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UA Muslim students seek more inclusivity, think new prayer room good first step



Caroline O'Keefe Staff Photographer

UA sophomore Madiha Alam prays in the Z Room at the Multicultural Center in the Arkansas Union on Dec. 3. Prayer is one of the five pillars of Islam to which Muslims must adhere.

Sabrina Godfroid
 Staff Reporter
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UA officials implemented a prayer room in September, but for Muslim students, work for religious inclusivity is not finished.

As of September 2018, the Center for Multicultural Diversity Education set aside a room for prayer, meditation and relaxation called a Z, or zone, Room, said Adrain Smith, director of leadership and diversity initiatives within the Multicultural Center. The Z Room is open for people of all faiths to use, not just specifically for Islamic students and the space.

Smith works to increase diversity acceptance and make all

students feel represented. This is partly what prompted the efforts to create the Z Room and allow a safe space for students to relax or practice their faiths, Smith said.

"We realized a lot of our Muslim students had to trek across campus to try and find an open room to engage in prayer," Smith said.

Muslim students use the Z Room often, and while there is a mosque located off campus, another prayer space closer to the east side of campus would also be convenient, Asif said.

"Being able to be a part of a group with people who are similar to you – it makes you feel more safe and secure on campus," said sophomore Faizullah Asif, president of the Muslim Students' Organization.

See "Students find" on pg. 8

Number of religious believers fall in state

Grant Lancaster
 Campus News Editor
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Christianity has strong support in Arkansas, one of the most religious states in the U.S., but data indicates that belief in God is weakening in Arkansas.

Arkansas tied with South Carolina for the fifth most religious state in the U.S. in 2016, according to the Pew Research Center.

Approximately 79 percent of adult Arkansans identified as Christian in 2014. Three percent identified with non-Christian faiths and 18 percent did not identify with any religion, according to the Religious Landscape Study by the Pew Research Center.

Despite the high percentage of Arkansans reporting they are Christian, belief in God has weakened slightly over the past decade, according to the Pew Research Center.

About 77 percent of Arkansans reported a strong belief in God in 2014, a decrease from 84 percent in 2007, according to the study. The percentage of people who are fairly certain of God's existence increased from 8 percent to 15 percent in that same time, according to the study.

Muslims made up the largest percentage of the other faiths category, with 2 percent of Arkansans identifying as Muslim in 2014, according to the study.

Atheists make up about 2 percent of non-religious Arkansans, 3 percent reported they were agnostic, and 13 percent reported they believe in nothing in particular, according to the study.

Zach Morris, associate college pastor at Cross Church, has noticed a growing number of people who have moved away from churches but still consider themselves religious, he said.

Some of Morris' friends that he came to college with slowly stopped attending church, but he is not exactly sure what led them to leave, he said.

"Some of those close friends aren't involved in the church as much," Morris said.

Despite the high percentage of Arkansans reporting they are Christians, 41 percent of them indicated they attend services at least once a week, down from 50 percent in 2007, according to the study.

Morris thinks that one of the biggest concerns churches in Northwest Arkansas face is that many students stop attending church when they get to college, he said.

In 2014, 36 percent of college students reported

that they attended church service at least once a week, according to data from the Pew Research Forum.

Among college students in 2014, 57 percent reported that they believed in God, according to the Pew Research Center.

Morris thinks it comes down to students taking responsibility for their own religious lives when they get to college, he said.

"It's this trend we see of 'do high school seniors own their faith personally, or did they just take it from their family?'"

Morris thinks the students that stick with churches in college are less interested in what denomination their church is and more concerned with how they do their sermons.

Cross Church is a Southern Baptist Convention denomination but strives to accept anyone who wants to attend, Morris said.

In spite of Arkansans' weakening belief in God, 48 percent of adults reported in 2014 that they look to religion for guidance about right and wrong, compared to 39 percent who reported they looked to common sense for right and wrong, according to the study.

This reflects a near-reversal from 2007, when half of respondents looked to common sense and 39 percent looked to religion, according to the study.

The percentage of people who think the Bible should be taken literally as the word of God decreased from 51 percent in 2007 to 45 percent in 2014. In 2014, 20 percent of Arkansans reported that they thought the Bible is not the word of God, according to the study.

About 84 percent of Arkansans reported they believe in heaven in 2014, while 76 percent believe in hell, according to the study.

Arkansas typically ranks low on the FBI's list of reported hate crimes.

Between 2010 and 2017, the most recent recorded year, law enforcement agencies in Arkansas reported 163 hate crimes to the FBI, 12 of which were religiously-motivated, according to FBI hate crime statistics.

Only four states reported less hate crimes than Arkansas in 2017, according to the data. The highest number of reported hate crimes in Arkansas in this time period was 2010 with 63 reports.

By comparison, California law enforcement officers reported 7,506 hate crimes in that time period, including 1,370 crimes against religious groups. California has ranked highest in reported hate crimes from 2010 to 2017, according to FBI data.

See "Hate organizations" on pg. 4

Joining campus religious groups proves challenging, rewarding for students

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 Staff Reporter
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For many students, finding a registered student organization that lines up with their religious views can be difficult, especially when they come from marginalized cultures and communities.

Junior Griffin Mathews thinks that Christianity is the most prominent religion on campus, which can be a challenge for both Christians and students of other religions when there are multiple RSOs for the same religion, he said.

Mathews thinks that having so many Christian organizations can make it hard for students to find one that is the right fit, or it can make it difficult to find another religion that they may be searching for, he said.

"In my personal experience, when I was a freshman, I remember a myriad of ministry organizations trying to get me to join their group or attend their church," Mathews said. "It was a little overwhelming."

Ungar is the vice-president of the Hillel Jewish Student Union, a Jewish organization



Courtesy of Muslim Student Association

Junior Faizullah Asif (left), President of the Muslim Student Association, and UA graduate Raiyan Gardener hand out goody bags with the MSA on Dec. 4 in preparation for finals week.

on campus. Ungar estimates there to be less than 100 Jewish students at the UofA, Ungar said.

"Being such a minority on campus, it can be hard to recruit new members," Ungar said. "It can be hard to find us because we don't have as many resources. And if they go to the RSO fair, there are so many booths set up. It can be frustrating, and people give up the search."

Hillel focuses on the

education and the discovery of Judaism. Hillel members are not actively converting people from one religion to another. The organization tries to create a sense of community for the Jewish students at the UofA by combining religion with activities. Hillel members often go bowling or get food together, Ungar said.

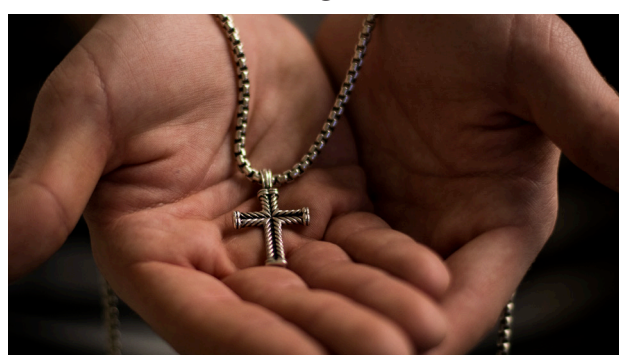
"Having similar people around me with the same belief system helps me feel at home,"

Ungar said.

Last year, Hillel had their highest turnout of students at a meeting with 60 people. The increased membership was a big deal because the group is small, with around 5-10 active members when Ungar first joined. Ungar thinks that if Jewish students can't find others, then it can lead to feelings of isolation because no one has

See "Same experiences" on pg. 8

Students Turn From Original Religion to Convert for Significant Others



Couples with different faiths see the importance of religion decrease the longer they live together, according to a study.

Crystals, Meditation Guide Natural Healers



New Ageism followers channel their energy through quartz to be more in tune with their surroundings and nature.

Buddhists' Karma-Driven Beliefs Bring Peace, Clarity for Followers



Students and professors who practice Buddhism create mandalas and meditate as part of their religion.



Editors' Note

December issue centers around minority religions



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In this month's issue of The Arkansas Traveler, we tackle issues concerning religion in Northwest Arkansas, from charity work to conversion.

However, to combat a single-note newspaper and to further promote diversity, this issue includes stories on several non-Christian faiths, including Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam.

less than 1 percent identify as Hindu. Despite these low percentages, we found it vital to include these religions to better represent the Northwest Arkansas community and to shine a light on lesser known religions in the area.

Within our staff, over half identify as Christian with the rest being either agnostic or atheist. This further highlights the Christian majority within Arkansas, and while religion may sometimes be a sensitive subject, our editors find it important to highlight the religious diversity we know exists within our university and the city around it.

There is also much more to religion in Northwest Arkansas than statistics. Instead of focusing entirely on numbers, we spoke with several people — both students and those within the Fayetteville community — to hear their stories, including those who are LGBTQ, atheist and those who have converted from one religion to another.

The inclusion of these stories is intended to highlight the importance or indifference Arkansasans have toward religion as well as from where those feelings come.

We also highlight those live without any type of spiritual beliefs. The Pew Research Center reports that belief in God is slightly weakening. In seven years, the percent of Arkansasans reporting a strong belief in God drop from 84 to 77 percent.

This paper is for all students, whether they be religious or not. And while 79 percent of our state identifies as Christian, this issue of the paper is by no means 79 percent Christian.

Subtle anti-semitism affects Jewish students

Clare O'Hagan
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A UA junior noticed a shift in attitudes from insensitive to caring toward his Jewish identity following the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting.

"Everyone knows I'm Jewish, and after the attack in Pittsburgh, I had so many guys come up to me and be like, 'I feel like I've said offensive things, I'm so sorry,'" said Noah Bradshaw a member of the UofA Hillel chapter.

In late October, there was a memorial service at Temple Shalom for the victims of the Pittsburgh Tree of Life Synagogue shooting. It was a full house with people of various religions and backgrounds showing support for the Jewish community in Fayetteville, Bradshaw said.

