



# **MSA STARTER'S GUIDE**

## **A GUIDE ON HOW TO RUN A SUCCESSFUL MSA**

**FIRST EDITION**  
**March, 1996**

© MSA of U.S. and Canada, 1996  
P.O. Box 18612  
Washington, D.C. 20036  
Tel: (703) 820-7900  
Fax: (703) 820-7888  
[www.msa-national.org](http://www.msa-national.org)

## **MSA STARTER'S GUIDE STAFF**

### **MANAGING EDITOR**

Faraz Rabbani

### **LAYOUT EDITOR**

Shireen Ahmed  
Katherine Bullock

### **Contributors**

Sameera Ahmed  
Wael Haddara  
Shireen Ahmed  
Hussein Hamdani  
Mirza Baig  
Suheil Laher  
Mohammad N. Battla  
Zaiba Malik  
Naveed Mallick  
Mohib Durrani

# Table of Contents

## WELCOME TO THE MSA STARTER'S GUIDE

### COMING ALIVE: GETTING STARTED WITH YOUR MSA

- *Managing the MSA*
- *Putting the Pieces Together: How to Start and Run Your MSA*
- *Publicizing the Existence of Your MSA*
- *How to Get People Involved: The QUMSA Experience*
- *MSA Nights*
- *4 Principles for an MSA to Live By*
- *Running Your MSA's Finances*

### MSA: A COMMUNITY ON CAMPUS

- *Islamicization of Campus Politics & the Politicization of the MSA*
- *Top 10 Things to Remember When Dealing with the Media*
- *MSA & Inclusiveness*

### THIS IS OUR MESSAGE: DAW'AH ON CAMPUS

- *Daw'ah on North American Campuses*
- *Starting & Continuing a Regular Daw'ah Table*
- *Daw'ah Tables: Dealing with the Public*
- *10 Characteristics of an MSA Table*

### INSIGHTS INTO LECTURES & REGULAR EVENTS

- *Planning a Lecture*
- *How to Plan a Lecture for a Muslim & Non Muslim Audience*
- *Procedure to Obtain "Permission" for Jumuah Prayers*
- *The Importance of Good Khutbahs*

### BRANCHING OUT: A LOOK AT ACTIVISM BEYOND THE LOCAL LEVEL

- *The Value & Need of Regional MSA Councils*
- *MSA National - Structure*
- *MSA National – History*
- *MSA National – Projects*

### MODELS ON STARTING MSA'S

- *Starting a Second MSA*
- *Starting an MSA: Brandeis*
- *Starting an MSA on a Small Campus*
- *Useful Tips on Starting an MSA*

# WELCOME TO THE MSA STARTER'S GUIDE

*In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Universe*

By Mohamed Salem  
MSA President

I would like **first** to start by thanking everyone who made it possible for this manual to be published, starting from the editor to everyone who contributed an article or an idea.

Let us put things in perspective before we go further into the details of this manual.

It is important that we remember -and remind each other of the *importance of sincerity and following of the Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

Realization of these aspects and their fulfillment in our daily life is what will make us succeed in our effort to serve Allah through our work in MSA or any other organization.

The **second** principle that I would like to bring to your attention is our *brotherhood*. We must not compromise our brotherhood if our methodology in work may differ "Truly, Believers are but Brothers/Sisters."

**Thirdly**, The command from Allah (SWT) is clear, "Help one another in enjoining what is good and not in enjoining what is evil" & "Who is better than the one who calls [people] to Allah and says 'I am from the Muslims'."

These two verses from the Qur'an set the stage for our work of daw'ah and organization.

We must come together to do good. This requires cooperation and coordination on all levels in order for us to be able to deliver the message of Islam to both believers & nonbelievers.

## OUR ROLE IN SHAPING THE FUTURE

As callers of Islam on Campus, we should realize the unique role that we play in shaping the future of our Ummah.

We are in contact with three important segments of the future societies:

- *the international students who will go back and lead*
- *the new generation of Muslim students who will lead the Muslim community in North America*
- *the American students who will be the political, social and academic leaders in North America at large*

We must reach out to all of these segments in order to introduce them to the message of Islam. Therefore, we must not lose focus: campuses are our arena of daw'ah and work.

**Finally**, we must come together, local MSAs and MSA National, to advance the cause of Islam in this continent. We are commanded by Allah "And hold fast, together, by the Rope which Allah (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves" (3: 102).

And if we turn around us, we find institutions of falsehood are coming closer to work together and unite to stand in the face of truth and righteousness.

Can we just stand watching? I do not think that neither you nor any one who understands their role will agree. Therefore, I call upon each one of you to realize the big responsibility that is on our shoulders requires us, more than ever, to come together and work more closely.

We are open for your suggestions and initiatives to advance the cause of Islam in North America ... Will You Help?

# Coming Alive: Getting Started with your MSA

## MANAGING THE MSA

By Faraz Rabbani

Your MSA must have clear objectives. The MSA's objectives would answer -the simple question, "*Why do you have an MSA?*"

At the most fundamental level, the MSA should create a community of Muslims on campus. One MSA's mission statement put it quite well:

The MSA takes a strong stand for Islam as a complete way of life. By this, we will develop a dynamic, united and welcome community on campus, raise awareness of Islam, and help people become better Muslims.

The MSA is based on the Islamic ideals of united *effort (jama'a)* and brotherhood. This unity is based on common objectives and transcends petty differences in order to have a community that every Muslim feels a part of.

The MSA is a proactive organization based on the Islamic concepts of excellence and execution (*ihsan and itqan*) that seeks to fulfill the Quranic injunction:

"Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong; they are the ones to attain felicity." (Surah Al-i-Imran, 3: 104)

## THE EXCELLENCE

Excellence can be achieved through planning for it. It is surprising how many MSAs simply don't plan. Some of the basic tools that would help your MSA to plan better would be:

- *Hold Elections in the Spring Term, for the next year, so that the incoming Executive has the entire summer to plan. This also enables a better transition and transfer of know-how.*
- *When you plan, do shura (consult) with as many people as possible. There are many ways to do this, and many people to ask, from other MSA workers and community leaders to students on campus.*
- *Ask people. There are many people with a lot of MSA experience who would be very willing to help you and to advise you. A very good way to find such people is by asking for help on the MSA's electronic networks [see Appendix]*

# PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER HOW TO START & RUN YOUR MSA

BY SHIREEN AHMED

## HOW DOES ONE START AN MSA?

1. **Get the club information package from your Student Union.** This will give you all the information you need in terms of club policies established by the university that you would have to follow. I.e. minimum number of people needed to constitute a club; election policies; leadership quotas, etc.).
2. **Contact Muslims and get them to sign up.** There are various ways they can be contacted, such as advertising on campus, forming an email list of Muslims within your university, phone lists, etc.
3. **Call a meeting.** Again. Make sure this is widely advertised on your campus. Determine your MSA's direction on your campus. (e.g. is the focus daw'ah or lectures)
4. **Elective executive;** gather a core group of workers. This group will be responsible for the activities of the coming year.
5. **Register club.** By registering you will become a group recognized by the school as a religious or cultural organization. This will give you the ability to post signs, be eligible for funding from the Student Union, book facilities, as well as other privileges.
6. **Meet regularly.** This will keep the group unity and communications going for your group.

## We Have An MSA. Now What?

Once you have a group formed, it's time to put that group into motion. There are many kinds of activities that your group may wish to do, so it's important that you come up with a list of priorities for your group. There are a very wide range of activities you may choose to do (many of which are outlined within this guide):

### Advertising

- *advertise the prayer times and locations all over the campus*
- *place ads in school paper so people know you exist*
- *put a banner with an interesting message outside of your university (if you are allowed)*

### Make your presence known!

- *Be visible at pre-registration and Frosh Week (maybe even an insert in the registration package)*
- *Maintain and increase your MSA by establishing regular contact*
- *Have frequent events on campus (e.g. Dinners, lectures, workshops)*
- *Have a regular daw'ah table*
- *Network with other groups on campus*

## JUST REMEMBER...

Don't get discouraged. As one person put it, the Prophet (SAW) had to go through very strenuous ordeals during the early Meccan period. And if he could go through all the trials of prophethood, the least

we (as individuals) can do is work together to set up an MSA. This is not necessarily an easy task, but by just remembering a few more ideas you should be fine.

- *don't do all the work yourself*
- *it does NOT take 100's of people to start - a handful of dedicated individuals can get a MSA going easily*
- *support can always be found through the MSA NETS on the internet for resources and advice*

More importantly, remember that your new club should act like an Islamic organization in everything that it does. This work is all being done for the sake of Allah (SWT), so we should work together to make it successful.

*This article was based on information from several MSAs which have been included within the appendix*

# PUBLICIZING THE EXISTENCE OF THE MSA ON CAMPUS

*The following is a compilation of ideas from the alumni of the Queen's University Muslim Students' Association (QUMSA) Executive regarding getting people involved in their MSA. It should be noted that each MSA and each campus unique in its circumstances, environment, as well as its relationships with both the greater Muslim community and the university community. Therefore, there can be no exact formula which can be used to encourage activism. These are merely suggestions learned from our collective experiences within QUMSA and, for some, other MSAs after leaving QUMSA.*

## PUBLICIZING THE EXISTENCE OF YOUR MSA

There are many reasons why Muslims students are not involved with their MSAs. Some of these are easier to tackle than others, yet the simplest reason for a lack of participation is not knowing that an MSA exists. This is a simple problem to deal with, yet it is ubiquitous. Solutions to this problem are simple, inexpensive and effective, and should be the first hurdle to leap:

- ***If not already done, make the MSA a legitimate student organization on campus*** by registering/affiliating with **the** general student government. This will automatically enable the MSA to have free ways of publicizing itself e.g. through billboards in the University newspaper, student government publications for the first year students and students in general, student calendars, etc. There may also be other organizations on campus with which the MSA can affiliate. For example, QUMSA is affiliated with both the Alma Mater Society (i.e. the undergraduate student government) and the International Center.
- ***Participate as a student group in any campus-wide event*** which is Islamically acceptable. For example, the International Center at, Queen's University organizes a mini folklore to promote a multicultural environment. Granted, Islam is not a culture per se; it is a way of life which many people regard as a culture and are confused about. By setting up a booth about Islam, one can dispel misconceptions, speak out on various issues and quite inadvertently, but perhaps most importantly, make contact with Muslim students who may not be aware of a Muslim presence on campus.
- ***Make use of any available resources through the student government*** For example, at the University of Manitoba, there is a fund available for any group who wishes to develop a brochure to advertise their group. Such brochures would be displayed at information booths around campus.
- ***Participate in any orientation activities possible to invite new Muslim students to come out.*** For example, QUMSA started by putting an insert into student orientation packages sent to all potential first year students. Since then, we have put a write-up about QUMSA in the orientation handbook along with a tentative schedule of alternative orientation events organized for the Muslim students
- ***Try to obtain office space through the student government.*** This is especially important for cities in which there are no mosques as the MSA may be the first available link to the Muslim community. Although it should go without saying, clean, the office and make it presentable. Equip it with Islamic books, pamphlets, art, decorations etc. Set up office hours (e.g. 2 hours a week) during which someone is responsible for sitting in the office, leaving it available for interested students to drop by and get information, or to find out how they can get involved. People, who sit in the office must be committed and prompt, have good interpersonal skills and good daw'ah technique. Without such people, public relations will not be what it should be. If feasible, it would be good to get a phone line (ideally with an answering machine) so that there is a contact number people- can call which is consistent from year to year.

The main point in the above is that we **cannot** assume that we have done all that we can to make ourselves known as an MSA and yet people are not coming forward. **We must realize that it is our prerogative to publicize ourselves and encourage people to join.**

# HOW TO GET PEOPLE INVOLVED

## *THE QUMSA EXPERIENCE*

*Know each other well and create an environment in which every member can comfortably interact with each other (within the Islamic guidelines) irrespective of nationality, etc.*

This can be realized by holding social events in addition to educational events to create a feeling that one is part of a family. For example, hold gatherings to welcome new members during Orientation Week, as well as Graduation Dinners with gifts for the graduates at the end of the academic year. These types of events create a feeling that one is part of a family which cares about its members. Thus, it is important to have a broad range of activities such as:

- *Halaqas, MSA Nights (see section on 'QUMSA Nights')*
- *Picnics barbecues*
- *Parallel sports events for Brothers and Sisters, possibly in conjunction with the Islamic community at large (i.e. the families)*
- *Potluck dinners*
- *Trips*
- *any other event which involves the community*

Insha'Allah, by creating such an environment, (i.e. one that is comfortable and accommodates the social needs of **all** the members), the common problem of "clustering" based on cultural differences may be minimized, Insha Allah. Other ways to get people involved include:

- **Maintain frequent interactions between members.** *The simple and most efficient avenue for this is to set up a facility to perform prayers in Jama'at e.g. Dhuhr prayer. This allows the opportunity for people to keep in touch on a daily basis rather than just meeting briefly at juma prayers.*
- **Do not hold a sectarian view of Deen.** *The Deen of Allah (SWT) is immense. Do not reduce it to a particular school of thought. Accommodate one another! What is in your heart will be transmitted to your Brother/Sister heart in even your simple interactions, so purify it if you feel any form of repulsion for a fellow Muslim student.*
- **Sister participation and activism is encouraged.** *Involvement of both Brothers and Sisters is crucial for Islamic work to progress. In addition, remember that any MSA on campus should be an organization which is open and welcoming to, and meets the needs of all Muslims. Thus, it is important to include both Sisters and Brothers in the general activities. This can be achieved, in part, by including both in the Executive as well as in other organizational positions. Brothers and Sisters need to be able to work together, within Islamic guidelines, in order for this to be achieved. This implies a need for open communication between the genders so that both points of view are included when decisions are made, and to clear up any misunderstandings before they result in friction between the genders. **It is important that those who are well-respected in the group be supportive of this idea as others will follow their lead.** With respect to the "hijab issue", please remember that people in general will be at different Levels of faith and or knowledge. Thus, not pushing the issue, be it directly or indirectly is a good idea as then a Sister can feel that she can be involved without feeling inferior as a Muslim or that she is being looked upon as such by others. Remember that the presence or absence of the hijab cannot be used as a measure of one's faith.*
- **Delegate responsibilities to individuals who have shown even a minute amount of interest.** *Do not judge them using the criterion of how close their behavior and level of Iman is as compared to yourself. Do not consider your Level of Iman as being more than that of others in your group. You will often be surprised to find that it is not.*

- **Get members involved in the activities, not just as participants, but also as organizers.** This can only be done if the Executive committee maintains a good relationship with the members. **Do not underestimate the capabilities of people or their determination, but give them a chance to express their abilities.** In addition, do not be ashamed to get advice or suggestions from the members. Being an Executive member neither means that one is a "slave" for the organization, nor that one has the power to do whatever s/he wishes. Remember we are working for the sake of Allah (SWT).
- **Committees:** form them and use them. This is especially useful when undertaking a big project such as Islam Awareness Week (originally known as Islam Days). For example, QUMSA's first Islam Day in 1990, dealt with various contemporary issues. By forming a committee to work on each issue, it allowed efforts to be focused. In general, participation in a specific committee (e.g. Fundraising Committee) allows the opportunity for one to get to know a smaller group of individuals - (i.e. establishing links of Brother/Sisterhood).
- When the Executive needs to recruit volunteers for a project or any other purpose, do not say "do it for me" or "I need a favor" but instead **ask them in the name of Islam.** This should not be a personal thing as the service rendered should be focused on the good for all. Saying the former makes it appear like a personal burden of the Executive member that is being alleviated by the volunteer. **The burden is all of ours, not solely that of the person in charge.**
- Observe the saying.- "**It is not important who says what, but what is said,**" among your ,group members and local Muslim community. Analyze what is being said using reason, evidence and a free mind fearing not the blame of others. Never get emotional or over excited about conflicts/disagreements that might exist or arise among members, i.e. do not get emotional about those issues; your sound mind should govern.
- **Encourage one another.** Continuously encourage one another. Not a sentimental encouragement, but rather a true heartfelt and humble love for your Brother/Sister in faith.
- **Do not be suspicious of members.** S/he is either really your Brother/Sister in faith or is not --- and for us the former is the case. Remember that we are all at different levels of knowledge when it comes to Islam.
- **If there is nothing happening, there is nothing for members to get involved in.** Sometimes, Executive members really spend far too much time with trivial matters; for example, holding a meeting where the five Executive Officers are all present is considered a significant accomplishment. Or sometimes we may spend too much effort in meetings worried, perhaps, about their Islamic behavior in the presence of one another or how we are perceived by others. It seems that this problem, should it exist in a particular group is a byproduct of not knowing what the basic mandate and reason (in concrete form) for holding such a meeting.
- **The Executive's attitude- should be to lead their members and encourage their participation.** Again, if we want participation, we should also have a clear plan of action. Otherwise, some members may start taking initiatives by themselves, in which case things are often discouraged from doing so.
- **Know why you are there and why you are doing what you do.** For example, a new QUMSA Executive may, following the previous year's example, automatically schedule an Islam Day without considering why. Preferably, they should consider (as a group) exactly why they wish to do so. What exactly is the motivation? From where and why did the idea come? What is hoped to be achieved (short term/long term?) Would we lose out on any other valuable opportunities events, or time? ...

