

University of Toledo students celebrate Islamic culture

Islam Awareness Week comes at a time when the topic of Islam has become a staple of the major news outlets. Despite being constantly bombarded with stories focusing on Muslims, many of us remain unable to answer even the most basic questions about the world's second largest religion. UT itself has a sizable Muslim population longing to spread awareness of their faith and eliminate misconceptions.

"Islam Awareness Week is a tradition followed by all universities across North America where we as the Muslim Student Association educate people about Islam and our cultural values," said Alyan Ahmed Memon, co-president of the Muslim Student Association.

The MSA organized an event for each day of the week. On Monday, March 13, the program kicked off with "Try on a Hijab Day" at a Student Union table. This event allowed non-Muslims to don the emblematic headscarf and to ask MSA representatives about their faith.

"Women can still feel beautiful while wearing a hijab, and I got to experience that firsthand," said second-year social work major Kenya James. "It's very important to acknowledge Islam and make people aware of it because there are a lot of false stereotypes of Muslims and Islam."

Tuesday's event featured Dawud Walid, executive director of the Michigan chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations. The speaker addressed Black Lives Matter and the travel ban. Memon said that MSA wanted to tie the week's events on real-world problems.

An open mic night of the Muslim Writers Collective will be held on Wednesday at 7 p.m. in the Brady Innovation Center.

Participants will share their poems and stories regarding the subject of "failure."

"It's a topic that everyone can relate to," said Rana Elhag, MSA secretary. "You can do a million different spins on it."

Memon stressed that Muslims stand up for various problems in the world, not just issues that affect their community alone. To demonstrate this notion, a workshop on mental illness will be held Thursday by Ali Altimimy in Student Union 2592.

"Islam is worried about your whole being; not just your heart and spirituality, but the mind, body, soul. Everything," said Fatma Ismail, a fourth-year religious studies major and former MSA president.

Islam Awareness Week will be capped off with a public Friday prayer at 1:30 p.m., led by Adam Smidi, in Student Union 2582.

Elhag emphasized the importance of MSA designating a week to reach out to the student body. She said that it enables them to clarify the issues that arise regarding their community.

"We are living in a time where a lot of the discussion around Islam is negative, so I hope this results in a greater sense of unity among UT students of all faiths and backgrounds," said Elhag, a third-year pharmacy major.