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Pontificio Istituto
di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica

**PISAI
CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE**

Strategic Plan 2024-2029



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di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica

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November 2023

“My desire is that this Institute increasingly become a point of reference for the formation of Christians who work in the field of interreligious dialogue.”

(Pope Francis, 24 January 2015)

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Foreword

The **Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies** (PISAI), faithful to the fundamental values that define its identity and strong in its vocation to promote a “culture of encounter” (*Fratelli tutti*, 216), presents itself as a centre of excellence in study, teaching and research for an in-depth knowledge of the Islamic religion and Islamic cultures. PISAI thus contributes to the mission of an outgoing Church that implements dialogue “not as a mere tactical approach, but as an intrinsic requirement for experiencing in community the joy of the Truth and appreciating more fully its meaning and practical implications” (*Veritatis gaudium*, foreword, 4).

Mindful of the close relationship between self-evaluation, external evaluation and strategic planning, after receiving the Report of the External Evaluation Committee from AVEPRO (12-14 February 2019), after having obtained approval of its new Statute on 26 January 2021, and after having overcome the challenge of the Covid-19 pandemic with strength and tenacity, the Institute launched the institutional strategic planning cycle in November 2023.

The Strategic Plan 2024-2029, prepared with the assistance of Hunter & Sparnon Consulting, is an act through which the Institute, with the involvement of the entire academic community and external stakeholders, has the opportunity to improve its management and organisational capacity. Pope Francis has evoked on more than one occasion the distinct challenges of the changing epoch we presently traverse; the Plan has been developed to ensure that the Institute’s academic profile addresses these challenges and that its operations have sufficient flexibility to respond to them.

The Strategic Plan 2024-2029 sets out the strategic priorities, objectives, actions and indicators to be monitored over the next five years. The implementation of the Strategic Plan and the monitoring of the objectives will be carried out through annual Action Plans and the procedures and tools for the promotion and evaluation of quality.

Section 1

Vision, Mission, Values, and Governance

VISION

The **Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies** (PISAI) will be an academic centre of excellence that promotes interreligious dialogue with Islam on every societal level through high-quality formation and research.

“In order to sustain dialogue with Islam, suitable training is essential for all involved, not only so that they can be solidly and joyfully grounded in their own identity, but so that they can also acknowledge the values of others, appreciate the concerns underlying their demands and shed light on shared beliefs.”

(Evangelii gaudium, 253)

“The 50 years of PISAI in Rome - after its birth and first steps in Tunisia, thanks to the great work of the Missionaries of Africa - show how much the Universal Church, in the climate of Post-Conciliar renewal, has understood the impending need for an institute dedicated explicitly to research and the formation of those who promote dialogue with Muslims. Perhaps there has never been a greater need, since the most effective antidote to violence is teaching the discovery and acceptance of difference as richness and fruitfulness. [...] This task is not simple, but is born and grows out of a strong sense of responsibility. Muslim-Christian dialogue requires, in a particular way, patience and humility along with extensive study, because approximation and improvisation can be counterproductive, or can even cause discomfort and embarrassment. A lasting and continuous commitment is needed in order not to be caught unprepared in various situations and in different contexts. For this reason, there is need for a specific preparation, not limited by sociological analysis, but having the characteristics of a journey among members of religions who, although in different ways, refer to the spiritual paternity of Abraham. [...] This Institute is very precious among the academic institutions of the Holy See, and still needs to become better known. My desire is that it increasingly become a point of reference for the formation of Christians who work in the field of interreligious dialogue.”

(Pope Francis, Address on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of PISAI in Rome, 24 January 2015)

MISSION

PISAI will deliver its Vision through the following activities:

- high quality taught academic programmes, courses and doctoral studies;
- academic research;
- engagement with institutions, organisations and communities committed to Christian-Muslim relations.

These activities will:

- cultivate and promote a scientific and comprehensive study of Islam and Christian-Muslim relations;
- form students at a high level in the specific disciplines of the Institute;
- prepare students for university teaching and research positions in the field of Islamic studies and Christian-Muslim relations;
- prepare practitioners of dialogue at the service of the universal Church and of the particular churches for the promotion of respectful and peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims;
- train experts at the service of society for the promotion of intercultural dialogue with Muslims.