Junior Lucy Goldman, president of Hillel Jewish Student Union, thinks, as a whole, the UofA is accepting and welcoming toward the Jewish community but failed in its response to the shooting.

"Personally, I don't think that many people were aware of the shooting," Goldman said. "My professors came up to me, asked if I was okay and said they were here for me, but student-wise, I didn't see a big reaction."

In 2017, the Anti-Defamation League reported 1,986 anti-Semitic incidents in the U.S. and three in Arkansas.

Arkansas has three Christian Identity hate groups, a unique anti-Semitic and racist theology, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center.

Many members of Hillel, a group of about 40 Jewish students on campus, were present at the memorial, Bradshaw said.

Throughout his entire life, Bradshaw has been viewed as the token Jewish friend and has been called things like Jew boy, he said. "When you're a kid, you don't

know how to defend yourself or tell somebody it's wrong," Bradshaw said.

Bradshaw still hears anti-Semitic comments, but it's different when his friends says something insensitive to him, he said.

"I think the one (word) people don't think might be offensive is using the term 'Jew' as a verb, like, 'You Jewed me,' or things like that," Bradshaw said.

Bradshaw understands that not all Jewish jokes and remarks are maliciously motivated, but thinks certain ones should never be made, he said.

He finds some Jewish jokes funny, just like any self-deprecating joke, but thinks when people make Holocaust jokes, they lack comedic value, Bradshaw said.

Bradshaw thinks harsh, deprecating jokes at the expense of Judaism desensitize the topic. When people make political jokes comparing people to Hitler it muddles the meaning behind what happened to people in the Holocaust, he said.

Junior Maya Ungar, vice-president of Hillel, says the biggest problem she faces is people asking ignorant, unintentionally offensive questions, she said.

"In high school, I had someone ask me if it was true that Jews still drank the blood of Christian children on their Sabbath and I was like, '... what,'" she said. "But, I was really glad that they asked me that questions, as much as I was taken back by it, because it made me realize how ill-informed people were about Judaism and gave me the opportunity to explain to them that that's just a conspiracy theory."

Goldman also has friends and acquaintances at the UofA who are fully aware of her religion and yet try to take her to church events, ask why she doesn't believe in Jesus or try teach her about Christianity, Goldman said.



Bridge Biniakewitz Staff Photographer
UA junior Noah Bradshaw lights the candles of his menorah Dec. 4 in celebration of the third evening of Hanukkah.

"I've had occurrences where friends have been like, 'Will you go to church with me?' trying to slowly convert me, but I wouldn't necessarily call that anti-Semitism," Goldman said.

Ungar has also experienced friends and acquaintances trying to convert her since she was little, and it still happens on campus, she said.

"When I was little, I had friends leave little candy canes with notes attached under my pillow that said 'accept Jesus' after they slept over," Ungar said. "Now I'll have people all the time say, 'Oh if you want to come to church with me, feel free.'"

Arkansas, which is in the Bible Belt of America, or an area in the U.S. that is predominantly Christian, is 79 percent Christian and less than one percent Jewish, according to the Pew Research Center.

There were 30 documented congregations in Arkansas, which

were established between 1866 and 2004. Of those, only seven Jewish communities have stayed together including locations in Little Rock, Bentonville, Fayetteville, Fort Smith, Hot Springs, Jonesboro and Helena. In 2017, the Jewish Virtual Library recorded that there were 2,225 Jewish people in Arkansas.

Ungar thinks that because a majority of the people in Fayetteville and at the UofA are Christian, it makes religious minorities like Jewish students feel the need to explain their religion to other constantly, she said.

"It's such a large Christian community here that people don't really pay attention to the fact that there are other religions here," Ungar said. "It's not even the idea of letting people know that I'm Jewish, it just, like, constantly comes up when it's people talking about Christian camps or events."

Holidays prompt religious giving from groups

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After the eviction of a homeless encampment Sept. 6, Northwest Arkansas, there is an increased need for religious charity this holiday season.

This winter is different than years past because of the amount of homeless people that the Salvation Army is serving, said Joshua Robinett, one of the Northwest Arkansas area commanders of the Salvation Army. Volunteers at shelters in Bentonville and Fayetteville have to serve more meals because of the increase in the number of people.

Close to 80 homeless people were evicted from a UA property south of 19th Street where they were camping and were forced to

find a new place to live, according to a previous article published in The Arkansas Traveler Sept. 6. Salvation Army officials opened two emergency cold weather shelters early to help house the people who were living on that property.

Bobby Maynard, 60, who has spent nearly 30 years of his life homeless, wants a place to live above all else, he said.

"I mean, you know, I stay at the Salvation Army at night, but it gets crazy in there," Maynard said. "Every time they open that darn door, you're freezing your butt off. It's getting right now to where there's 40, 45, 50 men in there. It's not big enough."

During the holiday season, Maynard can only look forward to meals provided by different religious organizations and homeless shelters in Fayetteville because he has no one with whom to celebrate the holiday

season, he said.

People tend to donate and volunteer more during the cold, winter months, said Daniel Robertson, site coordinator at 7hills Homeless Center. The shelter needs people to donate supplies for the winter, including coats, blankets and sleeping bags.

"I think some of that is because the weather is changing, you know, so people realize how cold it is," Robertson said. "We do get a lot more calls for volunteers that want to come serve Thanksgiving lunch or Christmas dinner and things like that, which is great. I wish we had that same enthusiasm throughout the entire year."

UA sororities and fraternities, Muslims 4 Community and several churches like Genesis Church are some of the groups that help at 7hills, Robertson said.

"It's just kind of a mixed bag," Robertson said. "It's the whole community working together."

Muslims 4 Community is a charitable group from the Islamic Center for Northwest Arkansas. Center officials offer a place for spiritual practices, said Abdullah Essalki, the imam, or leader, of the center.

The group hands out sack lunches on Fridays to help carry people through the weekend.

"Everybody's been super respectful, and they're a welcome sight," Robertson said. "They pull in, you know, and people start lining up."

Maynard likes when Muslims 4 Community members come to the center, he said.

"I like them. They're nice people," Maynard said. "I like their sandwiches too, just if they would put it on regular bread (rather than buns) because I've got no lower teeth and it's hard for me to

See "Increased holiday" on page 5



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Gay student endures conversion therapy, accepts his sexuality

Chase Reavis
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Growing up in Farmington, he wanted what he thought was the standard Christian life — get married to a nice girl, have kids, start a family and work in a church — but when he started to accept his sexuality, things changed for him.

After coming out as gay at the age of 18, senior Chance Bardsley's father kicked him out, leaving him to couch surf through the summer until he went to college in the fall, Bardsley said.

"My dad has never really been religious, but he used God as his reasoning for kicking me out, saying, 'Either you're going to go back to how you used to be and love God and go to church and be you, or you're not going to live here anymore,'" Bardsley said.

LGBTQ people represent 20-40 percent of homeless youth in the U.S., many of whom were kicked out of their homes because of their families' religions, according to the Religious Institute.

Although he was planning on attending Oral Roberts University, he turned down a few of their offers because the university is against homosexuality but later decided that having "food and shelter" was better than couchsurfing, so he accepted, he said.

ORU is a "spirit-empowered university, founded in the fires of evangelism and upon the unchanging precepts of the Bible," according to the university.

Because Bardsley signed The Code of Honor Pledge that prohibited him from engaging in any homosexual activity and was out as a gay man to ORU officials, he met regularly with counselors and religious leaders to convert him to heterosexuality, he said.

"They saw homosexuality as a sickness or disease, like I was broken," Bardsley said. "In their minds, they were trying to heal me. They thought we could pray this away."

Bardsley stayed at ORU for two years, studying theology in the hopes of becoming a missionary, while battling his sexuality with the aid of ORU officials and ministers, he said.

"I was Christian before I was gay, in my mind, and so I was just like, 'If you can heal me, if you can take this away, then do it,'" Bardsley said. "If you can fix me, fix me."

But Bardsley's perception of the sinfulness of homosexuality changed when he saw a gay couple on "The 100" on Netflix, he said.

"I remember just sitting there watching that and just had this feeling like, 'Damn, I wish I had that,'" Bardsley said.

After realizing that his desire for a romantic relationship was not founded on lust or anything sexual, he accepted who he "truly was," and decided that he "wasn't going to change," Bardsley said.

"I've personally felt what it's like to have somebody try to force me to change and be something I'm not, and it put me in the place where I would have rather died than continued to be who I was not," Bardsley said.

Bardsley decided to leave ORU when he realized that "if I keep going through this therapy, if I keep trying to change who I am, I'm going to kill myself," he said.

Lesbian, gay and bisexual youth are three times more likely to contemplate suicide and five times more likely to have attempted suicide than their straight counterparts, according to The Trevor Project. Those who are rejected by their families are 8.4 times more likely to have attempted suicide than those with low or no level of familial rejection.

Though many think Arkansas has gotten much better in terms of LGBTQ acceptance, John Treat, the director of development in the Honors College, thinks it has remained pretty much the same over the years, he said.

John Treat went to Harvard University where he earned a master's degree in religion and public policy. He was born in Arkansas, lived here for 22 years, then moved away for 20 years, living in bigger cities like Boston. There, he realized that the situation surrounding LGBTQ issues and rights wasn't as dire as it was in Arkansas, he said.

LGBTQ people face a "whole constellation of issues" that endanger them, including substance abuse, homelessness and suicide, Treat said.

Lesbian, gay and bisexual youth are 90 percent more likely to use substances than their straight counterparts, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse.



Photo Illustration

Although he was raised Christian and has a tattoo of a cross on his forearm, Chance Bardsley no longer identifies as religious. Courtesy of Chance Bardsley

"It's only since I've been back here that I've put a lot of time into LGBT issues again because it's still really necessary," Treat said.

Though Bardsley's family did not take him to church as a kid, he was still surrounded by Christianity living in a small southern town in the Bible Belt, he said.

"It was one of those things where everyone is Christian whether you're acting or not," Bardsley said. "Like, my family, we had dusty bibles on the shelves, and we were raised to be Christian and talk about God, but we didn't actively go to church."

