Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura
(Islamic Religious Council of Singapore)

SCIS | Singapore College of Islamic Studies

Symposium 2026

**From resilient learners to dynamic leaders and professionals:
Towards a new vision of higher education**

27 January 2026
Raffles City Convention Centre

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Overview

Contemporary societies face increasingly complex and interconnected challenges that demand new forms of thinking and leadership. For Muslim communities in advanced and plural societies such as Singapore, these challenges are sharpened by the need to remain anchored in rich Islamic intellectual traditions while engaging constructively with modern social, political, and technological realities and contributing to a multireligious society. This raises fundamental questions about how Islamic studies at the tertiary level should be reimagined to prepare future religious leaders and professionals for such contexts.

Against this backdrop, the inaugural Singapore College of Islamic Studies (SCIS) Symposium 2026, themed "From resilient learners to dynamic leaders and professionals: Towards a new vision of higher education," aims to present a vision of Islamic higher education that positions students of Islamic studies at the centre of interdisciplinary learning experiences designed for complex, plural societies. This approach aims to cultivate resilient learners who will emerge as dynamic leaders and professionals, equipped to navigate complex challenges through interdisciplinary thinking, contextualised understanding, and applied research.

Anchored in the three of the SCIS curriculum design pillars, namely (a) Interdisciplinarity, (b) Contextualisation and (c) Applied Research, the symposium offers participants insights into the envisioned SCIS learning experience. It illustrates how Islamic intellectual traditions can be thoughtfully integrated with perspectives from the humanities and the social sciences through case-based, problem-oriented and applied learning approaches.

Through plenary discussions, interactive workshops, and simulated classroom experiences, the symposium models how SCIS students will be trained to think critically across disciplines, collaborate with diverse stakeholders, and translate religio-ethical principles into socially meaningful action. In doing so, it highlights SCIS's commitment to developing graduates who are intellectually grounded, socially engaged, and equipped to contribute as dynamic leaders and professionals in plural societies.

Programme

Symposium Day	
8:00 AM	Registration
9:00 AM	Opening by emcee
9:05 AM	**Opening Remarks** by Ustazah Farah Mahamood Aljunied, Senior Director, Higher Education & Research, MUIS
9:15 AM	**Keynote Address** by Associate Professor Faishal Ibrahim, Acting Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs and Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Home Affairs
09:30 AM	**Plenary Session** "Interdisciplinary Islamic studies and collaborative applied research for social impact" 1. **Professor Abdullah Saeed,** Sultan of Oman Professor of Arab and Islamic Studies and the Redmond Barry Distinguished Professor, University of Melbourne 2. **Dr Suzaina Kadir,** Vice Dean (Academic Affairs), Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore
10:10 AM	Tea Break
10:25 AM	**Plenary Session** (Cont'd) 3. **Professor Lily Kong,** President, Singapore Management University (SMU) and Lee Kong Chian Chair Professor of Social Sciences 4. **Professor Tan Tai Yong,** President and Professor, Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) 5. **Sohibus Samahah Mufti Dr Nazirudin Mohd Nasir,** Mufti of Singapore
11:25 AM	**Panel Discussion** moderated by Mr Khairul Anwar, Deputy Chief Executive, MUIS
12:45 PM	Lunch & Prayer Break
2:00 PM	**Breakout Sessions** **Workshop 01** — "Religion as a resource – Interdisciplinary approaches to social cohesion in plural societies" **Workshop 02** — "Harnessing AI for Islamic studies: Tools, methods, and possibilities" **Workshop 03** — "Navigating religious identity and governance: The Singapore Muslim experience in context" **Research Presentation** — "Beyond the ideal: Reinterpreting family through Islamic and social science lenses"
4:00 PM	Tea Break
4:30 PM	**Closing Remarks** by Dr Albakri Ahmad, Deputy Chief Executive, MUIS
5:30 PM	End

Plenary Session

Interdisciplinary Islamic studies and collaborative applied research for social impact