VALUES

Rooted in Catholic tradition, PISAI is convinced that interreligious encounter must be based on good will, scientifically grounded knowledge, and a spirit of mutual respect.

Our values are:

- academic rigour;
- critical thinking;
- a scientific approach;
- the cultivation of a learning and teaching community;
- the appreciation of otherness;
- human fraternity;
- a commitment to engage in a constructive dialogue with Muslims;
- a “culture of encounter” (*Fratelli tutti*, 216).

“The word ‘culture’ points to something deeply embedded within a people, its most cherished convictions and its way of life. A people’s ‘culture’ is more than an abstract idea. It has to do with their desires, their interests and ultimately the way they live their lives. To speak of a ‘culture of encounter’ means that we, as a people, should be passionate about meeting others, seeking points of contact, building bridges, planning a project that includes everyone. This becomes an aspiration and a style of life. The subject of this culture is the people, not simply one part of society that would pacify the rest with the help of professional and media resources.

(Fratelli tutti, 216)

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES AND GOVERNANCE

PISAI will develop organisational structures, governance, and management practices which will embed the management and delivery of its strategic plan into its daily life.

Section 2

Academic Activities

GRADUATE CHARACTERISTICS

Through their life and work at PISAI, our students will develop specific graduate characteristics. Our students will:

- possess an intermediate level of Modern Standard Arabic, focusing on the structure of the language;
- be able to engage directly with Arabic texts representative of fundamental areas of classical Islamic culture and religious thought;
- be cognizant of the interdisciplinarity of Islamic studies and familiar with the modern trends and recent debates in the field;
- be able to carry out an adequate analysis of the complexity of the Islamic world;
- be attentive to the mutually enriching interaction between the Islamic and Christian world-views;
- be able to elaborate critically one's own reflection on the Islamic religion and on Christian-Muslim relations;
- be familiar with the theory of interreligious dialogue and its hermeneutics;
- be able to assess critically past interactions between Christians and Muslims in order to understand the current situation and promote the culture of encounter;
- be able to operate with competence in the field of Christian-Muslim relations in view of a constructive dialogue.

STUDENT PROFILE

Programme	Students (p/a)
Introductory Year (PISAI)	5-10
Licentiate (PISAI, 2 years combined)	15-20
Doctorate (PISAI/cotutela)	10-15
Joint Programmes (in partnership with other academic institutions)	15-20
Total	45-65

TEACHING AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES

PISAI will offer the following academic programmes:

- Certificate in Christian-Muslim Relations (PISAI)
- Certificates in Islamic Studies (Level I & II) (PISAI)
- Introductory Certificate in Classical Arabic (PISAI)
- Intermediate Certificate in Classical Arabic (PISAI)
- Diploma of Introduction to Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI, awarded at the end of the Introductory Year)
- Diploma in Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI, awarded only to students who stop at the end of the First Year of Licentiate)
- Licentiate in Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI)
- Doctorate in Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI/cotutela)
- Joint Programmes (in partnership with other academic institutions)

PISAI's academic programmes will be redeveloped to ensure that they facilitate the development of its graduate characteristics set out above.

PISAI will explore the possibility of offering specialised training in Islam for secondary school teachers of religion in collaboration with other appropriate institutions.

Both PISAI's Research activities (for example through the integration of the research of faculty members into classroom teaching, networking, and the development of an academic community) and Third Mission activities (for example through the development of public education courses) will be supported through its Teaching and Learning activities.

TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGY

Academic programmes at PISAI will continue to be built primarily around a philological-based approach and Arabic skills. Knowledge of Arabic is essential for a scholar of Islam.

In addition, PISAI will seek to provide opportunities for linguistic immersion in the Arabic-speaking world, as well as for practical encounters and dialogue in the field through exchange programmes and placements with appropriate partner institutions and organisations in a global context.

PISAI will develop other programmes of studies, less linguistically oriented and more interdisciplinary, in partnership with other academic institutions as appropriate.

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

PISAI will seek to become a centre of excellence of research in the following areas:

- Islamic culture and civilisation, with special attention to the fundamental sources of Islam (Qur'an and Sunna);
- current developments in Muslim societies and in Islamic religious thought;
- Islamic approaches to pluralism, peace-building and interreligious dialogue;
- Arabic linguistics and sociolinguistics;
- theological issues common to Christianity and Islam;
- Christian and Islamic theological appraisals of each other;
- Christian-Muslim relations globally, including both “traditional” and “secular” societies.

