develop their career prospects. IOU's online education platform not only provides access to education but also promotes student-centered learning.

## IOU's Learning Methodology

In its purest application to provide access to education and promote student-centered learning, the International Open University delivers education via online platforms using both synchronous and asynchronous methodologies, as we will explain. The first methodology applies the curriculum delivered in real-time, which requires lectures to be conducted through a synchronous method, where the lecturer shares the same learning space with students to facilitate maximum participation and interaction during teaching and learning activities. In this method, feedback is spontaneous; but it is a student-centered learning approach that requires all learners to connect and join the lecture space in a given time.

The asynchronous learning methodology, on the other hand, is also predominantly student-centered but does not require the lecturer to share the same learning space with the learners. It is accomplished through pre-recorded learning activities of the course curricu-

lum. The learners access these recorded materials to view and follow the instructions provided in the content.

## Student Assessments

The strength of both these student-centered learning methods is strategically embedded in the learning process at the IOU. Learners cannot proceed to another module, without completing a module test provided at the end of each module. If a student's performance is below the minimum standard or threshold, access to the next module is denied and the student is compelled to properly revise his or her learning techniques



in the module. In order to proceed to the next module they must complete the current module's test. This process progresses until all the modules of the course are successfully completed within a specified duration of the curriculum requirement.

Providing education with various methodologies will not be completed without assessment of student learning. In this regard, IOU monitors student learning and progress throughout the program of study.

In this pursuit, the module test makes a formative assessment of the student's learning progress and provides a general reflection of the student's understanding of the entire module. During the semester, learners are given assignments that must be submitted on time. Where learners fail in this demand, late submission constitutes a serious reprimand. The imposition of this reprimand is not considered a punitive measure but encourages and motivates learners to respect deadlines, thereby maximizing the requisite benefits accrued to gain good grades. After completing a number of modules, mid-term assessments are conducted halfway into the program.

The mid-term tests and the summative end-of-semester student learning assessments are conducted in authorized examination centers in the students' countries. The most desired quality assurance benefit of these assessments is the students' potential to maintain a high degree of transparency and accountability, thereby curbing the incidence of student examination misconduct, otherwise known as cheating.

In this assessment methodology, a computer-generated unique set of questions are displayed for a student who logs into the system ready for examination. In other words, students sitting next to each other doing the same course are presented with a completely different set of questions. As soon as the questions are displayed, an automatic timer begins to count down and when the time allocated to complete the exams elapses, the student's paper is automatically submitted.

Similarly, in an event that a student resets the computer, due to technical faults or other issues, during the test, a different set of questions appear. This assures that the credibility and integrity of the IOU's Online education system is kept intact. Coupled with the strength of the computer programming to effectively control the tendency of examination misconduct, the Quality Assurance Authorities giving Institutional Accreditation require all examination centers to be fitted with Closed Circuit Television Monitoring systems to support and provide more evidence of a claim of ex-

amination misconduct. The stringent conditions of the learning and assessment process at the IOU help to make it a highly regarded higher education institution with an indelible credibility and integrity profile around the world.



### By Ebrima Fatajo

Ebrima Fatajo is the Quality Assurance Officer at IOU. He has a Bachelors degree in Public and Environmental Health and a Masters degree in Public Administration.



**To view our accreditation certificates:**  
<https://iou.edu.gm/accreditation/>



# Affordable Education and Scholarships at IOU

UNIVERSITY  
FEATURES

Studying at the International Online University (IOU) is an affordable and cost-effective approach to gaining quality knowledge from a high-ranking university equipped with the proper facilities and competent human resources necessary for effective learning.

The quality and affordability of IOU programs are evident in their global acceptance. It is on record that IOU has over 270,000 students registered from 228 different countries globally within just seven years since its inception.

Many institutions are unsuitable for international students, especially students from developing countries, considering the exorbitant fees they charge for their programs. This factor has become a significant concern, with stakeholders and other interest groups calling on universities to charge reasonable fees to students from less developed nations. IOU has taken the lead in putting student interest first while formulating its course fees.



## By Ayoola Wahab

Ayoola Wahab is a certified engineer, entrepreneur, and writer. A graduate of Arabic from IOU, he holds a Bachelor's degree in engineering and a Master of Business Administration degree from the University of Liverpool.

## Features of IOU Affordability

### Tuition-Free



IOU is primarily a tuition-free institute driven by its goal of changing the world through education. The full-time and part-time registration fees are remarkably modest. A typical semester registration fee is usually a fraction of the cost of a comparable degree from a public university or other online universities.

