

# HUMA

HARVARD UNIVERSITY MUSLIM ALUMNI

## NEWSLETTER

As-salaamu alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuh,

We begin this newsletter in the name of our Lord, Allah, the Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Alhamdulillah, it is with great pleasure that I am able report some of HUMA's new growth and recent accomplishments. The new board, which assumed leadership in May, has been very busy, and I am grateful for all the hard work that has been put in by the members to support this growing community.

We welcome Imam Taymullah Abdur-Rahman to Harvard as the new Muslim Chaplain on campus. In this issue, you can learn more about Imam Taymullah's background in an interview with VP Communications Osman Shawkat. We are glad to have found a leader who can insha'Allah provide great benefit to the Harvard community with his vision, knowledge, and care.

The establishment of a paid chaplaincy position has been one of HUMA's long-standing goals, so we should all share in celebrating its beginning this year. However, we still need to prepare for the fund's growth and sustainability. Through our Ramadan fundraising, we were able to raise slightly over \$10,000 but we will need another twenty-five thousand dollars to meet our 2015 fundraising goal to continue the fund's growth. You will be hearing more about our fundraising efforts soon.

This year also saw the continuation of many of our established traditions and events. Ramadan 2015 brought HUMA members across the globe together in our Global Iftaar program with representation in 16 cities on 4 continents. The new board is also looking to expand our events throughout the year outside Ramadan, so please keep an eye out for future announcements for events taking place near you!

Our annual dinner in the Spring was, as usual, packed and beautiful. Sameera Fazili gave a fantastic keynote address on her time in Washington DC and the lessons she learned through her many varied experiences. We are delighted to have such distinguished alumni coming back and hope to see many more at our future dinners. While still in the planning phases, we will soon be announcing dates for the 2016 dinner and alumni weekend.

Inside this newsletter, you will also find a treasury report, which brings us to an important additional note: we would like to welcome Yasmeen Husain to the HUMA board as our new treasurer. We thank Armaghan Behlum for his service through Ramadan this year, and are grateful for Yasmeen's willingness to step up and serve the community.

On behalf of this new HUMA board, I thank all members of this community for your support of HUMA in participating in our events growing the Harvard Muslim community. We hope to continue to cultivate a supportive Muslim community fostering spiritual and professional growth. May Allah, the most Glorified and Exalted, bless all of our efforts in growing this community and bring us to a tomorrow closer to our Lord.

Rashid Yasin  
President

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## Financial Report

### 2014 Final Report

Last year marked a major transition for HUMA in our financial targets and achievements. We launched the Harvard Muslim Life Fund in April 2014 with the goal of raising \$30,000 in our inaugural year, to provide a strong foundation on which to build the chaplaincy and other fund initiatives. Through the incredible generosity of our members, we met that goal by the end of the summer.

With our expanding programming came additional needs and their attendant costs. To coordinate our fundraising and manage the bookkeeping for the Muslim Life Fund, we purchased subscriptions to online accounting and customer relationship management platforms. These costs, along with our website hosting and programming expenses, were covered by general contributions to HUMA. Our total operating budget for the year was \$2,760, and our income was \$3,652.39 (including Annual Dinner costs and ticket sales).

### Want to Support HUMA?

You can donate online at [HarvardMuslimAlumni.org/donate](http://HarvardMuslimAlumni.org/donate), or by mailing a check made payable to "Harvard University Muslim Alumni" to 21 Beacon Street, Scituate, MA 02066.

### 2015 Preliminary Report

Our work to grow the Muslim Life Fund has continued this year, and we have set our fundraising goal at \$35,000. We have raised \$11,500 of that so far, with plans for a major fundraising push this fall (keep your eyes open for emails about donating!) That goal would leave us with some funds after financing the chaplaincy, and we are considering investment options for the excess money as the fund transitions from the launch phase to more sustained growth. We have also hired our first chaplain, and will be paying approximately \$7,000 in salary before the end of the year out of the Fund money raised.

