What made you decide to go to graduate school?
I come from an educated family background in Iran- for me to go to school and continue to a graduate program was a natural decision- I think I must have been very lucky to grow up in that environment. All my elder cousins and friends are educated in medical, architectural, and academic fields. I believe they set a good role model for me.

What topics do you teach at UT?
I teach both graduate and undergraduate courses in the areas of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies. My area of specialization is popular religious practices: rituals and their influence on gender identity and discourse in Muslim societies, with a primary focus on Iran Islamic veiling material culture, textile and clothing.

What is your current research focus at UT?
I am active in research and publications. Although, I may seem to have departed from textiles and clothing research and moved in to the area of Islam and Middle East but in reality I have merged these areas together. In my research on the Middle East I am dealing with gender issues in relation to clothes, textiles (and other material cultures), ritual practices and of popular religious practices (Islam).


Is there a hot topic currently being discussed by scholars of Islamic studies in the U.S. or around the world?
There is nothing “hotter” than Islam and Muslims particularly the Muslim woman. Every day’s news is devoted partially to this topic.

What makes a good grad student?
A patient, and serious person who cares about learning for the sake of learning, not just to go to school since they did not know what else to do. There must be a goal set before going to graduate school. One must be very honest with her/himself to analyze what they want to get out of a graduate degree before even considering to apply.

What are 3 tips for students applying to your program?
1. Learn one of the languages of the Middle East (Arabic, Hebrew, Turkish or Persian) in at least two years in a formal classroom setting (4 semesters) before turning in an application.
2. Learn more about the cultural diversity of the so called Middle East, since they are not from the same tribe, race, and nation nor do they look alike or speak the same languages or practice only Islam.
3. Read and learn about the Middle East more from academic journals than just following the trendy on line personal web logs, or just the news.

What are the top five Islamic studies programs in the U.S.?
I like to say UT is among the very best schools but we do not have an Islamic Studies Graduate Program yet. Other schools to consider are:
1. University of Chicago
2. Harvard University
3. Princeton University
4. Columbia University
5. Duke University

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