In a 2018 BuzzFeed survey of 880 LGBTQ people, 33 percent of whom were from the South, 39 percent identified with no religion, 23 percent identified as Protestant or Christian, 18 percent as Catholic, 4 percent as Jewish, 3 percent as Buddhist and 1 percent as Muslim, according to survey results.

Of the gay men BuzzFeed surveyed, 33 percent indicated having injured themselves or attempted suicide, 61 percent indicated having depression, 55 percent indicated having anxiety or a panic disorder and 28 percent indicated having an eating disorder, according to the survey.

When he started to realize he was gay, Bardsley went to the religious leaders at his church who told him that homosexuality was a psychological condition. They told him his parent's divorce may have caused it or, it could be because his "dad didn't hug (him) enough," he said.

Bardsley started going to church with his neighbor when he was about 12 years old to get away from his home life where his parents were going through their divorce, he said.

"We were all Christian, but I was the only one who was going to church every week," Bardsley said.

Of 12,566 surveyed Southerners, 71 percent indicated they were absolutely certain that God exists, and 41 percent indicated they attended church at least once a week in a 2014 Pew Research Center survey.

Bardsley decided he wanted to be a missionary soon after starting to attend church. He spent three summers in Honduras working for Mercy International during high school and also spent a summer doing mission work with homeless people in New York City between his freshman and sophomore years of college, he said.

"In hindsight, I feel like I've always known (I was gay), but I didn't really start to figure it out until high school," Bardsley said.

In the BuzzFeed survey, 26 percent of gay men indicated they have always known they were gay, while the mean age for realization was just under 15 years old, according to survey results.

Unity of Fayetteville Rev. Annette Olsen thinks hatred of LGBTQ people is rooted in old, traditional ways of thinking, she said.

"I come from a very strict religion in my background, and it's based on beliefs that have been set up over several generations," Olsen said. "They don't expand their understandings of the Bible or their community or their culture beyond what they've always been told and what they've always known to be true."

The 2014 Religious Landscape Study found that almost all Christian groups have become more accepting of homosexuality since 2007, including a 10 percentage point increase in all Christians' approval, according to the study.

Bardsley left ORU after two years to come to the UofA, where he switched his major to social work and is now in his senior year. He is the president of Registered Student Organization PRIDE, which stands for People Respecting the Individual Differences and Equality.

Treat thinks LGBTQ people who grow up in a conservative, traditional household will either "leave religion altogether because of the hurt and the pain they suffer" or seek a more accepting religion to take them in, Treat said.

Rev. Evan Garner of St. Paul's Episcopal Church is not surprised that some LGBTQ people have "scars in their hearts and lives" that church leaders have inflicted upon them, he said.

"I do not blame individuals who have been so hurt by religion that they have turned their backs on the church or on God, and I believe that those are exactly the people to whom God's heart belongs," Garner said.

Bardsley is no longer religious, he said.

The Traveler reached out to multiple ORU officials and never received a comment since Nov. 27.

ORU filed for religious exemptions from 15 clauses in Title IX on Oct. 4, 2016, and the U.S. Dept. of Education granted those exemptions, which included clauses prohibiting discrimination within admissions, recruitment, housing, counseling, financial assistance, health and insurance benefits and services, marital or parental status and employment, on Dec. 1, 2017.

Title IX is a federal law that prohibits sex discrimination.

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Students fuse international cultures with Western Christmas traditions

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A freshman set tea lights around the colorful sand design on the ground, careful not to disturb the flower-petal design she created in front of the Hotz dormitory with her Indian friends. This rangoli design would be the first tradition of her extended holiday season, beginning with Diwali and ending with Christmas.

Freshman Aashiyana Patel celebrated Christmas and the Hindu Festival of Lights, Diwali, during the holiday season because her parents have different religious backgrounds. One of her holiday season traditions is making a rangoli design, which is a colorful sand design decorated with tea lights left outside of the house prior to Diwali, she said.

Not all UA students celebrate Christmas and the holiday season in the same way. For many, unique cultural experiences and different backgrounds influence how people celebrate Christmas. By bringing their own influences, they create a special holiday experience unlike traditional Western perspectives.

Patel and her family celebrate Christmas and Diwali because Patel and her father do not follow a religion, and her mother is Hindu, she said.

"I definitely think you can celebrate (Christmas) without being connected to the religion whatsoever, Patel said.

Patel tries to attend every Indian celebration, including Diwali, and also loves the Christmas season, she said.

Diwali is on the first Wednesday of November. To celebrate, Patel created rangoli designs and went to a big party the Saturday before, she said.

She recreated the same design she always makes with her family in Bryant in front of Hotz with her friends, she said.

"Diwali is the Indian new year," Patel said. "Right now, it's on the year 2075 because the way their year is set up is based off moon cycles, so they're very far ahead."

Patel's family celebrates Christmas in a very traditional way, especially by decorating their house, she said.

"We always have our entire family, extended family and everything come to our house for Christmas every year, which is really fun," Patel said.

Her family enjoys participating in two cultures, Patel said.

"We all do everything together. There's no division whatsoever in anything that we do," Patel said. "We'll all celebrate Christmas, and we'll all celebrate Diwali. It's a family thing, so no one's ever on their own."

For freshman Olivia Torres, it is also a priority for her entire family to celebrate the holidays together, despite the distance between them. Both of Torres's parents are from Durango, Mexico, and half of her extended family remains there while the other half lives in Springdale, she said.

"They're kind of spread apart, but we never fail to get together for the holidays," Torres said. "Everyone always comes together during this time."

In Mexico, many people will throw lots of parties leading up to Christmas, Torres said.

"One or two weeks before Christmas, they have these things called posadas, which are like parties everyday," Torres said. "Since all the neighborhoods are so tight, and all the houses are connected, they assign one family every day to cook and throw a party."

The hosting family will make

food, set up a bonfire, make piñatas, and the whole party will sing songs and socialize, Torres said.

In Arkansas, her family's parties look a little different than the parties they attend in Mexico and are just for family, Torres said.

"We'll all get together and stay there until very late - too late. That's how all the family parties usually go," Torres said. "We'll usually leave around 4 a.m."

Her family gathers to celebrate Christmas Eve. Her parents cook food like tamales and posole, a traditional Mexican soup, while Torres and her sisters make desserts. At their party, everybody dresses up, sings karaoke, eats tons of food, tells family stories and exchanges gifts, Torres said.

"I think we really try to incorporate the Hispanic culture in everything we do when we celebrate Christmas," Torres said.

The International Christmas Fest and Festival of Flavors was organized by several on-campus ministries and designed to share the biblical story of the birth of Jesus while acknowledging the different ways cultures celebrate Christmas, said Cory Garren a minister for Christ on Campus.

"While celebrating our own holidays we want to make sure we're not keeping other people from celebrating their own holidays as well," Garren said.

It is important to incorporate and acknowledge other cultures and how they celebrate Christmas, whether it be by caroling, eating special foods, or lighting Christmas trees, Garren said.

"I don't think there's one correct way to celebrate Christmas," Garren said.

The meaning of Christmas revolves around Christianity's core belief in Jesus's birth, Garren said.



Sadie Rucker Staff Photographer
Freshman Aashiyana Patel created a traditional rangoli design Nov. 5 outside of Hotz Hall for Diwali, the Hindu Festival of Lights.



Sadie Rucker Staff Photographer
Patel places an ornament on a Christmas tree in the Hotz Hall lobby Dec. 2.

Hate organizations in Arkansas target Muslim, Jewish groups

Continued from page 1

Of the 12 hate groups in Arkansas identified by the Southern Poverty Law Center, five are directly tied to religious groups, according to the Center's 2017 Hate Map.

Jonesboro serves as the headquarters for a branch of ACT for America, an anti-Muslim hate group founded in 2007, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center.

ACT for America published an online database including the names and home addresses of prominent Muslim Americans

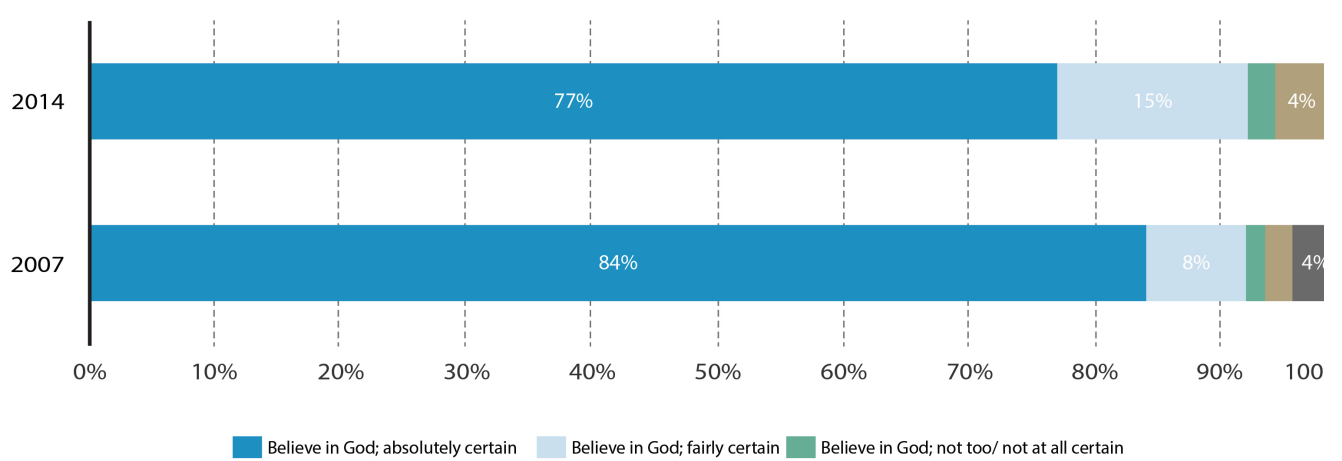
and members of Muslim student organizations, labelling these groups as radical organizations, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center.