### Sliding Scale Fees



The registration fees are based on the living standards of each country. Countries are classified according to their Gross National Product (GNP), which is, in turn, based on the UN Development Programme's statistics and classification. The sliding scale fee structure has different fees for the 'very high developed country,' 'high developed country,' 'medium developed country,' and 'low developed country.'

## Flexibility



Another unique feature of the IOU fee system is the flexibility in the mode of payment. The university provides convenient options for payment of students' fees, depending on each country's banking system.

## Scholarships



Scholarship schemes are also available for some categories of students with necessary requirements.

The bottom line is that IOU remains one of the best online universities with exceptionally low fees. In achieving this feat, the institute is guided by its primary mission of making authentic Islamic knowledge available to the world at quite an affordable rate. These efforts have resulted in the successful graduation of many competent and productive individuals in different disciplines worldwide.

# Research

## RESEARCH

# Agriculture: An Ancient Skill, Still Needed Today!

Agriculture is evergreen because it has sustained the past, embraces the present, and guarantees the future. Agriculture is broadly defined as the science or art involving soil cultivation, crop production, and livestock raising, which also involves the preparation and marketing of the resulting products. This marvelous art has been providing the food and associated products required for sustaining the fast-growing human population since time immemorial.

Nonetheless, agriculture in recent times is facing multifaceted challenges such as climate change, paucity of funds, a fast-growing population, ever-changing consumer preferences, and rapid technological growth. The most alarming of these challenges is the unwillingness of the youth to participate in agriculture. Fortunately, some of these challenges can be converted into opportunities if properly harnessed.

Rural smallholder farms produce around a third of the world's food production<sup>1</sup> and the majority of experienced farmers are part of an aging population. The average age of farming household heads in Nigeria, Mexico, and Peru is around 57 years<sup>2</sup>. Our global food security becomes more vulnerable as these aging farmers retire. The new generation has grown up seeing these old farmers struggle and perceive agriculture as an art that involves drudgery and a non-lucrative venture. If all young aspiring minds move on to

non-agricultural activities, then who would be left to produce the food basket we consume in the nearest future? These were some of the issues I was ruminating over in my mind at the prime of my graduation as a young agricultural economist.

I had to redefine what agriculture means to me. Agriculture has transcended the traditional cultivation of crops and livestock; it also involves utilizing innovation, technology, and value-addition to enhance production and profitability. In my quest for agricultural redefinition, I incorporated the catfish farming experience I had acquired while assisting my father during my study of agricultural economics at the university.

I started a small-scale aquaculture business (catfish farming) in my father's backyard while using an innovative pond. This pond was made with wood, screws, and a tarpaulin cover. I leveraged information technology to acquire knowledge of new practices across borders. At the time of harvesting, social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp were used in sending out marketing messages to my potential customers. This eliminated the stress of having to depend on a broker while maximizing the farm's price margin.

Agriculture value-addition is also a game changer in the aquaculture business. The stock of catfish can be categorized, with some being oven-dried and others kept as bloodstock, for a part of the market involved



in catfish spawning. This value addition involves less stress as compared to the production of fresh table-size catfish. Value addition is one of the arts of modern agriculture that is worth exploring. For example, Africa produces about 75% of global cocoa production but only receives around 5% of the total annual market value<sup>3</sup>. More income and job opportunities could arise when Africa taps its value-addition potential.

My shared aquaculture business experience is just an example of a branch of agriculture done on a small scale. Presumably, the magnitude of positive impact and spill-over effect that would have been generated if my aquaculture business was to be done on a large scale, using sophisticated machines and digital

agriculture, would be far-reaching in contribution to the job and food security of the rapidly growing population. It could also enhance the continuity of our

existence. This small-scale farming can be replicated and advocated for in different branches of agricultural production. Recent innovations in agriculture have

birthed new concepts such as indoor vertical farming (hydroponic and aeroponics), aquaponics, and smart apiary (bee) technologies. Some of these concepts require fewer start-up funds and space to establish. These are areas youth can explore for further development and business, in my view as an agriculturist.

Agriculture is a noble art that sustains the earth, and it is religiously encouraged based on detailed and aggregative textual evidence. In one narration, a young companion of the Prophet (ﷺ), Anas ibn Malik (may Allah be pleased with him), narrated from the Prophet (ﷺ) saying, "Even if the Resurrection were established upon one of you while he has in his hand a sapling, let him plant it."<sup>4</sup>

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### Akintola Abdallah

Akintola Abdallah is a research assistant at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman. He is an agricultural economist, international trade modeler, and catfish farmer. He has published several journal articles and is an Associate Accounting Technician at The Association of Accountancy Bodies in West Africa.

