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A Profile of the Middle Eastern/Muslim Community at the University of Virginia: Resources, Concerns, and Recommendations

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**A Profile of the Middle Eastern/Muslim Community at the University of Virginia:
Resources, Concerns, and Recommendations**

INTRODUCTION. Education concerning the history of one's surroundings is an essential step to becoming an active member of one's community. I am originally Middle Eastern and upon entering the University of Virginia realized that a written compilation of this particular minority community's history and resources was not accessible. The purpose of this paper is to provide a portrait of the Middle Eastern community at UVa, from the issues facing students, to the numerous ways they continue to engage and serve the greater University. Although the discussion is centered around UVa, as the number of Middle Eastern students in higher education continues to increase, a trend of similar concerns and modes of engagement across universities emerges.

This paper outlines the history of resources available for Middle Eastern and Muslim students at the University of Virginia, and attempts to create a profile of what the community has looked like throughout the years. It then assesses the most common concerns throughout the community and policy recommendations. It concludes with ideas for where further research of this community can continue.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION. Two main points of background information must be noted before commencing this paper. Firstly, the term, "Middle East" most commonly refers to the region from Morocco to Afghanistan. Secondly, there is an important distinction between Middle Eastern students and Muslim students. Because the populations within universities are small and interconnected, I will use the term MEMs (Middle Eastern/Muslim students) to reference the general community; however, Islam is a religion and Middle Eastern is a culture.

I feel that this research topic poses a significant question because of the lack of institutional memory, and methods to attain it, within the MEMs community at UVa. Many other minority communities that receive administrative support (Asian, Asian-American, Latino,

Latin-American, etc.) have a means of understanding their communities holistically through statistics found on admissions applications. The University, following the lead of the Common Application and United States Census, does not have “Middle Eastern” as an answer students can select when submitting their applications under the question “Race or Ethnicity.” The latest application listed the following category: “White (including Middle Eastern).” Because of this, it is almost impossible to gain an accurate read on the composition of the Middle Eastern community.

RESOURCES. This section is divided into the available histories of MEMs’: (1) Contracted Independent Organizations (CIOs) & Student Community; (2) Administrative support; (3) Relationship with the Charlottesville community.

(1) CIOs & Student Community

The purpose of discussing the CIOs in this fashion is to provide a profile of the size of the community, as well as the predominant interests. Most of the organizations aim to promote the culture and history of the Middle East, whereas others serve an administrative function and aim to provide resources for MEMs. There are 7 predominant MEMs CIOs: Arab Student Organization (ASO), Students for Peace and Justice in Palestine (SPJP), Persian Cultural Society (PCS), Afghan Student Association (ASA), KOMAK, Muslim Student Association (MSA), and Middle Eastern Leadership Council (MELC). MEMs are involved in many organizations across universities, but these CIOs are specifically targeted to appeal to those who find a sense of support through cultural connection with similar students.

In this section, I will begin with each organization's stated mission as found on the *AtUVA*¹ site and then provide, from my experiences working within the MEMs community, any relevant external information concerning each.

- “The Arab Student Organization is a social and cultural organization for all students to learn and be a part of the Arab culture at UVA. This includes cultural activities such as our annual show *Layaleena*, as well discussions and meetings that help spread the word about the richness of Arab culture. Also, ASO provides an environment for Arab or Arab American students to also feel that they can connect with other students like them and their heritage.”
 - This is a predominantly social and cultural organization with membership ranging from around 10-30 students.
- “The Afghan Student Association is a cultural organization created to promote awareness about Afghan culture at the University, as well as to aid Afghan students in their stay at UVa. We also aim to work cohesively with other organizations and bring together the Afghans in the Charlottesville community.”
 - The Afghan student community is one of the smaller ones within the MEMs community at UVa, and the organization is composed of around 7 students. They plan cultural programs.
- “Students for Peace and Justice in Palestine meets regularly with the purpose of disseminating information about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and about the Palestinian culture. We are dedicated to doing this as professionally and responsibly as possible: the information we spread will be well-supported by facts...We will not adopt a platform, but

¹ AtUVA is a website that compiles a list of all CIOs at UVa: <http://atuva.student.virginia.edu/>.

instead will focus on spreading information and ideas in order to promote awareness and action towards justice, with a special focus on the often overlooked and misrepresented plight of the Palestinian people.”

