

QLSP fosters spiritual and mental growth through community

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"Strong community." "Spiritual." "Body." "Seeking." These are words chosen by "QLSPers" to depict the Quaker Leadership Scholars Program.

For many of its members, the QLSP community is a prominent part of the Guilford experience, and yet, Guilford doesn't know who QLSP is. As a "Fourth Year" student in the program, I'd like to introduce you.

QLSP is a campus organization and scholarship program that allows young spiritual seekers to explore their faith and gifts through communal activities and worship. The group is made up of about 45 students with varying Quaker experiences and beliefs.

QLSP is the longest-standing formal college program for young Quaker leadership development. For many QLSPers, the program was a deciding factor in their decision to come to Guilford.

"I really wanted a college experience where I could explore myself spiritually and religiously ... and deepen my exploration through others' experiences as well," said Second Year Nora Cooke.

QLSP offers this sort of supportive community.

"Religion and community (are) really important to me," Fourth Year Melissa McCourt said. "(QLSP is) a community I can be thrilled about."

Participation as a QLSP scholar involves many different opportunities for personal growth. Each grade level gathers separately each week for a year-level meeting to share in personal check-ins, book discussions, worship and project planning.

Projects include an annual conference in which the Fourth Year students decide on a theme and design a variety of events. The conference is open for the whole campus to discuss and reflect on the chosen theme. Year-level work also emphasizes group bonding and personal faith exploration.

QLSPers also serve on various committees, including "Ministry and Council," and "Service Committee." Committees meet weekly to plan worship, address the care of the community and discuss the program's various logistical needs. Committee work offers QLSP members the opportunity to develop leadership and communication skills through focused, intentional group work. First Year Nate Secrest emphasized that communal experiences in QLSP, such

as committee work, have helped him to maintain his spiritual practice in an otherwise "horribly busy" college life.

QLSP is "filled with opportunities to learn," McCourt said. In addition to the weekly commitments of year-level and committee work, QLSPers participate in service opportunities, weekend spiritual retreats, potlucks, and classes on Quaker faith and history. They build relationships with Quakers in the Greensboro community by engaging with local Friends Meetings and inviting guest speakers to campus.

Every Friday, the entire QLSP body gathers for a meeting for worship designed according to a variety of Quaker traditions. QLSP staff members take part in each meeting. These staff members include Director of QLSP Deborah Shaw, Director of the Friends Center Max Carter, Gifts Discernment Coordinator Frank Massey and Friends Center intern Nathan Sebens.

According to Secrest, "the staff is really important in QLSP." The staff members serve as mentors, role models and spiritual support for the students in QLSP.

Weekly worship is a time for the group to pray together, reflect on the week and explore different methods of spiritual discernment. Worship is sometimes silent

and meditative, sometimes centered around an activity or query, and sometimes a space for music, meals and socializing. It is an important opportunity for the group to grow as a unified community but it is also a chance to offer a worshipful space for everyone on campus.

Few people realize that QLSP Friday worship is open to all who are interested. Everyone from the Guilford community is welcome, regardless of faith, religious experience or belief.

"We have a deep underlying foundation in QLSP," said Cooke. "It's a safe place to explore and be open to new experience."

Secrest agreed that for anyone "interested in spiritual deepening," QLSP worship "can be very powerful."

"There's such a story to QLSP," McCourt said. It needs to be shared. But perhaps most importantly, as Frank Massey said, "We want to know who you are."

IF YOU ARE CURIOUS OR SEEKING A WORSHIPFUL COMMUNITY, PLEASE JOIN QLSP THIS EVENING AT 5:30 IN THE MOON ROOM IN DANA AUDITORIUM FOR A PROGRAMMED WORSHIP.



(Left) Seniors **Megan Richards** and **Melissa McCourt** join a massage train with QLSP leader **Frank Massey** and sophomore **Lucas Blanchard-Glueckert**. QLSP facilitates spiritual growth, cuddling, messaging, community building and community service. (Above) **McCourt** helps do dishes. QLSP is the largest religious group at Guilford, and is a main Quaker element of Guilford. (Right) QLSP allows students to form spiritual and emotional bonds.

