
The Indian Ocean region is the center of global trade and its history extends back over 5,000 years. The many societies connected through monsoon winds and overland caravan routes are thought to have been the first to produce global modernity through the establishment of inter-regional networks moving goods, people, and ideas over the African and Eurasian landmasses. The early modern era reconfigured the Indian Ocean’s link with the western hemisphere, and European trade empires succeeded in dominating the region as colonial monopolies took hold of the world economy beginning in the 1500s, making the Indian Ocean an arena for competing imperia. Today, the UN considers the Indian Ocean to be the world’s largest crime scene as people and illicit materials are trafficked on the region’s tides. The Indian Ocean is also a site for an on-going global competition between China, India, and other world powers jockeying for political influence, economic advantage, and military superiority. From the ancient world to the present, the Indian Ocean’s relevance to an array of disciplines cannot be understated.

This group aims to provide faculty participants with a broad understanding of the Indian Ocean’s unique form of trans-regionalism, examining multi-disciplinary approaches to interconnected societies from South East Asia to the Horn of Africa, including regions such as Central Asia, the Eastern Mediterranean, and South Asia. The symposium hopes for participants to incorporate ideas, readings, and approaches into undergraduate curricula across the SMEIEIO consortium (WMU and Kalamazoo College).

The group will meet five times over the fall semester to discuss monographs related to the academic study of the Indian Ocean. The group is open to all disciplines and aims to provide a conceptual background for a variety of academic approaches and perspectives in hope of continuing this interdisciplinary collaboration toward future conferences, research, and further course development.

To apply, in a brief letter please outline your disciplinary background and how the academic study of the Indian Ocean region will impact your teaching. Please cite specific classes, proposed offerings, or programs. Address your correspondence to Dr. Ying Zeng, ying.zeng@wmich.edu, Director of Asian Initiatives, Haenicke Institute for Global Education.

The due date for all application letters is April 15, 2019, and participants will be alerted of their acceptance April 18, 2019. An initial planning meeting will take place before the end of the spring semester at a mutually agreed-upon time.

Participants will be required to attend all meetings and produce syllabi or course modules during the symposium. Additionally, each participant will receive a $500.00 honorarium to be used toward materials in the development of courses and course modules related to the Indian Ocean.

The group is being facilitated by Dr. Espelencia Baptiste, Associate Professor of Anthropology, Kalamazoo College; Dr. Nathan Tabor, Assistant Professor in the Department of History, WMU; and Dr. Carol Anderson, Professor of Religion, Kalamazoo College.

Initial readings will include:


Four to five additional readings recommended by facilitators and/or participants will be chosen by group consensus. With any questions, please write Dr. Nathan Tabor, nathan.tabor@wmu.edu.