- SPJP is more of a political organization – it focuses on spreading awareness about the situation in Palestine and fundraising for various relief NGOs.
- “This [Muslim Students Association] is a great opportunity to not only learn more about Islam, but also to meet new people and become part of the Muslim Community here at UVA. We have a variety of activities planned including Islamic discussions, workshops, bowling, outdoor sports, brunches, speakers, & Community potlucks.”
 - The MSA has the largest number of active members from all of the MEMs CIOs. It works very closely with the Muslim community in Charlottesville, maintaining close ties with the local mosque.
 - There is also a meditation/prayer room located in Pavilion VIII that is open for students to use during the day. Muslims pray 5 times a day, and this room gets used very regularly and has been a vital resource.
- “The Persian Cultural Society is a volunteer organization that brings together people interested in Persian culture, history, and language. Among its objectives are the sponsoring of Persian social and cultural activities and events in order to promote an understanding of Persian culture, foster friendship among different cultural groups, and provide a source of union and support for the Persian community at the University of Virginia.”

- At this point, PCS does not hold general body meetings, but they plan and organize events to bring together the Persian community. Their main program is “Iran Day” held in the spring.
- “The major aim and purpose of Komak is to provide academic guidance and support through Mentorship and Sponsorship. It is meant to aid the students through their academic rigors. This aid is directed toward for students living with a Middle Eastern, South Asian, and North African cultural perspective or interest in such. Komak encourages the unity of ethnicities, cultures, age groups, and other possible groupings to act in support of academic and intellectual growth.”
 - Komak deactivated in the spring of 2010, after it had considered shifting to focus more on other forms of community service (such as working with the International Rescue Committee). There have been conversations concerning reactivation as a sub-committee under MELC (see below) or PCS.
- “The Middle Eastern Leadership Council is a working group bringing together leaders of the different Middle Eastern student organizations on Grounds. Its goals are to facilitate communication and exchange of ideas among the various organizations; to coordinate scheduling of events and activities; and to collaborate where possible on worthy projects.”
 - MELC is the umbrella group for all of the aforementioned CIOs – it was created in spring 2008 to bring together MEMs CIOs and serve as a platform for reaching out to the greater UVa and Charlottesville communities, as well as to be the liaison between the MEMs community and the administration. It is composed of the ASO, SPJP, PCS, ASA, KOMAK, with the MSA as an honorary (non-voting)

member. After its formation it applied for and was selected to be the first non-founding member of the Minority Rights Coalition (the umbrella organization for the Black Student Alliance, Latino Student Alliance, Asian Student Union, Queer Student Union, Feminism is for Everyone, and American Indian Student Union).

- The Middle Eastern Mentoring Program (MEMP) is not an official CIO because it began in the fall of '08 as a project under MELC, with support from the Office of the Dean of Students (which will be discussed in the following section). MEMP reaches out to incoming first-year Middle Eastern students and pairs them with upperclassmen to help with adapting to a university atmosphere.

Due to the unavailability of statistics of incoming MEMs, it has been extremely difficult to gather a holistic profile of the student community. From personal experience, the minimum number of active MEMs students in each academic class or year at UVa (excluding the Turkish student community, who do not self-identify as MEMs) has been around 70-80. Currently, the MEMs community is working to create an alumni network. We anticipate similar problems to finding and disseminating information to alumni as we did in our first-year and prospective student outreach.

However, we have been able to find two alumni who we believe were at the University the earliest. Iran-born Jamshid Bakhtiar was a football player who earned All-America honors in 1957.

I was able to get in contact with Dr. As'ad M. Masri, MD who received his B.S. from the University of Cincinnati in 1958 and attended UVa for Medical school from 1958-1962. He completed his residency at UVa, and later became a professor as well as the Chief Resident in the Department of Psychiatry. He was at the University when the decision was made to bring in

women and in conversations with him, he discusses how much he enjoyed his experience at UVa. He also became a member of the Raven Society in 1991. Most recently, MELC has created the “Dr. As’ad M. Masri Distinguished Fourth-Year Award” in his honor to recognize a fourth-year who has served the MEMs community throughout their time at UVa.

(2) Administrative Support

In the spring of 2008, two third-year students (Nadine Natour ’09 and Manal Tellawi ’09) came together to set up a meeting with Dean Leonard Perry, of ODOS. The purpose of this meeting was to bring together students who were interested in assessing the status and needs of the Middle Eastern (ME) community as well as institutionalizing ME support from ODOS.² This was largely student-initiated, but Dean Perry had an interest in establishing an internship program for ME³ students, with the Middle Eastern Studies department. I was in attendance of the first meeting on April 17, 2008. The meeting highlighted the main issues concerning the ME community at that point, as well as, understanding our ideal vision of what the end goals for the ME community would be.

