

BU hosts discussion of Islamic culture, community

BRANDON, Man. – Brandon University (BU) is honoured to partner with Westman Immigrant Services and the Brandon Islamic Centre to host Walking Forward with Muslims, on Friday, March 24, 2017.

The event will provide an introduction and exploration of Islamic culture and Muslims in Brandon, featuring a panel discussion regarding current challenges, film presentation by Brandon filmmaker Meghan Cronkrite and traditional foods, tea and music.

“Islam is a tremendously rich and diverse religion,” said Dr. Faiz Ahmad, President of the Brandon Islamic Centre and a Biology Professor at BU. “The Islamic Centre has received considerable support from Brandonites, but there is also a great deal of misinformation that continues to be spread. This event gives us an opportunity to sit down and have a healthy conversation about Islam and Muslims in the community.”

The panel discussion will be chaired by Dr. Emma Varley, an Associate Professor of Anthropology at BU. Dr. Varley’s research focuses on Muslim community life, religious beliefs and practices, and women’s health and wellbeing in Pakistan. The panel will include faculty members from BU and Assiniboine Community College, as well as students and community members.

“We need to turn the conversation around because the image of Islam that is too often portrayed to us is far from reality,” Dr. Varley said. “In truth, Muslims have a vibrant and longstanding history in Canada, and share with non-Muslims in a common experience of Canadian society and culture. For individuals less aware of this reality, the panel provides a venue to engage in productive and peaceable discussion concerning the beliefs and concerns shared by Muslim and non-Muslim Canadians alike. This is also an opportunity to dispel those myths or misconceptions that present a barrier to intercultural and interfaith understanding.”

Dr. Alison Marshall, a Professor of Religion at BU, has traced the history of Muslims in Manitoba to the early 1900s. At the time there were less than 1,000 Muslims in Canada. While Canada’s Islamic community has grown greatly since then, Cronkrite fears that recent world events are creating a chasm that needs to be bridged. She raised the idea of holding an event at BU after helping to organize a similar event earlier this year at the University of Prince Edward Island.

Cronkrite's short film *Keep Walking Forward* will be screened at BU along with *Letter to a Terrorist*, by Winnipeg filmmaker Ayat Mneina. *Letter to a Terrorist* was produced by Mneina in response to November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, as well as Lebanon and Turkey.

"The reaction to these films has been very positive," said Cronkrite, who has also held a public screening for *Keep Walking Forward* at Westman Immigrant Services. "I feel it is very important for people to see the effects that terrorism has on Muslims as well. By sharing their perspective we can find a way to walk forward together."

The free event will take place from 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. in Harvest Hall and is open to the public.

Brandon University, founded in 1899, promotes excellence in teaching, research, and scholarship, and educates students so that they can make a meaningful difference as engaged citizens and leaders.

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