For general HUMA income, our recurring donations continue to provide the majority of funds for HUMA's overhead expenses. The amount expected in recurring donations this year is \$900. Our expenses include \$300 for website hosting renewal, and \$400 for the subscriptions to our bookkeeping and customer relationship management platforms. As our fundraising increases, the amount paid to process those donations through Paypal becomes an important part of our budget; this year the total is expected to be about \$400, split between the HMLF and general HUMA fundraising. The Annual Dinner was profitable this year, with expenses of about \$3,500 and ticket sales near \$4,000.

## Harvard Muslim Life Fund Update

### Muslim Life Scholarship Award Recipients

This year, we launched the first-ever HUMA scholarship, called the Muslim Life Scholarship, which aims to provide financial resources to augment personal and educational growth while at Harvard. The scholarship is intended to assist students with educational resources like books as well as other educational, social or cultural activities that enrich a student's academic experience. For our inaugural year, we divided a pool of \$500 among the 5 award recipients.

**We are pleased to announce the 2015 scholarship recipients:**

**Zain Jinnah** HLS 2016

**Anam Javed** FAS 2018

**Sarah D. Mokh** FAS 2018

**Mariam Jalloul** FAS 2016

**Humza Tahir** FAS 2018

## Interview with the Chaplain

*In August, Taymullah Abdur-Rahman started as the first-ever paid Harvard Muslim chaplain. To introduce him to the community, VP External Osman Shawkat chatted with him about his life, his path to the chaplaincy, and his goals as chaplain. The full interview can be found at [HarvardMuslimAlumni.org/Muslim-life-Fund/Chaplain](http://HarvardMuslimAlumni.org/Muslim-life-Fund/Chaplain)*

### What did you want to grow up to be when you were a child?

Originally, I wanted to be a lawyer. I've always loved to read and I've been into social justice so I figured it would be a good fit. I was accepted to Buckingham, Browne, and Nichols and thought that would be the thing for me but I took a different route.

### What was your path in becoming a chaplain?

I had an interesting childhood in that I was a performer for many years. I was signed to Columbia Records and toured the world but, once we were dropped from the label, I began running around the streets of Roxbury. I was a ghost writer for Dr. Dre and lived that lifestyle for a few years then came back and saw that wasn't what I wanted.

My good friend from when I was growing up called me to Islam from prison. I took my Shihada on December 8th, 1999, the first day of Ramadan. That's when I really found my mission in life – to use my personal blessings to help those around me to achieve as close to perfection as possible.

*Continued on the next page*

What drove me to go from a practicing Muslim to trying to help those around me explore the possibilities of achievement is my wife – she is a great model and influence on how to perfect your worship and improve your practice. I started tracking down local Imams and got acquainted with people who were studying at Mecca and Medina, which led me to an opportunity with Al baseerah to participate in their satellite program. And after studying with many of the ulema and their students; I traveled to Saudi Arabia and completed the program in 2006 with a degree in Islamic Studies.



I returned to Roxbury and became the assistant Imam. I was asked to volunteer as a chaplain in the prison system and, while I was reluctant at first, I volunteered for a year and really liked it and was offered a position. I served as chaplain in Concord for six more years, working between three institutions.

“...I really found my mission in life - to use my personal blessings to help those around me to achieve as close to perfection as possible.”

**In 2011, you received the St. Elizabeth Episcopal Church’s award for interfaith understanding for your concept of “fearless fellowship”. Can you describe this idea, and how you see it taking shape at Harvard?**

My friend, Episcopal deacon Bruce Nicolson, would share the same chapel in the Concord correctional facility. We would see each other’s denominations going in and out and we started connecting. We wanted to do something to show the unity between our faiths. We did a four part series about the Prophet Mohamed, the Quran, Islam and the misconceptions around it. We’d hold it every few weeks and present from the church pulpit about the Prophet, about Islam (dos to don’ts), the Quran. The attendance ballooned. Afterwards, we’d all go to the basement and break bread. This kind of fellowship hadn’t been done before. Bruce and I came up with “Fearless fellowship” to be truthful with your own convictions while respecting others.