*These may seem obvious at first, but the mere exercise of thinking earnestly about it can be beneficial, leading to creativity, focus, and more member involvement by being motivated through knowing the primary reasons for having such a program.*

- ***Ultimately, you do not get members involved, members get themselves involved.*** *The Executive should make the circumstances and environment most conducive for members to grow in Islam, benefit from each other in **all** aspects of life, and work to slow down the decay of Iman in society; it should lead members as a Muslim student community (not association)*
- *One of the factors that may have also contributed to QUMSA's good reputation and creativity as compared to other Muslim student activities on different campuses is that it was not really viewed as the MSA of Queen's. Rather, it was the Queen's University Muslim students who formed an association—QUMSA. The difference is related to the following point.*
- ***Be a truly Muslim student body and not wing of any particular larger organization.*** *Even though these organizations can be extremely helpful and resourceful, they may hold a uninformed or narrow view about the campus environment, and yet be bold in guiding your activities. "Wings of only one feather stick together."*
- *In short, **love them** (your members).*

## MSA NIGHTS

*QUMSA Night is the name given to the regular biweekly meetings of the QUMSA members. These are generally for the purpose of educating ourselves about Islam, Muslim countries etc. yet differ from the halaqas to minimize redundancy.*

There are various halaqas which have been established by QUMSA members over the years-e.g.: Sisters' Halaqa, Brothers' Halaqa, Brothers' Arabic Halaqa, Indonesian Halaqa -- according to need.

The QUMSA Nights, thus provide an opportunity for the entire QUMSA membership to come together for the purpose of education. The general format and "plan" for the QUMSA Nights is the responsibility of the Education Officer and his/her committee and, thus, changes accordingly. For example, in the past there have been debates, both formal (e.g. Whether the spread of Islam was by the sword.) and informal (e.g. Where can we serve Islam best, here or in die Muslim countries), workshops (e.g. problems in QUMSA and how we can resolve them) presentations and organized discussions on topics ranging from the history and lifestyle in various Muslim countries, Daw'ah to Muslims and non-Muslims, the status of women in Islam, death and the Hereafter, etc. One year (1993-94) QUMSA Nights were structured as a series of presentations on *Seerah*.

In general, how QUMSA Nights are formatted and the topics discussed depend on the QUMSA members themselves: i.e. "supply and demand".

Although the primary purpose of QUMSA Night is to educate ourselves, it is also important to have "fun" QUMSA Nights-- i.e. Games Nights-to play things like "Win, Lose or Draw", word searches, -number searches, quizzes ... anything involving teams! There is usually a balance between educational and non-educational games. For students, especially undergraduates, living away from home may result in a feeling of isolation as they are not comfortable partaking in the general social activities on campus.

Thus, it is important that alternatives are available which give an opportunity to "socialize" with Muslims in an Islamic environment. The key is to have a balance in order to meet the needs of as many of the members as possible. If one focuses only on education there will be some who find the environment too serious and be turned off. However, if one focuses only on social events, there are those who may feel that they are wasting their time and also turn away.

*Timing.* QUMSA Nights are usually held on a biweekly basis. The timing is chosen such that the majority of members can participate. Fridays and weekends are avoided since many members may go away to visit their parents or travel. In addition, activities of the Islamic Society of Kingston tend to be held on the weekends. Exam periods should be avoided as well as days which are popular for night classes.

# FOUR PRINCIPLES FOR AN MSA TO LIVE BY

By NAVEED MALLICK

*The following are derived from some very basic observations made about MSA'S. These principles, if followed, do not form a perfect MSA. Rather, they can form a basis from which MSA'S can grow.*

After consultation among many people who have been involved with MSAs for two to three years, we decided that certain principles should be a starting point for MSA'S. They are:

- 1) **Consistency is the best policy.**
- 2) **You are not the only organization out there.**
- 3) **Everyone is welcome'**
- 4) **You can't please everyone all the time.**

## PRINCIPLE #1

### CONSISTENCY IS THE BEST POLICY

The hadith of the Prophet (SAW) has said it best: "The best of actions are consistent even if small" (need to confirm text) Applying this general principle to the specific issue of MSA activities, we must conclude with the following:

Regularity is crucial to success, and it is preferable to have less activity on a regular basis than a few grandiose activities occasionally. It comes as no surprise then if consistency is best, that it is also the hardest to achieve. So what do we do?

**First set up a 1 hour weekly meeting.** Choose a day and time that can be maintained. Changing the location, time or place from week to week is not a good idea. It is important for MSA'S to establish at least one extremely regular event that all students know about.

As you may be realizing, **most MSA'S have a core of dedicated members** that will attend about 90% of these meetings. There is usually a **periphery** as well that attends from time to time. It is this latter group that benefits greatest from the consistency in time and location in meetings, because it gives them the peace of mind that when they are free, they will know exactly where to go.

Remember we are in the business of attracting members and any Islamic steps that can be taken to that end should be pursued. From my own experience, I know that not being sure where a meeting is can sometimes be the deciding factor between attending the meeting and studying or doing something else. Don't expect members to have to call around from week to week to find out where their MSA is meeting.

## PRINCIPLE #2

### YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY ORGANIZATION OUT THERE!

Sometimes it's easy to think that the MSA is the only organization on campus. After all, it is set up to serve the needs of Muslim students so they should come, right? The question we as organizers need to ask is not whether they will come, but whether the MSA is indeed set up to meet their needs,

The MSA must constantly remind itself that there may be hundreds of other organizations on campus looking for members. We must also remember that being named Ahmed or Ayesha does not automatically make one an MSA member, or preclude one from joining another organization.

The challenge then posed to the MSA activist is **how to make our MSA'S as attractive as possible.** Of course there are certain areas in which we cannot compete with other organizations. I remember thinking about the Indian Students Association and the large crowds it would gather at its dances and parties, often wondering what our alternative was.

## EXCELLENCE

The bottom line is to let us be the best, most proficient punctual organization in the areas where we can be. Let us not dwell on what activities we cannot do, but rather instill professionalism *~(ihsan)* those that we do from week to week.

To put it bluntly, an MSA is not at fault if a certain Muslim student does not come to the MSA because they do not like being with Muslims. They are at great fault if a student stops coming because the meetings start 30 minutes after they are supposed to, or are canceled at the last minute. The former is largely out of our hands, the latter is not.

This is an uphill battle! There will always be Muslims on campus who do not come to the MSA for one reason or another. What we are suggesting is that there are some very basic and simple changes that we can make in our outlook on Islamic work which can make a huge difference. Assuming that Muslim student deserves the best organization, and not that "it's their loss if they don't come" is just one of them...

## PRINCIPLE #3 EVERYONE IS WELCOME

No matter how many times we say this, sometimes **social activities** get swept under the rug for more "important things." An MSA must be as complete as the faith it represents.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, on at least one occasion indicated that he would not always talk about "Islamic topics" in the restrictive sense for fear of boring his companions!

Now if the Companions could be bored, I think it's fair to say that students may occasionally feel that way as well! A periodic (regular!) picnic or dinner can alleviate this problem.

In addition social activities are an excellent way to introduce students to the MSA. Unfortunately, sometimes we, as workers get annoyed by the infamous "socially active member" -- students who just come to the social events and conveniently skip out on the "Islamic stuff "

## THE "STRICTLY SOCIAL MEMBER"

How should the MSA worker respond to such people?

**First**, from the perspective of the worker, the **"strictly social member" (SSM)** is first and foremost a fellow Muslim brother or sister that has the same rights that your best friend has on you. Namely, the right to be treated with respect, not talked about behind their back, and not prejudged.

Islamic workers, somewhere along the line, -appear to have developed an extremely refined sense of suspicion, not paralleled by many other groups. As a not-so proud owner of this "6th sense" I think it's time that we give people the 73 benefits of doubt that Islam requires of us.

**Second**, the SSM is a potential worker just like any one else. Just asking that person if they could help in Islamic Awareness Week or other activities may be the invitation for which they have been waiting.

**Third**, the SSM is a polite reminder that maybe our activities are just not all that interesting after all. Can any of us deny that social activities are often more enjoyable than our sometimes not-so stimulating lectures and discussions?

The SSM is also a gentle reminder that we need to constantly be reanalyzing our work, and striving to improve. The Islamic response then is "Hey, what can we do to improve our activities." or "have we done enough outreach?" not "there he is again" or "she's only here for *fun*."

**Fourth**, we would like to suggest that having such members is in fact **a sign of a healthy and productive MSA**, and the lack thereof may indeed be a sign of stagnancy. The peripheral member is a sign of growth and expanse of the organization. It reflects the ability of the MSA to reach out to people who may not otherwise have any connection to the Muslim community.

## **YOUR PERIPHERY**

An MSA with no periphery is more prone to inward movement or "collapse" for lack of a better term.

Finally, the notion of "peripheral Muslims" is not a new one. In fact some people just hung around the Muslims "once in a while" in the time of the Prophet ~(SAV./) as well, and you know what kind of "Islamic workers" they became. (Something to think about the next time you see a SSM~D

Therefore, providing that relaxed, commitment free doorway to the Muslim community is a must -an entrance that many of us have come through as well!

## **PRINCIPLE #4**

### **YOU CAN'T PLEASE ALL OF THE PEOPLE ALL OF THE TIME**

**People are different** in more ways than one. Intellectually we understand that. But often this basic fact about human nature, which Allah (SWT) confirms in various places in the Qur'an, is overlooked in Islamic work.

To use the term guardingly, even amongst "religious Muslims" we find a wide array of interests, personalities and priorities. One brother may feel that daw'ah is the priority, whereas another may wonder how we can do daw'ah without first perfecting our own *iman*. A sister may feel that Islamic knowledge is the solution, whereas another may feel that developing true sisterhood and camaraderie is the way to go.

### **MANY IDEAS, MANY "SOLUTIONS."**

Although deciding which view is the "right view" is a difficult task, designing the MSA to fit diverse interests along this spectrum may not be. In one sense, many MSAs already do this. There are for example many committees that members can join depending on their interests. However, we are proposing that we go further if possible.

## **ISSUES OF KNOWLEDGE**

Take the issue of Islamic knowledge for example. We all recognize that different students are at different levels of understanding and interest. One approach that may address these levels would be to have some "light Islamic knowledge" at the weekly regular meeting, and a more intense level at a weekly or biweekly tafseer halaqa. Of course don't expect everyone to show up to both activities.

MSA members' schedules are as varied as their interests and levels of commitment. Having just a few people attend the "more intense" halaqa is perfectly acceptable. Remember, an additional activity is a service provided to our membership, not a burdensome requirement -with which all members must comply.

Our attitudes toward members then should be: "If you can come Alhamdulillah, if you can't I understand," even though our heart says, "Man I wish he/she would come to the halaqa, I think it would really help them" or "It's too bad more people didn't attend." That sense of failure that we all feel, or at least a majority of the MSA feels, is good for our hearts but not for our tongues.

But is this go' to divide our MSA? This is a very valid concern. We would suggest that the weekly "light knowledge" meeting be regarded and presented as the regular MSA activity, since it represents the least

common denominator for the greatest number of students. It follows then that this meeting can deal with MSA business as well, and serve as the backbone of the MSA.

The other more intensive halaqa then allows students who want to learn more to do so. In addition, by having a second halaqa, some pressure is relieved from the basic weekly meeting which often is burdened with too many, and sometimes unrealistic goals.

Finally, the intensive halaqa also allows certain students who just do not have the time or the interest in the "regular meetings" to attend what they feel comfortable with, just as social activities do. It is important however that the second halaqa not be viewed as an alternative but rather an addition to the normal routine.

### **OUR LIMITATIONS AND MISSION**

In summary, not everyone will or should come to all activities. Our job is to provide a variety of activities that meet the needs of as many Muslim students on campus as possible, with the understanding that all of us are trying to improve ourselves. Just as the second halaqa provides a means of extra involvement to some, just attending social activities may be the level of other students. Again this is not bad, nor should it be scoffed at.

Our job is to set up the events and encourage people to attend while observing the best of Islamic conduct. To do more is overstepping our responsibility and may cause the anxiety and frustration that so many MSA workers seem to be going through.

Most importantly, **let us remember the balance of the Prophet (SAW)**. Although his concern for the welfare of all people, Muslim and non-Muslim was so immense that Allah (SWT) had to remind him of his limitations, that concern did not result in the overt frustration and rudeness sometimes exhibited by Islamic workers in their zeal to increase "involvement."

May Allah help us all to work with sincerity and dedication to reach the highest levels of Islamic excellence. Amin.

# RUNNING YOUR MSA's FINANCES

## THE IMPORTANCE OF RUNNING AN MSA's FINANCES PROPERLY:

As Muslims, we must at all times be organized individually and collectively, and finances is no exception. Whether we like it or not, our world is run by money, and we must understand how to use it if we are to proceed with our long-range goals. Chronic indebtedness is an illness MSA's should not have to deal with at any time. Following clear, but strenuous, steps with aid MSAs all across North America from ever dealing with that problem, Insha'Allah.

