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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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Dar Alnoor Islamic Community Center

by Mimi Nguyen

I attended a Friday prayer at the Dar Alnoor Islamic Community Center, on Friday November 20, 2015 at 12:30 p.m. The mosque is located in Manassas, Virginia. The address is 5404 Hoadly Rd, Manassas, VA 20112. The presiding official, also known as president, is named Ehsan Islam.

“The mission of the Muslim Association of Virginia (MAV) is to establish and maintain a vibrant community based on the Qur’an and Sunnah that is pleasing to Allah, through programs that support the religious, social and educational advancement of Muslims we serve. It also includes establishing and strengthening relationships with other Muslim and non-Muslim organizations that share our values.”

-quote from their website

Before attending this service, I of course did research on Muslim mosques. I was most nervous about attending a Friday prayer, so I made sure to look up rules on how to be respectful and act/dress appropriately. What I found was; as for etiquette, just behave and be respectful. Dress modestly, no tank tops and short shorts. Wear something that is loose and covers well. Be quiet during prayers and make sure to turn off cellphones. Sounded easy enough, and similar to etiquette for the Catholic Church I attended, as well as the Buddhist Temple. For Muslims, Friday’s the big day when believers gather to hear a sermon

and participate in ritual prayer. Attendance is religiously mandated for healthy adult Muslim males, encouraged for Muslim women, and usually open to curious non-Muslims.

My friend Yousaf Zaidi accompanied me, making the whole experience a lot more comforting. He introduced me to families that he knew, everyone was very nice and accepting. So most importantly was the dress code, dress in clean, modest clothes. For men, this means no shorts. For women, this means covering the arms and legs, avoiding tight or revealing clothing, and bringing along a headscarf. When entering the mosque or prayer area, remove your shoes. This is similar to the Buddhist Temple, always a little uncomfortable for me to remove my shoes in a public place, but it’s an incredibly clean mosque. There are no seats, people sit on the floor in mosques, so very unlike a Catholic Church where there were benches throughout the church. Sit next to other congregants on the floor. Choose the available space closest to the front of the room. In other words, the front rows should be filled first, particularly because the back rows should be left open for latecomers. Listen as a fellow congregant gives the adhan, or call to prayer. This means the Friday prayer service has begun; refrain from talking at this point. Sit quietly and listen while the imam, or prayer leader, offers a sermon, or khutbah. The first half the khutbah is the longest, followed by a brief period when the imam will sit down and offer silent prayers. Then he will

stand again to deliver the shorter final section of the sermon.

The building itself is massive, a lot of parking around the building. It's neutral colored with pops of a red brick color on the outside. As for the inside, as I stated earlier, there are no seats, just large space for people to sit on the floor. There are huge rugs covering the floor, with Islamic print, majority red. The walls are neutral colored. I was surprised when I checked their website, out of all the services I attended, the Dar Alnoor Islamic Community Center by far has the best website. It is very current, making it easy to find all the information. I was surprised but happy to see this.

The Muslim Association of Virginia (MAV) is a vehicle to influence the lives of Muslims and “grow” Islam in Virginia by involvement with other Faith groups and organizations. Muslim community life flourishes when the religious, educational, cultural and social needs of individuals are met. The Masjid is the center of spiritual and community life. Providing facilities, services and activities to facilitate the spiritual advancement of the Muslim community is the chief priority for the MAV. It's great to have a place like this for Muslims, they work hard to keep the Muslims in the community connected and educated about their culture. This experience was very eye-opening, I was most nervous to attend a mosque prayer, but I'm glad I did. •

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