Islamic Students Get Prayer Space

In response to a growing need expressed by Islamic students at Tufts, the International Center has turned the Davies House lounge into a place of worship for the Islamic religious services on Friday afternoons.

The room is open from 1 to 3:30 p.m. Any member of the Tufts community who wishes to worship is welcome.

The opening of the new prayer space was organized by a group of Islamic students, mostly undergraduates, led by Manar Zarroug, a senior electrical engineering major from the Sudan.

In April, the students told the Rev. Scotty McLenann, university chaplain, and Jane Etish-Andrews, director of the International Center, that Islamic students on campus wanted a place to practice their religion.

The major obstacle, according to Etish-Andrews, was finding a place that the group could reserve in advance for every Friday afternoon of the semester. After obtaining use of the international center lounge and renovating it this summer, the group held its first services Sept. 5.

Before the prayer space was established, Moslem students from Tufts had to go to services at Harvard, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology or Boston University.

"Not having a place to gather at Tufts has made it difficult for the Moslems at Tufts to form a unified community," Zarroug said. He said he hopes that the establishment of prayer space on campus will bring together members of that community.

"Traditionally, the Friday prayer gathering has been a social event as well as a religious one within the Moslem community," he said.

One of the many benefits of a unified Moslem community at Tufts and the possible establishment of a Tufts Islamic Club is the "opportunity to show the community the diversity of the Moslem population at Tufts," Etish-Andrews said.

"I think that when people think of Moslems, the image conjured up is primarily of Arabs," she said. "At Tufts, the Islamic community is much more than that.

Among the worshipers at the first service were students of diverse national backgrounds. Freshman Huseyn Ozkaramanli is from Cyprus; Raina Megawangi, a nutrition graduate student, is from Indonesia; Manira A. Ahmed, also a nutrition graduate student, is from Bangladesh, and freshman Irfah Mecca is from India.

According to Mecca, "As we (the Islamic students) organize into a group, we are inviting people to observe our services." In the same spirit, Etish-Andrews added that the prayer space provides a chance for "mutual respect on the part of all students. It is a place for students to learn something."

The group hopes to formalize the services by joining the Islamic Society of Boston. Through this organization, the students may be able to get a formal prayer leader and a more permanent prayer space. Currently, the services are being led by Zarroug.

Zarroug hopes that as the semester progresses and more Moslem students hear about the prayer space, more will attend the services and that the group can establish a social time after the service. The group particularly hopes to attract all Moslem students involved in the various programs at Tufts, he said.

---Amy Resnick