

Gifts lift Islam study at Harvard, Georgetown: \$20 million gifts from a Saudi prince

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Harvard University plans to use a recently announced \$20 million donation from a Saudi prince to increase its focus on contemporary Islamic thought and Islam in South and Southeast Asia.

“The majority of Muslims live east of Karachi. Not as much attention has been given to those areas,” said Roy Mottahedeh, a history professor at Harvard’s Center for Middle Eastern Studies. “There’s a great deal of intellectual fervency in the Islamic world.”

Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal, whom *Forbes Magazine* ranked in 2004 as the fourth richest person in the world, also donated \$20 million to Georgetown University’s Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding. The Washington-based center plans to endow three faculty positions and rename the center for the prince, a nephew of Saudi Arabia’s King Abdullah.

John Esposito, head of Georgetown’s center, said the donation allows it to meet growing challenges. The center’s “needs expanded exponentially after 9/11, but we haven’t had sufficient resources,” he said. “This gift endows the center for perpetuity.”

The Saudi prince has also given to other causes. Earlier last year Bin Talal gave \$20 million to the Louvre Museum in Paris to create an Islamic art wing. He has also donated money to help victims of the South Asian tsunami and Pakistan earthquake.
-*Religion News Service*