As for bringing it to Harvard, it starts with building relationships organically, not something that’s superficial. I had a great meeting with Rabbi Getzel and I’d like to sit down and talk and be real with one another, to study Islam and Judaism and our similarities. Civility and humanity are embedded in all our faiths. We should acknowledge our differences and be civil.

**What are you most excited about as you begin your chaplaincy at Harvard?**

At the department of corrections, we were trying to show people how to cope with being prisoners and how to practice Islam. At Harvard, I’m able to connect and collaborate with the future world leaders, whether it’s in business, politics, or social activity. Whatever I can help them to gain understanding in, it is actually making a dent in the future. They will go on to do incredible things and I will hopefully share a small little slice of their pie.

**You’re writing a new essay called *44 Ways to Manhood*. Can you tell us more about it and what inspired you?**

It’s a short treatise I wrote for people transitioning into adulthood. It has 44 principles, based on Quranic ayahs, anecdotes from the Prophet, and anecdotes from my own life.

It is one of my greatest accomplishments to get picked up by the second largest Islamic publishing house, IIPH, and produce something they thought was useful for college students. It comes out in 2016 and we hope that it brings some benefit, inshallah.

**You mentioned your wife earlier. What does your family look like?**

I have seven children. My oldest son is at Wentworth studying engineering and my youngest, Zachariah, is being born today, inshallah [8/29]. We all live here in Boston.

My wife is second generation Muslim, born and raised, and the most profound teacher I’ve ever learned from. She taught me it’s not about lip service, it’s about action. That’s what Allah respects and what Muslims respect – it’s what you do.

One time, my wife and I were driving to Buffalo during a winter storm and she was saying that Asr time was coming to a close. I was still young in Islam and didn’t really understand the impact of salah. I hadn’t begun to study and had barely understood the faith. I wanted to keep going but she told me to pull over and let her out and she’d meet me in Buffalo. So we stopped and I stayed in the car stubbornly at first but she just put a coat out on the snow and combined the prayer and I joined her. That’s when I really knew that some people take this very seriously

**What’s your favorite place to eat in Harvard Square?**

My family and I used to spend a lot of time at the Coop, spending all day reading the books. There’s also a children’s book store in the square and we’d spend all day there with our kids. We’d go to the Falafel Palace on Mass Ave in Central Square.

**Between your family, studies, and work, what do you like to do in your few moments of down time?**

I’d like to say that the biggest misconception for people who have a lot of kids or work obligations is that they don’t have time. Imam Al-Nawawy had enough time and he studied 12 subjects with 12 sheikhs for an hour each and also reviewed each subject for an hour each. That’s 24 hours- when did he find time to do all of his work and writing? When did he sleep? If he had enough time to do all that, we certainly have enough time.

Alhamdulillah, I’ve never had issues with not having enough time. I enjoy dancing with my kids and physical fitness. We also are interested in documentaries.

**Another article mentioned you like watching *Shark Tank*. Do you have any inventions you’d want to present to the judges?**

We have a honey water drink called Honey Rain. My wife gives it to me and the kids when we’re sick. It’s delicious and healthy and we’re close to a small commercial production run now. I try to always keep something boiling that keeps me creative.

What we’re missing from the Imamate is this entrepreneurship spirit of independence. Shaikh Al-Azani was a watch repairman, some were clothing salesmen, bell hops, and such. It prevented them from being held hostage in their opinions – they could speak the truth at all times due to their financial independence.

## HIS News

Assalaamu Alaykum,

As our community continues to grow, the Harvard Islamic Society commits itself to nurturing the diverse and burgeoning family we have become. The makeup of the community is as diverse as we've ever had, with various schools of thought, ethnicities, and practices all represented in our constituency. Our goals were to make sure that our programming, environment and overall community were welcoming to all who wanted to participate. These goals were reflected more tangibly throughout the year by various initiatives heralded by both officers and community members.

