

Executive Director

The East-West Foundation

Iqbal Akhtar founded and heads a national nonprofit research and service foundation focused on applying Eastern ethics to support underserved communities in South Florida. His responsibilities cover strategic leadership across all operations, including managing the board, grant writing, fundraising, program administration, and staff supervision. Following the 7 October 2023 attacks, his efforts in Muslim-Jewish interfaith dialogue have been pioneering, aiming to foster community bridges between Muslim and Jewish groups and to develop a research agenda on American Muslim Antisemitism.

Areas of Expertise

- Interfaith Dialogue
- Covenantal Pluralism
- Peacebuilding
- Research Design & Data Analysis
- Jewish and Islamic Studies
- Antisemitism
- Community Outreach
- Program Development
- Ethics of Artificial Intelligence
- Academic Research & Publishing
- Scriptural Readings
- Policy Development & Advocacy
- Religious Extremism
- Team Building & Leadership
- Jainism

Career Experience

First Trust Bank Limited

Templeton Religion Trust, Nassau, The Bahamas

2021 – 2025

Program Director, Covenantal Pluralism Initiative

Strengthened engagement across religious differences by identifying and securing grantmaking, partnership, and collaboration opportunities. Expanded program impact by developing strategic initiatives, key projects, and funding competitions while overseeing their execution in coordination with leadership. Enhanced expertise and industry knowledge through active participation in professional development opportunities.

- Managed \$30 million covenantal pluralism grants portfolio with global partnerships in Africa, Asia, and Europe
- Research and strategic planning for Templeton by identifying global trends, futurist thinking, and identifying new partners for future initiatives.
- Improved grant effectiveness and organizational relationships by managing full grant lifecycle and maintaining strong connections with grantee organizations.
- Streamlined proposal processes and increased collaboration by leading submission, review, and referrals with Templeton sibling organizations.
- Ensured grant success and alignment with strategic priorities by evaluating performance metrics for grants and grantees.
- Maintained program integrity and donor alignment by clearly communicating Trust's mandates and strategic goals.
- Relationship-building skills with diverse stakeholders, including grantmakers in the space of religious freedom, community partners, and internal staff.
- Developed and implemented risk mitigation strategies for the grant portfolio, resulting in zero grant-related losses.
- Created Templeton Covenantal Pluralism Index to identify global trends using qualitative and quantitative data from grantees as well as other indices to understand where societies exist at tipping points for greater pluralism and to invest in key partners to leverage investment for long-term social change in the fields of academic research, K-12 education, and development.
- Evaluated grant proposals by applying rigorous criteria for scientific merit, methodological soundness, and budget realism. Provided constructive feedback to applicants, contributing to the overall quality and success to board for approval and funding of developed projects.
- Collaborated with the Chief Grants Officer and other program staff to achieve organizational goals related to staffing, structure, and communication.
- Cultivated a global network of researchers, scholars, and practitioners across diverse disciplines and geographical regions. Successfully managed projects engaging with diverse cultural contexts and perspectives, promoting interfaith dialogue.

Florida International University, Miami, FL
Associate Professor, Religious Studies/Politics & International Relations 2012-present
Founding Director, Western Indian Ocean Studies
Director, Jain Studies

2012 – Present

Increase international academic presence by securing funding and overseeing Fulbright foreign language teaching assistants and Scholars-in-Residence from six countries over three years. Optimize global academic collaboration by creating Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) programs with 12 universities. Support advanced research by serving as external examiner or committee member for 68 doctoral theses across multiple disciplines at universities in four countries. Develop future scholars by mentoring and graduating 23 Master's students in religious studies and politics and international relations over past decade.

- Established first academic Jain Studies Center in North America with a \$3.5M endowment by developing strategic vision in cooperation with university stakeholders and forming key partnerships.
- Maximized interdisciplinary research in Jain Studies through management of \$1.2M endowment, annual programming, graduate student mentorship, and stakeholder coordination.
- Grew global engagement in Jain philosophy by directing first fully virtual International Conference on Science and Jain Philosophy (ICSJP), uniting all Jain sect leaders for the first time and achieving 10,000+ online impressions.
- Advanced Western Indian Ocean Studies by founding the first research center in U.S., securing over \$1M in grants from global institutions to connect scholars across Africa, Asia, France, and the U.S.
- Elevated FIU's national standing as the 6th largest producer of Fulbright Scholars in 2022 and a 'Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) Top Producer' (2019-2022) by leading Fulbright strategy.
- Amplified curriculum offerings by designing, gaining state approval for, and teaching 10+ graduate and undergraduate courses to 2,000+ students in religion, international relations, and cultural studies.

U.S. Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, CO
USNORTHCOM Visiting Professor

2007

Improved cadets' critical thinking and global perspective by developing and teaching undergraduate 'Geopolitics' and advanced 'Asian Politics' courses. Augmented student engagement and learning retention in Geopolitics by integrating Columbia University/Barnard College's 'Reacting to the Past' pedagogy, incorporating perspective-taking, active learning, and primary texts.