The database is no longer active.

There are also branches of the Nation of Islam, a black nationalist group that espouses anti-Semitic ideas, in Little Rock and Pine Bluff, according to the Hate Map.

Other white nationalist groups that are not explicitly anti-religion but may have anti-Semitic views are located in cities like Harrison and Vanndale, according to the Hate Map.

Belief in God among adults in Arkansas



Jewish students celebrate Hanukkah traditions even with finals looming

Laurel Anne Harkins
Staff Reporter
@LaurelHarkins

After a glance outside revealing a dark sky, a student put her pile of books aside, grateful that a stressful day of work and school was finally done. Walking to her windowsill, she lit a candle on her menorah and began to sing, marking the beginning of Hanukkah.

Graduate student Toby Klein is Jewish and wishes she could celebrate Hanukkah with her family this year like other people can during Christmas, but this year, Hanukkah begins on the evening of Dec. 2 and ends Dec. 10, the first official day of finals, Klein said.

Klein thinks that when people talk about the holidays, they are typically referring to Christian holidays that are not inclusive of minority religions, she said. Klein thinks some people do not realize Hanukkah and Christmas are unrelated holidays, she said.

Jewish tradition follows the lunar calendar, so most

major holidays fall on the day of the full moon or something similarly significant, Klein said.

"They call it winter break now, but it obviously revolves around Christmas break and Christmas time, so that can definitely be a little sobering," Klein said.

Hanukkah commemorates the Maccabean Revolt of Jews who defeated part of the Seleucid Empire that occupied Israel. After reclaiming the temple, the Jews needed oil to purify the temple but only had a day's supply, and it was an eight day process to make the holy oil. The miracle of Hanukkah is that the oil lasted long enough for the people to make more, said Jacob Adler, rabbi of Temple Shalom of Northwest Arkansas and UA philosophy professor.

"We light the menorah every night and put it in our window. It's really an attempt to bring light and warmth into the world," Klein said.

Jews are supposed to put the menorah on a windowsill or a place where people can see it to publicize the miracle of the oil, Adler said.

Klein will celebrate the holiday later with her family.



Liz Green Staff Photographer
Graduate student Toby Klein sets up her menorah before a Hanukkah party at Temple Shalom on Dec. 2.

Her family and her cousins will get together for a party one night during winter break, she said.

Klein has found Temple Shalom to be a community of friends in Northwest Arkansas who are inclusive of her beliefs, but she does not think that Hanukkah

has equal representation in mainstream media, she said.

Although Klein does not have a problem with people saying "Merry Christmas," it does remind her that the Jewish community is not as large as she thinks it is, Klein said.

Comedian Adam Sandler's

Hanukkah songs were popular with Klein and her friends while they were growing up because they saw themselves represented in mainstream media, she said.

"It was something where there was someone like us, and I think we just sort of expected that we weren't

going to see our narratives portrayed in the media," Klein said.

However, Klein has positive memories associated with Christmas, despite not celebrating the religious significance, she said.

"Growing up, we had family friends where on Christmas Day we would drink eggnog underneath a Christmas tree but eat latkes and spin dreidels, so we did a sort of cultural collaboration, which is always fun," Klein said.

Her family and Jewish community also enjoy going to the movies and eating Chinese food on Christmas day, which is a special tradition to her, Klein said.

"Even though we could watch Netflix and stay inside, it's nice to know that we have that little space for ourselves within the larger context of Christmas," Klein said.

Klein thinks it is important to experience cultures different from her own and to connect with people of other beliefs, Klein said.

"I think it's really

See "Students find" on page 6

Residents, students convert for significant other, personal beliefs

Karen Sue McKenzie
Contributing Reporter

Fayetteville resident Misty Piazza and her husband were not a Catholic couple when they first began dating. She was Baptist, and they couldn't start their Saturday date nights until mass ended. But in order to spend more time with her future husband, she invited herself to his Catholic church.

At 24 years old, Piazza started attending mass with her boyfriend and soon found out that Catholicism was a perfect fit for her. She's been married to that same man for 11 years, and together they are raising three kids in the Catholic church. Although the process of becoming a converted member was difficult, it was worth it, she said.

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) is the process Piazza went through to become a Catholic. Local Catholic churches offer the RCIA, an educational program for anyone who desires to seek entry into the church, according to Catholic Online.

Piazza sought her entry through weekly classes at St. Joseph Catholic Church in Tontitown, Arkansas, to learn more about the faith. St. Joseph's RCIA program was about eight months long and ended on Easter, Piazza said, but the length of a conversion process depends on the person, according to Catholic Online.

The RCIA classes at St. Joseph are structured as an explanation course to help the people who want to enter the church understand what they are agreeing to, RCIA Coordinator Pat Buhr said. Participants can

also purchase a textbook that explains the Catholic doctrine.

Through RCIA classes, Piazza better understood Catholicism and learned the history and the sacraments of the Catholic church, she said.

Teachers begin with the basics: they explain Christian theology and then talk about the Holy Trinity – the Father (God), the Son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit, Buhr said. Following the basics is the history portion of the program. Participants learn the history of the church and discuss the functions of the church, which are defined by the seven sacraments, Buhr said.

The seven sacraments are divided into three categories: initiation, healing and service, according to Loyola Press.

The Sacraments of the Initiation consist of baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist; the Sacraments of Healing consist of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick; the Sacraments of Service consist of Holy Orders and matrimony, according to Catholic Online.

While Piazza was taking RCIA classes, she had to complete all of the sacraments of initiation, as well as reconciliation from the healing category, to be accepted as a member of the Catholic Church.

People will complete and practice the remaining three sacraments when they are needed, Buhr said.

While waiting on her declaration of nullity, which stated that her previous marriage was no longer binding, Piazza became impatient because she had been engaged for more than two years, she said.

"For a while, I was wondering whether I was going to become Catholic," Piazza said.



Photo Illustration
The majority of people who convert from their childhood faiths do so by the age of 24, according to a 2011 report by the Pew Research Center.

Kevin Snyder Staff Photographer

Piazza was raised Baptist, but she liked the structure of Catholic mass. When she was Baptist, pastors taught lessons on anything, but she prefers the consistency of Catholic churches. Piazza could attend any Catholic church across the world and know what is going on, like reciting the prayers, she said.

Piazza also thinks Catholicism was a better fit for her family. Marriage and children stimulate a more regular or semi-regular religious practice, according to the General Social Survey. Piazza likes that her and her husband

are teaching their children the faith, she said.

Piazza thinks that her kids would have more fun going to church if they were raised Baptist, she said. Piazza's previous Baptist church provided children's classes during the main service, so they did not have to sit through a lesson they didn't understand. Compared to the Catholic Church, this is much different, Piazza said.

During Catholic mass, Piazza and her family sit together. There is no alternative service for children to attend, so sometimes getting the kids excited about going to church is difficult, she

said. In educational systems, faith simply remains in the background of students' lives because it is not something that is discussed among peers or professors, according to the report.

But senior Kyle Beard converted to Christianity as a freshman in college and interacted with professors who challenged his new beliefs, so he often got into arguments in class, he said. Beard thinks that converting to a new religion at any time in life would be difficult because old habits are difficult to shed, he said.

About half of American adults have changed religious affiliation at least once during their lives, and most people who change their religion leave their childhood faith by 24 years old, according to a 2011 report by the Pew Research Center.

While Piazza converted to Catholicism, Catholicism has taken the greatest loss of affiliates. Two-thirds say they stopped believing in its teachings, and fewer than 30 percent of former Catholics say the clergy sexual-abuse scandals factored into their decision to leave the religion, according to Pew Research Center.

Student converts from religion, discovers sense of community

Elias Weiss
Staff Reporter
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As the only practicing Hindu teenager in Bentonville High School, he longed for a sense of religious community and found it when he befriended a Muslim student. Later that same year, that friend helped him convert to Islam.

Although Muslims made up only 2 percent of Arkansas' population in 2014, according to the Pew Research Center's Religious Landscape Study, Freshman Vaayuputra Balusu converted to Islam after discovering what he thinks is the most welcoming community he has ever known.

Balusu was born in Bentonville and raised by Hindu parents who immigrated to the U.S. in 1997, he said. He had a difficult time connecting with other Hindu children.

"I couldn't relate to the kids or the parents," Balusu said. "There was no one there my age. Most of them were older and grew up in India, so the culture was different. Even if they were four or five years apart from my age, they grew up in India too, so there was a cultural disconnect."

Hinduism accounts for less than 1 percent of Arkansas' population, according to the Pew Research Center.

"I felt like an outsider," Balusu said. "I had no connection with anyone there. I felt like I was practicing Hinduism by myself."

Many of Balusu's childhood friends were Muslim, and their strong sense of community piqued his interest, he said.

Wanting to belong to a community is the reason for 10 percent of conversions to Islam in the U.S., according to the Pew Research Center. This is one of the top three reasons for conversion to Islam in the U.S.

"In Islam, there was an intense community – they were always there for each other," Balusu said. "It is so easy to assimilate into the community."

Muslim holidays can bring the best out of the Islamic

community, said freshman Abdussaboor Muhammad, who has practiced Islam since early childhood.

"During holidays like Ramadan and the two Eids, we all gather – the whole community – in one place, either in the mosque or, if the weather is nice, at a park," Muhammad said. "It's really nice to see the whole community, 400-500 people, getting together to celebrate."

During Ramadan, a

equality in the U.S. allows for more converts because people are less likely to judge others for their race or religion.

Out of all American citizens who converted to Islam, 77 percent converted from Christianity and 19 percent were not religious before their conversion. Only four percent of Americans converted to Islam from other religions, according to the Pew Research Center.

Balusu met his first Muslim



In Islam, there was an intense community – they were always there for each other."

- freshman Vaayuputra Balusu

prominent Islamic holiday, local restaurants sponsor the meals enjoyed during prayer, Muhammed said.

"You can really see the big role the community plays during that time," Muhammed said.

