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Muslim students try to clear misconceptions through Islam Awareness Week

Friday, October 22, 2010 | 10:20 p.m. CDT

BY [Jaclyn DiPasquale](#)

COLUMBIA — In light of the recent controversy over a planned mosque near the site of Ground Zero, MU's Muslim Student Organization is prepared to set the record straight with Islam Awareness Week.

From Oct. 25 through Oct. 28, the organization will host multiple events to spread the word about the religion of Islam and its practices.

Islam Awareness Week

The MU Muslim Student Organization will host the following events as part of Islam Awareness Week:

Monday, Oct. 25: Muslims in the Media — Ppanel Ddiscussion

7 p.m., Memorial Union South, room 110

A panel of community members will discuss the portrayal of Muslims in the news, including the accuracy of various media characterizations.

Tuesday, Oct. 26: Movie Sscreening: "Bilal's Stand"

7:30 p.m., Ellis Auditorium

Free screening of a Sundance Film Festival selection, which details the struggles of a young Muslim in Detroit.

Wednesday, Oct. 27: Pink Hijab Day, Women in Islam Ppanel

7 p.m., Mumford Hall, room 133+

A panel of Muslim women share life experiences and discuss dealing with stereotypes.

Thursday, Oct. 28: Keynote Speaker: Suhaib Webb

7 p.m., Gaines/Oldham+ Black Culture Center

Webb, a prominent figure in the American Muslim community, will speak about how the cultures of Islam and the U.S. have shaped him.

Islam Awareness Week is an annual event, typically held in the spring. Because of recent mosque burnings nationally and negative discussion about American Muslims in relation to Ground Zero, however, the group made the decision to move the date of the event.

“We really just want to educate people about what Islam in America really is, especially because nowadays people get the wrong impression of Islam when they only watch 30-second clips on Fox News or CNBC,” said Mahir Khan, the Muslim Student Organization’s public relations chair. “Islam and America are not that conflicting, they are actually more hand-in-hand than most people understand.”

Mark Scott, a religious professor at MU, teaches a class on major world religions.

“It’s important to cultivate appreciation of all world religions,” Scott said. “Every religion has the capacity for peace and the capacity for violence.”

The first event, “Muslims in the Media,” will include a panel of Muslim community members hosting a discussion about the portrayal of Muslims in the news. The event will be held on the MU campus in 110 Memorial Union South.

“Conceptions about Islam are so widespread and often relate to terrorism,” Scott said. “I can see why this event would be very valuable.”

On Tuesday, the group will screen the film “Billal’s Stand,” a Sundance Film Festival selection. It tells the story of Bilal, a young black Muslim, living in Detroit.

“We picked this movie because it portrays a story that a lot of American Muslims go through when they struggle to keep their faith in this environment,” Khan said.

The film will play at 7:30 pm in Ellis Auditorium.

In addition to promoting Islam awareness, the Muslim Student Organization plans to support another cause at its third event on Wednesday. The organization will host a Women in Islam panel, which comprises Muslim women within the Columbia community.

The panelists will discuss their stories of adjusting to Islamic life in the U.S., especially in the context of common stereotypes and negative images that surround Islamic women in America.

Khan said each Muslim woman will be encouraged to wear a pink hijab, in honor of breast cancer awareness. This tradition started in Columbia a few years ago, and has now become a national phenomenon. Each attendee will also be encouraged to wear pink and contribute to the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation.

The event will be held at 7 p.m. Wednesday in Mumford Hall, room 133.

The final event for Islam Awareness Week will feature Suhaib Weeb, a former gang member who converted to Islam. Webb is now a prominent Islamic figure, who Khan described as a “huge force in the American Muslim community.”

“He embodies the American values of fixing yourself, getting out of a bad situation and pulling yourself up from your bootstraps,” Khan said. “He also embodies Islamic ideals like dedicating yourself to your religion, and the more you learn about him the more you fall in love with him.”

The Muslim Student Organization expects this to be the most popular event of Islam Awareness Week, and anticipates a crowd of about 100 people.

Khan said he hopes that these events raise awareness and understanding of Muslims as regular people.

“I put my pants on one leg at a time just like everybody else,” he said.

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