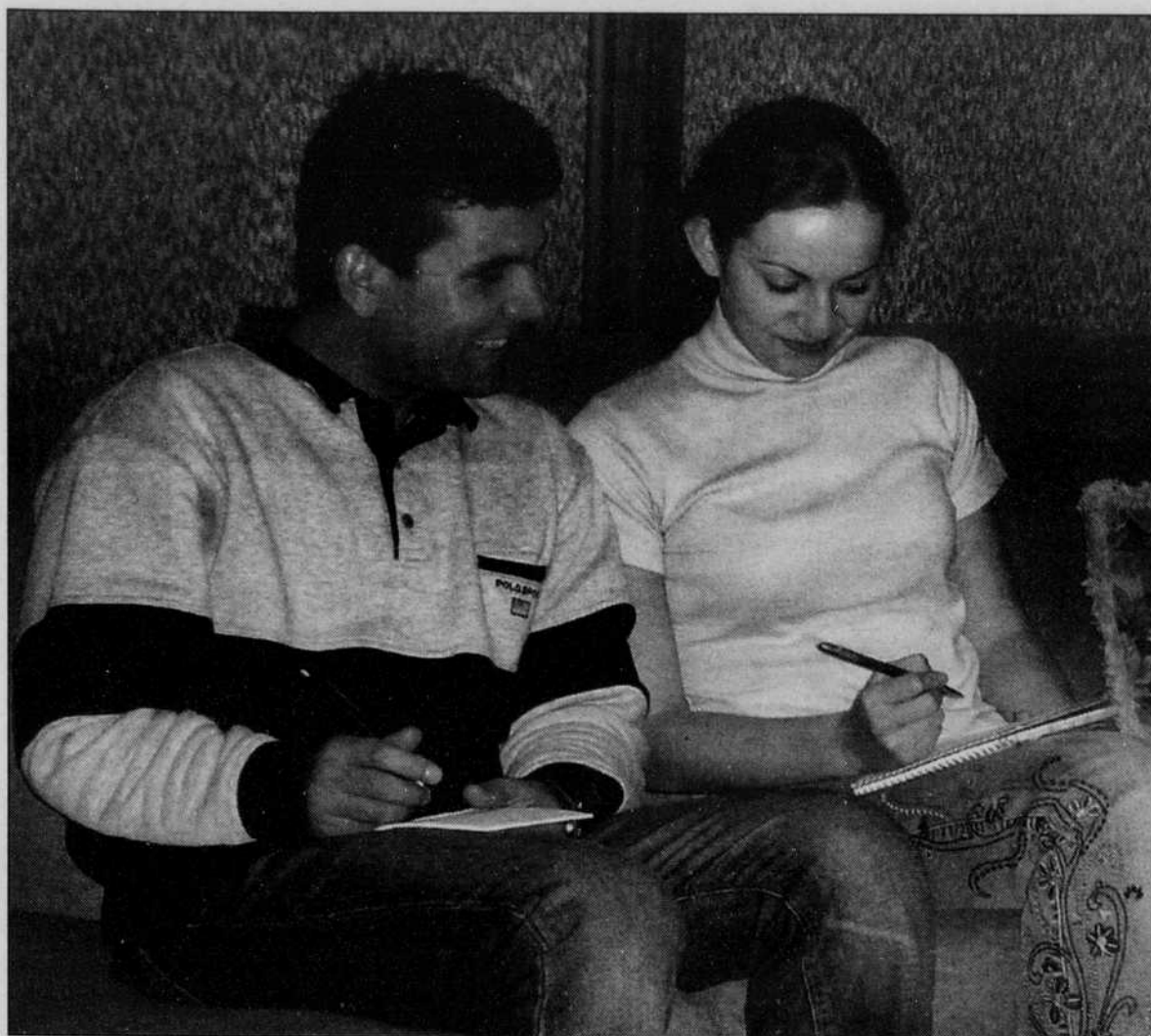




Noriko Miyazaki Emerald

Members of the Muslim Students Association come from many different cultural backgrounds and enjoy sharing their experiences.

Campus religious groups provide open belief forum

The University's variety of religious and ethnic groups serve to aid and enlighten the campus community

By Noriko Miyazaki
Freelance Reporter

College is not only an arena for education and academia, it can also operate as a venue for cultural enrichment and self-realization. University-affiliated organizations offer students and faculty an opportunity to enhance their personal views of life and spirituality.

The University now houses 28 religious-oriented student bodies on campus, and those can become excellent opportunities to educate oneself outside the classroom.

"It will bring you whole new dimensions," said Mona Alzubair — who has helped run the Muslim Students Association, located in EMU Room 202 for more than two years.

Alzubair said the group is comprised of a wide variety of students coming from different cultural backgrounds who have all enjoyed learning from each other.

Last year, MSA group members shared their religious ideas and thoughts with "student representatives" from more than seven other countries overseas.

"We are from Asia, Middle East, Africa and United States. We are a very diverse group, which makes us all unique," Alzubair said. "But at the same time, we try to keep good balance of leadership."

She said religious faith or ethnicity does not come before the valuable experience of sharing and understanding one another in the group.

"It's a student association," she added. "Everyone is welcome; everyone can be a member."

MSA does not limit its potential to share religious faith and cultural complexity to the group. Group members have organized several religious events and have cooperated with the Eugene Middle East Peace Group, a

local peace activists' group, to provide the community with a better understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and how to promote peace in the region.

Buddhists For Peace, another University club, also offers unique opportunities for the campus community.

BFP recognizes itself as a fairly new and novel student group. The group was formed two years ago and is the only active Buddhist group on campus, according to group organizers.

"A lot of people probably haven't heard about (the group)," BFP co-founder and member Austyn Young said. "So, we're trying to get the word out because it's important to have diversity."

Young said the group wants to offer more options to students and have them gain the positive experience she has had through the group.

In the club, members share international philosophy of peace, culture and education, chiefly guided by Lotus Sutra, the supreme teaching in Buddhism.

Besides the weekly readings of the religious teaching, the group hosts intermittent campus events.

BFP organized an interfaith conference called "Building a Culture of Peace" at the Knight Library last year in hopes of achieving mutual understandings and fostering peace among various religious groups.

"We invited people who are Christian, Muslim, Jewish and had actual dialogues," Young said.

She said the conference discussed the field of religion and science and attempted to share the similarities among current scientific findings on their religions.

BFP holds weekly meetings every Thursday at 7 p.m. in the EMU International Lounge.

InterVarsity Christian Fellowship similarly provides the campus with a forum to learn about the religion and discuss what it means to be a Christian.

Tricia Miyashiro, a two-year InterVarsity Christian Fellowship member,

said she hopes to see new faces now that school has begun.

She said the group is open to both Christians and non-Christians, and the purpose of the group is to explore the universal fellowship among the campus community.

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