## II. PRELIMINARY STEPS:

Before/during the summer, it is essential that the MSA elects/appoints a Treasurer. The Treasurer should have the following characteristics:

- (1) One who is committed to increasing the welfare of the MSA Chapter, by fulfilling his/her role.
- (2) One who is trustworthy and respected by the Executive Committee (I purposefully leave out the general members here, because the Treasurer will need to earn the respect of the general members through his/ her hard work and, by the Grace of Allah (SWT), eventually results).
- (3) One who looks at this position as if it is a wage earning job, because it is (wages are distributed in the Day of Judgment). Except with this "job", there is retribution for the lack of effort that one puts into that job. In other words, the Executive Committee must feel that this is the best person available in the chapter for the job, and that he/she will carry out his/her duties at all times for the pleasure of Allah (SWT).

## Developing a Financial Strategy

The Treasurer is in need of extra time before his/her daily operations begin in **the** fall in order to **develop an overall strategy for running the MSAs finances** (with the help of the previous treasurer)-

When the Fall Term begins, the chapter should proceed as quickly as possible in urging members to join certain **committees**, one of which should be a financial committee.

As the Treasurer is pondering over fund-raising plans for the up-coming year, the President should instruct each committee to meet regularly and produce an agenda and BUDGET before a certain date (preferably 4-6 weeks into the school year). The agendas and budgets of all the committees should then be brought up in front of the Executive Committee for discussion, alteration, and approval.

## III. DAILY OPERATIONS:

After the budgets have been passed and approved, the Treasurer should add up all administrative expenses plus committee budget figures to finally come up with **a year-long budget** for that MSA for that school year.

The Treasurer is then directly responsible in amassing enough funds to cover for the budget for that school year (and hopefully extra funds to kick start the next school year).

Each member of the financial committee should then be appointed to 1 committee, in which they are responsible for overseeing all financial activities for that committee (number of members in financial committee = number of committees).

**ALL financial transactions must go through the Treasurer** for approval and recording. The Treasurer must keep a log of all monetary transactions in a "cash book", as well as oversee and monitor all financial accounts (university checking accounts, bank accounts, etc.).

The Treasurer should head the financial committee and keep up to date with their progress. All committees must be constantly warned not to exceed **their budgetary limits** by their financial committee "advisor." If a committee does exceed its approved budget, it must fundraise for the excess spending (unlike the US Federal Government, we believe in a balanced budget).

The Treasurer is responsible for distributing a **financial report** to the Executive Committee and all interested member at the end of each term,

#### **IV. SEVERAL FUND-RAISING ACTIVITIES:**

- *Membership Dues*

Although the revenue might be low, collecting dues at the beginning of the year, will show the members that the Executive Committee means business.

- *Selling chapter T-shirts.*

A time consuming, meager-profit project (not a businessman's favorite), but it could establish/ strengthen unity.

- *Islam Awareness- Week:*

Yes, IAW! IAW can and should be a profit-sourcing activity each and every year for all the MSA's in North America. How?

- *Use university facilities to lower costs,*
- *And ask ALL university departments/student groups for massive allocations of money (the more money you ask for, the more you will likely receive).*
- *Sell food.*

A \$2000 profit from IAW is not unlikely if it is planned well. The Treasurer should meet with the IAW Coordinator(s) before-hand and discuss relevant financial issues.

- *Masjid Clean-up:*

If your MSA belongs to a community which hires professional cleaners to clean-up your Masjid, it would be worthwhile for your chapter to offer to do it (for less).

- *Fund-Raising seminars, dinners, etc.*
- *Summer Fund-Raising Drive*

Distribute a pamphlet describing your chapter and ITS NEEDS to all members and their parents during the summer, and follow up with a phone major drive.

#### **V. HINTS FOR SUCCESS**

- *Long-term vision is essential:*

Major plans, like Muslim campus-housing should not be overlooked just because they require massive amounts of capitals. Intend to keep some capital stored away every year for emergencies and massive projects.

- *A Trust from Allah*

The Treasurer should always keep in mind that he is dealing with Allah's money, and that he is working in the Muslim movement of North America.

- *Behavior*

The Treasurer and financial committee members should be careful when dealing with their members: they are to serve the chapter, at large. Although kindness is always appropriate and recommended behavior, firmness with the task at hand is necessary to emphasize the fact that the chapter's finances will not be taken advantaged of

*And hold fast together, by the Rope which Allah (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves. And remember with gratitude Allah's favor on you; For ye were enemies and He joined your hearts in love, so that by His Grace, ye became brethren. And ye were on the brink of the Pit of Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus doth Allah make His Signs clear to you: that ye may be guided.*

*Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong they are the ones to attain felicity (3:103 - 104)*

# MSA: A COMMUNITY ON CAMPUS

## ISLAMIZATION OF CAMPUS POLITICS AND THE POLITICIZATION OF THE MSA

By HUSSAIN HAMDANI

*This brief statement outlines the potential long-term goal of every MSA:*  
**The Islamicization of Campus Politics and the politicization of the MSA**

### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

First, it should be the long-term goal of every MSA to *Islamicize* the politics of their respective university. In other words, c

It is the duty of the MSA to bring morality back into the campus. For example, the Student Union should not have to debate over endorsing legislation in favor of same-sex benefits, this issue should clearly be seen as immoral and thus voted against or ignored. 

**Secondly**, the *politicization of the MSA* means to make the MSA more of a force on internal campus politics. The MSA needs to be a more 'In-your-face' association.

This could be exemplified in a number of ways.

For example, the student body must be convinced that there is such a thing as a Muslim-bloc especially when it comes to voting.

When student election time comes around, candidates should be trying to trip over themselves in order to speak to the MSA membership in order to solicit their votes.

### REALISM

Realistically the Islamicization of Campus Politics and the Politicization of the MSA cannot come about over night. For this to be fully effective, the MSA needs to perform a plethora of smaller events and advancements.

### SHORT TERM GOALS

Many of the terms I use here reflect the names of positions and institutions at my home University of McMaster. In trying to understand the following passages please put them 'in the context of the equivalent, positions and institutions found in your respective University.

We need to mobilize the Muslims on campus so that everyone knows we are around. The dormancy of the Muslim community can no longer continue. If we do not step up our program, than the non-Muslims will push us to the fringes of campus society.

**The MSA can leave its mark on campus politics in a number of ways.** Listed below are various means to achieve this goal. I have also listed ways the McMaster Muslim community has advanced themselves in the last two years just to show that it is possible for Muslims to attain these positions of authority.

### **DAWAH TABLES:**

- *Every month or so have a Daw'ah table at rotating locations handing out pamphlets and info on Islam*
- *This ensures that the student population at large learns about Islam, and also is notified that there is an organization representing Muslims on campus.*

### **FORM A MEDIA COMMITTEE:**

Requires 4-10 individuals, depending on the size of the MSA

- *Half of the committee should work for the campus newspaper as reporters*
- *Aim is to eventually be on the editorial board*
- *Ensures that anti-Muslim sentiments are not easily be expressed through this medium*
- *Other half scopes the university regional, and national newspaper for anti-Muslim propaganda and then responds to it promptly*
- *Negotiate with the editorial board to have a weekly or biweekly MSA column*
- *At McMaster, a Muslim is the Chair of the newspaper's editorial board of publications*

### **STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE ASSEMBLY**

- *Easily the most visible way Muslims can affect campus politics is if they participate in the Student Union*
- *Do not underestimate the importance of good representation*
- *Aim is to rise within the ranks of the Union and to get on selected executive committees*
- *I cannot stress this enough, the Union has vast powers that Muslims need to control. This is where the real politics lies*
- *At McMaster, 2 of the top 9 student executives of the Student Union are Muslims, thus McMaster cannot endorse clearly anti-Muslim legislation without a good fight from the 'Muslim lobby'*

### **STUDENT COMMITTEES:**

- *In most universities, these committees are encompassed within the Student Union but for our purposes we will separate the two*
- *It is essential for Muslims to get on several committees. The prominent ones are the External Affairs, the University Affairs and the Human Rights' Committee.*
- *These committees have vast resources and can be used to the benefit of the MSA*
- *At McMaster, the Chair of the University Affair committee last year was a Muslim. Also, for the last two consecutive terms the Chair of the Human Rights Committee has been Muslim.*

### **CLUBS ADMINISTRATOR:**

- *At McMaster, all the funds that are allocated to each club is handled by only one person, the club administrator*
- *Other universities may have the same system, concentration of authority in one person, or in a committee. Nevertheless, it is imperative that Muslims get on these committees and occupy positions.*
- *No one single university institution can help the MSA more than the one that allocates the funding.*
- *The 1993-1994 McMaster clubs administrator was a Muslim and he basically gave the MSA a blank cheque. He greatly helped his ummah out in their time of need.*

### **NEWSPAPER CLUB:**

- *The MSA should form a new club with a different name, under the MSA's umbrella with the sole purpose of getting funds from the university to establish a newspaper.*

- *This newspaper can espouse Islamic ideology in the form of an intellectual journal.*
- *The goal is so that non Muslims can read this journal.*
- *For example, in McMaster we have the MAC MINARET CLUB.*

#### **STUDENT UNION AFFILIATIONS:**

- *Find out what provincial and federal level students' association your particular Student Union belongs to.*
- *Then ask your Union if an MSA-representative could go on the conferences this association holds.*
- *For example, the Jewish students of York University unsuccessfully lobbied the Canadian Federation of Students to have one member of the Jewish Students' Contingency to sit on the executive committee.*
- *Although they were unsuccessful this time, it will merely be a matter of time before they do get representation.*
- *The MSAs must also lobby the Students' Union like the Jewish students have.*

#### **POLITICAL CLUBS ON CAMPUS:**

- *The MSA should encourage Muslims to run for positions on these clubs*
- *The benefits to do this are that executives on these clubs usually always have an opportunity to get to know candidates running for either municipal, provincial or federal government*
- *These Muslims then can ask the candidate questions pertaining to Muslims more readily, also they can lobby the candidates at greater ease than the average student can*
- *At McMaster, the Director, Vice-President, and the Recruitment Coordinator of the McMaster Young Liberals were Muslim*

# TOP 10 THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

BY MIRZA BAIG

"We are in a riddle wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma." --- ???

Care to take a guess on who said this. Nope, it is not some Muslim leader with eloquent speaking ability. It was Winston Churchill describing Great Britain's 'imperial perception' problems.

Even the greatest spin doctors of modern times, the English, have trouble portraying the *right* image. Unlike Great Britain, we are neither imperial minded, nor are we trying to subjugate every human into the Queen's service.

Rather, ours is a message of justice and peace. So how our image did become one of short tempered, evil minded, gun-toting fundamentalists?

## MEDIA PERCEPTION

Most students correctly point out the problem of media perception. Many of us can even rattle off a number of media personalities that are biased or at the least incompetent and uninformed on Muslims. Some can even correctly diagnose the problem that Muslims are not involved in the media.

But very few understand where the problem begins and how we can begin working towards solving the media bias.

## "ALL MEDIA IS LOCAL."

Yes, all media is local and it begins on your campus. Or at least that's where most of the journalists decided to enter media.

Many professional journalists have worked for their campus newspapers, radio stations and increasingly TV stations. The experiences and values of college life form a window from which everything is evaluated. This is where the hope for the future lies.

Journalists are a dedicated bunch who believe they were born to write and seek out the truth. When one criticizes the media as a whole as being unfair, they take it personally.

## TIPS ON HOW TO DEAL WITH THE MEDIA PRODUCTIVELY

So we offer you some tips on how to deal with media and how to foster a long term relationship. Insha Allah, we will be able to receive a more balanced approach by taking steps now.

### 1. TALKING HEADS:

Have a spokesperson who can comment for the whole group and become the point of contact for news organizations.

This prevents contradictory statements, and over time, journalists, will form professional relationships with this individual. It's sometimes tough in college to have one consistent person. So perhaps the best person would be a graduate student or a freshmen or sophomore who will be there for a number of years.

Make sure that the person can speak well; i.e., the journalists have no trouble understanding the accent.

## **2. PRESS PACKETS:**

Obtain ready made press packets from the Council of American Islamic Relations (CAIR) or the American Muslim Council (AMC). Many reporters do not know about Islam or how to present the religion or Muslims.

Giving background information on Islam, the community, yourself and Muslims can be very helpful and prevent negative press coverage. CAIR and AMC have style books, pamphlets on Islam and other relevant articles on important issues.

This reduces the amount of time you spend on research and presents things professionally.

## **3. SOUND BITES:**

Practice what you will say. It cannot be stressed enough that your statements should be practiced before speaking. Make sure the statements are precise and brief.

If you are speaking to TV or Radio reporters, be ready with some catchy sound bites. Sound bites are short statements that articulate the message with attention gathering phrases. "Bill Clinton is Neville Chamberlin of our times. He has not lifted a finger to stop the Bosnian genocide."

Boom! You have colorfully explained your position: that Clinton should take a more active stance; and just guaranteed yourself a 5 second spot on the nightly news cast.

Broadcast producers will look for the statement that sums up your feel' and will also attract an audience for them.

Editors are looking for the attention grabbing headline. Go ahead and explain your statement so that no misinterpretations occur.

Do not use stupid phrases to explain things. Dan Quayle perfected the art of saying things like, "Hawaii is an important state. It is the fiftieth state of the USA." Blah, the statement is bland and makes the speaker look sophomoric!

## **4. ADAB**

Be nice.

One has to be courteous. Do not be arrogant or self-righteous. Ted Koppel was interviewing a certain Muslim on *Nightline* after the World Trade Center Bombing. Koppel was being very courteous to him; however, Koppel mispronounced Muslim names. So right in front of millions of people, the Muslim brother decided to correct Ted Koppel.

I am sure the intentions were pure, but he appeared as an arrogant man. Of course, Koppel corrected himself but was no longer sympathetic.

Islam requires you to be courteous. It neither hurts nor costs you anything in being polite to student journalists, they are human and students just like your self

## **5. GROUPS:**

Speak to reporters in a group rather than one on one if possible. Your statements are less likely to be distorted by a group than one individual.

## **6. SIMPLICITY:**

Do not use confusing and arbitrary language. Keep it simple. A newspaper is written in seventh grade English.

#### **7. TRUTH:**

Always tell the truth (not the whole truth) to the media. This does not mean that you spill your guts, but journalists will check facts with various sources, especially if you didn't sound comfortable.

Be prepared to back up your information with credible sources. A lie will do you more harm both in the short and the long term.

Sometimes reporters ask questions that you may not have the answer to. Say that you don't have the answer but add, "I will research the answer and get back to you."

If you want to properly phrase an answer about a difficult issue, use the same excuse so that you can *properly research* the phrasing of the answer. Appearances of deceit must be avoided in order to fully convey your message.

#### **8. PROFESSIONAL IMAGE:**

Be organized and professional.

A professional image goes a long way in dispelling myths and stereotypes. If you are helping reporters in a lecture series, make sure you have the bios of the speakers and the subject importance.

An important part of appearing professional is grooming. Grooming consists of your dress, facial and physical cleanliness, something the Prophet (SA) repeatedly emphasized.

Nobody is suggesting that you wear a suit every time you deal with the press but not looking like you just woke up will do wonders.

Your appearance should not distract from the message unless the message is about cultural and traditional appearances,

#### **9. FOLLOW UP:**

Follow up with reporters who have covered you.

A thank you note or phone call after a good story will always be remembered.

Many reporters will be pleasantly surprised and happy to discuss the story as well as any future events.