- Expanded international exposure and leadership skills by designing, recruiting, and leading a cadre of cadets on study abroad program to Tanzania in 2008.
- Secured fully funded graduate study opportunities for three cadets via personalized mentorship and application guidance.

Fellowships

U.S. Fulbright Scholar, Lahore, Pakistan

Strengthened the academic study of non-Muslim heritage in Pakistan by establishing a national network of scholars and securing funding for interfaith and interfaith dialogue initiatives. Achieved provincial and national policy changes on Jain heritage preservation in Lahore through strategic advocacy and research efforts. Elevated virtual academic collaboration by implementing FIU's Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) program across seven Pakistani universities in partnership with the U.S. Consulate in Lahore and the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad.

- Propelled interdisciplinary peace studies by securing NGO and corporate support for initiatives in public and private universities in Peshawar, Lahore, and Islamabad.
- Advanced cultural preservation through a pending application with the Sindh Department of Archaeology and COMSATS University Lahore for the U.S. Ambassador's Fund to restore a Jain temple complex in Tharparkar, Sindh.
- Contributed to global education access by evaluating Pakistani students and scholars as Fulbright evaluation board member.

U.S. Fulbright Fellow, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Maximized cross-cultural research through primary studies in Arabic, Gujarati, Kacchi, Sanskrit, and Swahili. Advised U.S. policy on Horn of Africa by analyzing Tanzanian racial and religious dynamics for the U.S. Embassy (USAFRICOM). Supported diplomatic efforts by coordinating University of Dar es Salaam's role in President George W. Bush's visit to Tanzania.

- Assessed impact of a USAID-funded water pipeline in Zanzibar through focus groups with community elders.
- Advanced global education by evaluating Fulbright applications for Tanzanian scholars.
- Increased cadet cultural competency by leading U.S. Air Force study abroad program in Zanzibar, Arusha, and Dar es Salaam.

National Security Education Fellowship, Rawalpindi, Pakistan

Enhanced understanding of national identity in Pakistan by researching school curricula at Quaid-i-Azam University. Improved archival preservation by digitizing manuscripts and developing a digital strategy at The National Archives of Pakistan.

- Gained proficiency in written Urdu and spoken Pothohari Punjabi through dedicated linguistic study.

Government Experience

Cultural Affairs Intelligence Officer, U.S. Northern Command Headquarters Peterson Space Force Base, CO

Advanced homeland security operations by delivering intelligence analyses on Muslim world for Standing Joint Forces Headquarters-North during Global War on Terrorism. Optimized senior leadership's cultural competency by providing training on Middle East and South Asian geopolitics and diplomacy.

- Augmented intelligence reporting by translating Urdu news on Afghanistan and Pakistan into weekly briefings.
- Supported defense and policy strategy by publishing intelligence reports on South Asian political and economic developments for Congressional and military.
- Acknowledged with Armed Forces Civilian Service Award for meritorious service during Hurricane Katrina. Recognized as Civilian of Quarter by NORAD-USNORTHCOM for exceptional contributions.
- Granted Top Secret/Sensitive Compartmented Information (TS/SCI) security clearance for handling classified intelligence.

Assistant Webmaster & Strategic Marketing, Southern U.S. Trade Association (SUSTA), New Orleans, LA

Boosted website engagement by updating and maintaining the SUSTA website and member portal. Enhanced user experience by analyzing site activity, implementing feedback, and adding new features.

- Improved trade policy recommendations through data analysis and research on export challenges in Latin America.
- Expanded export opportunities by assisting Louisiana businesses with approvals, translators, and importer connections.
- Propelled industry awareness by researching and writing INsight newsletter articles highlighting SUSTA successes.

U.S. Department of State, U.S. Department of State, Washington, DC

Strengthened U.S. foreign policy by assisting Ambassador Daniel Kurtzer in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, Israel-Palestine Desk (NEA-IPA). Informed Congressional reports by leading research for the 2001 PLO Compliance and Commitment Act (PLOCCA).

- Shaped diplomatic strategy during the Second Intifada by coordinating with Israeli, Jordanian, and Egyptian embassies and briefing the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee.
- Improved policy analysis by producing briefs, monitoring Hebrew and Arabic media, and consulting with analysts from Brookings, CSIS, and the Heritage Foundation.

Science and Engineering Apprenticeship, Naval Research Laboratories Stennis Space Center, MS

Amplified naval environmental modeling accuracy by programming data interpolation, visualizing atmospheric fields, and testing the GEMS (Global Environmental Modeling System). Published report used by Navy SEALs by analyzing and documenting the Tampa Bay Swimmer Model. Grew Arctic ice prediction capabilities via data interpolation and graphical compilation for SSMI/SMMR models.

- Advanced STEM diversity/inclusion efforts by advocating for DEI initiatives in STEM education at Northshore High School.
- Expanded programming expertise by developing skills in C++/Unix and HTML.