✦ Programme highlights

This panel will explore the interdisciplinary nature of the Islamic intellectual traditions and its continued relevance in addressing contemporary challenges, with a particular focus on cultivating resilient learners and dynamic leaders. Historically, Islamic scholarship has integrated various fields of knowledge-such as theology, law, ethics, natural sciences and politics, thereby creating a holistic framework for addressing contextual needs. In today's interconnected world, this learning tradition offers a model for Islamic higher education that nurtures students into community leaders and professionals equipped to tackle complex, multifaceted issues. The panel will address the following key questions:

01 *How does interdisciplinarity feature within the Islamic tradition and how can it be applied to modern challenges to develop resilient learners?*

02 *How can an interdisciplinary approach in applied research make impactful contributions to broader society in addressing contemporary challenges?*

03 *In what ways can higher education equip students to become dynamic leaders and professionals?*
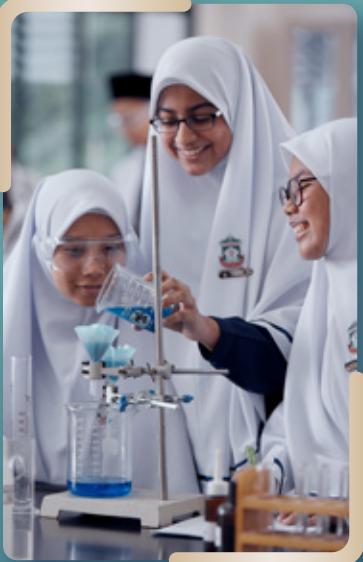
04 *How will the interdisciplinary approach be delivered through the curriculum of the SCIS, and what role can it play in developing the leaders of tomorrow?*

✦ Interdisciplinarity

The panellists will unpack the theme **interdisciplinarity**, bridging the depth of the Islamic intellectual tradition with the evolving landscape of higher education. The session will connect classical Islamic scholarship with the imperative for universities to remain relevant and responsive to societal needs. The discussion will also highlight how fostering an interdisciplinary culture benefits both faculty and students, supporting meaningful scholarship and equipping learners with the critical thinking needed to navigate the balance between tradition and modernity.

Building on these insights, the panel will address the challenges of studying Islamic sciences in isolation and introduce the proposed thematic approach for the SCIS curriculum. The session will also reflect on the significance of the SCIS–SUSS partnership and how this collaboration creates a unique environment pivotal in preparing future leaders who are grounded in faith, socially engaged, and capable of contributing constructively to Singapore's diverse society.

✦ Collaborative applied learning & research

The panel will also explore the significance of **collaborative applied learning and research**, demonstrating how academic inquiry and religious leadership can come together to generate meaningful social impact. The session will highlight the public value of higher education institutions by examining how research can inform policy and shape practice and contribute meaningfully to public discussion and decision-making while remaining grounded in intellectual curiosity and public accountability.

The panel will also address how future religious leaders can be prepared to guide diverse communities through collaborative leadership. This involves moving beyond traditional domains to areas such as social work, mental health, education, and technology. Highlighting the recommendations of the Committee on Future Asatizah (COFA), the panel will emphasise the role of key stakeholders in co-creating a thriving institute of learning that serves as a catalyst for academic excellence and social upliftment.

Plenary Speakers

**Sohibus Samahah
Mufti Dr Nazirudin
Mohd Nasir**

Mufti of Singapore

Interdisciplinary Islamic studies: The SCIS approach

Synopsis

Beginning with a brief overview of the shadow of a predominance of disciplinary approaches to Islamic sciences that continue to plague modern approaches to Islamic studies, Mufti Dr Nazirudin will argue how challenges associated with this approach have become more critical, and more urgent to be addressed, especially because contemporary issues have become very much multi-faceted and far more complex. Mufti Dr Nazirudin will elaborate on the envisioned interdisciplinary approach for the upcoming SCIS, which will require both integration between the Islamic Sciences and integration between the Islamic and non-religious sciences. He will also share on the thematic approach for the SCIS undergraduate curriculum and his vision for the Research Programme in the Study of Muslim Communities of Success (RPCS) moving forward, in championing interdisciplinary applied research in Islamic studies and the study of Muslim communities living in advanced economies and plural societies.