Conversion for the sole purpose of joining a community is somewhat uncommon, said Hamed Alamat, a Shaikh at the Islamic Center of Northwest Arkansas in Fayetteville. A Shaikh is a Muslim teacher who delivers sermons and aids newcomers in their conversion.

"Islam is not just a social scene," Alamat said.

The Muslim population in the U.S. has grown by 1.1 million in the last decade. One in 5 American Muslims are converts, according to the Pew Research Center.

There are a lot of converts, and they come from many phases of life for many reasons, Alamat said. He thinks increased

friends, who helped him visit a mosque for the first time, in high school, he said.

"They were very welcoming at first, even though they knew I wasn't Muslim," Balusu said. "Even the people you didn't know would refer to you as 'brother,' which made the community much more intimate."

Balusu officially converted to Islam in 2016. He had a conversion ceremony at the Bentonville Islamic Center, he said.

"New converts typically start by learning the basics of Islam," Alamat said. "They will go through a series of classes before their conversion ceremony."

Converts must read an excerpt from the Quran called the Shahadah, Muhammad said. The new Muslim pronounces his belief in one God and that the prophet in Muhammad was the last messenger of Allah.

The Muslim community was

Increased holiday donations sustain shelters Homeless Shelters

Continued from page 2

eat that."

The group also serves sack lunches at the Salvation Army center in Fayetteville, even though their help is not related to the holiday season. Christmas is the busiest time of the year for the Salvation Army, said Joshua Robinett, one of the Northwest Arkansas Area Commanders of the Salvation Army.

"This time of year is a time that we are reminded about all the things we're thankful for, and we're reminded to give and we're reminded to serve," Robinett said. "So as those reminders come up, really within the American culture, the opportunity is there (to serve). There's an increase of folks that are volunteering."

Ringling the Salvation Army bells, a volunteer activity that starts in November to raise money, is the biggest source of money for the organization, Robinett said.

"Without that, let me tell you, there's no way we'd be able to step up to the plate the way we did this year when some of the homeless encampments cleared out," Robinett said. "We just wouldn't have the resources to do it."

Christmas is a major holiday for Christians, but Maynard does not celebrate the occasion. He sometimes attends services, but mainly goes to different charities

for holiday meals, he said.

Maynard, a Christian, wishes he could celebrate Christmas, but none of his family members are alive to be with him. Maynard is the only one left after multiple family members, like his father, died of cancer. Other family members died in accidents, including a drunk driving incident that killed his cousin and a shooting that killed his nephew, he said.

Maynard does not think religious groups or charitable organizations have donated as much for winter this year, he said. "Usually they give long-johns, or toboggans, or some of them give coveralls and things like that, but a lot of them haven't done it this year yet," Maynard said.

The Muslims 4 Community group rotates between multiple locations across Northwest Arkansas and partners with other organizations to provide clothing and food, Essalki said. Charitable giving is one of the five pillars of Islam.

"Our members in the community here love to volunteer," Essalki said. "The charity goes to help people, that's including poor and unfortunate people in hard times. All sort of good that we can give, we have to."

Temple Shalom of Northwest Arkansas has no activities to help the homeless at the moment, but officials are discussing working

with Muslims 4 Community to help shelters, said Stanley Rest, president of the temple, in an email.

During Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement and refers to the annual observance of fasting and prayer, the temple collects food, personal items and clothing to donate to the Peace at Home Family Shelter, Rest said.

Helping the needy is a command in the Torah, both materially and spiritually.

Charitable giving is also a tenant of the Christian faith, which was set by the example of Jesus because he gave his own life, Robinett said.

"We were created as social beings dependent on so many things, including our fellow man. I think we were designed to give and to receive," Robinett said. "The mission statement of the Salvation Army is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in his name without discrimination."

Despite what has happened to him, Maynard continues to practice Christianity. He does not think it makes sense when a person stops believing after a tragedy happens, he said.

"It's part of life. You can't change it," Maynard said. "They say, 'Oh well, I don't like Christianity. I don't believe in Jesus or God.' That ain't going to change s---. That's not going to bring them back."



Kevin Snyder Photo Editor
A Salvation Army volunteer rings a bell next to a donation station Dec. 4 in front of the Walmart on Martin Luther King Boulevard.

Students find creative ways to stay in touch with families during holidays

Continued from page 4

important, especially in America where there are religious minorities, that there gets to be opportunities for cultural learning," Klein said. "Because even though I don't necessarily know the sanctity of a Christmas tree, I know that I love watching Lifetime Christmas movies because they're just good rom-coms."

Jewish student Jessica Woitte celebrated both Hanukkah and Christmas growing up because her mother was Jewish, but her father had not yet converted to Judaism, she said.

"My father did not grow up Jewish, so we did Christmas as kids growing up," Woitte said. "And as a kid, that was always more special to me because that was the time we got our big gifts."

After her father converted, Woitte's family stopped celebrating Christmas, she said. Not being with her family during Hanukkah this year will not be too difficult

because technology makes it very easy for them to connect.

Woitte thinks it is fun having Hanukkah at different times every year and that the varying dates of the holiday do not really affect her, even during a busy week like the week before finals, she said.

"It's kind of nice, because it gives me kind of a study break to do things," Woitte said. "I have been Skyping with my parents, so we chat for an hour or two and get everyone updated, so I think it's really nice to be able to get a break from things."

Hanukkah is celebrated at night, so Jewish students can find ways to both study and celebrate throughout the week, Woitte said.

"By that point I'm usually out of class," Woitte said. "I can usually get off work in time to go do things. For me, it's pretty subjective. If I do it before sundown or after sundown, that's fine."

Hanukkah has become major because of the time of the year that it comes at, Adler said.



Klein's menorah, which was given to her when she was born, is set up to celebrate the first night of Hanukkah on Dec. 2.

People are influenced by the society they live in, and American Jews must compete with the presence of Christmas, Adler said.

Woitte has never felt excluded during the holiday season because she grew up celebrating Christmas, she said.

"I can definitely see how

someone who didn't grow up with that influence would feel pretty ostracized by how huge it is," Woitte said. "But it's really nice that there's a lot going on this year. There's a public menorah lighting and (the Hillel Jewish Student Organization) is having a party. It'll be a good time."

This year, her family might

put out Hanukkah lights along with blue and yellow colored decorations around their house, Woitte said.

"I just kind of do the traditional things," Woitte said. "I'm going to make some latkes and do the candle lighting every night. Last year, my family, we video chatted while we were doing menorah

lighting because all four of us were in different places."

Woitte does not particularly mind that Hanukkah falls before finals week and outside of winter break, she said.

However she does think that there are more apparent academic scheduling conflicts for more important Jewish holidays, like Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah, that fall outside of the normal holiday season, Woitte said.

"That's kind of harder to get around, especially because Hanukkah is usually at the end of the semester anyways," Woitte said.

Though Hanukkah is a minor holiday within the Jewish faith, it points attention to other more important holidays, like Passover, that can also conflict with school and working schedules, Adler said.

"Hannukkah you have your menorah and you light it at night, you get presents, you sing some songs and there's not too much interference," Adler said.

Students find acceptance in new faith even if not from families

Continued from page 5

refreshing because Balusu did not like the rigidity of the rules in Hindu temples in Northwest Arkansas, he said.

"I remember being at the Hindu temple," Balusu said. "They made the little kids pray, even though they didn't want to. They made them sit for hours. They wanted to run around, like little kids do. In the mosque, they let the kids be kids."

After his conversion to Islam, Balusu never hid his beliefs or his conversion from his parents, but his parents warned him about sharing his conversion with extended family, he said.

"(My parents) have always been pretty supportive of my conversion," Balusu said. "But a decent amount of my family

still doesn't know - basically everyone outside my parents. My parents told me I shouldn't tell anyone else."

Growing up, there was always a negative stigma surrounding Muslims in the Hindu community, Balusu said.

"Hindus think (Muslims) only want more Muslims and to exterminate Hindu culture," Balusu said. "They think of Abrahamic religions very negatively because they only care about converting more people."

For Muhammad, he has never doubted his religion, he said.

"I was born into a Muslim family," Muhammad said. "Islam has always been part of my life. As a kid, in car rides sometimes, my parents would put on

Islamic lectures or recitations of the Quran."

Muhammad found wisdom in the teachings of his mosque as well, he said.

"Every Friday, there are Friday sermons," Muhammad said. "In that sermon, a lot of the time there would be something I heard that makes a lot of sense to me or is beautiful. I quickly learned to appreciate the religion."

Muhammad thinks people who convert are usually the most active Muslims in the community because they were able to make that choice, he said.

"It's more impactful when someone joins Islam rather than being born into it," Muhammad said. "They always say, 'You're either a Muslim by choice or a Muslim by chance.'"



Freshman Abdusaboer Muhammed prays in the Center of Multicultural and Diversity Education's prayer room Dec. 4.

Quartz crystal deposit makes Arkansas attractive to New Age believers

Beth Dedman
Campus News Editor
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When she touched the amethyst, she felt a wave of peace go through her body, and then an enormous sense of calm. After a lifetime of being surrounded by crystals, this experience was what finally caused her to believe that they could have healing powers.

UA alumna Arianna Pascoe is one out of a movement of people who believe in healing through spiritual energy and connecting to the natural environment in spiritual, mental and physical ways, she said.

Dark Star Visuals has been a representative of Fayetteville's connection to this belief system for 27 years by selling crystals, candles, incense and naturally sourced clothing, said Stacey Wieties, the owner of Dark Star Visuals.

Wieties became involved in the New Age movement

when she followed the Grateful Dead on tour for 12 years. She opened Dark Star Visuals because the crystals and crystal jewelry she gravitated towards at those concerts were not sold in Fayetteville, at that time, she said.

Pascoe has worked at Dark Star Visuals for two for two years since she completed an internship there for her apparel merchandising and product development degree from the UofA, she said.

"(People) call it 'new age,' but it's actually ancient," Pascoe said. "It's kind of going back to the way religion or beliefs were before mainstream religion ... It's like going back to (a) connection with nature, so all the metaphysical properties of crystals and such."