Don't count on running into reporters to thank them. Take a little extra effort to reach them at their office and if they are not there, leave a message.

#### **10. SCOOPS:**

Offer scoops to reporters who you have dealt with in the past.

The story does not have to be *hard* news, it could be a feature story on refugees in the community, harassment of a Muslim on campus, Islamic studies issues, Muslim students from countries in the news, or fundraising drives for a Campus Masjid.

Make sure the story is legitimate. Stories that are not generated by any specific event are a building block towards reconstructing our image.

### **BUILDING THAT LASTING RELATIONSHIP**

These tips should help you build a lasting relationship with media institutions.

Overtime, your work will bring changes into the national media coverage and, Insha'Allah, go a long way towards bringing a balanced coverage of Muslims. These tips not only apply to the Campus but our local communities as well.

# MSA AND INCLUSIVENESS

By SAMEERA AHMED

*I think that we as a group are still missing the point. We have to start looking at MSAs from a different perspective. Take it from this view:*

## A TYPICAL MUSLIM

You are a Muslim and are attending college. Your parents do not support you and you must rely solely on whatever your income is.

You may or may not know if you will be attending college next semester because you can't afford it, therefore you get another job. So now you are taking classes (lets say 16 credit hours), working two jobs, plus you have your family responsibilities, not to mention make the grades. What does the MSA do here?

NOTHING!!! (Not really, but in some eyes it may look like that) They may be committed brothers and sisters, but they may not have the time.

Meaning by spending 2-3 hours a week on MSA and its related activity, one is losing income which could be used to help pay next semester off or to help out at home and relieve some stress.

## MONEY AND MSA

Despite that, many times a lot of the bonding stuff people do together (go out to eat, go places, etc.) requires **money**. If it requires money, that will pose a problem. Many will not want to subject themselves to that situation.

Also, **what does the MSA really offer them?** The only tangible thing many can see is *halaqas* and many believe this is the same thing as what is happening at their Masjid.

## CHANGE MSA!

So, instead, they just go there, it's much easier as they already know everyone. The **key thing is that we need to change the local MSA**.

For the local chapters, I've been working on bonding and have been able to take care of some stuff, but not enough. Instead of always going out to eat, we invite people over.

For Suhur we would all go out, but this year we rotated apartments. After Ramadan we still have stuff like that. We just had a seminar which was free (but asked for donations. We're just scraping the surface, and that **there** is a lot more.

*[Editor's Note:] There are a lot of things one can do to make the MSA more accessible for the average student. The key thing to do is to recognize problems, evaluate them, and systematically plan an appropriate response.*

*Know ye (all) that the life of this world is but a play and a pastime, adornment and mutual boasting and multiplying, (in rivalry) among yourselves, riches and children. Here is a similitude: How rain and the growth which it brings forth, delight (The hearts of) the tillers; soon it withers; thou wilt see it grow yellow; Then it becomes dry and crumbles away (57:20)*

# THIS IS OUR MESSAGE: DAW'AH ON CAMPUS

## DAWAH ON NORTH AMERICAN CAMPUSES

By WAEL HADDARA

Broadly speaking daw'ah is of two types:

- Individual Daw'ah
- Collective Daw'ah

Daw'ah is individual and collective only from the sense of the receiver. Regardless of how many people we are trying to make daw'ah to, it should always be a collective, organized effort.

### 1. INDIVIDUAL DAWAH

#### Daw'ah by example

This is the most often spoken about form of daw'ah. It simply consists of living Islam.

It is the most intuitive and most difficult of all methods of doing daw'ah, because it requires that we live Islam every minute of our lives.

Simply speaking most Muslim university students do not.

However, we can always try our best. Islam should show in our behavior, our speech, or mentality and our reaction to events and situations.

The use of distinctive dress always helps. Keeping the beard; wearing the hijab; wearing appropriate clothing [both genders]; kufis; taking time out for prayer; fasting and making it known, and so on.

However, it must be clear in our minds that we are not doing this to *show* people what we do, but rather because we are practicing Islam [not all of the things mentioned above are required in Islam, obviously, but I am just giving examples].

Compare this to a person trying to teach another how to pray. You pray because it is prescribed. Someone else is learning from you, but that was not the primary motivation.

It is said that daw'ah by example is the most effective form. Unless the *da'iya* is a public figure, however, the scope [audience] is limited.

#### Active Daw'ah to interested individuals

The first three years of Islam depended very heavily on this form of daw'ah. The Prophet, *alaihi assalatu wassalam*, only approached those individuals in whom he saw an acceptance of the basic tenets of Islam.

The first who became Muslim were, Khadija, 'Ali and Abu Bakr (*radoa Allahu 'anhum*). This line of daw'ah was the one that Abu Bakr as-Siddiq (RA) took when he started to invite to Islam. He approached those individuals in whom he saw a natural lean towards Islam.

Those who became Muslim through Abu Bakr included Uthman, Abdul-Rahman ibn A'waf, Sa'd ibn Abi Waqas, Talha and al-Zubair. In fact, those listed above constitute 3 out of the 4 Khulafa ar-Rashidun and 7 out of the ten given glad tidings of Paradise.

### **Some requirements of individual daw'ah:**

Daw'ah in this manner depends on a number of things in the *da'iyah*. These include:

- *An understanding of the culture of the society*
- *A knowledge of the individual being given daw'ah*
- *Understanding of how to approach people, and*
- *What is of interest to them*
- *Good manners*
- *Strong iman and application of Islam*

### **Young open minds: open to daw'ah**

One can find many young Americans who are passing through very traumatic periods of their lives.

They think, and question, and are open to dialogue. This is perhaps not the majority or even a large minority, but these are the ones most open to Islam, because they recognize comfort in it.

We may not be able to identify these individuals, but we can draw them to the MSAs through a variety of means listed later on.

Those that we do identify, we can take a number of steps with them.

- *Draw them into environments that are primarily Muslim; for example, Muslim circle of friends. The intent here is not to develop 'emotional dependence' but to show the person the relaxed, content atmosphere which is present in a Muslim circle.*
- *Invite them to events with a Muslim/ Islamic content, such as: Iftars, Eid celebrations, lectures and halaqas*
- *All of this can be preceded, accompanied or followed by books and pamphlets on Islam. Although you should choose books carefully, also ensure that you are objective in your choice of literature. Present Islam as it is.*

### **Daw'ah Through Opportunity**

We should take every opportunity to introduce and expose people to Islam. This form is both possible on the individual as well as the collective level.

**On the level of individuals**, our thinking must be Islamic. Our perspective is not based on emotionalism, culture, tradition or the flow of the tide; rather it is based on and derives from Islam.

We should show this perspective whenever the occasion arises. Offer insights from the perspective of Islam on various discussions that take place between you and your friends. You need not preface every single sentence you utter with, the opinion of Islam on this is..."

However, it will become known that you are a Muslim and these opinions are your understanding of Islam. Stress the issues of understanding: none of us represent Islam.

We should have the conviction that if our understanding of Islam is good, then people will find in it sense and sensibility.

Choose your presentations and your papers in areas that relate to Islam. When you do a class project, choose something through which you can present the Islamic idea.

This is arguable easier in the social sciences and the humanities, but it is also possible in sciences where there is a social/global edge, such as Medicine ... etc. This has the dual advantage of increasing the amount of Islamic scholarship on any given subject as well as introducing people to various aspects of Islam they may not have realized existed.

## **II COLLECTIVE DAWAH**

### **Daw'ah through Opportunity**

On an extended basis, instead of holding lectures on "Islam and the West" or "The Status of Women In Islam" and so on only, hold lectures that are different and *atypical*.

Coordinate with the relevant department in your Faculty of Art to organize a lecture on "Islamic Arts" or "History of Calligraphy" or coordinate with the department of Architecture to have a lecture on "Islamic Architecture and Its Influence on European Architecture".

If we truly claim that Islam is life, you should be able to organize presentations on very diverse topics. There are a number of places where help on Speakers can be obtained [such as the MSA Speaker's List: please see -appendix on page 491.]

These lectures/seminars are intended to cater to a specific, more or less, specialized audience. Once more, the Speaker's intent is not to present Islam to the audience, but naturally a brief survey of that religion which was the basis for the genius, development and accomplishment in that field is necessary as background.

Two things can be accomplished here:

- *Introduce Islam in a comprehensive manner*
- *Introduce the MSA as a source on Islam.*

The latter will help you on both an individual and organizational level: individuals who want to know more about Islam as well as departments who want to pursue more activities about Islam will know that they can contact you.

### **Advertise Muslim Presence on Campus**

- *Distinctive appearance [see above]*

Print T-shirts, sweat-shirts, hooded-shirts and other clothing with an Islamic theme. Mugs, Lunch boxes... be creative!

The logo or theme should be useful to non Muslim as well [Queen's University: "Walk humbly on the Green Earth in Peace"]. Sell them through whatever venue is available. Wear them.

- *Establish regular, visible Muslim gatherings*

Have lunch together, for example, in a particular *part* of the cafeteria as a Muslim group. People will get used to seeing you.

Make sure, however, that the group behavior is not counterproductive!

- *Hold Useful Activities*

Support worthwhile activities on your campus and in your communities.

- *Clean up the garbage on campus;*
- *Contribute to murals on walls*
- *Support, establish or help the Food Bank*
- *Join in Alcohol & Drug Awareness campaigns*
- *Support human rights organizations with compatible aims*

In all events ensure that the Islamic idea is presented to people and that it is visible.

### **Activism**

- *Get involved.*

### **Utilize the media**

Whether it is the local radio, the local paper , etc. Respond not only to issues relating to Muslim countries or just political issues, but also to social issues and the needs of the downtrodden, the weak and the poor ... etc. Be pro-active.

Don't 'react' to events, explore concepts and ideas that others have not discussed. Take up the cause of poor security on campus at night; or library facilities or access to resources, for example.

### **Get involved in the university**

Find out more about the calendar. What can you change? How? Can you introduce courses to Islam? Can you increase the Islamic concepts and ideas in existing courses?

### **Get in touch with your departments**

Tell them you have people willing to speak about various aspects of Islam. Philosophy, History, Sociology ...

### **Hold outside events**

Rallies, demonstrations [organized, innovative and peaceful, please] for specific events may be a good idea.

### **MUCH TO DO**

In conclusion, there is much that can be done. An MSA is typically limited by three things:

- *the number of people willing to work*
- *the time they wish to allocate to the MSA; and*
- *money*

In a sense, therefore, it may simply be easier and more productive to go out and talk than to work towards activities that may not give immediate return.

In closing I leave you with these quotes from Imam Hasan al-Banna:

*The realm of talk is different from the realm of thought, and the realm of action is yet different from the realm of talk. The realm of jihad is different from that of simple action, and the realm of correct jihad is different from that of misguided jihad.*

*It is easy for many to think and imagine, but not all thoughts can be articulated into words. Many may talk, but few will prove steadfast when the time for action arrives. Many of those few can work, but few of them can carry the burden of the arduous work and jihad. These select few may miss their mark and fall off the right path unless they are surrounded by the guidance and mercy of Allah.*

*In the story of Taloot [al-Baqarah 246-250] is an explanation of what I mean.*

*Never despair for despair is not a part of a Muslim's character. Today's realities were the dreams of yesterday, and today's dreams will be the realities of tomorrow. The weak do not remain weak for as long as they live, and the strong do not remain strong forever.*

ALSO REMEMBER THAT RUNNING HALAQAS ARE AN INTEGRAL PART OF ANY MSA'S ACTIVITIES!

# STARTING AND CONTINUING A REGULAR DAWAH TABLE

BY AAFIA SIDDIQUI

*"Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what right, and forbidding what is wrong thy are the ones to attain the Supreme Joy." (Qur'an 3:104)*

A Daw'ah Table can be as simple as a table with a few introductory brochures on Islam, or it can have an attractive display of posters, a large variety of daw'ah literature, and Qur'ans - depending on how many people one wants to attract.

The concept of the daw'ah table encompasses much more than just giving out pamphlets on Islam. Once this effort is started, with some amount of dedication and consistency, it can easily lead to the formation of an organized resource of information on Islam, an effective means of advertising other MSA activities and services, a way of getting to know more Muslims, and a training ground for *da'iyas* (callers to Islam).

## **CORRECT INTENTION:**

As with starting any endeavor, the most important thing is the intention behind it. As the Prophet (SAW) said: "Indeed, actions are based on intentions. For every person is what he intended." (Bukhari and Muslim)

First make sure that the intention for this effort is only to please Allah (SWT). We need to ask ourselves this question again and again.

## **PRAYER TO ALLAH:**

Pray to Allah (SWT) to make this endeavor a big success and ask for His pleasure. Remember the Prophets Ibraheem and Isma'il (as), and their prayer to make Mecca a land of *barakah*, and to have a prophet in their progeny. The grace with which Allah (SWT) accepted this prayer is in front of everyone.

While we may have many shortcomings, still, the power of *dua* is great. Imagine our humble, but sincere daw'ah effort turning into a major daw'ah movement in this country! Just imagine it! And us, reaping the reward of everyone who accepts Islam through this movement, through years to come... Think and plan big: Allah's powers are not to be underestimated:

"And when My servants ask thee concerning Me, I am indeed close (to them); I listen to the prayer of every suppliant when he calls on Me; let them also, with a will, listen to My call, and believe in me; that they may be rightly guided." (Qur'an 2:186)

"O Allah, bestow on us, mercy from Yourself, and dispose of our affair for us in the right way." (Qur'an 18:10)

## **REALIZATION THAT...**

- a) Strength to serve Allah (SWT) comes from Him.
- b) He chooses people to serve Him based on their sincerity and effort.
- c) If we are setting up a daw'ah table to convey His message to His people, we are NOT doing a favor to Allah. He, in fact, is doing a favor on us by granting us an opportunity to attain reward.
- d) Shaitan and those who follow him will try to prevent us from working for the sake of Allah. We have to keep striving despite opposition, as the rule of Allah (SWT) is to help those who make an effort, and then ask Allah (SWT) to help us and make things easy for us:

"And those who strive in Our (Cause), We will certainly guide them to Our Paths: for verily Allah is with those who do good." (Qur'an 30:69)

## **BASIC MATERIAL NEEDS:**

1. **DAW'AH MATERIALS:** At least 50 each of 6 different kinds of daw'ah brochures and two or three attractive posters about Islam. See recommendations below on posters and literature.
2. **PEOPLE:** At least 5-6 enthusiastic people.
3. **FUNDS.** Some funds for buying poster material and photocopying / ordering daw'ah literature.
4. **THE BIG ATTRACTION--** English translations of the Qur'an for free distribution. If available, this is the single **thing** that attracts **the** most people to the table.

Here is one way to go about it:

### **STEP 1 OBTAINING THE DAWAH LITERATURE AND QUR'ANS:**

Start the search for daw'ah literature and Qur'ans early (i.e. a month or two in advance), so that there is enough time for materials to be mailed to you. If you want to start a table right away, you may want to photocopy what you can for a start. Daw'ah literature and further information sources are also available on line on the "World Wide Web" (See Appendix).

