

Hartford Seminary Awarded Grant for International Exchange Project

For Immediate Release

(HARTFORD, CT) Fifteen Christian and Muslim scholars, clerics, and civic and religious leaders from Malaysia will participate in an exchange program with Hartford Seminary in 2008.

The Office of Citizen Exchanges of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, U.S. Department of State, has awarded a \$257,000 grant to the Seminary in order to support the international exchange project under the rubric "Faith and Community: A Dialogue."

The Seminary program is designed to educate the participants about Islam in the United States and enhance their work back home. The program builds on the Seminary's strengths of hosting international guests and fostering inter-religious understanding through dialogue and education.

While in Connecticut, the Malaysian participants will take part in seminars on Muslim life and Islamic scholarship, visit mosques and Islamic centers in the region and connect with local and national community and religious leaders.

Scholars and students enrolled in Seminary programs will benefit from the dialogue with the exchange participants, while the international guests will gain a better understanding of the place of religion and religious study in American life.

It is anticipated that participants will return to Malaysia better equipped to take part in inter-religious cooperation. Following the Hartford visit, scholars from the Seminary will visit Malaysia for joint follow-up workshops.

The Seminary's Hartford Institute for Religion Research will conduct an evaluation of the program to assess the impact of the exchange.

In the first half of 2008, teams of Hartford Seminary staff and faculty will visit partners in Malaysia to introduce the "Faith and Community: A Dialogue" initiative to organizational constituents.

When Hartford Seminary offers its June 2008 summer courses, individuals selected to participate in the initiative will convene in Hartford. An orientation session will brief them on issues of multi-culturalism and multi-ethnicity that they will encounter during the exchange. They will take part in three weeks of focused work around inter-religious dialogue, ethics and society.

In 2009, Hartford Seminary faculty and staff will return to Malaysia to conduct consultations with the participants. Students and local leaders who engaged the visitors during the summer 2008 visit will accompany this delegation to observe dialogue in an applied context in Malaysia.

These site visits will allow for the assessment and evaluation of local work and overall impact on the participants in the exchange. Seminary representatives will monitor the impact of the exchange and look for signs of greater effectiveness in inter-religious dialogue and strengthened inter-religious relationships. Students will compare the joys and challenges of doing dialogue in an international context.

The “Faith and Community: A Dialogue” initiative of the State Department supports international exchanges of clerics, scholars of religion, educators, and community leaders. The goal of these exchanges is to advance the understanding of the place of religion, especially of Islam, in the life of American communities, to support American and non-American participants in finding a common basis in order to examine issues of relevance to their respective societies, to offer an understanding of Islamic practice within a multi-cultural, multi-faith, democratic context and to broaden the horizon of American scholars, clerics and laypersons of Islam and of its place in diverse non-American societies.

Further Grants for Hartford Seminary and Partnerships

Hartford Seminary, in partnership with the Institute for Training and Development (ITD) in Amherst, MA, has been awarded a State Department grant for Faith and Development cooperative projects in Southeast Asia and Southeast Europe. Prominent Islamic religious scholars from the Southern Philippines and from Bosnia will travel to America to meet with their counterparts for dialogue and shared exploration of how Islam is practiced in diverse American societies. While in the United States, Filipino and Bosnian participants will visit Muslim communities, speak with clerics, and interact with scholars at major institutions for teaching and research. During an exchange visit Islamic and other religious leaders from American host institutions, including Hartford Seminary, will visit participants’ institutions in the Southern Philippines and Bosnia.