About

Mufti Dr Nazirudin was appointed as Mufti of Singapore in March 2020. As the chair of the Fatwa Committee, he takes the lead in providing guidance for the Muslim community's religious life. Mufti Dr Nazidurin is also a member of the Presidential Council of Religious Harmony, Singapore. Mufti Dr Nazirudin is also the Chair of Steering Committee for the SCIS.

Professor Abdullah Saeed

Sultan of Oman Professor of Arab and Islamic Studies and the Redmond Barry Distinguished Professor, University of Melbourne

The Interdisciplinary approach within Islamic tradition and its relevance in the modern context

Synopsis

This introductory presentation set the stage for the symposium and will discuss the interdisciplinary nature of classical Islamic scholarship (highlighting scholars such as Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Al-Ghazali) which blended philosophy, science, and theology in their work, to create a foundation for a robust and interconnected worldview. This tradition of interdisciplinary thinking should continue to influence contemporary Islamic scholarship, particularly in this modern interconnected era. The relevance of this interdisciplinary approach will be examined through the lens of modern issues faced by Muslim communities. Issues include the role of Islamic law in contemporary governance, the ethical implications of new technologies, the evolving dynamics of family, interfaith relations, and broader social cohesion in multicultural societies. This presentation will argue that by drawing on the rich interdisciplinary legacy of Islamic tradition, scholars and policy makers today can offer nuanced, context-specific solutions that balance traditional Islamic values with modern needs.

About

Abdullah Saeed is the Sultan of Oman Professor of Arab and Islamic Studies and Redmond Barry Distinguished Professor at the University of Melbourne, Australia. He is also an advisor to the Studies in Interreligious Relations programme at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, and has maintained a strong scholarly and professional interest in Singapore for over two decades. His research focuses on the negotiation of text and context, ijtihad, and interpretation in contemporary Islamic thought, and he is a leading advocate of reformist and contextual approaches. He is deeply committed to interreligious engagement and regularly works with Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities worldwide.

Professor Lily Kong

President,
Singapore Management
University (SMU) and Lee
Kong Chian Chair
Professor of Social
Sciences

Beyond the ivory tower: Religion, research, and societal impact

Synopsis

Professor Lily Kong will speak on the public value of institutes of higher education and how they should be contributors to societal development. She will elaborate on the creative, catalytic and consequential potential of research in light of intellectual freedom, research driven by curiosity and the expectation of public accountability. Based on her own experience on the landscape of higher education and universities both locally and abroad, Prof Kong will underline the importance of research in informing policy and reshaping practice by providing the evidence base for decision-making and public debate. She will also share on how research on religion and religious communities may also contribute to the overall public good.

About

Professor Lily Kong, BBM, PBM, FBA, was appointed President of Singapore Management University (SMU) in 2019. She is the fifth President and the first Singaporean to lead the -25year-old university. She is also the first Singaporean woman to serve as President of any university in Singapore. She previously served as Provost of SMU from 2015 to 2018, making her the first woman to hold the position of Provost at any university in Singapore. Before joining SMU, she held various senior management roles at the National University of Singapore.

Prof Lily also serves on the Advisory Panel for the SCIS, contributing her expertise in higher education leadership to the development of the college.

Professor Tan Tai Yong

President and Professor,
Singapore University of
Social Sciences (SUSS)

Universities beyond disciplines: Preparing leaders for a complex world

Synopsis

Professor Tan Tai Yong will speak on the importance of fostering an interdisciplinary culture in higher education to prepare leaders for today's complex and fast-changing world. He will explain why moving beyond traditional academic silos is essential for universities seeking to remain relevant and responsive to societal needs. Drawing on his experience, Professor Tan will discuss how an interdisciplinary environment benefits both faculty and students. He will highlight how such a culture supports meaningful scholarship and collaboration, while equipping students with the critical thinking and confidence needed to navigate the balance between tradition and modernity. He will also reflect on the significance of the SCIS–SUSS partnership and how this collaboration creates a unique learning environment that is key in preparing future leaders and professionals who are grounded in their faith, socially engaged, and able to contribute constructively to Singapore's diverse and plural society.