**STEP 2 PRELIMINARY FUNDRAISING:** Some suggestions for fundraising are as follows:

Food sales; Collecting money after Friday prayers; Fundraising lectures and dinners; T-shirts and poster sales; Direct funding from your university; Telethon

### **STEP 3 RESERVING THE TABLE AND OBTAINING PERIPHERALS:**

Contact the appropriate department office in your university in advance to find out their deadlines if any for reserving a table for daw'ah purposes. Reserve your table early for the whole semester. This is to ensure getting a good spot for your table. You may also want to reserve or purchase two or three stands or easels to mount posters as well as have some business cards printed so that interested people have a contact to follow up later.

From a coordinator's point of view, it is convenient to have a weekly table consistently on the same day of the week. However, in order to reach the maximum number of people, switching to another day in the middle of the semester may not be a bad idea.

### **STEP 4 GETTING THE VOLUNTEERS:**

At least one person and one backup is needed for the duration of the table and two people for setting up and closing. It may be a good idea to introduce the daw'ah table and ask for volunteers at the *first* MSA get-together of the semester.

Ask people to dedicate at least one hour (out of 168 hours!) of the week for this purpose. Make a sign up sheet and pass it around. Have one person in charge of calling all the volunteers the night before the daw'ah table every week to remind them of their shifts. Arrange for wake-up calls if needed and encourage people to find a backup if they cannot make their shift. However, the coordinator should be prepared to deal with occasional absenteeism and be available on call (if possible) for the duration of the table,

### **STEP 5 MAKING SIGNS AND POSTERS:**

Attractive signs and posters can go a long way in encouraging people to stop by the table. Also, putting up posters with Quranic verses and other information about Islam is daw'ah in itself, as people who don't

stop by the table will also learn something about Islam. Short Qur'anic verses and a hadith written clearly and attractively seem to be the most beneficial.

Political issues also attract attention, but are usually NOT good daw'ah tools. It is advisable to keep the daw'ah table away from politics as the goal is to call people towards Islam with hikmah (wisdom), which may be better achieved by removing the focus from political issues and bringing it to Tawheed. Allahu Alam.

#### **STEP 6 ADVERTISING FOR THE TABLE:**

It may be a good idea to put up posters and use email and other means available at your university for advertising the daw'ah table. Encourage people to tell their non-Muslim friends about the table.

#### **STEP 7 PROCEDURAL MEETING OF VOLUNTEERS:**

Before starting the table, have a meeting where the volunteers are informed of policies concerning the daw'ah table and also given a briefing on the basics of doing daw'ah. Procedural things to go over may include the following among others:

**Setting up and closing.** One seemingly obvious but often forgotten thing is making sure that, if you are using tape or any sticky material to put up posters, it is used in such a way as to not destroy the poster itself. Also, it is important to be careful when closing not to leave the tape sticking on the back of the posters, as it will destroy the posters placed underneath.

**The use of a log book.** This should contain the names and particulars of the volunteers along with their assigned shifts, any specific instructions that you may want to give them, and a section for special requests, such as if someone wants to be informed of Islamic events, or wants a copy of the Qur'an, or anything that you can provide but may not have handy at the table. It can also be used to keep track of how much literature is being given out and how many people are stopping by the table.

**Observe university regulations.** Go over the pertinent rules and regulations with all the volunteers. For instance, if a university forbids taping posters to walls, then the people setting up the table need to be aware of this and respect this rule. Breaking university rules just gives enemies ammunition to work against the daw'ah table and try to stop it.

**Delegate responsibilities.** Have specific people in charge of photocopying, calling up the volunteers, following up on special requests, ordering Qur'ans and daw'ah material as needed etc.

**Basic etiquette of doing daw'ah.** It is important to go over the basic etiquette of daw'ah with the daw'ah workers. Basic daw'ah training is a whole topic in itself. However, some ground rules are listed in the next section (*At The Daw'ah Table – Dealing with the Public*).

#### **STEP 8 READY TO GO!**

The procedural meeting should mark the completion of the preparations for the table. The night before the table, tie up any loose ends, make sure all materials are packed ready to go and call up volunteers to reconfirm their shifts. The materials you will typically need are:

Daw'ah brochures; Qur'ans; Selected Posters; Copy of the Bible; and basic information for the Da'ees; Tape and scissors (or something to put up the posters); Stands or easels (if needed); Log Book. Insha Allah, have a successful daw'ah table the next day

# AT THE DAWAH TABLE

## DEALING WITH THE PUBLIC

General rules to remember are: use *hikmah* (wisdom), be cheerful and friendly, and never be rude or get upset at anyone. Remember that the da'ee at the table is representing Islam!

Some people suggest a more aggressive approach. i.e. call out to passersby and ask them to come to the table, or stand near the table and give out brochures to all those who pass by.

That is fine as long as it is not against university regulations and the material being given out does not have Qur'anic verses, as people may throw it away. Allahu Alam. However, there are a fair amount of people who voluntarily stop by the table, being attracted by the posters, display of materials, free Qur'ans or the cheerful look on the da'ees face. These people need to be dealt with and can roughly be divided into three categories:

1. **Those who stop by, pick up some daw'ah literature, and leave as fast as they can.** These are the easiest the deal with. Just give them a friendly smile.
2. **Those who stop and ask honest questions.** Be aware of the basic etiquette of daw'ah in order to deal effectively with these people. Experience has shown that one person draws others to the table, especially spectators, when an interesting discussion is taking place.

## DEALING WITH HONEST QUESTIONS

Thus, if the da'ee has a reasonable amount of knowledge and skills, it is recommended to try to get a discussion going. It is helpful to keep a copy of the Bible and mark some pre-selected verses which can be used to talk to Christians and some Jews more effectively. Try to keep the focus of discussions as much as possible on *Tawheed* and the central beliefs of Islam.

If someone asks a question and the da'ee does not know the answer, it is better to ask the person to give their name and number and have someone who knows get back to them or send them some literature. Be sure to follow up.

**Don't guess on an answer**, as we are dealing with the revelation of ALLAH (SW), and need to be very careful. Our wrong guess could result in someone's being misguided instead of being guided, and that defeats our purpose. Moreover, we are clearly forbidden to say things about Allah, of which we have no knowledge (Qur'an 7:33). Some verses of the Qur'an to remember are:

"Invite to the path of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious." (Qur'an. 16:125)

"And do not dispute with the People of the Book, except with that which is best, unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong, and say " We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; Our God and your God is One, and it is to Him that we submit." ~(Qur'an, 29:46)

"Say what is true and correct from your Lord and let him who will, believe, and let him who will, reject..." (Qur'an, 18:29)

3. **Those who don't like Islam no matter what and try to create problems.** Never get into a heated argument with anyone at the table. No matter what they say or do, the da'ee must not lose control.

## **DEALING WITH ANTI-ISLAM SENTIMENTS**

Remember, the da'ee at the table is representing Islam! Be patient with such people. If they incessantly argue a wrong point, or raise objections no matter what you say, then, without getting apologetic, end the discussion graciously 'in accordance with the following verses of the Qur'an:

"And the servants of (God) Most Gracious are those who walk on the earth in humility, and when the ignorant address them, they say, "Peace!" (Quran, 25:63)

"To you be your way of life (deen) and to me, mine." (Qur'an, 109:6)

### **VERY IMPORTANT NOTE:**

"Say what is true and correct from your Lord. Let him who will, believe, and let him who will, reject..." (Qur'an, 18:29)

It is very tempting and easy to succumb to western pressure and "water-down" Islam to fit a more western perspective. This is especially the case with topics like jihad and women in Islam.

Surely we don't want our reward of doing daw'ah to be transformed into punishment for speaking about Allah without knowledge, or attempting to change His religion. Even the Prophet (SAW) was warned:

"And had We not made you steadfast, you would nearly have inclined to them a little. In that case, We should have made you taste an equal portion (of punishment) in this life, and an equal portion in death: and moreover, you would have found none to help you against Us!" (Qur'an, 17:74~75)

Our job as da'ees is only to honestly convey the message in the best manner using hikmah, but not changing the message in doing so. It is up to Allah, and not to us, to make people accept Islam.

# 10 CHARACTERISTICS OF AN MSA TABLE

BY AAFIA SIDDIQUI

Background work involves maintaining a consistent supply of daw'ah material, Qurans, and finds, making and maintaining posters laminating them etc.), arranging for special activities at the table, training the da'ees, and taking care of special requests if any.

The coordinator can delegate these jobs to others, but needs to be responsible and follow up regularly, as all of the above are very critical in ensuring the success and continuity of the table.

It is also a good idea to hold periodic meetings to get feedback from the da'ees -and other people and improve upon the table -as appropriate.

## TEN CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD DAWAH TABLE:

1. **Attracts positive attention.** Posters and materials should be displayed prominently and attractively and should not be the same every week.
2. **Is in a busy area of the campus,** preferably in the equivalent of the "student center" in your universities.
3. **Has occasional non-standard activities** as a part of the table, such as the "wheel game" (see description later) and "Have your name written in Arabic for Free" service etc.
4. **Is consistent.** Consistency is very important. Sometimes an individual may feel the first time, but on seeing the table for the third or fourth time, may decide to stop by.
5. **Its da'ees are trained in basic daw'ah.**
6. **Gives incentives for people to return** and not just stop by once and never come again.
7. **Encourages positive discussion on Tawheed and the fundamentals of Islam** and discourages endless discussions on politics etc. You can achieve this partly through the choice of literature and posters you display, but mainly this is the job of the da'ee manning the -table.
8. **Has a follow-up mechanism for people genuinely interested in Islam.** You can point them to a local daw'ah organization that offers classes on Islam to non-Muslims or start one yourself. Also follow up with them if you have taken their name -and address in response to a request by them.
9. While the main focus is Tawheed, **occasional themes** are chosen such that they address some issue **relevant** to the society and attract **attention**.
10. Gives out free translations of the Qur'an.

## ADDING COLOR TO THE RAINBOW: SOME CREATIVE IDEAS FOR THE DAW'AH TABLE:

- *Personalized business cards –in Arabic – for FREE*
- *Quiz or other educational game*
- *Free stuff*

This goes without saying. People, especially students, are attracted to free things. Especially, if any form of food is being given out for free. However, it may not always be possible for an MSA to give out free items, but it is worth the money.

At one university, free dates were given out during the daw'ah table after Ramadan (a good way to use the left over dates). Two or three dates were packed in a small plastic bag and tied with a ribbon to make them look attractive. Sure enough, this did attract people.

- *Audio-Visual Material*

Showing an appropriate video on Islam or playing Islamic songs may not be a bad idea. However, realize that people are not going to stop for the duration of the video or the audio tape. It may attract their

attention and they may stop for a minute or two. But in this process, they may pick up some brochures, or at least start thinking about Islam.

- *Islamic computer game or software*

#### **CONTINUING THE TABLE:**

This is the real challenge. Very often MSA originated activities stop when the person who initiated them graduates and leaves. If the person who starts the table is about to graduate and leave, then he/she needs to start looking for someone, usually from among the volunteers of the table, who will be able to coordinate the table after the present coordinator leaves.

It is good if they can spend a semester working together, where the future coordinator is trained to do the work and also gets a chance to feel how it would be to coordinate the table all by him/herself.

However, this may be subject to the election procedures of each individual MSA, and may not be possible in every case.

At any -rate, the coordinator should share information among others so that he/she is not the only one with all the know-how of running a table. Coordinating a daw'ah table is relatively easy and does not require much time once the coordinator becomes familiar with the work.

However, strength to carry out any Islamic activity, however easy or difficult, comes only from Allah (SWT), if He sees sincerity in our hearts. May Allah give this strength and sincerity to us so that our humble effort continue, and expands *fi sabi Allah* and more and more people come to the deen of Allah until America becomes a Muslim land.

*Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; And argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: For thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His Path, and who receive guidance. (16- 125)*

# INSIGHTS INTO LECTURES AND REGULAR EVENTS

## PLANNING A LECTURE

BY AAFIA SIDDIQUI

Planning and executing an activity can vary much depending on the nature and target audience of the activity. The most common kind of activity is a public lecture. This section will be based on planning this kind of activity, while making it general enough to apply to planning other activities.

For a successful lecture, the three main things needed are:

- *The speaker*
- *The money*
- *The people*

### START PLANNING:

- *Ideally planning should be started at least one semester (3 months) in advance. This allows for flexibility in terms of time, speaker, and location.*
- *Have a preliminary meeting to come up with a rough idea of what to do, the location of the event and the choice of speaker(s).*
- *Also come up with a rough budget and ensure that you have resources to meet at least half the expenses at the start, and discuss realistic means of meeting the remainder of the expenses.*
- *Allow room for unanticipated expenses and agree on a first, second and third choice for the speaker and subjects you would want them to cover.*

### TIMING OF THE EVENT:

- *Time should be selected such that it ensures maximum attendance of your target audience.*
- *It is worth your effort to contact the local masjid before setting the date of your event to ensure that it does not conflict with any activity they have already planned.*

### CONTACTING THE SPEAKER(S)

- *Contact the speakers and confirm the dates with them as early as possible. Usually three months in advance is adequate.*
- *Contact the speaker with some dates (or a specific date) in mind and a rough idea of a topic. You can either suggest a topic to them or ask them what they would like to speak on. It is important to confirm the date with the speaker so they can write your event down in the calendar.*
- *An open ended conversation regarding the date is not useful as speakers get booked well in advance.*
- *Be persistent in contacting the speaker you want. If they don't return your fourth phone call, that does not mean they are trying to be rude. It just means they are very busy; be persistent.*
- *Usually MSAs pay for the speaker's travel and accommodations. Some speakers appreciate an honorarium, and some do not. It is good to clarify these matters with the speaker soon after the speaker has expressed availability to come to your event.*
- *If you want to have a lecture, but don't know who to contact, refer to the MSA Speakers' List and ask around for help (See Appendix)*
- *Sometimes speakers cancel at the last moment. It is important to have arrangements for a **backup speaker**. At one university's Islam week, they only called two speakers and both canceled at the last moment.*

### **CHOOSING A TOPIC:**

- *Topics should be chosen based on their interest and potential benefit to the target community and also based on the area of specialty of the speaker.*
- *Many possible lecture topics are given in the MSA Speaker List.*

### **RESERVING A LOCATION:**

- *Reserve a room for the date(s) your speaker can come.*
- *Check and make sure you are aware of your university's policies regarding food, fundraising, etc. for the room you have reserved. Take that into account before planning your lecture.*

### **ADVERTISING THE EVENT:**

Once the location, timing and the speaker are confirmed, you are in a position to start advertising your event. **Good advertising is crucial to the success of your event.**

#### **TO GET MUSLIMS:**

- *The best advertisement is making announcements and giving out fliers after Friday prayers and at community events. You may leave a bunch of fliers at the various masjids for people to pick up. Call the masjid in advance to have announcements made.*
- *Also call your friends and other people and sound excited about the event. If your MSA has a phone list, use it!*
- *The best time for advertising among Muslims is starting a month in advance. Efforts must be increased very much starting from a week before the event until the day of the event.*
- *If there is anything going on in the community the week of the event, don't miss it. Send someone there with fliers prepared to announce your event.*
- *Advertise in your community newsletter (if any).*

#### **TO GET NON-MUSLIMS**

- *Make use of the bulletin boards on campus and the local newspaper.*
- *If funding permits, advertise your event in the local or campus newspaper and radio station in advance.*
- *Put up big banners and posters wherever appropriate.*
- *A very effective means of getting non-Muslims is to have a daw'ah table the day before and the same day with a visible banner describing the event. Then, give out fliers to people as they stop by and encourage them to come.*
- *Also, personally invite your friends and colleagues in lab or work. Make them interested in the event.*
- *Give fliers to your contacts in other MSA's for posting in their respective campuses.*

#### **SPEAKER'S TRAVEL AND ACCOMODATIONS:**

- *One of the big expenses in having a speaker event is usually the speaker's plane ticket.*
- *Arrangements for the speaker's stay must be made prior to their arrival, and the speaker should be informed of the arrangements.*

#### **AUDIO VISUAL MATERIALS:**

- *These usually include a microphone/ sound system and arrangements to video tape the lecture. These can also include a slide projector and TV/VCR depending on the nature of the speaker's presentation. Campuses usually have an audio visual service which rents out these things.*
- *It is a good idea to videotape your event for future use.*

## **FOOD:**

- *Having some kind of refreshments is a good idea if your budget allows you to. It gives an added incentive to people to come.*
- *If you do decide to serve food, order the food in advance and make arrangements to pick-up/deliver the food.*
- *Also, confirm with the vendor the day before the event to make sure they remember your order.*
- *You can also try to get people from the community to donate food.*
- *Food can also be sold at the event to raise funds for your MSA. However, some universities have rules against that, so check to make sure it is okay to do so.*

## **EXPENSES AND SOME FUNDING TIPS**

The main expenses in a lecture are:

Speaker's plane ticket, Food (if applicable), Renting audio-visual materials, Advertising, Videotaping the event.