Non-profit Experience

Founder, Miami Interfaith

Rebuilding trust among temple and mosque congregations in South Florida by launching the Muslim-Jewish Dialogue in collaboration with local institutions after October 7, 2023. Further developed interfaith cooperation among Jewish and Muslim clergy in greater Miami by leading initiatives that foster dialogue, ethical discussions, and community service across diverse demographics.

- Enhanced engagement on faith-based AI ethics by organizing educational programs on the intersection of technology and religious values.
- Promoted inclusivity and social justice by developing partnerships and events encouraging interfaith understanding.

Executive Director, The East-West Foundation

Increased social justice impact by establishing a 501(c)(3) nonprofit applying Eastern ethics to underserved communities. Expanded environmental education by designing a county-funded early childhood curriculum on Native and African contributions to Miami's history. Preserved cultural heritage by leading the restoration of Masjid al-Ansar, Florida's first extant African American mosque.

- Improved local food security by developing a community garden in Brownsville's food desert.
- Maximized nonprofit volunteer support by launching Virtual Volunteer platform with ShareNest, funded by Children's Trust.
- Expanded nonprofit operations through strategic leadership in board relations, grant writing, fundraising, program management, and staff oversight.

Chairman, Children's College Foundation Slidell, LA

Improved access to quality early education by supporting a 4-star, state-rated learning center for underserved children in Slidell. Introduced Swahili language education by assisting in the development of the first U.S. Swahili early learning curriculum. Elevated multilingual learning by co-authoring four DOE-funded children's books in English, French, and Swahili.

- Secured grant funding to sustain early education initiatives and a local food pantry.
- Enhanced childhood literacy by partnering with Louisiana Endowment for Humanities to distribute free books.

Additional experience as Government Relations Consultant, APCO Worldwide, Washington, DC

Education

PhD, Interdisciplinary, University of Edinburgh

MA in Religious Studies, University of Denver

MA in Political Science/International Relations, Tulane University

AB in Political Science & Jewish, Islamic, & Near Eastern Studies, Washington University in St. Louis

Languages

English: Native

Spanish: Urdu/Hindi, Gujarati, Swahili: Intermediate

Kachchhi, Classical Arabic: Advanced

Sanskrit: Elementary

Licensure & Certification

- National Administrator Credential, 2012, District of Columbia, National Early Childhood Program Accreditation
 - Child Development Associate, 2013, District of Columbia, National Credentialing Program
 - Florida Teacher License Certification, 2016, Florida, 1304073, State of Florida
 - Louisiana Teacher License, 2016, Louisiana, OS 564510, State of Louisiana

Books & Articles

- Akhtar, Iqbal S. Covenantal Pluralism. Springer: Dordrecht, 2025
- Akhtar, Iqbal S. The Khoja of Tanzania: Discontinuities of a Postcolonial Religious: Identity. Brill: Leiden, 2015
- Akhtar, Iqbal S. and Bhalloo, Zahir. "Les manuscrits du sud de la vallée de l'Indus en écriturekhokhī sindhī : état des lieux et perspectives." Asiatische Studien. Berlin, De Gruyter. (2019)
- Akhtar, Iqbal S. "Iqbal Akhtar Exploring Ethno-Religious Identities of Khōjā: Preliminary Notes on a Missing Homeland." Edited by U. Kirchberger, et al. Global Diasporas in Age of High Imperialism. Berlin: Peter Lang GmbH, 177- 186. (2018)
- Akhtar, Iqbal S. "South Asian Muslims in East Africa." Edited by P. Raposo et al. Routledge Handbook of Africa-Asia Relations. Abingdon: Routledge, 60-75. (2017)
- Akhtar, Iqbal S. "Religious citizenship: the case of globalized Khōjā" Journal of Indian Ocean Region. 10:2, 219-236 (2014)
- Akhtar, Iqbal S. "The Anthropology of Dreams and Dreaming among Muslim Communities." Anthropology of the Contemporary Middle East and Central Eurasia, 2:1 (2014)
- Akhtar, Iqbal S. "Negotiating the Racial Boundaries of Khōjā Caste Membership in Late 19th Century Colonial Zanzibar (1878- 1899)". Journal of Africana Religions, 2:3 (2014)

Papers

- Akhtar, Iqbal and Southworth, Maj. Aric. "Historical Lessons from Islamic Civilization: The Khārijites and the Malay Insurgency." Institute of National Strategic Studies, Occasional Paper (December 2007)
- Head Researcher, PLO Commitment and Compliance bi-annual report of 2001 to Congress for 16 Dec. 2000- 15 Jun. 2001

Op-Eds/News

- Articles in [The Conversation](#), an academic news publishing site
- "This Miami synagogue partnered with a church to break bread- and bias", [Miami-Herald](#), 16 December 2024
- Akhtar, Iqbal S. "Perspective | World Powers Keep Misunderstanding Afghanistan - Leading to Failed State-Building." The Washington Post, 16 Sept. 2021