

New religiously diverse organization at Meredith

The Herald's biweekly diversity column

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We all have our own ideas about religion and who or what our God is. For some of us, it is difficult to express those religious views or to find others who will accept those beliefs and not judge us for them. A new organization on campus might be the place for those who have different views than the more traditional Christian beliefs found here on campus. The name of the new organization is AURA, the Association for Understanding and Religious Awareness.

AURA was approved in the spring of 2003 as an organization to be added to

the roster here at Meredith. I recently met with the president of this new organization, junior Cheryl Stanley, and she explained to me the purpose and goals of AURA.

"AURA is designed to create a place for non-traditional based Christian members of the Meredith community. A place where they can go to find tolerance, acceptance, encouragement, and place where they can have their religious needs addressed," explained Stanley.

Before AURA, there was not an organization that acknowledged that all members of the Meredith College community are not part of the traditionally Christian community usual-

ly found here on campus.

"The goal of AURA is to increase tolerance and acknowledge religious diversity on campus, and have a place of connection for the non-traditional Christian believers on campus," stated Stanley.

The members of AURA don't all have the same faith. On the contrary, there are members of the organization that are Christian, Muslim, Pagan, Atheist, and Wiccan. Most of the members at this time are of a Christian based faith.

This organization was created for those who do not fit into the Christian majority to feel like they belong.

To get a better understanding of the idea of the

organization you need to know about different religions.

As most of you know, Muslim is an Islamic faith. In the Islamic faith, believers worship the God called Allah. Each person of the Islamic faith worships in his or her own personal way. However, typical practices for someone of Islamic faith are the five prayers a day. A problem that AURA would like to address is that there is the lack of space on campus where the Islamic faith can be practiced.

Wicca is a polytheistic, nature-based religion that focuses on the connection between nature and deity and the belief that deity is present in all things including people. There is normally no concept of heaven or hell, unlike in the Christian faith. A problem AURA would like to address for the Wiccans on campus is for the Meredith community to gain the understanding that being Wiccan does not mean being evil or demonic. Wiccans pray, like Christians, though their prayers are sometimes called spells. In the past, many have thought of spells as curses, but they are generally just prayers being said to the God or Goddess they worship. However, it should be noted that many Wiccans choose not to perform spells at all and choose to pray in their own way with prayers much like Christian prayers or by song.

There are atheistic views, which believe that there is no god at all.

I have only given a few descriptions, but there are

more different religious preferences in the Meredith community. For many, going against the norm of the Meredith College community is hard when there are so many students on campus who are Christian and very vocal about their beliefs.

AURA is giving all types of students a chance to express themselves in a non-judgmental environment. Although for writing purposes I used the term traditional and non-traditional, it should be noted that traditional for one person may be non-traditional to another. These terms are not derogatory; they are just being used so that there is a clear understanding.

The next meeting for AURA is Thursday, November 13 at 3:30 p.m. in 128 Joyner. If you are interested in becoming a member or supporting the organization, President Cheryl Stanley, welcomes you. Anyone is invited no matter their religious background as long as they are curious and supportive.

"[My] leadership vision is for acceptance of diversity and equal treatment of all people no matter the race, gender, sexual orientation, or religion," stated Stanley.

Once again I urge the entire Meredith College community do not let diversity mean divided.

International Education Week

November 17-21



Monday, November 17: "Meredith Cares: Hardships Women Face Around the World"
An opportunity for Meredith women to learn about the challenges and hardships faced by women around the world. Sexual slavery, honor killings, violent dowry disputes, rape as a tool of war – these are grim realities that concern us all. Learn from Amnesty International spokesperson Allison Anders what we can do to help.
6:00-7:15 p.m. 101 Ledford Refreshments

Tuesday, November 18: "Ta War, or Not To War – Six Months After the U.S. Said 'Yes!'"
A lively exchange of views on the Iraqi war – moral imperative or quagmire? Included in this dialogue will be information on the Iraqi groups that oppose the U.S. – and projections regarding the future. Meredith professors Jim Piazza and Greg Vitarbo will lead this session.
5:30-7:00 p.m. 101 Ledford Refreshments

Wednesday, November 19: "International Worship Service"
Margarita Suarez and members of the Meredith international student community will lead this week's worship service.
10:00-11:00 a.m. Jones Chapel

Wednesday, November 19: "A Global Celebration"
A celebration featuring international cuisine, study abroad information, a guitarist playing an international repertoire, study abroad information, geographical challenges, study abroad information, a raffle (first prize, an overnight getaway compliments of The Oakwood Inn), study abroad information, and cake for everybody. *How could you miss it?*
11:45 a.m.-1:15 p.m. Belk Dining Hall Cake for Everybody

Wednesday, November 19: "The NAFTA Skit: Consequences of Globalization"
A simulation led by BorderLinks alums Amanda Beasley and Nina Borum allowing you to understand the consequences of globalization by assuming the roles of those who are affected by it.
5:30-7:00 p.m. 101 Ledford Refreshments

Thursday, November 20: "Opportunities for Meredith Women to Take on the World"
Study Abroad Information Table
11:45 a.m.-1:15 p.m. Cate Center International Treats for Everybody

Thursday, November 20: "La Vita E Bella"
An Academy Award winning movie that will make you both laugh and cry. It is two films in one – at first a romantic comedy set in Fascist Italy with Guido seeking to woo a pretty girl, Dora. Then the transition to drama – to the last days of World War II and the tragic story of a father and son caught in the horror of the Holocaust.
7:00-9:00 p.m. 101 Ledford Refreshments