Some funding tips include:

- *Ask another MSA or Islamic Society to co-sponsor the speaker's visit. You could work with them to arrange two non-conflicting events or co-sponsor the same event.*
- *Sell dinner and/ or baked goods at or before the event and encourage everyone to buy.*
- *Ask for donations after Friday prayers.*
- *Tap all the usual sources of funding for other MSA activities (see section on fundraising).*

## **VOLUNTEERS:**

A major thing is recruiting volunteers and not ending up doing all the work oneself. Ideally, the coordinator would need one person in charge of each of the following areas:

- *Communication with the speaker*
- *Hosting the speaker*
- *Room reservation and other materials (Audio Visual, tables, chairs, etc if needed)*
- *Food*
- *Publicity (everyone needs to help out here)*
- *Set up; Clean up*
- *It is very important for the coordinator to follow up with the people in charge of the above. Do not assume that someone who says they will do something will do it.*
- *Know your volunteers and assign them work according to their abilities and trustworthiness. Some people can be trusted with crucial work and others cannot*
- *It is good to have backups for some of the more important items to account for last-minute change's in people's plans*
- *The coordinator must be prepared for the worst and not panic if things seem to be going wrong. Imagine the worst scenario and be prepared to deal with it.*

## **MODERATING THE EVENT:**

- *Having a good moderator for the lecture is important, especially if the topic is a controversial one such as politics or a women's issue.*
- *A strong moderator is a key factor in dealing with potential trouble-makers.*

## **CLEANING UP:**

- *Make sure the lecture room(s) are in proper order when you leave.*

**OPTIONAL:**

The following are some things that can make the difference between a very good and an excellent program.

- *Distribution of Pamphlets: It helps sometimes for people to have an outline of the speaker's talk or more information relevant to the topic of the talk. The speaker can be asked to provide some of this material or it can be arranged by the MSA.*
- *Feedback Questionnaires: Asking feedback on the topic and the content of the lecture and the style of the speaker can be useful for future events. The questionnaire should be short and such that the majority of the people can easily fill it out in a few minutes.*
- *Registration and Sign-Up: The nature of some events require people to pre-register or sign up at the door. The lists generated through such sign-ups can be used later for fundraising purposes or to invite people to other events. However, one must be careful with the use of such lists and take ethical considerations into account.*
- *Badges/ T-shirts for the Volunteers: Benefits of having these are boosting of the workers' morale and an organized look during the event (people know who the workers are). The issue is the cost of the T-shirts. Also remember water for the speaker at the podium.*
- *Relevant posters and banners in and outside the room.*

# HOW TO PLAN A LECTURE FOR A MUSLIM AND NON-MUSLIM AUDIENCE

By KATHERINE BULLOCK

Successful lectures can be a very influential way of changing negative impressions people may have of Islam. However, if not carefully arranged they can also reinforce perceived stereotypes.

Organizing a speech which is suitable for both Muslims and non-Muslims requires a delicate balance between the needs/expectations of Muslims, and the needs/expectations of non-Muslims.

The lecture given by Imam Jamil Al-Amin in Toronto in January 1994 is a good example of an evening which was enjoyed by Muslims, but not by non-Muslims. Much can be generalized from this experience. This section will outline what was good and what the problems were while trying to provide recommendations for the future.

## WHAT WORKED WELL

### Good advertising:

The event was coordinated with non-Muslim groups and was very well advertised, and very well attended (1,400 people). Good advertising is essential for getting people to attend lectures, especially since there is so much on offer that one is competing with many different events;

### Use of the Quran

The opening remarks by the moderator included some beautiful verses from the Qur'an. This is a good way of both reinforcing the faith of the Muslims listening and of letting non-Muslims hear something from the Qur'an which they may not otherwise hear.

### Recommendation:

When opening the meeting with a reading from the Qur'an make sure the verse is translated into English, and make sure the person reading the translation has a very good English pronunciation. Often the Qur'anic reader has a thick accent which obscures the English meaning.

## WHAT DID NOT WORK WELL:

### The Speech Was Not About the Announced Topic:

Advertisements said the Imam was an ex-Black Panther, and would talk about 'Social justice in the Americas.'

One expected a talk about the social injustices suffered by segments of American society (possibly blacks given the speaker's background), what discrimination meant, where it came from, how to change it, and so on. Instead the talk was about the Five Pillars of Islam, and how observing them would lead to justice 'in America.

### Recommendations:

Organizers do not have control over the contents of a lecturer's speech, but since non-Muslims in the audience felt misled by the advertising it is important to know in advance what a speaker will talk about, and advertise accordingly.

## **CATERING TO BOTH MUSLIMS AND NON MUSLIMS**

### **(1) CONTENT OF THE SPEECH**

The content of the Imam's speech was fine for a Muslim audience, since they understand how the Five Pillars of Islam can lead to social justice.

For the non-Muslim audience the relevance was obscure. Telling a non-Muslim to follow the Five Pillars of Islam may be appropriate for a speech entitled "Why be a Muslim?" but not for the advertised topic.

In addition, the Imam mocked Westerners, Jews and Christians, alienating a large part of the audience. He also talked about how in Islam men were above women. Naturally the 'women and Islam' topic is delicate, but comments like that made in passing without the whole Islamic context, reinforces, rather than challenges, the notion that Islam oppresses women.

The content of the speech contradicted the opening address by the moderator, which stressed that we come together as Muslims /non-Muslims to tackle the problem of injustice together.

### **Recommendation**

If the speech is intended to be a multifaith event, ensure the non-Muslims feel respected and included in the speaker's topic. Try to ask a speaker to use gender neutral language when speaking in English. Again, it is difficult to tell a speaker what to say but if there is to be a large non Muslim audience, stress this to the speaker in advance, and insha'Allah, they will take this into account.

### **(11) SEATING PLANS**

The physical seating arrangements is another example of the difficulty of balancing Muslim/non Muslim needs. At the entrance, Muslims directed the audience to "Brothers" and "Sisters" areas. Naturally, Muslims expect this, but it is a shock for Non Muslims, and can reinforce the idea that Islam is an out-of-date religion. Non-Muslims were offended at being given directions to sit in segregated areas.

### **Recommendations:**

Make sure there is a brothers' and sisters' sitting area that is well-marked, and perhaps policed by Muslims to ensure non-Muslims of the young gender don't sit there, but provide an area for mixing couples. Do not direct people at the first entrance. Try and be discreet about the seating arrangements.

### **(111) QUESTION TIME:**

As Muslims, we face the predictable silly/nasty questions from a non Muslim audience that occur so often it can be frustrating.

Sometimes the Imam was impatient with such questions, and his responses seemed rude. For example: He was asked what he thought about the Salman Rushdie affair. His response was "Why should I have an opinion about it, there's been a fatwa." Nothing more was said. From a Muslim point of view this response is understandable. From a non-Muslim point of view, it is an off-putting answer. What is a fatwa? What is a Muslims' relationship to it? Does that make all Muslims obliged to kill Salman Rushdie? and so on.

### **Recommendation:**

Again, organizers have no control over, and are not responsible for, a speaker's answers. However, the moderator is controlling the event, and should keep aware of the flow.

If necessary, a moderator can politely do some damage control without offending a speaker. For example: 'For those of who in the audience who may not know what a fatwa is...? Or invite the speaker to explain. 'Maybe there are people here who do not know what a fatwa is, perhaps you'd be better at explaining that than I...' etc.

**OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS:**

*Knowing who the audience will be is one of the most crucial aspects of a successful event. If the audience is to be mostly Muslim, it is easier. If the audience will be very mixed, it is essential to ensure the speaker is appropriate, that they will be respectful of other people's faiths/ beliefs.*

*Knowing about the speaker. Since the speaker represents Islam for the audience, it is important to know about the speaker, their reputation, their ability, and so on.*

# PROCEDURE TO OBTAIN "PERMISSION" FOR JUMAH PRAYERS

BY: MOHIB DURRANI

This article also applies to other Islamic Observances and Practices: Growing Beards, covering head (men and women), Modesty (Haya)

The need to obtain 'permission' for performing obligatory duties could be easy or difficult, depending on the situation that Allah (swt) places us in.

The various inputs that were received indicate that an informal, low key approach is usually the most effective.

In difficult cases, a formal letter from a qualified attorney may be needed. Of course, *make sure that we makeup all the extra time* that maybe needed to go to the nearest Masjid or prayer place, so that all the time/work required at work/study is accounted for.

A sample standard letter is attached.

In the USA, the Tide VII of the Civil Rights Act (USA) is also *applicable to all aspects of religious observance and Practice*. This implies that there should be no restrictions on Muslims who want to:

- *Grow beards (men)*
- *Cover their heads (Men and Women)*
- *Maintain their modesty (Haya), especially in gymnasiums and in the shower areas [individual enclosures; not 'communal showers'], etc*

The Laws of the country (USA) also 'guarantee' religious freedom. For example, in the United States of America, *Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion*. Under Tide VII, religion is defined to include *all aspects of religious observance and practice, as well as belief*.

*[Editor's note. Canada has even more accommodating "Civil Rights" and "Religious Freedom" policies; make use of them!]*

Our burden in establishing the sincerity of a religious belief is not a heavy one. Some states give a broad definition of creed/ religion which even encompasses nontraditional forms of religion, but does not encompass political philosophies or beliefs. 

This information is usually sufficient for obtaining "permission" in most cases. A draft letter giving this information is attached.

## DEALING WITH PREJUDICED PEOPLE GIVING MUSLIMS A "HARD -TIME":

A separate important issue is with those that are prejudiced against Muslims either from their (die prejudiced "bosses") previous oppression of minority Muslims, or when they come from majority Muslim countries to non -Muslim countries. May Allah (swt) protect us from the prejudiced person, and give guidance to that person, amin.

A tremendous amount of fighting spirit, courage, tact, personal relations with other influential parties, etc. may be required to overcome these defective prejudiced personalities.

This is no way a complete document on the possible solutions that can be sought. With the prayers of all to the ONE CREATOR (ALLAH swt), and with His Help and Guidance, insha'Allah, solutions will become possible and easy.

**A SAMPLE DRAFT LETTER**

This draft letter is for a University and is addressed to the Provost, the person responsible for the academic and other requirements of the students.

It is to be noted that copies were also sent to the Director of Religious Affairs, Foreign Students' Advisor, and die Registrar.

It is to be noted that this letter is from an internal organization (part of the university), with the copies to others. Some background lobbying may also be of use before sending the letter. The following is an example of such a letter which can be addressed to the university.

THE MUSLIM STUDETNS' ASSOCIATION of \_\_\_\_\_  
University Address \_\_\_\_\_ CITY \_\_\_\_\_.

Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Raheem  
(In the Name of Allah, Most Beneficent, Most Merciful)

Dr. \_\_\_\_\_  
Provost of \_\_\_\_\_ University

Address \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Dr. \_\_\_\_\_,  
This letter is to inform you of the difficulty faced by members of the University 'in trying to follow their religious obligations.

The Muslims are required to go to the obligatory weekly Friday (Jumah) prayers, which have been held in \_\_\_\_\_ for over thirty years. The time for the jumah prayers (which takes about an hour) starts just after the sun crosses the zenith and hence is from 12.00 Noon until 2:00 P.M. (taking account of Standard Time and Daylight Saving Time).

There has been a difficulty for the students/staff to attend the jumah prayers since the class schedule has some required and core courses/ labs/ seminars/ meetings scheduled at the above times (12:00 to 2:00 p.m.).

Please 'inform the class/lab./seminar/meeting schedulers to avoid this time so as to avoid conflict with the religious duties of Muslims.

Thank you for your concern for the religious obligations of the \_\_\_\_\_  
University community. Please inform us of the changes being made.  
Sincerely yours,

Name \_\_\_\_\_, President  
Muslim Students' Association \_\_\_\_\_  
University Address \_\_\_\_\_ CITY \_\_\_\_\_

cc. Dr.  
Director of Center for Religion  
Address

Dr.  
Director of International Students Office  
Address

Dr.  
Registrar, Registrars Office  
Address

*An example of successful lobbying can be found within the MSA of Syracuse University. Not only do they have halal food available in their cafeteria, but this year Eid was made a holiday for the **entire university**. **Another example can be found at Carleton University, where many years of persistent hard work led to a very large prayer room & washroom facilities being built for them by the university on campus.***

# THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD KHUTBAHS

BY SUHEIL LAHER

1. The khutbah is an important **"weekly dose" of Islam**, and in fact for many it is the only Islamic contact they have in the entire week. This should be born in mind when delivering a khutbah.
2. **The first essential is to make sure your khutbah satisfies the requirements for a valid khutbah.**

For the sake of exhaustiveness and precaution, you should ensure that the khutbah is valid according to all schools of thought.

This basically involves:

- *Praising Allah (with the words "al-Hamd")*
- *Sending blessings on the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) using the specific words*
- *Ordering people to fear/ obey Allah*
- *Providing both encouragement and warning*

All these should be present in each of the two khutbahs. In addition,

- *At least one of the khutbas should contain a verse of the Qur'an which conveys some message to people, and*
- *The end of the second khutba should include a du'a for Muslim men and women relating to their needs of the Hereafter.*

3. **Make sure you are qualified to give khutbah.** This means you must be able to satisfy all the requirements in (2) -above, as well -as being able to recite the necessary portions of the Quran (in the khutbah and the salah) correctly in Arabic.

4. **The main purposes of the khutbah are to:**

- *remind people of their Islamic duties, and*
- *teach them about their religion*

Topics should be selected with this in mind. Do not talk about highly abstract issues which have little, if any, practical relevance, nor about peripheral issues which are the subject of scholarly disagreement.