The main issues, as presented in April 2008:

- I. There is little to no recognition that the ME community exists by the UVa community:
 - a. The Admissions Office provides no box (under the “Race or Ethnicity” category) to indicate ME descent;
 - b. There is an increased marginalization and invisibility of ME students and their concerns – (ME is a minority within the greater minority community).
- II. Misconceptions and stereotypes concerning the community are prevalent:

² MELC was being formed by the same students at this time. MELC has maintained a close relationship to ODOS.

³ Initially, support was aimed at specifically Middle Eastern students, but over time ODOS has formed stronger ties with the Muslim Student Association.

- a. Students are poorly educated on the Middle East as a region (students often don't know where countries are or how to relate when meeting someone who says they are Middle Eastern);
 - b. ME students feel pressure to disprove stereotypes at UVa and that they are constantly fighting a larger battle of disproving stereotypes (in lieu of the increasing stigmas against Middle Easterners after September 11, 2001).
- III. ME students are confused on how to balance between the greater UVa community and ME sub-communities:
- a. Should the minority reach out to the "majority?" Is that the case?
 - b. How can ME students find the happy medium between involvement in both UVa-wide groups and ME groups?

The ideal ME community, as presented in April 2008 centered around:

- I. Recognition of the ME community (increase visibility, voice, and strength);
- II. An improved regard with which the activities of ME organizations are held;
- III. Education and awareness to improve perceptions of Middle Easterners and disprove stereotypes;
- IV. Increased outreach, to reach a happy medium, between the ME community and the greater UVa community;
- V. Increased first-year and prospective student support (peer mentoring initiatives, etc.);
- VI. Increased resources for student-leaders and members of organizations to access (institutional memory, training, etc.).

When students returned in the fall of '08, Dean Perry had left UVa, and Phoebe Haupt-Cayasso took on the communities he had worked with (Hispanic/Latino, Middle Eastern, and American Indian students) under the title "Multi-Cultural Programming Coordinator." She facilitated the internship program for the ME community (a 3-credit internship with ODOS and the Middle Eastern/South Asian Studies Department), and throughout the year also integrated Muslim affairs into resources and support provided by ODOS. The MEMs community was also allocated a \$2,000 budget from ODOS. The presidents of the Middle Eastern Leadership Council and the Middle Eastern Mentoring Program would meet with the Program Coordinator to figure out how best to distribute the budget to the MEMs community. This also created institutionalized support and a greater connection between MELC and ODOS.

When MELC joined the MRC in 2008, it was invited to Leadership 2008, and has been invited to this conference ever since. The "Leadership 2k" program is hosted by the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs. It brings together student-leaders from major organizations at UVa to build personal relationships before the academic year, when they will be working together professionally. It also introduces students to many administrators and resources at UVa that they may not have been able to interact with previously (such as the Police Department, Student Affairs, the Provost, etc.).

In addition, MELC and MEMP's relationship with ODOS has helped with the issue of first-year outreach. During the summer of 2009, MELC and MEMP were granted access to the list of incoming students who marked "African/African-American," "Asian/Asian-American," or "Other" on their applications. These were then cross-referenced with the "Parents Country of Origin" category, to find those from Middle Eastern origins. In addition to this, MELC was able to pull the list of international students enrolling from countries in the Middle East/North Africa

region. MELC then sent welcome emails with information about the various MEMs organizations, resources, academic programs, student-leaders, etc. to the incoming students and provided them the option of enrolling in MEMP. ODOS continues to help work on the issue of consolidating a list of incoming ME students, to help with first-year outreach.

ODOS has also provided support for MEMs on a case-by-case basis, such as in response to incidents of hate-speech.

(3) Relationship with the Charlottesville Community

There are many refugees and immigrants from the Middle East in Charlottesville, and quite a few who work at the University. However, a formalized relationship between them and MEMs does not exist. Rather, the MEMs relationship with the Charlottesville community centers around the Charlottesville Masjid (mosque). The Charlottesville Masjid is currently a small house, located at 118 10 1/3 Street SW. Over the past few years community members have worked to raise money for the construction of a new mosque in the area, because of the growing Muslim population in Charlottesville. After much effort, including planning fundraisers in Northern Virginia, they were able to complete construction of the new mosque. More information about the community can be found here: <http://www.charlottesvillemasjid.org/>; and more information about the new, three-story mosque, which will also serve as a community center, can be found here: http://www.charlottesvillemasjid.org/masjid_proj.pdf. The relationship is highlighted further in the interviews with Dr. Aliaa Khidr and Dr. Emaad Abdel Rahman.

