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News Release

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NMCC Receives Bridging Cultures Bookshelf Grant; Film Series and Presentation Planned

Aroostook County - The Edmunds Library at Northern Maine Community College has received a *Bridging Cultures* Bookshelf: Muslim Journeys grant from the National Endowment of the Humanities. The library is one of seven institutions in Maine and 843 nationwide to receive the award.

With the *Bridging Cultures* grant, libraries and state humanities councils across the country, including the NMCC library, were presented a collection of books, films and other resources that will introduce the public to the complex history and culture of Muslims in the United States and around the world. The collection includes 25 books, three films, and access for one year to *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*.

“We are delighted that the library was selected to receive these materials to add to the collection and to make them available to our community,” said Gail Roy, assistant dean of learning resources. “This is yet another way in which libraries connect with their communities by providing access to information. The books and DVDs in this bookshelf offer diverse perspectives and information about the Muslim world.”

To celebrate receiving the grant and to promote the collection, NMCC will be hosting both a film series and a book presentation in coming weeks.

A film series featuring the three DVDs from the collection will be held on three consecutive Wednesday evenings, beginning on April 17. The series will be facilitated by NMCC English instructor Eric Pelkey. Each will be offered in the Edmunds Conference Center at NMCC beginning at 7:00 p.m.

“This series is a great way for our campus and community to explore the rich cultural heritage of Islam,” said Pelkey. “Having lived in a predominantly Muslim country during my Peace Corps service, I can attest to the diversity of ideas and practices that fall under the broad umbrella of Islam, and I believe that it's important for Americans to see that Islam is not a monolithic religion.”

The April 17 film will be *Koran by Heart*, an inspiring documentary that follows three 10-year-old children as they leave their countries to compete in an annual Koran reciting contest in Cairo. Over 100 students from over 70 countries across the Islamic world compete, and several have memorized the entire 600-page Koran without actually speaking Arabic. The documentary captures touching moments of three of these children at home with their families, where they open up about life and religion, academic dreams and career aspirations.

Islamic Art: Mirror of the Invisible World will be featured on April 24. This documentary transports viewers over nine countries and across 1,400 years of cultural history to reveal the astonishing riches of Muslim art, crafts, and architecture.

The film series concludes on May 1 with *Prince Among Slaves*, the remarkable true story of an African prince who endured the humiliation of slavery in America without ever losing his dignity or his hope for freedom.

In addition to the film series, a presentation on two books from the collection will be held in the NMCC library on Friday, April 26, at 12:00 noon.

NMCC English instructor Jan Grieco will lead a discussion on *The Butterfly Mosque*, a book from the American Stories section of the bookshelf collection, which draws attention to ways in which people of varying religious, cultural, ethnic and racial backgrounds interact to shape their communities' identities and our collective past.

Lynne Nelson-Manion, another NMCC English instructor, will be presenting *In the Country of Men*, a book from the Points of View section of the collection. Books like this one help readers experience Islamic culture through memoirs and novels representing a diverse geography and some of the best works of contemporary storytelling.

The noon-time presentation on April 26 will also include information on the purpose of the grant. Other books from the grant will also be on display, which include offerings in Connected Histories, Literary Reflections and Pathways of Faith, in addition to Points of View and American Stories.

“This series is important because technological advancements have made our world much smaller, the likelihood of interactions with people from other cultures more probable, and yet we do not have the understanding of the differences,” said Grieco. “Much of what we know about the Islamic world is only bits and pieces delivered to us by news reports and political discussions. This series shows us beauty and humanity.”

Both the film series and the book discussion are free and open to the public. For more information, see the college's website at www.nmcc.edu or contact Gail Roy the NMCC library at 768-2734 or groy@nmcc.edu.

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