- *Stick to practical issues. And facts which scholars and schools of thoughts agree upon.*
- *Make sure you deliver a khutba, as opposed to a lecture.*
- *Refer back to the Qur'an and hadith as far as possible.*
- *Do not philosophize too much.*
- *Recognize the fact that some people will be regularly practicing Muslims while others will not, so try not to address one group to the exclusion of others.*

5. **Some of the suitable topics for the khutbah include:**

- *Fundamental issues of 'Aqidah (doctrine), especially those people may be confused about; those in which it is especially important to maintain our beliefs, such as Finality of Prophethood and the truth about Jesus; the essentials, such as the requirements of faith and the necessity of accepting the Qur'an and Sunnah wholeheartedly; the fact that Islam is the only acceptable religion before Allah, etc*
- *Practical details of Islamic worship: Taharah (Wudu and Ghusl, Salah, Zakah and Fasting).*

- *Rewards and punishments related to the devotions mentioned above.*
- *Good character and morals (e.g. truthfulness, lowering the gaze, politeness) and self purification (eg Avoiding showing off in good deeds, avoiding the doubtful, sticking to the commands of Allah and the prophet).*
- *Relations between Muslims and non Muslims: 1) on the individual level (daw'ah); 2) on the level of nations (importance of maintaining our identity, and relying on Allah and the lawful means to solve our problems).*
- *Supporting our suffering and persecuted Muslim brothers and sisters in other parts of the world (jihad).*

6. As far as possible, **avoid reading** (from a book or paper) **during the khutbah**. Otherwise, you will not have much impact on the congregation. Make sure you prepare well, and speak with emotion, not monotonously. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) used to speak with great feeling and his appearance used to change during the khutbah as if he was warning people of an eminent attack by an army.

7. **Do not make the khutbah too long**, otherwise people will get bored. Try to keep the subject matter focused.

Attempting to cover too much will result in people leaving without taking back a specific message. Remember that the Sunnah is to shorten the khutbah and lengthen the *salah*.

*O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witness to Allah, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor: For Allah can best protect both. Follow not the lusts (of your hearts), lest ye serve, and if ye distort (justice) or decline to do justice, verily Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do. (4:135)*

# BRANCHING OUT: A LOOK AT ACTIVISM BEYOND THE LOCAL LEVEL

## THE VALUE AND NEED OF REGIONAL MSA COUNCILS

By SAMEERA AHMED

*An MSA Council is a representative body of all the MSAs in a given region. The Council's purpose is to provide training for MSA workers, facilitate communication and cooperation between MSAs as well as the local communities.*

### BENEFITS

Having an MSA council is beneficial in terms of exchanging ideas, activities, and resources. For example, often Michigan's MSA Council brought speakers together and split the costs . This enabled the MSA to decrease the financial burden and enabled more students to gain knowledge from the speaker.

### A LINK

An MSA Council serves as the link between the local MSAs and MSA National. Theoretically, the MSAs elect an Amir(a) for the Council and that Amir represents that region for all MSA National activities and decision making processes.

This way, the MSAs not only have a better understanding of what goes on at the National level, but they then also have a greater say in the direction of MSA National.

### STARTING A COUNCIL

Starting an MSA Council, like starting an MSA, is a long and arduous process.

- *Initially, each MSA in the region must be contacted and invited to discuss the possibility of a council.*
- *All MSAs should ensure their representatives take an active role because the beginning meetings are the most crucial and have a lasting impact on the future council.*
- *A Constitution stating the Council's goals and purposes as well as roles and responsibilities should be drafted and approved by all participating MSAs. Often times, it is during this process that many arguments occur. In such a situation it is best to remind everyone the purpose and goal of the MSA Council and Islamic work in general.*

### DEALING WITH PROBLEMS: A SAFETY CLAUSE

It is also important to understand that the MSA Council's representatives may not always agree upon one solution in matters of fiqh.

Therefore, in order to quickly end discussions reaching no agreement and causing fitna amongst the council, the MSA Council of Michigan opted to add a safety clause in its constitution stating that in the event of a major disagreement based on Islamic jurisprudence, it would refer its disagreement to the ISNA Fiqh Council who would make a final decision.

This action was taken to ensure an unbiased decision by individuals who are knowledgeable and dependable. MSA Councils need not necessarily depend on ISNA's Fiqh Council, it was given as an example so that other MSA Councils could incorporate such ideas into their Constitution.

This way any problems can be quickly and effectively , and the council can continue concentrating on meeting the needs of the Muslim students.

### **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

It is also recommended that the Amir(s) of MSA Council is not the Amir(s) of his/her respective MSA. The Amir(s)'s responsibilities will be many and if s/he is responsible for both organizations s/he will be unable to give each responsibility enough time and effort and it is likely that one, if not both organizations may suffer.

### **COMMUNICATION**

Once the Council has formed and has been approved by the respective MSAS, it is importance to maintain communication between the members and the MSAS.

This can be accomplished by regular meetings, setting up e-mail networks, and telephone calls. The increased communication will help ensure better planning and support from the surrounding MSAs whether it be in the form of advice, resources, or attendance.

### **ACTIVITIES OF A COUNCIL**

The activities MSA Council vary from council to council depending on geographic location, the size of the MSA Council, and the make up of the student population.

Some ideas that have been accomplished in the past are:

- *Setting up an MSA scholarship fund (Chicago)*
- *A common MSA Student Day-Planner/ Calendar (Toronto)*
- *Organizing basketball tournaments (Ontario)*
- *Organizing seminars and conferences (MSA council of Michigan)*
- *Workshops to improving MSA workers' leadership skills (Toronto)*
- *Workshops on computer graphics (Michigan)*

The formation of an MSA Council also facilitates activities such as a Media Watch Committee which organizes responses to negative media and initiates political action (Michigan). Activities such as book drives for Muslim universities as well as Eid festivities can also be organized.

It is important to understand that the MSA Council need not always plan activities by itself, but also serve as a vehicle for publicizing events of individual MSAs for the rest of the Muslim community.

### **RESPONSIBILITY TO THE COMMUNITY**

MSA Councils must also understand their responsibilities toward the regional Muslim communities.

In an effort to begin working with the Muslim community at large, MSA Councils such as Michigan's have planned seminars for students and professionals and have helped repair inner city masjids.

It is also important that the MSA Council helps and supports the local youth and their youth council activities.

For example, Michigan's MSA Council has a representative who attends both MSA Council and Michigan Muslim Youth Council meetings and keeps both organizations informed of the others activities. In fact leaders from both organizations are on the others' respective email networks.

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF COUNCIL AND THE NEED TO DEVELOP THEM**

Currently **there** are only a few MSA Councils (Michigan, Boston, Chicago, Toronto, and Washington D.C.).

It is extremely important that MSAs realize the importance of coordination and work together to develop a strong cooperative MSA Council which will help serve the students and the Muslim community in their region.

# **MSA NATIONAL STRUCTURE**

THE MSA OF USA AND CANADA

## **IDEOLOGY**

The MSA bases its conduct on Islam, as embodied in the Qur'an and the Sunnah and accepts Islam as the only true way of life one which can bring happiness and well-being and which can enthuse the world with a spirit of brotherhood and unity.

The best manner in which the MSA, as a body engaged primarily in education, can best make the presence of Islam felt is by presenting Islam not as an isolating but as an integrating force, a way of life that is concerned with the betterment of humanity as a whole irrespective of one's ethnicity, race or nationality.

## **VISION**

To be the medium through which Islam will be the active, progressive force on University and College campuses.

## **MISSION & GOALS**

To seek the pleasure of Allah through *lqamat ad-deen* (establishment of the *deen*) as stated in the Qur'an and Sunnah. To this end, we will:

1. Provide for a systematic program of Islamic education (*tarbiyya*) of Muslim students.
2. Improve communications and coordination among MSAs at all levels.
3. Facilitate the provision of services and resources specifically geared toward the campus community.
4. Develop and maintain a responsive and financially stable organization.
5. Foster a spirit of cooperation, unity and a common sense of purpose among MSAs and with other Islamic organizations, *Insha Allah*.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

Currently the MSA is operating through its Office of Operations in Washington, DC. All correspondence should be directed to:

MSA of USA & Canada  
P.O. Box 18612  
Washington, DC 20036  
Tel (703) 820-7900  
Fax (703) 820-7-888  
E-mail: [org-request@msa-natl.org](mailto:org-request@msa-natl.org)

# **MSA NATIONAL HISTORY**

THE MUSLIM STUDENTS ASSOCIATION OF UNITED STATES & CANADA

## **HISTORY**

The Muslim Students' Association (MSA) of the United States and Canada holds a unique place in the minds of Muslims on this continent and elsewhere.

It had a modest start. On January 1st, 1963, about seventy-five Muslim students, representing nearly ten campus organizations, met at the Urbana campus of the University of Illinois to consider establishing the ~MSA.

There was no money, no plan, no agenda and no future direction. What these students did not lack, however, was the commitment to sacrifice time, money and even their educational plans, if called for, to further the cause of Islam by promoting unity among Muslim students of varied backgrounds, ethnicity and nationalities.

## **THE BEGINNINGS**

By the time MSA held its first convention in the summer of 1963 and adopted a constitution, the number of affiliated chapters had already more than doubled. Muslim organizations on nearly all major campuses followed suit.

It seemed that the MSA had touched a responsive chord among Muslims in North America. For, as the news of the new organizations were moved to join this transitional forum. By the time the MSA initiated and transferred its major functions to the Islamic Society of North America in 1983, the MSA could boast almost 300 student chapters and just about the same number of non- student Muslim communities affiliated with it.

## **ORIGINATING ACTIVITIES**

The MSA originated a number of activities such as conventions and conferences, an Islamic book service, a publishing house, marriage and Hajj facilities, Islamic calendar, re- fixation of the direction of the Kabah, a timetable for Salah at different locations, Qur'anic tapes, Islamic- correspondence course, and children's' camps just to name a few. The MSA also introduced two regular publications, a journal and a monthly newsletter.

Besides, the MSA had been instrumental in establishing professional organizations such as the Association of Muslim Social Scientists, the Association of Muslim Scientists and Engineers and the Islamic Medical Association.

Toward the end of the 1970's it became apparent that a large number of MSA members from overseas had settled down in North America permanently. Moreover, a significant number of American Muslims had also begun to join the MSA individually and organizationally. They were entertaining high hopes about this new organization.

Consequently, pressures started building up within the ranks of the MSA to come up with new programs in order to serve the community which was facing a new set of family-related problems.

This was a painstakingly slow -and tedious process; but various committees involved in this process strongly recommended the formation of a community organization more in tune with the needs of those who had opted to live in this continent.

### **1980s: MSA FOR CAMPUSES**

This is how the Muslim Communities Association (MCA) was born in 1982. A year later, in 1983 MSA gave birth to the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) to be the umbrella of Islamic organizations that sprang from MSA in North America. Thus, this progress gave back MSA its role as a student organization involved mainly on campus.

### **THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF MSA NATIONAL**

For operational efficiency in field work and in reaching out to Muslim communities on campuses and in cities and towns, the MSA works through a system of local, regional and zonal organizations.

**Local:** The chapters of the MSA constitute its backbone. They are the Primary structural and Functional units of the MSA organization. They perform diverse Islamic activities for the benefit of Muslims throughout the continent. For this reason, great emphasis is put on their official affiliation with and active participation in the Association.

The Executive Council's decisions concerning chapter assistance go a long way in guiding them to become useful units of Islamic activity on campuses and in communities.

In addition to holding jumah and Eid prayers, the chapter organizes seminars, conferences and Qur'anic study circles as well as other social activities such as picnics and get togethers.

**Regional:** Each region within the zone has a representative, elected by chapter presidents who serve in the zonal council representing the views of their regions.

In each region, MSA activities are structured to develop the mechanism of inter-chapter coordination and cooperation. Furthermore, the representatives of the Association take an active part in a variety of correctional facilities and participation in local Islamic celebrations and facilities.

**Zonal:** Geographically, the MSA has divided the US and Canada into five zones: East Coast US (four regions), Central Zone (five regions), West Coast (four regions), East Canada (Three regions) and West Canada (two regions). Each zone has a zonal representative who is assisted in his work by the Zonal Council which is composed of regional representatives. The Zonal representative speaks and acts on behalf of his zone in the MSA Executive Committee.

**US EAST ZONE**, including the states of Alabama, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Virgin Island, Virginia, and West Virginia.

**US CENTRAL ZONE** including the states of Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, and Wisconsin.

**US WEST ZONE**, including the states of Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

**CANADA EAST ZONE**, including the provinces of New Brunswick, New Foundland, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, and Quebec,

**CANADA WEST ZONE**, including the provinces of Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan.

The MSA activities at the zonal level are reflected mainly in the decisions of the zonal council meetings and in the follow-up actions resulting therefrom. They are reflected also in the Council's efforts to coordinate interregional activities within its jurisdiction. In recent years, such joint efforts blossomed into summer and winter youth camps in selected locations in the zones.

**Executive Committee:** The MSA conducts its activities through its Executive Committee, elected every two years. It meets at least three times every year and, if necessary, may be summoned into emergency sessions.

# MODELS ON STARTING AN MSA

## STARTING A SECOND MSA!

By FATIMA SADAF SIDDIQUI

When I arrived at this university, I was full of hopes, dreams, and expectations about how wonderful it would be to get involved in the MSA. I had been active in MYNA and thought it would be an easy transition.

That was far from the case, unfortunately. There were many problems and irreconcilable differences that led to the formation of another Muslim group on campus. This was the unavoidable result of years of unsuccessful attempts to overcome the differences.

### THE PROBLEMS

The problems we faced with the previous organization were not uncommon. Does this sound familiar?

- *Sisters were not allowed to participate in the organization. Anyone not from a certain part of the world did not feel welcome.*
- *No Shura system was implemented*
- *The community controlled the organization*
- *There was no tolerance for difference of opinion*

These problems prevail in MSA's throughout North America. Alhamdulillah, many are overcoming their problems to successfully practice and spread the *deen* of Allah (SWT).

### WORKING WITH THE OTHER ORGANIZATION:

Initially, for my first years on campus, we tried to work with the other organization. *Alhamdulillah*, we accomplished a lot.

Even though it seemed that things were going well, the problems still existed. The organization itself was not doing Anything.

The executive just made all of the decisions but contributed no effort. They came in the way of the Islamic work, may Allah (swt) forgive them. Only a few people were doing all of the work and the cabinet was just objecting to it.

### ATTEMPTS TO RESOLVE THE CONFLICTS

The executive of the organization was a mess. No one agreed with anyone else and the only thing that was ever accomplished was argument.

We needed to do something if we wished to continue the Islamic work on Campus. What did we do?

- *We organized a meeting with the other organization and respected scholars from the community ... but it only ended up with them insulting everyone for not thinking like them.*

- *We tried to talk to the cabinet of the organization ... but the only one they listened to was their Imam ... the meetings ended up in argument*
- *We rewrote the constitution, in order to solve some of the problems, and presented it to them ... but they just disregarded it and said they would change it themselves ... they never did.*

All of our attempts to work with them were unsuccessful. They did not want to change and we could not do anything to change them ... no matter how hard we tried.

## **WE STARTED AGAIN**

Most of the Islamic work (such as daw'ah') was being done by the Pakistani Students Association (PSA,) on campus.