Both PISAI's Teaching and Learning activities (through enhanced academic programmes) and Third Mission activities (for example through appropriate media commentary) will be supported through its Research activities.

PISAI will undertake the following research activities:

- the development of a community of post-doctoral researchers, possibly in partnership with other institutions and organisations;
- publications, internal and external, with national and international partners;
- joint research projects with appropriate organisations, institutions and individuals in a global context;
- seminars and study days to create a common research culture by sharing methodological tools between experienced researchers, emerging researchers, and doctoral students.

It will seek to produce research outputs of quality that is *internationally excellent* in terms of originality, significance and rigour.

PISAI will develop a strategy to support the development of its research activities. This will comprise *inter alia*:

- an allocation of time for faculty members to undertake research;
- training in research activities, methodology, writing for publication and support in seeking project funding.

THIRD MISSION

Third Mission activities at PISAI seek to give expression to its vision and mission, as a Catholic point of reference for the undertaking of the Church with relation to Muslims.

PISAI will undertake the following Third Mission activities:

- provision of expertise to appropriate forums, for example Vatican's Dicasteries, National Episcopal Conferences, local churches, religious congregations working in areas where Muslims are present, etc.;
- networking with academic institutions, organisations and individuals;
- social and media contributions and commentary;
- public lectures and events;
- contact with diplomatic missions;
- reception of groups and delegations;
- promoting grassroots interreligious dialogue.

PISAI will develop a strategy to support the development of its Third Mission activities. This will comprise *inter alia*:

- an allocation of time for faculty members to undertake Third Mission activities;
- training in Third Mission activities, methodology, writing for media, and support in seeking project funding.

PARTNERSHIPS AND ALLIANCES

PISAI will develop suitable partnerships and alliances with appropriate institutions, organisations and individuals to facilitate the delivery of its academic and Third Mission activities. In particular:

- student placements and exchanges;
- exchange of professors;
- research projects and publications;
- academic exchanges with Islamic institutions;
- Third Mission projects.

Section 3

Support Activities

STUDENT SUPPORT

PISAI will support its students through:

- appropriate information at the time of recruitment, including organisations that may provide scholarships;
- effective administrative procedures to include admission and registration;
- efficient management of student records through an appropriate Student Information System (SIS) software;
- facilitation of linguistic immersion in the Arabic-speaking world and experiences of lived dialogue with Muslims;
- providing career prospects;
- initiating doctoral students into academic publication and presentation of papers in conferences.

LEARNING RESOURCES

PISAI will effectively support the academic activities of its staff and students through:

- appropriate library provision, including online resources;
- IT provision for online learning;
- finding funding for the ongoing linguistic formation of professors;
- sourcing funding for professors to present papers in international conferences;
- developing partnerships with institutions that can assist the students and professors of PISAI in various ways.

PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES

PISAI will effectively promote its academic activities through:

- effective promotion of the Institute among potential senders;
- information about career prospects, in particular for lay students;
- an institutional website;
- developing promotion materials such as brochures;
- media interaction.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

PISAI will seek to develop and implement institutional quality assurance policies and practices that are compliant with the procedures set out in *AVEPRO Guidelines – Nature, Purposes, Standards and Procedures of Quality and Evaluation*.

Section 4

Resource Management

FINANCE

To ensure that the academic and support activities set out above are appropriately delivered through the allocation of sufficient financial resources, PISAI will:

- identify those activities that are not financially covered by the Holy See and that depend on external funding;
- develop an effective strategy of fundraising, exploring the possibility of engaging professional fundraisers and organizing fundraising events.

HUMAN RESOURCES

PISAI will seek to ensure that the academic and support activities set out above are effectively delivered through the allocation of appropriately qualified and supported academic and administrative staff. These may include:

- President;
- Director of Studies;
- Director of Research and Third Mission;
- Secretary General;
- Bursar;
- Head Librarian;
- Assistant Librarians (2);
- Communication and Public Relations Officer;
- Marketing and Events Coordinator;
- Academic and Administrative Secretary;
- IT Manager
- Porter;
- Other administrative and support staff as appropriate.

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