About

Professor Tan Tai Yong is the President of the Singapore University of Social Sciences and holds a PhD from Cambridge University, with research focused on India, Southeast Asia, and Singapore history. A National University of Singapore graduate, he chairs the Institute of South Asian Studies and serves on the boards of the National Library Board and National Heritage Board, where he also holds key leadership roles. He has been recognised with the National Day Administration (Silver) Award in 2009 and the Public Service Award in 2020 for his contributions to education and public service.

Dr Suzaina Kadir

Vice Dean (Academic Affairs), Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy National University of Singapore

The role of religious leadership alongside other community leaders and stakeholders in enriching collaborative solutioning for contemporary social development

Synopsis

This presentation will discuss how Singapore's future religious leaders can be prepared to guide an increasingly complex and culturally and religiously diverse community by embracing interdisciplinary knowledge and collaborative leadership. Against the backdrop of a multicultural, multireligious, and secular society, the presentation invites the audience to reflect on how religious leaders can move beyond the traditional religious domains to work alongside professionals in areas such as social work, mental health, education, and technology. The discussion will highlight the importance of cultivating cooperation across organisations, ethical and contextual religious guidance, and a deep understanding of contemporary societal challenges.

About

Associate Professor Suzaina Kadir serves as Vice Dean (Academic Affairs) at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy (LKYSPP), National University of Singapore, and sits on the Steering Committee for the SCIS.

She holds a PhD in Political Science from the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Her scholarship centres on religion and politics, with particular focus on Muslim politics in Southeast and South Asia. She also works extensively on state–society relations, political development in Asia, and regional security issues in Southeast Asia. Her recent research explores non-traditional security challenges affecting ASEAN, including women's rights and the impact of religion.

Breakout Sessions

The breakout sessions are designed as applied learning platforms that connect research and curriculum to real-world challenges. Each session will explore key questions related to a contemporary theme in Islamic studies. Designed to give participants a glimpse into the SCIS learning experience, the breakout sessions will be highly interactive, showcasing interdisciplinary and applied learning approaches and methods. Participants will also engage in activities that will encourage reflective thinking, boundary-crossing and collaborative solutioning.

Workshop 01 | Theme: Social cohesion

Religion as a resource – Interdisciplinary approaches to social cohesion in plural societies

Guest Speakers

- **Professor Abdullah Saeed,** Sultan of Oman Professor of Arab and Islamic Studies and the Redmond Barry Distinguished Professor, University of Melbourne
- **Dr Leong Chan-Hoong,** Senior Fellow and Head of Social Cohesion Research Programme, S. Rajaratnam School of International studies, Nanyang Technological University
- **Ustazah Lina Sakina Salim,** Chairperson, Centre for Interfaith Understanding (CIFU)

Facilitator
Shaik Muhammad Khairun Nabil, RPCS Associate Research Fellow

Synopsis

This workshop brings together three complementary perspectives on how Muslims in Singapore can draw on their religious heritage, ethical traditions, and lived experiences to strengthen social cohesion in a multicultural society. The session aims to address the workshop's central question: *How might Muslims in Singapore harness their religious heritage and intellectual tradition to deepen social relations, strengthen trust, and contribute meaningfully to the common good in a diverse and plural society?*

Workshop 02 │ Theme: Science and technology

Harnessing AI for Islamic studies: Tools, methods, and possibilities

Guest Speakers

✕ **Ustaz Ridhwan Basor,** Founding Director, DigitalWell.ai
✕ **Ustaz Fadhil Azman,** Researcher, Religious Policy Department (Fatwa)