INTERVIEWS

These interviews were conducted with administrators and community members in Charlottesville. The interviewees have been actively involved both with the students and with the greater MEM community and had much insight into the concerns that have been surrounding

MEMs for years. It is important to note that the interviewees are valuable resources that can provide context to incidents as well as positive approaches to change.

I. Interview with Dean Allen Groves, Dean of Students, Office of the Dean of Students

➤ Concerning ODOS support for MEMs

When Dean Allen Groves came to the University in '07, ODOS had resources for support to all students, but nothing was designated, or made public, to MEMs specifically (through the website and other venues). There was a Dean for Hispanic/Latino students and one for Asian/Asian-American students. Then he had conversations about providing designated support to other student communities, namely American Indian and Middle Eastern. ODOS decided this would fall under the position for Hispanic/Latino students, because the dean had more capacity to take on providing services to those communities. Leonard Perry, the Associate Dean of Students in ODOS during that time (early '08) was working with some Middle Eastern/Muslim students to bring together the community and provide resources. He left in the summer of '08 and Phoebe Haupt-Cayasso (who had held the position for the Hispanic/Latino services in ODOS a few years prior) returned to ODOS to work with Multicultural Student Services (encompassing Hispanic/Latino, Middle Eastern/Muslim, and American Indian students). In addition, Patricia Lampkin, Vice President and Chief Student Affairs Officer, allocated funding to ODOS for minority communities. Previously, those funds had been divided equally between the Asian/Asian-American community and the Hispanic/Latino community. There was an increase in funding and allocation changed - it was the first time money had been allocated to the American Indian and Middle Eastern/Muslim communities. Phoebe Haupt-Cayasso met with representatives from each community to see what the financial needs were, and these were

presented to Dean Groves. Money was then allocated - around \$2000 for the Middle Eastern/Muslim communities, and some more would be made available if necessary.

I asked him why resources of support started being given to these communities. He said that even though historical issues were different, with respect to the African/African-American communities, it can still be challenging to be different in a community where people have different life experiences. So the question became how to provide a support base for students, especially because American Indian and Middle Eastern/Muslim communities are very small, thus the ways to connect with other students of that background is limited. He views it as the “best of both worlds.” MEMs have the option of connecting, to the extent that they want, to the resources and communities made available through ODOS. At the same time, they have access to the rest of UVa. They have the opportunity to feel supported, if and when they find their own niche in other places. He also used the term “safe spaces” to describe the environment created. He then discussed the peer advising offered by the organizations that work with ODOS. Originally, such services started with the Office of African and African-American Affairs, but they have spread to the communities ODOS works with. The money provided through ODOS also helps facilitate these programs.

II. Interview with Dean Gregory Roberts, Dean of Admissions, Office of Admissions

➤ Concerning “Middle Eastern” as a racial category in admissions

Dean Gregory Roberts is the Dean of Undergraduate Admissions. I met with him during the spring of 2009. To apply to UVa students submit through the Common Application, but the Office of Admissions also sends out a supplemental form. In the interview I asked if it would be possible to include “Middle Eastern” as a race on the supplemental form (as it includes demographic questions), because of the importance of getting statistics on the number of ME

students at UVa. He said that the University uses federal guidelines when it comes to requesting the race of an applicant. He did express an interest in seeking creative ways to find a solution. One such idea was to request this information when prospective students complete an admissions tour and fill out “interest cards.” He said they might be able to find a way to match these cards with applicants who are accepted. The Common Application currently includes the following listing: White (including Middle Eastern), which still makes it very difficult to seek out these students.

III. Interview with Aliaa Khidr, Faculty Lecturer, Curry School & Community

Member, Charlottesville Masjid (Mosque)

➤ Concerning MEMs and the Charlottesville Muslim community

Aliaa Khidr is a faculty lecturer in the Curry School and is very involved in the Charlottesville Masjid, and the Muslim student community. She has been a member of the Charlottesville Muslim community for around 14 years.