The people, upon getting disillusioned with the other organization, started to get involved in the PSA and began working, Islamically, through it. If the other organization had a problem with doing something, the PSA would take care of it.

This was working well, *Alhamdulillah*, but many people from other backgrounds were turned off by the fact that it was a Pakistani organization.

We had raised a lot of money, *Alhamdulillah*, through our efforts in the PSA. Also, we had gained recognition on campus and were better able to work for Allah (SWT).

Since the PSA was doing mainly Islamic work, had funds to do it (it was a cultural organization and was, thus, funded by the school), had a dedicated group of workers, and the intention to please Allah (SWT), we decided to change the constitution of the PSA in order to make it an Islamic Organization.

After getting nowhere with the other organization, the steps we took were:

1. We came up with a constitution that would include a system of Shura, positions for sisters, and no community interference
2. We presented this constitution to the organization's members
3. The members voted on whether or not they wanted to change and accept the new constitution ... it was accepted
4. We submitted the new constitution to the university and they reviewed it and after a while decided to accept it

Instead of the PSA, we are now the Islamic Society, *Alhamdulillah*. We are registered as a cultural organization [for funding reasons]. Our organization consists of brothers *and* sisters, and students from Malaysia, Pakistan, the Middle East, and America.

## **HINTS FOR SUCCESS**

- *Your intention should be to please Allah (swt), not power or greed. Always respect other people's opinions*
- *Only attempt this as a last attempt, when nothing else seems to work – Support from other Muslim students is necessary*
- *Consider the consequences of your actions*
- *Never do conflicting activities*
- *Do not isolate any group of people*
- *Support the other group ... work together whenever possible*

May Allah (SWT) guide and forgive those that have been misguided, and help those who attempt to spread His deen and practice it in this society.

# **STARTING AN MSA: BRANDEIS**

BY MOHAMMED N. BATTLA

## **1. HOW TO GET STARTED**

### **A) CONTACTING MUSLIMS**

The first thing that I did after deciding to establish an MSA was to get in touch with all of the Muslims that I knew and ask them

1. if they were interested and
2. if they knew any other Muslims on campus

### **B) FINDING A COMMITTED, CORE, FINDING THE MUSLIMS!**

After having found a good core group of Muslim students who seemed interested in starting an MSA I went to work in trying to find all of the Muslims on campus.

On the Brandeis campus the health center keeps a card on file for every student that also indicates their religious preference in case a religious person is needed to say the last rites or to say a burial prayer.

At Brandeis there were 5000 of these cards that we had to sort through but after it was over we found that there were over 50 Muslim students on campus. Going to the Chaplains (i.e. Rabbis and priests ) is also a great way to get a hold of a list of Muslim students on campus. The University generally distributes a list of the incoming freshman's religious preference to these groups.

### **C) BECOMING OFFICIAL**

Now that we had a core group of Muslims with which to work with, we went before the student senate with our freshly written constitution.

However, I suggest that for convenience you obtain a model constitution from the MSA Net.

Once we were chartered by the Senate and became a legitimate club, we were now eligible for allocations, a mailbox, an office and several other benefits.

I strongly recommend that you establish yourselves as a University affiliated organization. This will allow you to be able to post signs, get funding hold meetings on University property, and be included in University publications such as mailing lists, the year book and the freshman orientation guidebook. The latter two are invaluable for letting incoming freshman know that your group exists and how to get a hold of you.

### **D) THE CHALLENGE OF REGULAR MEETINGS**

Once we were chartered, we began meeting weekly on Monday nights. This is probably one of the biggest and trickiest areas that we had to deal with.

Getting people to come to the meeting was a real pain. Even though they were really interested in the MSA, it was still like pulling teeth- To overcome this we made really great flyers from Islamic images that we got from various ftp.

The flyers plus at least 2 phone calls per week really helped to get things going but it required a great deal of work. I discovered that the *most* important job is that of the Secretary. Arguably, not even the

President is as important, and the best and hardest worker should always be put in this position no matter what.

#### **E) NETWORKING WITH OTHER GROUPS**

We began to let various groups around the campus know that we were now an active part of the Brandeis community and we began to regularly attend their meetings.

However, we tried as hard as we could to not let anyone who was not Muslim attend any of our meetings due to the fact that we did not know where we were going with this group and we only wanted to present a strong unified image to the campus.

#### **F) DETERMINING OUR MSA'S DIRECTION**

The next step was for us to decide what direction we wanted the club to go. Did we want it to be more of a political organization that would respond back to the negative propaganda that some of the more radical Jewish organizations were issuing; or did we want it to be a club that was strictly religious and would only meet for the purposes of prayers, Ramadan, and some speeches?

We decided that we would be a strictly religious club until we got our feet under us and then afterwards we could become more of a political force, debating bringing speakers and such.

I strongly recommend not biting off more than you can chew. Because we were so small and disorganized, **the** most important thing for us to do was to develop a sense of unity and brotherhood amongst ourselves.

So for the first 4 months we simply met every Monday night and talked about whatever we felt was relevant at the time.

#### **G) ESTABLISHING OUR MEETINGS**

Our meetings generally began with us taking care of any business, ie. any new Muslims that we had met, ideas and suggestions, funding books etc.

Then we would pick a topic about which we were curious and then go around the room and discuss it. For instance, one night we talked about women in Islam, another night we talked about how Islam was spread by the sword in some instances and by the pen in others. Later we began to have Qur'anic discussions after we got copies of the Qur'ans for everyone in the group.

#### **H) JOINING THE MSA NETS**

This is probably the best thing you can do!

There are so many people out there who have gone through the same things that you are going through now. They have the answers to almost everything that you can think of.

They know where to get free Qur'ans, they know who to contact for discounted books, they know how to talk to people, they know how to get speakers and they can tell you which ones are the best for which topics. We could never have gotten as far as we did without them.

They also provide a big spiritual boost. When things get down (and believe me they will!!!!!!) it's very good to know that there are thousands of other Muslims out there in cyberspace that you can lean on for help and advice.

#### **I) GETTING FUNDING FROM THE UNIVERSITY**

Allocations: the key to getting money at Brandeis University from the Allocations Board is to impress them *before* you go to them for money.

If they think that you are serious about your club they will be far more inclined to give you money. They gave us 400 dollars for Qur'ans, 200 for hadiths, 100 dollars for prayer rugs, and another 100 for magazine and newspaper subscriptions.

Understand, for the Student Senate to give 800 *dollars* to a brand-new organization was unheard of. They did it only because they thought that we were serious about this club.



### **THE OVERALL EXPERIENCE**

Overall, founding an MSA at Brandeis was a very rewarding exercise although it was, and still is, exceptionally trying at times, but the key to it is:

#### *1) Don't get discouraged*

I read a great deal about the trials of the Prophet (saw) during the early Meccan period in order to get inspiration and figured if he (saw) could go through all of the trials of prophethood, the least I could do was to set up an MSA.

#### *2) Don't try to do it all yourself*

This is the mistake that I made in the beginning. I thought that if I did not do it, it would not get done right or not get done at all.

But what happened is that I became very frustrated. No one was learning to do the work and they were all depending on me to get everything done. Worst mistake that I ever made in my whole life! I-let others help you.

#### *3) Make sure that your club is a religious organization*

Make sure that you hold at least the Jum'a Salat on campus, or at least travel together to where it is held.

This is very important. We tend to get caught up in the club and forget what we are doing this for in the first place.

Bill Clinton used to keep a sign in office while running for President that said "Its the economy Stupid!!!" We should all put up a sign in our offices saying "Its for Allah" just to keep us focused on the purpose.

Besides, prayer offers a great opportunity to let everyone in the group get together for just a little while. It also breaks up the day and makes it easier to get through. Especially if you as Muslims are in the great minority at your campus, prayer is a wonderful way to keep you sane in this insane society.

# **STARTING AN MSA ON A SMALL CAMPUS**

*MSA Rollins had quite a battle in getting recognized as a campus group, but the experience strengthened their organization...*

BY ZAIBA MALIK

For us, starting an MSA on campus was quite a hurdle. Although our college is the oldest college in the state of Florida, until 1994 there was no MSA chapter. It was in fact a non Muslim friend who suggested and really pushed us to start an MSA.

## **NEED AND ENIRONMENT**

We felt there was a need for an MSA because, basically, the majority of students at our school had no concept of Islam or Muslims. At the time the Muslim day students numbered only six.

There were more Muslims yet they attended the evening school and were basically unable to attend any functions during the day. Being so few in number, our primary goal was to introduce Islam to our campus and clear up misconceptions.

## **SCHOOL STRUCTURE**

Our school is structured in such a way that at the top sits the Student Government Association (SGA) and under it are various other organizations, one being Cultural Action Committee (CAC). Our non Muslim friend was chair of CAC, which overran all the other major minority organizations.

## **GETTING RECOGNIZED**

The first task was to formally become part of the Cultural Action Committee, through an amendment to the constitution. Another sister and I, were already involved with CAC through various other organizations, and when this prospect was introduced at the CAC meeting all groups represented voiced unanimous approval and support.

After finding two senators to write and sponsor a bill, we then planned to introduce this item to the Senate floor. The night before the student newspaper deadline, I received a phone call and was asked about the purpose of our organization and told that some students were objecting and stating that instead of a Muslim Students' Association, we should name our group Arab Students' Association.

## **IDENTITY AND PURPOSE: WHAT IS THE MSA?**

I told the editor that the purpose of our organization was to present Islamic culture, history, and life and to clear up misconceptions on this campus. By being called Arab Students Association, we would in fact be promoting a common misconception, and be limiting the membership of the group. I reiterated the point that all Muslims were not Arabs and all Arabs were not Muslims.

The next day the paper came out and there was opposition from some members of Campus Crusade for Christ.

## **CLARIFYING OUR POSITION THROUGH STUDENT MEDIA**

After the paper came out, we, as a group decided to submit articles for the next edition to clarify our goals and gain support for the Senate hearing. That edition of the paper was a huge success. There were

three articles in our favor, one consisted of an editorial supporting our endeavors. The Muslim students then proceeded to call all Senate members to clarify our position and seek support at the Senate meeting.

The night of the Senate hearing there was quite a bit of tension and anticipation. The Muslim students, our advisor, and our non-Muslim friends all attended the meeting to show our support. After the Senate was called to order and our bill introduced there was much discussion on the matter.

### **OPPOSITION FROM WITHIN: THE STUDENT COUNCIL**

Ironically, the Vice President of Student Government is also President of Campus Crusade for Christ and felt "that promoting a purely religious group would be dangerous to the purpose of CAC."

Campus Crusade for Christ members also attended the meeting and they tried to call a vote to add their name on our bill. Obviously the senators who wrote our bill saw this as hostile and adamantly opposed this proposition.

At this point we knew that if the Christian group were written onto our bill, we would have no chance of being approved by CAC. Fortunately, the senators voted against this issue as they wanted to make sure we received a fair chance and equal opportunity. After the CAC chair, our advisor and some members of the MSA were called on to speak on our behalf, a vote was called. Alhumdulillah, there was unanimous approval of our bill, and we were granted membership into CAC.

### **THE POLITICS OF APPROVAL: THE NEED FOR A PRESENCE ON CAMPUS**

Unfortunately, there was a lot of politics involved in our gaining approval into the student government. But we as a group really pulled our resources and fought for our goals.

I truly believe that it is important for Muslims to be involved in other activities and groups on campus. Because two Muslims were already active members of Cultural Action Committee, we were able to gain support and help from CAC. Also being on the editorial staff of our school newspaper, I was able to make sure articles representing our views were printed and was able to gain support from the editor-in-chief, by communicating our side of the issue..

I feel it is important to realize that **it doesn't take hundreds of people to start an MSA~, rather, a handful of dedicated and committed individuals can do so.**

Masha'Allah, we have been very active and proved ourselves to both student government and the college.

A significant achievement of our group is the active membership of both Muslims and non Muslims.

### **PROJECTS**

- *Our projects have included hosting theme nights, which are comprised of cultural dinners focusing on particular Islamic countries and discussing the role of Islam in these countries as well as their politics, art and history.*
- *Participating in Islam Awareness Week and hosting a week full of activities and lectures on our campus was a great experience for us and really publicized our group.*
- *Articles are submitted regularly to the school newspaper on topics such as Ramadan, Eid, and the Bosnia situation.*
- *We petitioned and initiated an Arabic course to be taught at our school (the course is currently in its second semester).*
- *Presently, we are collecting textbooks from students and faculty to be donated to a Syrian University. This project has received enormous support from faculty and various departments, as they continue to send boxes of books. (MSA pays the postage to Washington DC and then the United Nations has agreed to provide postage and handling by delivering the books to the University).*

## **MAINTAINING MOMENTUM THROUGH ACTIVITIES**

I think it is important, once MSA gets established to keep the momentum going by planning and carrying out various activities.

Once the MSA showed that it was impacting the campus, we gained widespread -support from both faculty and students.

## USEFUL TIPS ON STRTING AN MSA

1. Why should your MSA be recognized by the student union?
2. How to Ratify your MSA with the Student Union
3. Tips on How to Maintain an MSA

BY WAEL HADDARA

### WHY SHOULD YOUR MSA BE RECOGNIZED BY THE STUDENT UNION?

#### 1. TO GET FINANCIAL SUPPORT

- *Part of your tuition fees are given by the university to the Student Union. What you get as financial support from the Student Union is just a part of your (already paid) fees.*
- *You are NOT getting or begging for extra money or money that does not belong to you. If you don't claim your money, another club will.*

#### 1. TO BE ABLE TO USE UNIVERSITY FACILITIES:

- *Book rooms for lectures, meetings, etc...*
- *Get special student rates as a recognized club (may even get rooms free)*
- *Use athletic facilities for members; eg men's only / women's only swimming*

#### 3. TO BE RECOGNIZED BY THE UNIVERSITY AS THE OFFICIAL MUSLIM STUDENT BODY:

Lobby/ negotiate privileges for Muslim students, such as:

- *Being excused from class at Jum'a time*
- *Rescheduling evening classes during Ramadan*
- *Affect positively the university's policy*

### HOW TO RATIFY YOUR MSA WITH THE STUDENT UNION

1. Get clubs information package from the Student Union
2. Find list of items needed for a club to be ratified
  - *Minimum number of members*
  - *Minimum number of executives needed*
  - *Types of members allowed (grad, under grad, faculty, staff)*
  - *Constitution/ charter*
3. Get at least the minimum number of members required to sign up
4. Call a general body meeting ( people who signed up)
5. Elect executives, ratify constitution
6. Fill in club registration form and hand it in to the Student Union by due date

### TIPS ON HOW TO MAINTAIN AN MSA

- *It is important to maintain if not increase MSA membership.*
- *At the beginning of the school year, make the MSA as visible as possible.*

**Below are a few suggestions :**

1. Make posters of prayer times, locations etc. and put them all over campus

- 2 If possible, take out an ad in the student paper (this may be done free)
- 3 Have "Frosh Week" (Orientation Week) activities
- 4 Post a banner outside a university building -with an interesting message (in some universities this may not be allowed)
- 5 Be visible at pre-registration
- 6 Make sure the MSA is listed in the Student Union publications of clubs
- 7 Try to get an MSA insert sent out to Muslim students in registration packages.