# Ilm Institute: An Islamic Coursera

## Ilm Institute: Background & Aims

For years, Muslim students found themselves searching for short courses that could refine their skills and improve their competency. The internet is saturated with modern platforms that offer such courses but they rarely align with Islamic principles.

The International Open University (IOU) identified the need for introducing a platform that caters solely to Muslim students who, for a multitude of reasons, cannot spare the time to register for an entire degree program but still want to gain knowledge in a particular field of study. This is how the Ilm Institute came into existence.

The educational website, launched in March 2019, aspires to correspond between experienced Muslim teachers and visionaries from different parts of the world and students who want to access a multitude of professional, Islamic, and modern courses.

## IOU and Ilm Institute: What is the difference?

The IOU offers elaborate and extensive degree or diploma programs, whereas courses at Ilm Institute are short and do not have any educational prerequisites or a time limit for completion.

## Bridging The Gap

Ilm Institute bridges the gap between Muslim educators and students, who are laser-focused on seeking

or imparting quality education.

A teacher of any specialization can register with Ilm Institute and submit a course for publishing. Each course goes through an initial screening process for quality assurance. After a course has been approved and published, students can browse through the course curriculum and register for it.

## Top Reasons to Join the Ilm Institute

- Short and Crisp Courses**  
 In the fast-paced world of today, Ilm Institute understands that not everybody would have the precious resource of time to gain knowledge. Each course at Ilm Institute is short and designed to sync with a student's modern lifestyle.
- Remote Learning**  
 Remote learning is the new buzzword. However, IOU and the Ilm Institute were ahead of their time when they offered a complete remote learning platform to their students.
- Shari'ah-Compliant**  
 Not all courses at Ilm Institute focus on teaching the Deen, yet they are all quality-checked to make the content free of any unIslamic values.
- Variety of Courses**  
 There are a plethora of courses at Ilm Institute: from psychology to health, Islamic studies to parenting hacks. In short, there is something for everyone!

- **Flexibility**

The platform is designed for students who wish to learn at their own pace. Neither age nor time is a constraint to study at the Institute!

## What does Ilm Institute offer?

### Arabic Language

Who doesn't want to learn the Arabic language?

Ilm Institute offers short courses that acquaint you with the basics of the language and help you master its pronunciation.

### Banking and Finance

When you understand Islamic banking and finance, you stay clear of any haram transactions that may harm your akhirah (hereafter). Courses in this genre discuss all money matters that need to be understood by Muslim students in a world full of usury.

### Education

Whether you are homeschooling your children or en route to becoming a professional teacher, there are interesting courses that could help you master the art of imparting education.

### Health and Fitness

Do young Muslims neglect their health? Unfortunately, yes! These courses help you achieve holistic wellness — physical, mental, and spiritual!

### Parenting

Whether you are entering the beautiful phase of parenting or have been there for a few years, courses in this category help you deal with your children in a much better way.

### Personal Development

From anger management to nurturing relationships through better communication, and from dealing with difficult people to holistic living, there is something relevant for everyone here!

### Psychology

Depression is more common today than you would have thought. Ilm Institute's psychology programs help you battle it with grit and determination through an Islamic lens.

## Understanding Islam

Islamic education lies at the core of the Ilm Institute. There are plenty of courses that help you understand the various aspects of Islam. Stimulating courses like The Prophetic Administration, Feminism in Islam, Lives of the Sahaba, and more await you!

All courses at Ilm Institute are easy to navigate on both desktop and mobile devices and will be instructor-led, self-paced, and entirely online. Anybody who wishes to seek quality education, a student or a professional, can enroll and gather knowledge on their own schedule. The good news is that prospect courses on productivity like MS Office, Technical Coding, and lots more are expected to be featured in the future.



Visit Ilm Institute <https://ilm.iou.edu.gm/>





# The Silent Soldiers

## Volunteering at IOU

*"...But whatever thing you spend [in His cause] - He will compensate it, and He is the best of providers." [34:39]*

There is no better investment than investing one's wealth, time, and efforts to propagate Islam.

The International Open University (IOU), under the leadership of Shaykh Dr. Bilal Philips (may Allah preserve him), provides an enthralling virtual platform for volunteers to participate in making a difference to the global community, and it does so in the most wholesome and fulfilling way.