Each crystal has properties that are supposed to serve a specific purpose, like purifying the air and provoking feelings of peace or love, Pascoe said.

"Everything has an energetic value to it," Wieties said. "I believe that everything on the

planet, from plants to rocks to earth, wind and fire all have some kind of precious connection to the earth and healing properties if you tap into it"

Pascoe's mother brought her to Dark Star Visuals when she was a child, and it became Pascoe's favorite store, but Pascoe did not necessarily believe in any kind of spiritualism, she said.

"I'm super skeptical of everything, and I grew up with crystals and not necessarily knowing that they were magical," Pascoe said.

Pascoe thinks that the power of crystals and meditation helped her overcome her the depression and anxiety she had when she was 18. She looked for anything that could help her and found crystals, she said. The first crystal she ever purchased was a fluoride crystal from a shop called Crystal Waters in Eureka Springs.

"I was having a really hard time making decisions in my life, and so fluoride is supposed to help you be more decisive and help with decision making," Pascoe said. "I meditated with it.

I tried to tap into it, and I found that it really just started to work for me."

Pascoe began to advocate for crystals after she went to a crystal fair and had a spiritual connection with her friend when they both touched an amethyst crystal at the same time. They both felt an electric shock and both felt an intense sense of peace, which is one of the attributes of amethyst, she said.

"I feel like I can advocate for them now because I've personally felt changes in myself when I'm using them..." Pascoe said. "It's the power of your mind, if you believe that that's gonna work, and they're so beautiful aesthetically too... So you just put them in your house as decor, and they'll still work."

The crystals will still work even if the owner does not believe in its metaphysical properties. The crystals will still purify the space, Pascoe said.

With multiple mines around the state open to the public, Arkansas is one of the top locations for quartz crystals in the world, according to Arkansas Tourism.

"We live on top of this, like, energy field because there are just crystals all over the place," Pascoe said. "Clear quartz is specifically for amplifying, so if you put it with another crystal, it amplifies the metaphysical properties of that crystal. So it's kind of just like we're sitting on top of this, like, amplified energetic field."

Crystals also help in meditation practices, where the user is trying to align and stimulate their chakras, said Bo Larga, a believer in natural healing.

There are seven chakras arranged along the spine, often envisioned as "whirling energy centers" and each color of crystals correlates with a chakra, Larga said. For example, amethyst



Dark Star Visuals owner Stacey Wieties crafts a necklace for a customer Dec. 1. Wieties has owned the shop for 27 years.

crystals, because they are purple, are meant to correlate with the crown chakra, which has to do with spirituality.

"Every stone is connected to a chakra," Wieties said.

Larga has used crystals since he was a teenager. He used to refrain from telling anyone about the crystals he carried around in his pockets, but now he is a strong advocate for crystal use and no longer feels ashamed of it, he said.

"You need to open yourself up to it," Larga said. "The more time you take with the stone and the more you meditate on it, the more sensitive you become to it and the more it can have an affect on you."

Larga has become so sensitive to the effects of stones that when

he went camping near a river in the Ozarks, the energizing properties of limestone in the creekbed kept him awake all night, he said.

Larga taps into the stones by envisioning energy running between himself and the crystals in order to create a "resonance within" with the stone, he said.

"Vibration is what crystals do," Larga said. "I look at them as a more intense manifestation of vibration than the average things in your environment. Once you clue into stone energies, you really begin to notice that everything in the environment has a vibrational property and you become more sensitive to the general environment."



The crystals used in New Ageism are supposed to have properties that help followers tap into the earth and evoke certain emotions or purpose.



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Students use food to celebrate religious ceremonies, holidays

Halie Brown
 Lifestyles Editor
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As the sun sets Dec. 2, senior Jessica Woitte heats up her frying pan. She begins shredding potatoes to make latkes, a type of potato pancake, which are sometimes mixed with eggs, onions, flour and other seasonings for the first day of Hanukkah.

Woitte grew up in the reformed Judaism sect, which is a sect that has adapted Judaism to the modern world. She is a member of the Hillel

executive board, and her favorite food is matzo ball soup, which is a type of Jewish delicacy, she said. Almost every Jewish holiday has some type of food associated with it, from the first night of Hanukkah with latkes, to Passover with a seder dish that symbolizes the plight of the Jewish people as they fled Egypt, Woitte said. Seder plates are a type of display dish with six different components that represent Passover. A seder plate has a shank bone, egg, vegetables, bitter herbs, charoset, salt water and a

paste made out of apples, pears, nuts and wine, Woitte said. "The bitter herbs, you dip them in salt water because of tears and things, and the (charoset) is supposed to symbolize the cement that goes between the bricks that the Jews made the pyramids with and what not," Woitte said. "The meal following it with more traditional food that isn't necessarily tied to the Passover story." Because her mother and sister were kosher, meaning they only ate food that is fit for consumption under Jewish law, Woitte grew up in a household where she could not eat pork and shellfish, she said. Kosher means fit in Hebrew, and the laws of kosher defines which foods are fit for consumption by Jewish people, according to Chabad.org

There are certain animals, like pigs, that people who practice Judaism can't eat, and certain things they can't eat together like milk and meat. Some temples even have a different kitchen for dairy and meat products, Woitte said. "There are some people who don't eat trefe, which is basically just not eating those animals, like not eating the pork and the shellfish and what not," Woitte said. "But personally, I eat all the things." Freshman Ali Husnain is an



Morgan Browning Staff Photographer

Senior Jessica Woitte places the potato mixture into oil to fry them into latkes on Dec. 3. Latkes are traditionally cooked during Hanukkah.



Morgan Browning Staff Photographer

Senior Jessica Woitte makes latkes that sit on paper towels to cool after being fried on Dec. 3. Jessica made this traditional food on the second day of Hanukkah to symbolize the miracle of the oil in ancient Judaism.

international student from Pakistan, a country with a large Muslim population. He is strictly kosher. Husnain only eats food that is halal, or clean and drained of blood. He does not drink alcohol or do drugs per the law in the Qur'an, he said. The blood must be drained from slaughtered animals so it does not sit in

the body, Husnain said. Muslims can not eat pork because pigs eat trash and are filled with germs, Husnain said. "When our prophet came and started spreading religion, he (forbade) people from eating pig," Husnain said. One of the largest holidays for Muslim countries is Eid. One Eid, Eid al-Fitr, is a

festival of breaking fast that usually takes place during the month of Ramadan, Husnain said. During Eids, Muslims traditionally cook something sweet like rice pudding, Husnain said. Rice pudding is one of

See "Traditional foods" on page 10

Students, Arkansans practice their faith outside of churches



Aleena Garcia Staff Photographer

Senior Cole Butler reads "Modern Man in Search of a Soul" by C.G. Jung on Dec. 3 in the Leflar Law Center. Jung's book discusses denying the dogmatic component of organized religion and formulating one's own religious ideals.

Halie Brown
 Lifestyles Editor
 @halieeliza

It seemed to senior Cole Butler, one night as he was sitting there at St. Paul's Episcopal Church listening to

a lesson about Jesus healing a 12-year-old girl, that there was something fundamentally wrong with the lesson. There was an underlying political thread to the lesson, one that he did not think belonged. Butler is deeply religious,

but that night, it seemed to him that the speaker was trying to twist a New Testament story to push a political message. Although he understands politics and religion sometimes overlap, it was then that he started to question his relationship with the church, he said. That night made him think of other aspects of the church that he didn't agree with, like making statements proclaiming his faith when he wanted to be more open-minded, he said. "I'm still a Christian, but I don't go to church anymore," Butler said. In the U.S., the amount of Americans attending church at least once a week has declined from 39 percent in 2007 to 36 percent in 2015. The amount of Americans who seldom or never attend church has risen from 27 percent in 2007 to 30 percent in 2015, according to the Pew Research Center. Thirty-seven percent of Americans said a very important

reason they do not go to church is because they practice their faith in other ways, according to a Pew Research study that surveyed 4,729 adults. 28 percent say an important reason is that there are not believers and 23 percent say an important reason is because they haven't found a church or house of worship that they have liked. Twenty-six percent of respondents said that there is no important reason that they do not attend church, according to the Pew Research Center's 2018 study, "Why Americans Go (and Don't Go) to Religious Services." Samantha Haycock coordinates young adult ministries with St. Paul's Episcopal Church, and thinks it is common for young people in college to explore their faith and not make a firm commitment, she said.

"It's not surprising or troubling to me that a student would come and be a part of a community for a short period of time and then decide to go to try somewhere else," Haycock said. Even though Butler does not go to church, he does practice his faith in other ways, although his definition of religion is a little broader than most people's. When he feels like he needs to, he prays to God and he has been practicing Buddhism since he was 18 years old and meditates 30 minutes a day for the past two years. On occasion, he also picks up the Bible and reads. Right now, he is halfway through Leviticus, he said. Butler thinks religion is a good thing that allows people to be involved in a community, and it serves a purpose in his life, he said. For Keely Bolman, a Huntsville resident who has attended Fayetteville churches

to try to find one that she would fit into, churches were more than a community. When she was 16 and her grandfather passed away, it was members of her local church in Missouri that got her to church functions and school because her mother was disabled, she said. Christianity was something of which Bolman had always wanted to be a part of. She stayed home with her mom on Sundays until she was 7 years old because her grandparents did not want her to attend church until she knew who Christ was. When she finally got to go to church, she loved it and attended every Wednesday and Sunday night church service. Today, after all these years, her favorite memory is still being baptized on an Easter Sunday, she said. But in 2017, when she came to Arkansas, it was difficult to