One of the first initiatives was introducing HIS Families to unite the members of HIS by facilitating bonding and interactions with various members through family nights, dinners, and friendly competitions. HIS Families allowed undergrads as well as upperclassmen to interact with members of HIS outside of their social circle and helped facilitate an active and well integrated community. Additionally, it allowed them to become close friends with a diverse group of people, learning and growing from their differences. Many undergrads still seek mentorship from the upperclassmen in their HIS families.



*Clockwise from top: HIS undergrads gather to share memories and say goodbye to the class of 2015 at the Farewell Dinner. The Spring Dinner was a stunning success, and in place of a keynote featured several community members sharing pieces of their own spiritual journeys. As always, food is a central part of HIS gatherings, as members from across the university gather at an HIS mixer. The musalla has a new look, complete with fresh rugs, paint, and new lighting!*



Alongside structured programming, there were also smaller yet crucially important changes made to accommodate various practices and beliefs. Through the help of various community members, HIS was able to provide *sadjahs* or *turbahs* for prayer in the musalla for Shia University members. There was also a *halaqa* jointly organized by a graduate school student and freshman at the college on Ashura. These accommodations allowed for ease in practice for many and provided a great learning opportunity for other members of the Muslim community.

By gauging the concerns of many community members in regards to a lack of spiritual programming, our Director of Islamic learning organized daily *jamat* prayers for Maghrib and Isha followed by small lessons. This gave many members of our community the opportunity to commit to the remembrance of Allah with their new peers and for many eased the transition onto their respective campuses.

Although there were many internal initiatives, HIS also sought to play a larger role on campus and the dialogue at Harvard on diversity. This reflected itself in our keystone External event, "Remember X: The Life and Legacy of a Civil Rights Legend", and was continued with our Islam in America Series. This was capped with

our annual Spring Dinner, "Celebrating Diversity", which incorporated the voices and experiences of students across Harvard's campuses.

Lastly, through work by our Director of Development, the aid of other officers and the Office of Student Life, we were able to renovate the musalla into a space that will help us cater to our community and its needs as we continue to grow!

With all of these initiatives alongside the introduction of our new chaplain, Taymullah Abdur-Rahman, we are excited and hope we have established a firm foundation for the rapidly growing and diverse community we see ahead of us. As this year continues, our hope is to broaden our goal of embracing community and diversity beyond the small initiatives we've taken in the last year. For example, this year will be the Harvard Islamic Society's 60th year and, in commemoration of its establishment, we hope to put on a benefit gala where the proceeds will be donated to the Amal Women's Center, ICNA Relief's transitional housing facility in Boston. We also hope to extend our conversations and programming with other schools across the greater Boston and Cambridge area. Lastly, we are working on integrating all of the HIS divisions across the campuses to ensure synergy and organization as we all seek to provide for the new members of our community.

*The HIS 2015 Board*

## Checking in with recent grads

*The class of 2015 is four months into their post-graduate lives. We caught up with a few of them to learn about what they have been up to and what they have planned for the future.*

Since graduating I've moved back to Houston, my hometown. I'll be starting work at BCG as a consultant in September. This summer, I've enjoyed spending time with family and friends and traveling before my schedule gets hectic with work! - **Farah Ahmed, HBS**

I work as a software development engineer on the Audible Kindle app team at Amazon. I work in Kendall Square and live close to Harvard Square which might be because I love the area. I'm also living with other recent graduates, Mohammed Sarib Hussein and Yacine Fares, and combined with the living area I sometimes get confused whether I actually graduated college. - **Armaghan Behlum, FAS**

I spent the summer after graduating from HBS in Boston, looking for housing. I now live in a cute yellow house in Cambridge with two roommates and a black cat named Lorelei. I started working at Deloitte Consulting in August and it's been fun so far! - **Sundus Husain, HBS**

## 2015 Global Iftaars

Ramadan is a time of struggle, reflection, and humility. We are at our weakest as individuals but made much stronger by our community. The physical and mental fasts, insha'Allah, polish us individually. The physical and emotional fast-breaking, insha'Allah, nourishes our sense of communal responsibility in each other's well-being.

