

Islamic Studies Salon

President Ora Hirsch Pescovitz Remarks

Thursday, March 31

- Thank you, Henri.... And thank you for all the important work you are doing as director of OU's Religious Studies program.

- Welcome to Oakland University... and thank you for the generous support you give to your communities, and your commitment to making our region and world a more prosperous and peaceful place.

- For those of you who haven't been to Meadow Brook Hall... Welcome to one of the greatest cultural treasures in America....
 - This mansion, which is on the historic preservation list of great places in America, was built by Matilda Dodge Wilson....who believed fiercely that culture and education are essential to cultivate a civil society.

- A few weeks ago, we welcomed Imam Omar Suleiman to Oakland University. Our doors are always open to those who advocate for a greater understanding of religion, culture and our common humanity....
 - We appreciate how Imam Suleiman's work has brought attention to the pressing need for an interfaith dialogue and to stand together against Islamophobia and all other types of prejudice.

- Several years ago, when I became president, one of my first formal acts was to add diversity, equity and inclusion as one of the pillars for our university.

- My reasoning...
 - Higher education must represent our highest ideals....

 - And those are the ideals reflected in the pursuit of knowledge and truth in the core academic disciplines and in the humanities that teach us about our shared need to live together and appreciate our differences.

- Like many of you, I am the offspring of immigrants....and like many of you, my ancestors came here because they followed the light of opportunity and found dignity in America.

- I like to think Oakland offers a light by providing the type of education that leads to opportunities for our students.

- Among our fundamental goals at Oakland is to provide a first-rate education so our students will succeed in their studies and in their lives....
 - But we also have in mind a broader obligation, and that is to foster an understanding about the world, so our students can appreciate the interconnectedness of all civilizations and the important contributions that all cultures make as we strive for progress.

- Understanding and respect are the impetus behind the Islamic Studies program, a broad and in-depth study of world religious traditions, Islamic ethics, Islam in the modern world and in America, and a survey of the great accomplishments of Islamic culture in the arts, sciences, architecture...along with the many innovations from brilliant Muslims who have shaped our lives and wellbeing.

- In the digital age, it is essential that when you teach history that it is relevant to what is happening today.
 - And we are very proud and mindful of doing just that.

- The Islamic Studies program focuses on gaining a deeper understanding of the modern-day Middle East, and the Arab-Israeli conflict at the core of the turbulence of that region.
 - Presenting many perspectives of the Middle East foster a greater understanding of the complexity of the confluence of cultures in that region... and our hope is that through understanding the many forces at play that we foster a deeper appreciation for the common values, which is essential in the pursuit of peace and cooperation.

- We are so appreciative and grateful for your presence here.

- Thank you for taking the time out of your busy lives to be with us.... I look forward to getting to know each of you, and hope you always feel at home at Oakland University.