Facilitator **Ustaz Sheikh Mohamad Farouq,** RPCS Associate Research Fellow

Synopsis

This workshop introduces participants to the practical uses of Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI) tools in the field of Islamic Studies. Designed for educators, students, and researchers with little or no background in AI, the session will explore how tools like ChatGPT and AI-powered search engines can assist in key tasks for research and teaching, such as summarising, translating and analysing. Participants will engage in guided, hands-on activities using prepared prompts and resources to explore these tools. The workshop also opens space for critical discussion on the limitations of AI, ethical concerns, and the necessity of a 'human in the loop' for Islamic knowledge production. By the end of the session, participants will be better equipped to explore AI as a complementary tool and will be encouraged to reflect on how AI can enhance rather than replace traditional methods of Islamic scholarship.

Workshop 03 | Theme: State and governance

Navigating religious identity and governance: The Singapore Muslim experience through an interdisciplinary lens

Facilitators

- ✖ **Ustazah Farah Mahamood Aljunied,** Senior Director, Higher Education & Research, MUIS
- ✖ **Ustazah Sri Nurayu Mat Aris,** Senior Manager, Higher Education & Research (Academic Programme), MUIS

Synopsis

This breakout session examines the impact of Singapore's governance approach to Muslim religious life, exploring how faith communities navigate identity, governance, and pluralism in a multicultural society.

The session begins with an unpacking and discussion of the Constitution of Madinah, the Maqasid framework, and key pillars of governance in Singapore for a deeper understanding the dynamic relationship between state and society in Singapore's highly diverse environment. Through this lens, participants will examine how the local Muslim community adapts and thrives whilst maintaining core religious values in a pluralistic setting. Drawing from Islamic scholarship, sociological analysis, and political science perspectives, this interdisciplinary session will equip participants with a nuanced understanding of the complex considerations involved in providing relevant religious guidance to diverse communities.

Participants will also engage in reflective dialogue about the importance of an interdisciplinary and applied curriculum approach to better appreciate the complexities of the governance of religious affairs and the value of boundary-crossing in practical collaborative solutioning in addressing contemporary socio-religious issues.

Research Presentation │ Theme: Family

Beyond the ideal: Reinterpreting family through Islamic and social science lenses

Guest Speakers

- ❌ **Ustazah Dr Siti Nur 'Alaniah Abdul Wahid,** RPCS Adjunct Research Fellow
- ❌ **Ustazah Hafiza Roslee,** RPCS Adjunct Research Fellow
- ❌ **Associate Professor Dr Noor Aisha Abdul Rahman,** Department of Malay Studies, National University of Singapore (NUS)
- ❌ **Ustaz Dr Mohammad Yusri Yubhi Md Yusoff,** Director, YusriYusoff Consulting

Facilitators	❌ **Dr Tuty Raihanah Mostarom ,** Head, Higher Education & Research (Academic Programme), RPCS Research Fellow, MUIS ❌ **Aisyah Yusoff,** RPCS Associate Research Fellow, MUIS

Synopsis

This panel explores how Islamic ethics and social science research can enhance our understanding of today's diverse families. Against the backdrop of shifting gender roles, emerging kinship forms, and Singapore's evolving social landscape, panellists will discuss contemporary reinterpretations of concepts such as *qiwāmah* and *qānitāt*, alongside empirical evidence showing that family well-being depends on emotional bonds and functional stability rather than adherence to a single ideal structure. Drawing on Islamic, sociological, and practice-based frameworks, this collaborative approach invites audiences to explore how these perspectives enrich our understanding of modern families.

References

Read more about SCIS's programmes here:

SCIS

The following SCIS booklet documents our first steps in this journey to build the foundations for the SCIS.

RPCS

The Research Programme in the Study of Muslim Communities of Success (RPCS) is the dedicated research arm of the college.

PCICS

The Postgraduate Certificate in Islam in Contemporary Societies (PCICS) aims to nurture a generation of confident, compassionate, and competent professional asatizah.

For more information, do contact us at scis@muis.gov.sg or access the website www.scissymposium.com