The HUMA Global Iftaars program in 2008 with this intention to foster community. Hosts in cities across the world dedicate their time and energy to bringing together a local community.

The 2015 Global Iftaars program saw 16 iftaars hosted across the world by new and returning hosts, who created spaces to build personal and professional relationships, support one another, reflect on and remember the Divine, and enjoy themselves as a form of gratitude for this life.

After graduating from HBS in May, I went back home to spend the summer with my family in Egypt. I'm now in Minneapolis working with Emerson in its Corporate Planning group as a Strategic Planner. My family and I are enjoying the Twin Cities' beautiful summer weather and are getting ready for the brutal winter ahead. - **Mohamed Elfedawy, HBS**

I came back to Turkey and I am working in the Ministry of Development of Turkey as a planning specialist. - **Burak Karagol, HKS**

Salaam HUMA! This past summer, I had the opportunity to visit Pakistan for the first time in over a decade. I just returned home, but I will be hopping over to the other side of the pond in a few short weeks to study at the University of Cambridge. Then, I'll go from bleeding Crimson to bleeding Blue at the Yale School of Medicine. - **Fatima Mirza, FAS**

After graduation, I took some time off to live at home in Miami, FL, where I was for the past few months. Now I am off to Seattle, WA to start my new role as Software Engineer at Microsoft. If any HUMA members are in the area, let's meet up! I would love to get to know you and make HUMA presence in the Seattle area stronger. - **Zehra Naz, FAS**



This year, our hosts made iftaars possible in the following cities:

Boston, Cairo, Chicago, DC, Dubai, Houston, Karachi, Kuala Lumpur, Lahore, London, New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Princeton, San Francisco, and Toronto.

A heartfelt thank you to our members for hosting and participating in strengthening our community!

*Where were the 2015 iftaars? All over the world! If any Australia or South America alums want to host next year, we can get all the inhabited continents!*



## Rashid Yasin, FAS 2012 President



After graduating in with a BS in Engineering Sciences, Rashid received a master's at UCLA in mechanical engineering, and is currently at Vanderbilt University for his PhD. When not studying, researching, or teaching, he enjoys cooking for his busy wife (Eftitan Akam; FAS 2012) and reading too many articles on the internet.

## Nikhat Dharani, FAS 2014 VP of Internal Affairs



Nikhat is a Harvard College 2014 graduate with a BA in Applied Mathematics. She enjoys finding patterns in data to explain behavior and searches for consistency in an ever-changing world. Nikhat spends her time analyzing data, teaching, reflecting on identity, and marveling at nature.

Though she spent her formative years in the Deep South, Nikhat has yet to develop a Southern accent.

## Ana Nast, FAS 2012 VP of Communications



Ana studied biology and computer science at Harvard, and graduated in 2012. After several years of working, traveling and volunteering, she started medical school this fall at the University of Cincinnati. In addition to studying for exams and learning more about maternal health, Ana enjoys kayaking, building websites, and hanging out with her three cats.

## Osman Shawkat, FAS 2011 VP of External Affairs



Osman graduated from Harvard College in 2011 with a degree in physics. After a few years in strategy consulting in Boston, he moved to San Francisco to join a small hardware startup making canes for the elderly.

When not chatting up senior citizens, he can be found wrenching on cars, climbing or biking.

## Yasmeen Husain, HES 2014 Treasurer



Yasmeen studied International Relations and Economics at Harvard, she graduated in May 2014. She hopes to work in International Development Policy and currently works for a local research institute.

Yasmeen spends most of her time fundraising, volunteering, writing and convincing people to move to the best part of the North, the Greater Toronto Area.