She began by highlighting that the majority of students who identify as both Muslim and Middle Eastern are international graduate students, especially within the school of medicine. She then went on to describe the situations of Muslim students and how it has changed over the years. She said that when she first came to the University, prior to September 11, 2001 (which led to an increase stigmatization of Middle Eastern and Muslim Americans), students were more public about being Muslim because they had more pride in their faith. The students also had a very strong presence and bond with not only the Charlottesville community, but also the University community – because they did not have the impression that there was negative attention surrounding Muslims. She said students after 9/11 felt persecuted, and there was no support offered to them by the administration. Other students would antagonize them, such as

asking if their VISA papers were correct. She also believes the hardships for Muslim students have increased, but students have learned to deal with the negativity.

With respect to the Muslim community now, she feels the size of the student community is the same, but there is an increase in the size of the Charlottesville Muslim community. She also has noticed a more positive turn around lately from the administration.

IV. Interview with Emaad Abdel Rahman, Associate Professor, Department of Medicine (Nephrology Division) & Head Imam (Mosque Leader)

➤ Concerning MEMs and the Charlottesville Muslim community

Dr. Rahman has been involved with the University and the Charlottesville Muslim community for 15 years (since 1996). Although there are no official statistics, he said that the number of Muslim students attending the University has not seemed to change throughout the years, remaining at around 250-300 active students. The Muslim community in Charlottesville has grown dramatically, as 15 years ago there were around 500-600, and now there are around 2500-3000 (due to an influx in refugees and some professionals). He also made the distinction between *total Muslim students* and *active Muslim youth*, which he defined as those involved in the Muslim Students Association and/or mosque. He said there were around 30-70 active in the latter. Lastly, with respect to size, he said the demographic of students has shifted a little with less international students – this complements what Aliaa Khidr said about the international community, and its role within the greater Muslim community.

I then asked about the sense of community and if/how it has changed over time. He said this fluctuates depending on the number of “active students” and how involved they choose to be. For example, more active students would be heavily involved with the mosque, teaching in the Sunday school, giving a khutba (sermon) and participating in interfaith activities (Habitat for

Humanity, visiting nursing homes, etc.). From 1998-2002 they had a community of very active students, and thus it was more close-knit; from 2002-2005 they were less active; in the past few years students have been more active.

Lastly, he said that the Muslim community in Charlottesville is difficult to characterize:

- (1) “Refugees are on one side and their involvement depends on if they are at their first phase of moving in and struggling to make a living, or have settled in for some time and are well to do (they are also very different according to their backgrounds – Somali, Bosnia or the previous Soviet Union, Iraq, etc.).”
- (2) “People who are regularly at the masjid (whether professionals or not), and they are very close together on the social level regardless of background.”
- (3) “Then, there are the people who do not care about this or that, do not come to the masjid and are seen twice a year at Eid Prayers (Holiday prayers).”

V. Interviews conducted by Aliaa Khidr with female Muslim students

➤ Concerning female Muslim students at UVa

Below are key takeaways from interviews conducted by Aliaa Khidr in October 2010. She sent her findings to me, which involve concerns and issues faced by female Muslim students at UVa. I’ve summarized them below.

- (1) Exposure to alcohol. The Quran (Muslim holy book) teaches Muslims to never drink, and to stay away from any environment with alcohol/drinking. Thus students:
 - a. Have not been exposed to alcohol, drinking, or spending time in bars;
 - b. Do not know other’s limits, with respect to alcohol, and have a hard time distinguishing when it is appropriate to intervene;

- c. Do not know how to resist peer pressure without being alienated by peers, or without sacrificing spending time with their peers to build upon relationships (as drinking is an integral part of the “UVa culture”).
- (2) Muslim students who end up getting involved in drinking or other activities forbidden by Islam feel they have no counselors on grounds to help them hold on to their faith while dealing with these dilemmas.
- (3) Female students who wear a head cover find it difficult to dress comfortably and uncover their hair in dorms as they can’t prevent male students from walking in their hallways.
- (4) Some practicing Muslims only eat halal meat (according to Islamic dietary law), thus the options at dining halls are limited.
- (5) The persistent negative media coverage after the September 11 tragedy has made all Muslim students the targets of racially or religiously motivated incidents.
 - a. They do not know how to respond to negative comments from classmates.
 - b. They are hurt by the passive behavior of colleagues who witness such incidents.
 - c. They are unsure of what is considered religious harassment.
 - d. They are unaware of who to talk to about this and what University services are available.
 - e. They do not know how to respond when speakers who are known for their Islamophobia are invited to speak on Grounds.

