

Muslim GTF hopes to break stereotypical views

By Denise Clifton
Emerald Associate Editor



Fida Muhammed

Fida Muhammad insists he is not your stereotypical Muslim.

"I do not belong to that very kind of reactionary group that Westerners see Muslims as," says the Muslim Student Association director as he sits placidly at his desk discussing Western thinking and stereotypes. "I am very fond of music, which is not seen as very Muslim, and most of my interests are very secular."

And the 32-year-old native Pakistani is quick to point out only a small fraction of the more than 1 billion Muslims worldwide fit into the Western stereotype of fundamentalist Muslim terrorists.

Muhammad, who is also a sociology graduate teaching fellow at the University, claims the Western media tend to present hijacking, killing, taking hostages and "wanton human massacre" as typical Islamic activities, but he said most Muslims don't approve of violent behavior.

"The word, Islam, literally it means peace," he said. "We are not intolerant as we are portrayed in the newspapers and on TV."

"In my country, I have never heard that someone has been kidnapped," Muhammad added. "It would be considered very cowardly to hijack or kidnap a tourist."

Although born and raised in a deeply religious and conservative Islamic family, Muhammad said he is not conservative religiously or politically.

"I have friends who are athe-

ism in any form whatsoever, whether it is committed by Muslim, Christian, Jew or anyone," he added.

Muhammad also wants non-Muslim students to realize double standards often are applied to terrorists worldwide.

"The world should be alerted to the atrocities committed by Israelis in the West Bank because that is also terrorism," he said. "And there should also be a provision against state terrorism like in South Africa, where

they have been depriving the black people of their rights and oppressing them since the 19th century."

Universal criteria should be used when judging terrorist activities, Muhammad said.

"Whether Christian, Jew or Muslim, if someone hurts an innocent civilian, that is a crime," he said as he quietly closed an open book on his desk. "But with the selective standards used today, many unfair stereotypes are created."

ists, Jews, Christians and all religious and political schools of thought," he said.

"Personally, I am very close to 'New Left' politics," Muhammad added, noting that he enjoys studying all types of Western philosophies and social theories.

Muhammad has a combined bachelor's degree in literature and political science, and a master's degree in philosophy from the northwest Pakistanian University of Peshawar, where he also taught political science for four years.

In August 1986, Muhammad received a grant to go to Eastern Washington University, where he earned another master's degree in public administration.

"It was very easy for me" to come to the United States, he said. "My background is in Western institutions and I understand the language."

Two years ago, Muhammad received offers of graduate

teaching fellowships in sociology from three universities, including this University.

"I decided to come to Oregon for my doctorate in sociology because I like to stay in the Northwest," he said.

Eventually, Muhammad hopes to become a sociology professor because "I think the study of sociology gives you good insight into human problems."

But in the meantime, he is kept busy with his GTF and MSA responsibilities.

"I really didn't plan to become the director, and I didn't submit my name to be director when it was decided last year," Muhammad said, shaking his head as if he is still surprised. "It was decided by the group."

But Muhammad said he enjoys being involved with the association, which claims a total membership of 80 to 90 students with about 40 active members.

"It makes sense to go where you are most comfortable and share the same senses of right and wrong with the people," he said.

As director of the student association, Muhammad's goals are to eliminate stereotypes of Muslims at the University by sponsoring educational films and guest speakers, such as last Tuesday's lecture on "Islam, Jihad and Terrorism: A Non-media Point of View."

"I think many Westerners think that Jihad, terrorism and Islam are closely linked," he said. "I thought we should clarify that Jihad is not another name of terrorism."

"I'd like to show our position that we do not approve ter-

rorism in any form whatsoever, whether it is committed by Muslim, Christian, Jew or anyone," he added.

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