See "Christian struggles" on page 10

Religious organizations offer sense of belonging, acceptance to students

Continued from page 1

the same experiences as they do, Ungar said. Sophomore Faizullah Asif, president of the Muslim Student Association, agrees that it can be difficult to find students of the same religion with similar experiences. Asif already knew people in the Muslim Student Association so it was an easy choice for him to join. If a student comes to school not knowing anyone, it can be an intimidating task to find a group, he said. "Our main focus as (the Muslim Student Association) is to provide a safe haven for Muslim students on campus and a place for them to feel welcome," Asif said. Many Muslim Student Association members are international students. They have members from Saudi Arabia, Mexico, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The organization encourages international involvement because it increases the diversity of the Muslim Student Association. Having a variety of different backgrounds helps bring awareness to the RSO and to the Muslim faith. Word of mouth is really

important when it comes to increasing membership and making the Muslim Student Association known on campus, Asif said. "Sometimes we struggle with getting Muslim students to actually join Muslim Student Association because of the stigma that surrounds our religion," Asif said. "I have friends that will help out with events but won't join because their friends will make fun of or bully them." As a group, they try to show other students that Muslims aren't always Arabic, which is the most common ethnic group associated with the religion, he said. He thinks that Muslim Student Association has made a lot of progress in changing the way students view Islam, Asif said. "I feel that we have made a positive change so far," Asif said. "Students will sometimes come to the mosque just to see what's going on and what we are about." Both Asif and Ungar agree that Christianity is the dominant religion on campus. Because they live in the Bible Belt, it is just the nature of the

population, they said. "It's definitely not a bad thing," Ungar said. "It's just a fact." Mathews knew he wanted to be involved with organizations on campus, but had no interest in an Interfraternity Council fraternity. An Interfraternity Council fraternity is an organization under the Interfraternity Council. Mathews had friends involved with Beta Upsilon Chi, a Christian social fraternity, which identifies as a fraternity but is not associated with the Interfraternity Council, that helped him get involved, he said. "We are an organization that cultures intentionality and pursuing our faith," Mathews said. BYX is more of a community than a religious organization, but members do get together in a small group type setting to talk and pray for each other. Sometimes, they pair up with other organizations on campus to host fun events or worship, Mathews said. "We prioritize our religion and are rooted in what we do daily," Mathews said. "As a whole, BYX supports each other and builds one another up in a way that is encouraging and makes you feel that sense of community."

Muslim students face obstacles in leaving class for religious reasons

Continued from page 1

Asif would prefer if students could have another designated place to pray on the east side of campus, he said. He thinks that even a professor offering their office for a few hours would be beneficial. Asif does not feel pressure to schedule his classes around prayer times, but he does try to create his schedule to fit in a Friday prayer service located at a mosque, Asif said. The Friday prayer is similar in importance for Muslims as Sunday morning church is to Christians, Asif said. "Jummah is what we refer to as 'Friday,'" Asif said. "The actual service that takes place at the mosque is referred to as the 'Khutbah,' and it's important because it's our weekly communal prayer. The men are obligated to go, and the women are recommended to attend." Asif attends services at the Islamic Center of Northwest Arkansas, located off West Center Street, according to the Islamic Center of Northwest Arkansas. Friday prayer time is at 1:30 p.m. year-round at the mosque, according to ICNA. "I understand if a professor would not allow me to leave class for a prayer time, but if I

have to miss Fridays consistently, I would expect them to work with me on that," Asif said. The UofA's policy for religious observances that if students wish to have an excuse for religious reasons, they must "provide their instructors with a schedule of religious holidays that they intend to observe, in writing, before the completion of the first week of classes," according to the university. "We are extremely thankful for the Multicultural Center on campus for having a prayer room," said Shameer Abdeen, public relations officer at the Islamic Center Of Northwest Arkansas and doctoral student at the UofA. Muslims are required to pray five times a day, and having a place to pray on campus means a lot to practicing Muslims with busy schedules, Abdeen said. "If you miss a prayer you can cover it up later. So if you are at work and it is the time of prayer, you can skip the prayer without any penalty from God," said Sarwar Alam, a professor in the Middle Eastern studies department. Islam has more emphasis on the pure intentions of prayer and thoughts above all, Abdeen said. People pray based on their situation and they all basically have the same essence.

"Students would not be allowed to leave my class to engage in prayer. They can pray anywhere, anytime, and if they have to miss a prayer for a class, they can cover it later," Alam said. Alam teaches Introduction to Islam and researches religious extremism as well as religion and public policy. "It is a secular university, we should maintain that secular space," Alam said. "I respect your faith and culture. I respect your belief, but keep it in you, and I will do the same thing with due respect. Let's have a common ground in higher learning, not religion." Alam thinks it is alright to have a space designated to practice faith but that UA officials should be careful not to encourage a spiritual, instead of academic, environment, he said. "A better understanding of religion is not bad at all. The conversations are important when they are secular," Alam said. "Create a dialogue about the spiritual aspect outside of the classroom for better understanding. That dialogue may be promoted to help students better understand their neighbors, but the university itself should remain secular." Neither Alam nor Asif have experienced any tension or discrimination from others on campus because of their faith, they said.



Christian struggles in search for accepting church in Fayetteville

Continued from page 8

find a church. She began looking for a church that could act as that community for her daughter and herself, but when she visited churches in Fayetteville and surrounding areas, she couldn't find that, she said.

"I feel like the more churches we have been to, they're just more judgmental," Bolman said.

Bolman lives off a low income and thinks that the people and church communities she attended in Missouri were more open-minded and welcoming. In Arkansas and specifically Fayetteville, she thinks because she doesn't appear to be in

the right tax bracket and does not dress as well as other churchgoers, that she is not as welcome in churches, she said.

"I mean, we don't have the best clothes in the world but walking into some of the churches, if you're not dressed a certain way, they don't want you there," Bolman said.

Bolman attended Cross Church in Fayetteville, and although she was used to people being more welcoming at her previous churches. In Missouri, pastors and ushers greeted new faces before and after service, but she has not had the same experience here, she said.

Dressing well may be a

standard in some places, but it is not something that churches do to make people feel unwelcome it's just tradition, said Zach Morris the associate college pastor for Cross Church.

"In our church on a Sunday, you may see a fortune 500 CEO sitting next to a college student, sitting next to a couple of a different race, sitting next to a low-income family," Morris said.

But some churches might make a big deal about contributing financially and how people dress, and while they might say they are welcome to everyone their body language or interactions might say otherwise, Haycock said.

Traditional foods give taste of home to international students

Continued from page 8

the most popular Eid dishes, his favorite dish though was one he had every Friday in his dorm in Pakistan. Every Friday, Husnain has a special prayer called Jumu'ah, and he would order biryani, a spicy rice dish. Without it, his Friday prayers are incomplete, he said.

For Iranian graduate student Iman Mosleh, Yalda, a Zoroastrianism celebration of the longest night of the year Dec. 21, is not complete without pomegranate and watermelon, which symbolize

dawn. This night comes from the Zoroastrianism part of Iranian culture, Mosleh said.

Zoroastrianism is a pre-Islamic religion of Iran. While Iran is Islamic, most of Iran-Islamic culture includes a part of Zoroastrianism, such as Yalda and other holidays like Nowruz, the Iranian new year on March 21, Mosleh said.

During Nowruz, Iranians eat Sabzi Polow Mahi, which is rice with herbs like dill, chives and parsley and the Mahi-mahi fish. Mahi-mahi is a fish native to Iran that tastes similar to salmon, except in the U.S. it is more expensive than in Iran and costs around

\$29 by the pound, Mosleh said.

On the first month of the Arabic calendar Muharram, Shi'a and Sunni Muslims celebrate the first 10 days of the month. Muslims come together and celebrate the martyred prophet, a grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, at Karbal and tell stories about his life, Mosleh said.

"It's not a happy gathering, but it is mostly we tell all the stories that belong to him," Mosleh said. "We celebrate all the things he did to make Islam powerful."

Food is served at the end of the celebration, Mosleh said.

Students, professors practice Buddhism based on nonviolence, compassion

Patrick Clarkson
Staff Reporter
[@loosy_goose](#)

Standing over a stone slab, humanities professor Geshe Thupten Dorjee readies his chakpur, a tool which he meticulously filled with colored sand only moments before. In front of him is a swirling pattern of sand, which he spent days creating. With a small step forward, he clicks a rod against his chakpur before getting to work.

Dorjee was born in Tibet, where 99 percent of people are Buddhists, according to the International Campaign for Tibet.

Buddhism is based on a philosophy of nonviolence, compassion, giving and logic. The Gautama Buddha was a monk who founded Buddhism and taught that if people truly examine his practices, then it will make sense to people. People can follow Buddhism as a religion or as a philosophy, Dorjee said.

It can take more than 100 hours of work to create a sand mandala. The amount of time spent on a sand mandala's creation represents a person's commitment to benefitting the world. A sand mandala represents a person's relationship with peace, harmony and happiness, Dorjee said.

Graduate student Samuel Binns thinks that a sand mandala encapsulates the ideas of Buddhism. The monks spend days creating the most precise details before destroying it, which represents the importance of impermanence and detachment that are central to Buddhist beliefs, he said.

During the closing ceremony, people are given bags of sand to spread the healing properties of the sand mandala. Binns thinks it is ironic to hold onto part of a symbol that represents impermanence but views it as a gift, he said.

Fayetteville resident Sam Divinia has seen three sand mandalas in his life. He thinks that they are the perfect example of the Buddhist teaching of impermanence. The creating and destruction of the mandala reflects all of the things that come and go in life, he said.

"You have this beautiful symbol meticulously made out of all these brilliant-colored sand particles," Divinia said. "(During) the final ceremony, they wipe it all out, and it's all grey sand."

Divinia thinks that there are devout members of different religions who think their way is the only way. People have occasionally judged him for his Buddhist beliefs, but he never holds it against them because that would contradict his Buddhist philosophy, he said.

Buddhism is based on a person's karmic deeds, or the morality of their actions, rather than their dedication to the religion. Buddhist practitioners do not try to convert people but instead try to share knowledge of Buddhism so that a person may choose if they want to follow Buddhist practices, Dorjee said.

Binns thinks of Buddhism as a philosophy that a person can choose to follow rather than as a religion. Binns thinks a person can be Muslim and Buddhist or Christian and Buddhist. Binns thinks that the world would be a better place if people adopt the philosophy, he said.