VI. Interview with Dr. Phyllis Leffler, Professor, Department of History

➤ Concerning religious affiliations within UVa

Professor Leffler has researched issues concerning the Jewish community in Charlottesville and at the University. I contacted her to learn more about how to approach researching a religious community at UVa. She said that religion was never a criterion for establishing particular markers, as was established by the US Census Bureau. Universities have also given up any notion of trying to track religions, unless it is a religious institution, but UVa has chosen not to have a religious identifier.

To her knowledge, UVa never had a question in which one was asked to indicate a religious preference, on the admissions application. In the 1920s-1940s the University tried to keep track of students' backgrounds (including religions), through the interview process which was in place at that time. This was done because the dean at the time was concerned with the "racial purity" of the University. Around the 1950s the University decided to get away from that mentality and thus self-identification became the only way of gaining such information. In the 1960s, with desegregation, diversity became a positive concept, and students began making demands to admit more African-American students. She provided this information to help me set the historical context on why information concerning a religious community of students is difficult to attain.

She also directed me to the website: <http://cti.itc.virginia.edu/~hius316/home.html>, which was a joint project between the UVa History Department and UVa Institute of Public History. It contains information on desegregation, coeducation, and religious organizations and programs throughout UVa's history. I did not find anything specifically related to the Muslim community within the documents on the website, however there was some information that is applicable to all faiths. In 1865, chapel services were made voluntary. In the 1960s, Student Council approved

the formation of religious organizations, granting them permission to use university space. Administrators were strongly opposed to this.⁴

COMMON CONCERNS & POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Common Concern: Accessing contact information for incoming Middle Eastern Students is a common concern because it affects the ability of MEMs to reach out to: first-years to introduce them to resources; MEMs during their time at the University; and alumni.

If/How it is being addressed: ODOS has been working with MEMs and the Office of Admissions to address this concern. The current Program Coordinator, Julie Roa, has found a way to pull categories from the admissions application that will be indicative of Middle Eastern descent. ODOS and MEMP will then reach out to incoming students, within the categories, with information concerning MEMs and available resources.

Policy Recommendations: Although this is a great step, it does not seem sustainable in the long-run. Thus, the strongest recommendation I can make is to include “Middle Eastern” as a category under the UVa supplement to the Common Application. In this way, it is institutionalized, simplified, and easily accessible. This will also translate into more established results, as the category on the supplement can aid with establishing an alumni network, a current project of MELC.

Common Concern: After the tragedy of September 11, 2001, there was an increased stigma surrounding MEMs. Many racial and religiously motivated incidents of hate-speech and assaults have occurred.

If/How it is being addressed: According to Dr. Khidr, in 2001 the University offered very little administrative support to MEMs, and a formalized relationship between ODOS-MEMs was

⁴ <http://cti.itc.virginia.edu/~hius316/religionuva/folderA/1865catalogue.PDF>

not established until 2008. However, since the establishment of these resources, ODOS has served as a support for MEMs. For example, when a known anti-Muslim speaker was invited to UVa in the fall of 2008, ODOS organized meetings with MEMs to offer support. Representatives from ODOS attended the speaker's event and were very involved with the process of understanding MEMs needs and addressing them.

Policy Recommendations: I believe occurrences of hate-speech and assaults should never be tolerated, but that they are also isolated incidents. Thus, I recommend continuing to work with ODOS and to continue to have conversations, and educate others about the Middle East/Muslim cultures. Also, it is important to disseminate information to MEMs concerning the "Just Report It!" system (<http://www.virginia.edu/justreportit/>), which connects students directly to deans in ODOS who can help. Finally, a referral process was recently instituted at Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), with the Student Health department. Thus, MEMs can request a referral from CAPS to a Muslim psychiatrist who they may be more comfortable discussing concerns with.

NEXT STEPS: WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

A component of this issue which I have not addressed is the question of academics. It will be important to look into when courses on Islam, Arabic, Farsi, the Middle East, etc. began to be offered at the University. One could also look into the Middle Eastern Studies Department, when it was established, what the conversations surrounding its creation were, as well as course enrollment. Two years ago, a master's program in the MESALC Department was also created, so researching such programs further will provide a different approach to assessing this community.

Another component can be to conduct further research to find needs of the community as well as creative ways to increase education about, and resources for, MEMs. This can be done

through student groups or relationships with University administrators and offices – there is always much room for growth.

IN CLOSING. It is important to note the necessity of understanding the history of a group because it provides context to concerns that arise or struggles faced. This level of understanding comes through engagement with members actively involved with the issues, those who can provide different perspectives, and our personal experiences as members of university community.

For more information about this research, or to discuss possible ideas for further research, please contact me at hkt4k@virginia.edu.