Most of us have heard of the numerous perks of volunteering, for instance, feeling fulfilled, giving back, and networking, just to name a few. But life gets in the way, and we – despite wanting to – never manage to

do it. Nevertheless, there is still an opportunity to volunteer in a way that significantly cuts down the travel and time commitment.

The IOU provides its platform to volunteer virtually from anywhere in the world in an all-inclusive and diverse work environment.

The IOU recruits and places volunteers – irrespective of age, gender, race, ethnicity, economic status, or disability – in various projects and tasks utilizing their qualifications, experience, skills, and interests. Hence, as a consistent volunteer, you gain tremendous benefits from the IOU

## Why Volunteer at IOU?

- To fulfill the very purpose of your creation in establishing Islam on earth, by utilizing your abilities and resources to propagate Islamic education and perspective in various fields.
- To broaden your global outlook and gain cross-cultural understanding and unique exposure to various organizations globally.
- To expand your network, boost your social skills and expose yourself to people with similar interests and resources.
- To provide a sense of accomplishment and contentment, which stimulates and revitalizes your mental health.
- To receive beneficial feedback and advice to assist you in personal and professional development.
- To test the skills you would like to work on and get feedback in a low-risk environment.
- To develop 21st-century skills in technology.
- To boost your professional resumé and provide opportunities to practice crucial workplace skills; for instance, project or task management, communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills, among others. Thus, providing opportunities to hone these skills in a volunteer position before stretching your wings comfortably at work.
- To receive training, connections, and hands-on experience in a new department before you start your career.
- It's a similitude to a hidden good deed - a hidden charity for the Ummah, seeking acknowledgment and reward only from Allah.
- As volunteering at the IOU is primarily online, it compels you to get away from the routine, by allowing you to come up with out-of-the-box ideas to assist the IOU in driving social change.

The IOU stays true to its mission of "changing the nation through education" while empowering you to contribute to this wholesome journey -- all from the comfort of your home.

***While the very essence of a volunteer's work is selflessness and hard work, it is undoubtedly one of the most honorable and rewarding work when done consistently and sincerely for the sake of Allah. For, indeed, the voluntary act of righteousness is greater in reward.***

## By Ayesha Khattak

Ustaadha Ayesha Khattak volunteers as a Legal Advisor at IOU, Director of IOU Alumni, and as a lawyer to thirty-seven International Islamic scholars. She is a Haafidha, lawyer, certified counselor, and a fiqh lecturer. She graduated from the University of London, Harvard Law School, Yale University, Umm al-Qura, and Imam University as well as studied under Fuqahaa from Ash-Shaam.

# Book Launch

## Tafseer Soorah Yaa Seen: A Commentary On The 36<sup>th</sup> Chapter Of The Qur'an

By Dr. Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips



In November 2022, Dawah Corner Book Store published Professor Dr. Bilal Philips's extensive Tafseer in English of the most popular Soorah of the Quran, "Soorah Yaa Seen."

In the book's 361 pages, the commentator has gathered and expanded on both classical and recent Tafseers of Soorah Yaa Seen by well-known commentators of the Quran like *Tafseer Ibn Kathir*, al-Qurtubee's *al-Jaami' li Ahkaam al-Qur'an*, Ibn al-Qayyim's *Compilations*, ash-Shawkaanee's *Fat'h al-Qadeer*, ash-Shanqeetee's *Adwa' ul-Bayaan*, as-Sa'dee's *Tafseer al-Kareem ar-Rahmaan*, and Al 'Uthaymeen's *Tafseer Soorah Yaa Seen*.

All the hadiths mentioned in Dr. Bilal's Tafseer are fully referenced and authenticated, giving the educated reader confidence in the explanations and conclusions of the author.

The book exposes a number of the unauthentic virtues attributed to

Soorah Yaa Seen. For example, the claims that it should be recited over the dead, that sins are reduced for every letter recited, and many others that are based on unauthentic hadith narrations are highlighted.

The Tafseer covers most of the major areas of Islamic learning and the language used is easy to read and easily understood by the average reader. Dr. Bilal's Tafseer of Soorah Yaa Seen is a must-have literature among the collection of Islamic books in Muslim home libraries. Likewise, it is an academic reference tool for those seeking a reliable and well-researched Tafseer of this popular chapter.

In the Tafseer, the three common Quranic themes of man's relationship to God, to his fellow human beings, and to the creation in which Allah has placed him are interwoven in various divine scenarios consisting of factual statements, rhetorical questions, and exclamations for human beings to reflect on,

and to find a better understanding of God.

In closing, it may also be noted that this Tafseer is a required text of the Bachelor of Arts in Islamic Studies course offered at the International Open University.

