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Students gather at the hijab discussion, led by freshman MSA president Nasreen Bibi, March 28 in Pershing 232. The discussion followed the day-long hijab challenge, which was an event to educate women about the experience of wearing the head scarf.

Association seeks to change stereotypes

Islam Awareness Week aims to teach students about the religion

BY CHRIS BROWN
Staff Reporter

The week marking the 20th anniversary of Islam Awareness Week as a national event also marks the first annual Islam Awareness Week for Truman State, introduced by Truman's Muslim Students Association.

MSA was founded during 1990 to provide information about Islam through educational events and networking, according to their website, msa.truman.edu. To further their goal of education, MSA had the University's first annual Islam Awareness Week from March 25 to March 29.

The week's events on campus included the Islamic gallery — an educational exhibit — an educational dinner, an Islamic film screening, the hijab challenge and the Jumu'ah open house. Each event was designed to educate participants about some aspect of Islam, freshman MSA president Nasreen Bibi said.

One reason MSA brought IAW to Truman this year was to show the community they can be a resource for anyone wanting to learn about Islam, Bibi said.

Bibi said she wants people who attend the events to experience a different version of Islam than what often is portrayed on television, one that focuses on harmony instead of violence.

"Everything on TV is so negative," Bibi said. "That's not what Islam is. Hopefully through us, through these events, they can see Islam really isn't the way it's portrayed in the media."

As part of Truman's first IAW, MSA showed the film "Inside Islam: What a Billion Muslims Really Think" on March 27. Freshman Muneenat Winjobi, MSA vice president, said the purpose of showing the film was to demonstrate that most Muslims don't share the radical beliefs often portrayed by the media. This event included a discussion portion following the film screening.

Winjobi said she was encouraged to see many of the students who attended the film had many positive questions and comments regarding the film itself and Islam. She said she thinks many people in the community don't know about Islam and are afraid to ask questions.

Winjobi, who wears a hijab, or headscarf, said she has seen people staring at her, and she encourages them to come up to her and ask her questions if they are curious.

"Muslims in America have made

it our mission to clear misconceptions about Islam," Winjobi said. "We want people to stop being afraid of us, so we've made it our mission to educate people."

The hijab challenge, which occurred March 28, was an event designed to educate women in the Truman community about Islam by inviting them to wear a hijab for one whole day and experience for themselves what it feels like to wear the headscarf and to see how people react, junior MSA treasurer Sandi Bowers said.

Bowers said the purpose of the hijab challenge is also to encourage participants to share their experiences with others by posting on Twitter and other social media.

Bowers wears a hijab and niqab, or face cover, every day. She said she wears the hijab as an act of dedication to religion and of modesty.

Bowers said the idea for the week and all the events is to give students who don't know much about Islam a reason to ask questions in a setting that doesn't involve any pressure or expectations. She said she hopes throughout the future, students will turn to MSA as a resource for their questions about Islam, whether as part of a school project, to ask about something they heard or saw on TV, or just out of curiosity.

Lyceum series attendance shrinks

BY ANNA SELLE
Staff Reporter

Despite the posters on campus and the postings in Truman Today about the Kohlenberg Lyceum Series, some students might be missing the opportunity to take advantage of one of Truman State's longest standing events.

The Kohlenberg Lyceum series specifically is aimed at uplifting the student population and providing a cultural experience, according to Lyceum committee member Heidi Templeton.

During recent years, the events haven't been as well-attended as they were throughout the past, Templeton said. While deciding where to take the series during the future, the committee members have considered different ways to appeal to the student population, she said, and how to drag them from their hectic schedules to attend these otherwise inaccessible events.

The program started during 1899, Templeton said. The first year of the series was during University President John R. Kirk's presidency.

Templeton said this culturally elevated entertainment series, named for an Ancient Greek landmark where intellectuals of the day would have scholarly debates, was intended to bring prominent speakers to campus, including Eleanor Roosevelt and Maya Angelou. Throughout time, other cultural events were added to the series. As the series developed, the name was changed from "The Lyceum Series" to the Kohlenberg Lyceum Series, named for a former history professor, Gilbert C. Kohlenberg, who devoted thousands of hours to the continuation of the program, Templeton said.

"When I first started, the auditorium was always full," Templeton said. "In the last few years, we have really struggled to fill the auditorium. I'd like to figure out again how we can connect with the students especially."

Templeton said she believes some students might not be attending because they are busy with other tasks. She said she wants students to know that taking a break from studying to attend the Lyceum series can be both rewarding and uplifting.

The Kohlenberg Lyceum Series committee goes through an extensive process annually to make these culturally-enriching events available to the students, faculty and Kirksville community members, committee co-chair Winston Vanderhoof said.

Vanderhoof said the planning process usually takes a year. The committee is planning for 2013-2014 now so they can contact agents and sign contracts to give to Randy Bame, the auditorium manager. When Bame approves the contracts, Vanderhoof said he contacts the agent and decides on a fair price. Vanderhoof said the committee has a budget which the University has always been gracious about.

Vanderhoof, like Templeton, said he hopes to see development within the Lyceum series during the future, including in the type of events that will be brought to campus. He also hopes improvements will be made to the available spaces in Baldwin for the events to be held.

"There are a lot of events that we'd like to bring but haven't been able to, a lot of which is due to our facility," he said. "Even though it's a tremendous facility, the age and condition of it is a detriment to the performances that we can bring in ... We used to have ballets and jazz and tap dances, but we can't do that anymore. But since I've been on it, we've seen a lot of variety of performances. The sky's the limit. I think Dr. Kohlenberg looks down and is smiling at the performances we bring."

Student involvement and input is important to the decisions made by the committee, Vanderhoof said. For that reason, a specific position was implemented on the Student Activities Board to create a connection between the student body and the committee.

"The Lyceum as a whole is very interesting to me," sophomore Sydney Slavin, Student Activities Board representative, said. "So I decided to run for the Lyceum representative and the Board honored me with this position. I just like how it brings in different cultural aspects and programs to the students that we might not get to experience, especially because they're free for students."

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