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## All Dulles Area Muslim Society Mosque

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Student perspectives on worship services from Instructor Jennifer Garvin-Sanchez's Religious Studies 108 Human Spirituality undergraduate course at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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# All Dulles Area Muslim Society Mosque

by Nizama Dervisevic

On September 24th, 2015 I attended a Muslim service in Sterling, Virginia. Normally their services are held on a Friday, but the 24th was a holiday called Eid. The most well known mosque in the area is called the Adams Center – All Dulles Area Muslim Society (46903 Sugarland Rd, Sterling, VA 20164), and the service I attended was held through them. Because the crowd was bigger than usual on holidays, and in order to be able to hold everyone attending, they held the service in another location and at various times. The service I attended was held at 8:00am at the Dulles Marriott Hotel in the grand ballroom (45020 Aviation Dr, Sterling, VA 20166). The presiding official during my service was Abdul Malik Ahmad; he was very kind and open to everyone who was attending the Eid Al-ADHA service. The Adams Center welcomes all Muslims (Sunni/Shiite) and there is no separation between them during the services, everyone is looked at the same and is there to worship.

When I arrived at the Dulles Marriott Hotel at 7:30am the parking lot was already filling up quickly. The hotel wasn't very big and the early service could only hold a maximum of 500 people, but that didn't stop people from showing up to worship on this holiday. I noticed on the outside of the building there were some police officers making sure everything went smoothly, and that no one disrupted the services. As I walked into the ballroom, where the service was going to be held, I noticed how the entire room was set up to accommodate

the vast majority of people there. The entire place was filling up very quickly.

I was visiting the service with a friend from high school, and she taught me the saying “Bajram Šerif Mubarek Olsun” which is wishing them a happy holiday. As people were pouring into the ballroom I would walk around with her and say it to people she would greet the same way, everyone was so friendly, they introduced themselves and told me if I needed anything I shouldn't hesitate to ask. While looking around, and talking to the different people near us, I noticed there were a vast variety of people attending this service. From all different social classes, gender, age, and ethnicities. Even though everyone was different, they all seemed happy to be there and happy to be around one another.

While attending the service I felt very comfortable because everyone made me feel welcome. When they asked me about my religion, I told them I didn't have one but I was interested in observing theirs, they were happy to tell me anything I wanted to know. The people I was surrounded with were extremely friendly and one of the kindest people I have met.

As the service was starting, people in the back who weren't able to stand and pray or who just wanted to sit and observe sat in chairs set up for them. The front, closer to where the prayer was happening, was set up so people could pray normally. Once everyone

was where they wanted to be for the service, Abdul started off talking about how we need to respect our brothers and sisters, and how we have to be good people within our short lifetime. After his sermon, Abdul began to read from the Quran, which started the prayer part of the service. They started off standing and then would kneel during the prayer and I just looked around and observed. Everyone was so into it and would close their eyes while they were praying. During the prayer, everyone synced up and it looked really beautiful just watching everyone do his or her thing in silence. The only thing you could hear was Abdul reading from the Quran. The opening was more casual than the other religious institutes I have visited, and everyone was more reserved during prayer because it was a private moment for them. The entire service felt ritualistic because people were synced up during prayer when they'd go down while kneeling then stand at the same time. It was beautiful to look at. I didn't even notice how much time was passing by, because I was absorbed just listening to Abdul read. As he read, the words flowed and just sounded beautiful, but I did not understand anything that was being said because it was all in Arabic. As I looked around during the service I noticed that everyone was wearing a star and moon (similar to how Christians wear their cross) and that the symbol was also on the podium where Abdul was talking/reading. The only ritual I could think of that was used was the symbolic "kneeling" we see whenever someone talks about Muslim prayer. In photos we see online and in books, we see Muslims kneeling and praying towards Mecca, and that is a common thing that happens with every prayer. No matter where a Muslim is in the world they must pray towards Mecca, and that generally happens while standing and kneeling,

because a Muslim is not allowed to sit and pray unless they physically cannot stand and kneel. •

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