### Order your copy here -

<https://www.dakwahbookstore.com/product/pre-order-tafsir-ya-seen-p-b/>

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# Comments From Our Readers

## PREVIOUS ISSUE 11



### Salem Tahmina

Alhamdulillah the magazine is very informative. The tips were excellent and the magazine took me back to my days off studying with IOU which was a wonderful experience. Keep up the good work and Jazakumullahu khairan for still motivating and inspiring the alumni.

### Thahira Iqbal

It was very nostalgic when I saw my article in the 10th issue. 'I graduated at age 68', which I hope will help others understand that there is no end to learning. I wish to continue from MAIS to Ph.D. in IOU. It is the best institution and I don't want to keep away from it.

### Fathima Khan

This is the only Islamic magazine I have come across from a global educational institute. It's delightful to see a blend of Islamic and educational topics. Looking forward to the next issue! I highly appreciate the efforts of the team. Barakallahu feekum.

### Hafsah Hassan Gwarzo

Very insightful indeed. The Ijaza program article brought tears to my eyes.

### Clare Kopp

There was a really good mix of subject articles, news, and stories of alumni/students. Very enjoyable read. Jazakum Allahu khairan.

### Reema Fathima

It was my first time reading this issue. MashaAllah it's very interesting. Hope to see more like this in the future. InshaAllah

# Your Views

## Your Feedback is Welcome!

We'd love to hear what you thought about Insights.

Click **here** to submit your feedback.

If you would like to contribute to the magazine or volunteer with IOU Insights, please email: [insights@iou.edu.gm](mailto:insights@iou.edu.gm)





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*"When a person dies, his deeds come to an end,  
except for three: ongoing charity (Sadaqah Jariyah),  
knowledge that is benefited from, and a righteous  
child who prays for him."*

(Sahih Muslim)

If you give a **small donation today** you can earn a  
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for your small deeds



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# Come and see what IOU has to offer!

## Islamic Studies

- Bachelor of Arts in Islamic Studies (BAIS)
- Postgraduate Certificate (BMAIS)
- Master of Arts in Islamic Studies (MAIS)
- PhD in Islamic Sciences

## Economics

- Bachelor of Islamic Economics, Banking & Finance (BSc IEBF)
- Associate Degree in Islamic Economics, Banking & Finance (AIBE)
- Certificate in Islamic Economics, Banking & Finance (CIBE)

## Education

- Bachelor of Education (BED)
- Associate Degree in Education (AED)
- Certificate in Education (CED)

## Others

- General Diploma in Islamic Studies
- New Muslims Certificate
- Special Workshops

## Arabic Language

- Bachelors in Arabic Language (BA-ALS)
- Postgraduate Certificate (BMARB)
- Master in Arabic (MA ARB) (Starting Soon)
- Intensive Arabic Program (IAP)

## Information Technology

- Bachelor of Science in I.T. (BSc IT)
- Associate Degree in I.T. (AIT)
- Certificate in I.T. (CIT)

## Business Administration

- Bachelor of Business Admin (BBA)
- Associate Degree in Business Admin (ABA)
- Certificate in Business Admin (CBA)

## Psychology

- Bachelor of Psychology (BSc PSY)
- Associate Degree in Psychology (APSY)
- Certificate in Psychology (CPSY)

## Qur'an

- Quran Memorization (One-on-One and Group)
- Tajweed (Beginner, Intensive) and Ijaazah

## Fee range is \$75 to \$220 per 6-month semester

for bachelor, associates and certificate programs.

\*See additional program fee details on our website and they are subjected to change without notice.

## Founder and Chancellor DR. BILAL PHILIPS

- BA in Islamic Studies, University of Madeenah, KSA
- MA in Islamic Theology, King Saud University, KSA
- PhD in Islamic Theology, University of Wales, UK
- Author of over 50 books on various Islamic topics
- Among the 500 most influential Muslims in "The Muslim 500" journal.

## ACCREDITATION

The International Open University (IOU) received a university license from the Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology in The Gambia in May 2014 and is an accredited university by the National Accreditation and Quality Assurance Authority (NAQAA).



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## WHY DO WE **NEED EDUCATION?**

- ☑ It is a command of Allah.
- ☑ It broadens the mental horizons.
- ☑ It helps in personal development.
- ☑ It encourages critical and creative thinking.
- ☑ It assists in overcoming social & economic barriers.
- ☑ It provides guidance to live a virtuous life.
- ☑ It frees people from ignorance.
- ☑ It facilitates the distinction between right & wrong.