Buddhism has helped Binns be more grateful for the events that transpire in his life. The teachings have helped him slow down in a world that he views as quick and be more aware of what is happening, which has helped with being a student, he said.

Binns became a Buddhist during his undergraduate studies and is still developing his beliefs as he learns about Buddhism. Classes that covered Hinduism and Buddhism solidified his beliefs of non-violence and compassion that had been

developing since he was a teenager, causing his transition, he said.

"When I was 15, I began becoming more attentive toward others suffering and the idea of nonviolence and compassion," Binns said.

Fayetteville resident Dalton Hudson converted to Buddhism when he was a 16-year-old high school student in Alabama, he said. When he arrived in Fayetteville, Hudson studied with Dorjee. He believes that

Buddhism helps him find structure and happiness and that by helping others who are suffering, it will relieve his own, he said.

"I had a life-changing event when my grandmother died at 16," Hudson said. "And it is something that left me searching for something more."

Being Buddhist, Hudson has never faced any criticism for his beliefs since he has been in Fayetteville. Growing up in Alabama, he was sometimes

bullied for his Buddhist beliefs of nonviolence and for being different than the majority, he said.

Hudson first got into Buddhism when he joined a group that met on Sundays in high school. There are also a variety of groups in Fayetteville, such as the Tibetan Cultural Institute of Arkansas, he said.

The Tibetan Cultural Institute of Arkansas has weekly meditation classes on Monday and Wednesday. People might

have misconceptions about meditation, such as a person must sit down and cross their legs, but anything that helps a person be more attentive toward their surroundings and self, such as a walk, can be meditation, Binns said.

Meditation is starting to become more popular, Dorjee said. The purpose of meditation is to make people focus on self-discipline and stabilize their thoughts and mind.



Aleena Garcia Staff Photographer

Geshe Thupten Dorjee, a Tibetan monk and UA clinical assistant professor, leads the closing ceremony for the Tibetan Buddhist sand mandala in David W. Mullins Library on Nov. 17.

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OPINION

Students struggle to balance campus ministries with school, personal life

Emma Richardson
Columnist

Years ago when I first set foot on this campus, wide-eyed and innocent, full of freshman wonder and Baptist ideology, I became immediately involved with the first college ministry that crossed my path. As is common with campus ministries, there was both a church element that involved ministry-wide weekly meetings and a community element that was essentially a weekly Bible study.

I was incredibly lucky to join a Bible study with a group of girls who are very dear friends of mine to this day. I firmly believe that in college, especially during the first year, finding a support group of some kind is vital. What made mine so unique was that it was filled with upperclassmen who took me under their wings and supported me in any way they could.

During the second semester

of my freshman year, I was asked to consider being a Bible study leader, and I was hyped. I began attending leadership training meetings and joined a second Bible study for the freshmen women who wanted to become leaders the following year. I was doing something ministry-related most days of the week. And on top of all this, I was attending church weekly.

However, if I thought I was involved then, it was nothing compared to the weeks leading up to my sophomore year. The ministry I was a part of had a very intensive recruitment plan for freshmen over the course of welcome week involving barbecues, pancake parties and much more. While this was planned in part by the paid ministry staff, the vast majority of the actual work was done by student leaders. During the first week of my sophomore year, I made more pancakes than I had in my entire life.

After the welcome week activities, there was of course the follow up period in which

the leaders would individually text all the contacts that were given throughout the events. In just the first week of classes, I could feel myself spreading thinner and thinner. The staff members assured us that this was normal for welcome week and everything would be more manageable after we got into the swing of it. In a way that was true. There were far fewer events, but as the school year progressed, pressure began emerging from another direction.

The question, "Why are you here?" was mantra of sorts to our staff team. The idea was to point out that our time at the university was limited, but touching someone's life was forever. Admittedly this is a nice concept, but too often I thought that it was being used to squeeze every ounce of resources out of college students who already had far too many obligations competing for their time and energy. The pressure was not only to take on as much as possible, but also to prioritize ministry activities over school, social life and personal needs.

While this was rarely — if ever — stated outright, it was pushed in other ways. It was not uncommon that staff members would spotlight a student leader who had gone above and beyond in the ministry and urge us to do the same. Firstly, I want to say that there is nothing wrong with celebrating success. If a student has chosen to prioritize their campus ministry above all else,

then they should absolutely be celebrated for whatever successes they find there. That said, I do not think it is appropriate to use this example to pressure other students into setting their education, which they are paying thousands of dollars for, on the back burner. It is especially inappropriate if this makes a student feel that they are not committed to their faith because they are choosing to prioritize school over campus ministry involvement.

This frustration is significantly more widespread than just me. The number of adults in America identifying as religious dropped almost eight percentage points between 2007 and 2015. However just three percent of those identifying as non-religious were atheist. This suggests that people have more of a problem with the way religion is expressed than with the idea of God. In my experience with religion, churches and ministries often face the pitfall of creating an environment that pushes checklists and ministry time logged as proof of faith.

I should say that I do not think there is anything wrong with campus ministries. They provide a vital resource to individuals who wish to pursue their religion on campus, and the staff of this particular ministry truly believes in what they are doing. I also recognize that I signed up for extra commitment when I chose to be a leader. However, it is irresponsible of the staff,



Claire Hutchinson Staff Cartoonist

for whom this is a full-time, paid job, to allow and even encourage students to drain themselves dry. If I am not much mistaken, Jesus said in Matthew 11:28 "Come to me all who are weary, and I will give you rest," not "Come to me, but only if you're willing to ignore all your other responsibilities." Ultimately, I decided not to stay

with this particular ministry. Instead I attend a church that has an informal Bible study for college students once a week, or whenever I can make it.

Emma Richardson is a junior English major and a columnist for the Arkansas Traveler.

A state senator's religious intolerance places American liberties at risk

Micah Wallace
Columnist

Oh, First Amendment, how I appreciate and defend you. Your flowery words read that Congress, "shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

The simple concept screams, "America." It's part of the reason why the founders fled from tyrannical British rule, and it is supposed to be a principle tenet of our national identity.

Yet, in Arkansas, it seems like we are still working out

the kinks to this concept. Just a quick glance at one of our democratically elected leaders will say it all.

"95 percent of Muslim voters participated in this year's midterm election. Do you want them ruling everything in America?" state Sen. Jason Rapert (R) said on Facebook.

Muslims make up 1.1 percent of the U.S. population, Rapert. They couldn't even rule everything if they tried. Out of all of the elected officials in our country, only about a half of a percent of them are Muslims. Keep reaching, though.

Rapert claims that he

is targeted by those who want to "squench religious liberty and religious speech in the public square." This could not be further from the truth. It is senators like Rapert who put everyone else's religious liberties at risk. Yes, he is defending the exclusive religious freedoms of Christians, but he is squandering the rights of everyone else to be free from his religion. He is literally being sued for showing animosity to "those who support the constitutional separation of religion and government," according to Matt Campbell, the lawyer in the case. He is going to court over the constituencies he has silenced, yet he claims he is being persecuted. Rapert getting reelected proves this: The idea that there is any separation of church and state in Arkansas politics is a farce.

The incredible irony of Rapert biting his nails anxiously over the thought of Muslims voting — and making their voice heard like every other American — is appalling. This is Rapert, the man who made national headlines for inviting every single American lawmaker (all 7,383 of them) to join his group of National Association of Christian Lawmakers. How is this acceptable? He expresses explicitly that he wants to look at policy, "from a Judeo-Christian worldview."

Don't get me wrong, I have no problem with people of similar faiths meeting together and deciding on policy issues. The problem I have is when we approach problems from the viewpoint of our religion instead of the viewpoint of what is objectively factual and best for our constituencies.

People of all walks of life, all creeds, all races and all religions should have their voices heard in government. When politicians approach issues looking directly at their faith for answers instead of looking at facts, the issue is obvious: Our laws will be worse and benefit only a fraction of our constituencies.

Everyone should have the freedom of and from religion. Given this, why did the Arkansas State Legislature vote to put "In God We Trust"

signage in every school in Arkansas? Would parents feel comfortable if Muslims put up similar signs? Certainly not, so why is it okay when Christians do it?

The truth is, it is not acceptable for anyone to

religion and not respecting others or our Constitution.

The thing is, if politicians in the Arkansas State Legislature want to advocate for a religious theocracy in which the Bible is our guiding document and the Constitution plays second

communities, has anyone considered that more and more people will decide against the faith? No one should have to be forced into loving an all-forgiving, merciful God.

All religions are optional. It is up to people to decide which

“Don't get me wrong, I have no problem with people of similar faiths meeting together and deciding on policy issues.”

do this. No one should put up signs in publicly funded schools, paid for by the taxes of atheists, Muslims, Jews, Hindus and Christians alike, promoting any religion. How does that even make sense, given that the First Amendment prohibits laws "respecting an establishment of religion?" Bolstering it in our schools is certainly respecting an establishment thereof.

Here is a simple government litmus test: If you can't replace the word "God" with "Allah" and be comfortable, you are certainly promoting your

fiddle, that's fine. Don't claim that you are an advocate for religious liberty, though.

When the Ten Commandments from a particular holy book sits on public property in front of the Arkansas State Capitol, it is obvious that no one is encroaching on the believers of that faith.

There are two paths ahead: pretend like Christianity is exempt from the First Amendment or start treating all religions the same. As Christians impose their religion on children and

one best fits the facts and their belief systems. Government is not optional. As taxes get taken out of every person's paycheck, the infrastructure helps transport all citizens, and every child is legally required to go through some form of schooling, it is time that all religious preferences start getting respected rather than

Micah Wallace is a junior political science major and a columnist for the Arkansas Traveler.

"Once you clue into stone energies, you really begin to notice that everything in the environment has a vibrational property."
-Bo Larga, a believer in natural healing.
Quartz crystal deposit makes Arkansas attractive to New Age believers
Page 6

THE ARKANSAS **TRAVELER**



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