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Rabb Named Carnegie Scholar

CHESTNUT HILL, MA (AUGUST 2009) – BOSTON COLLEGE LAW SCHOOL ASSISTANT PROFESSOR INTISAR RABB, WHOSE RESEARCH FOCUSES ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF ISLAMIC LAW IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY AND THROUGHOUT HISTORY, HAS BEEN NAMED A 2009 CARNEGIE SCHOLAR BY THE CARNEGIE CORPORATION OF NEW YORK.

CHESTNUT HILL, MA (August 2009) - Boston College Law School Assistant Professor Intisar Rabb, whose research focuses on the theory and practice of Islamic law in contemporary society and throughout history, has been named a 2009 Carnegie Scholar by the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

The two-year grant will allow Rabb to pursue her research project entitled "Islamic Law and Legal Change: The Internal Critique." Trained in Islamic and American law, Rabb will study Muslim juristic debates about modern legislation and implementation of classical Islamic law. She will examine the criminal law legislative practices of 27 countries that have incorporated Islamic law into their constitutions or allow for a jurisdiction of Islamic criminal law. Rabb will provide these findings in a public, online database, which she intends for the use of scholars, legal professionals, nongovernmental organizations and relief workers.

Rabb will also conduct a comparative study of judicial debates in Iran and Saudi Arabia, with references to Pakistan. This study will compare judicial debates and the types of juristic critiques that arise in recent and proposed criminal law reforms in each country.

"One of the things that I find interesting is that there are many human rights critiques against criminal law practices in many Muslim-majority countries, but there is a sense that these so-called 'external' critiques do not resonate sufficiently with the stakeholders in charge of applying and imposing the criminal law," said Rabb. "I am interested in the internal conversations and critiques, that is, looking at what jurists and other stakeholders, responsible for fashioning and implementing the laws, have to say; what criticisms they have from internal perspectives. I think that sort of conversation could add to the human rights discussions typically adopted from external perspectives."

Rabb will be joining the Boston College Law School community in the spring, after completing her doctoral dissertation at Princeton University's Department of Near Eastern Studies. Her dissertation focuses on legal maxims in comparative American and Islamic law. A graduate of Georgetown University, Rabb also holds a law degree from Yale Law School. She served as a judicial law clerk to the Honorable Thomas L. Ambro of the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit. She has also studied in Syria, Iran and elsewhere. At Boston College, Rabb will be teaching Criminal Law, Legislation/Statutory Interpretation, and Islamic Law.

In her research on the theory and practice of Islamic law in contemporary society and throughout history, Rabb said she observed a complex system of law in the pre-modern period and "a striking phenomenon of modern countries appealing to pre-modern law. I want to see what changes the classical law, in it's own context, have taken on in the modern period – which is very different context from the one in which these initial laws were formulated."

The Carnegie Scholarship is a two-year grant of up to $100,000 from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Carnegie Scholars are selected from names provided by more than
500 nominators representing a broad range of disciplines and institutions, including academia, research institutes, nonprofit organizations, the media and foundations. Selections are based on a scholars' ability to spark academic and public debate, and on work that transcends academic boundaries.

"We are delighted that Prof. Rabb has joined the faculty at Boston College. She is an incredibly accomplished person with an impeccable academic pedigree in a highly sought-after field," said Associate Dean for Academic Affairs R. Michael Cassidy. "We are all excited that she has received this level of recognition so early in her career.

"To a certain extent, the world is shrinking and it is important to have Islamic culture represented as one of the comparative studies within the Law School," Cassidy said.

Boston College was founded by the Society of Jesus in 1863 - the first institution of higher education in the city of Boston. Today, it is one of the nation’s foremost universities, with a co-educational enrollment of 14,500 undergraduate and graduate students drawn from all 50 states and more than 80 countries. Boston College is among the nation's most selective universities - with nearly 30,000 applications received for its 2,250-member freshman class this year - and is among the leading American private research universities.

By Melissa Beecher, Staff Reporter, Office of Public Affairs