

in the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

The
HALAQA
HOW-TO
Packet

An MSA guide to running a successful study group

A product of MSA West

One of the main foundations of a Muslim Students' Association is the weekly *halaga* (study group). The impact of a strong *halaga* on an MSA over time is amazing. It is through such meetings that Muslim brothers and sisters strengthen themselves in Islamic knowledge and unity. For students who left strong, active communities when they came to college, the MSA must fulfill that critical role of a support group and for students only now coming to their deen, the MSA must fulfill the equally important role of mentor. An MSA *halaga* provides members with an opportunity to find the security of a community, the bonds of friendship, and a source of knowledge in their new homes on campus.

The Role of MSAs:

1) Internally: The MSA plays a very important role for Muslim students on campus. The MSA should offer the proper environment for Muslim students where they can learn about Islam and sustain or increase their level of commitment to this deen. This environment is needed for Muslim students to increase their understanding of their faith, to meet other Muslims, and to create a sense of community on campus.

2) Externally: Another important role of the MSA, after creating a community for the Muslim student on campus, is to deliver the beautiful message of Islam to the larger student body and in the purest forms. The MSA is obligated to implement programs that teach the general student body about Islam and to clarify any misconceptions they might have. Converting people should not be a goal of the MSA, we are not a people of evangelism. Muslim students should work to inform people about Islam. *Dawa* is a very essential element of the MSA and should be done in a variety of ways that make use of the resources available on campus.

In order for the MSA to survive it needs to hold a weekly or bi-monthly meeting for the MSA members. During this meeting the officers of the club get to interact with the club members and hear their ideas and at the same time everybody gets to feel a sense of belonging to the MSA. Many students will choose to incorporate an informational portion into their meetings (the *halaga*) while other MSAs will choose to have them on separate nights. In either case, the presence of both types of interactions is vital to the success of an MSA.

Many of our brothers and sisters who want to start an MSA or want to improve the MSA currently existing at their school struggle with how to run the MSA meeting. Often it is hard to determine where to place the balance between administrative issues of the MSA and educational/ social activities for the general body. No one wants members to get bored planning events and yet no officer wants members to feel they have no say in how the organization runs. *Insha'a Allah* we will try shed some light on types of meetings and *halaga's* that you can run and how to succeed in having a balanced program.

Different Aspects:

1) Educational: An important role the MSA plays in the lives of Muslim students is that of Islamic education. As club officers soon learn, many of our brothers and sisters lack Islamic knowledge and many of them don't even have the desire to learn

while other students may themselves have studied the Islamic sciences for years. The MSA is meant to be for all Muslim and officers should try to gauge where most of their MSA members are in their Islamic knowledge and in their desire to learn more. This means that not only should *halaqa* be held that cover simple and complex topics, but these sessions must be done in an interesting manner. Often, the time spent planning a *halaqa* is equally divided between preparing the informational portion and perfecting a means of delivery that will captivate and inspire an audience. Recognize that not everyone will be enthralled with every *halaqa* but that it most certainly is your responsibility to try. Also, many students—especially those who need the most encouragement to attend the informational *halaqa* will not become loyal MSA members until the MSA caters to some of their other perceived needs.

2) Social: The other main interest of MSA members is a social one. Muslims like to get to see each other and have fun together. Of course the social dynamics of the club are very important, they help build ties between Muslims on campus that increase the potential of MSAs. Having social events will attract Muslims who are far from friends and family, those who have left active Muslim communities, and those who are only now returning to their traditions. However, officers need to keep in mind that these types of activities should be held in a manner that is well balanced with the other roles, goals, and responsibilities of the MSA.

Though they are not directly related to establishing a successful study group, we are including these types of events since they are often a source of unity amongst Muslims which helps to encourage more students on campus to attend the *halaqa*.

3) Administrative: In order to fulfill the preceding two roles MSAs play, there has to be some organization and planning. This administrative work is usually designated to a few officers who work with the input of the members at large. It is important that communication about what is going on, what ideas the officers have, and when help is needed, is effectively conducted between MSA officers and MSA members. However, officers should be realistic and not overburden their members with the work that they were elected to do. Meetings should be used for announcements, passing flyers, and assigning people to tasks needed for the major events, but they should be about more than only that.

How to Run a *Halaqa* and MSA Meeting?

There are a variety of ways that MSAs have in the past managed to fulfill the different roles they are expected to play on campus. After a semester or so of trying different methods, you will soon learn what works best for your campus. You can always call up officers from other campuses to see what they do with their members, but remember that different campuses will have different dynamics and what works for them may not work for you. Some examples are listed below:

1) Divide the meeting into more than one portion. In other words, designate a time for educational material, time for administrative issues, and social time. For example, if the MSA meetings on your campus are 1-hour a week, then try to have 30-minutes for

Islamic education, 20-minutes for social interaction, and 10-minutes for administrative announcements.

Advertise the meeting this way saying that the meeting will begin at 5:00 pm with MSA business, followed by a presentation on some topic at 5:10pm with snacks or dinner at 5:45pm. That way people who have no interest in the operational issues of the MSA can come late if they choose.

2) Divide the meetings on a weekly basis where you have the *halaqa* every other week covering either a series of topics (the lives of the prophets (may peace be upon them), chapters from a specific book (see Appendix A)), or a random assortment (see Appendix B). Then on the off weeks, you can have social events (see Appendix C) and/ or administrative/ planning meetings.

This model works usually when you need the full hour or the full meeting time for the program you are trying to do, either the educational or the social.

Appendix A

Suggested Readings

The below list of books has just a few of many books that your MSA members may choose to use. Suggest to your members that you all try and buy a copy of the book and go through one chapter a week on your own (more if they are short). Then one person can be designated to lead the discussion every week and to pose thoughtful questions to the group. This way, by the end of the year, everyone will have read at least a few books related to Islam and *Insha'a Allah* increased themselves in knowledge.

David, Ron, *A rabs & Israel for Beginners*

Diouf, Sylviane A., *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas*

Ghazali, Zainab, *Return of the Pharaoh*

Haley, Alex, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

Imam Ibn Kathir, *Stories of the Prophets*

Lings, Martin, *Muhammad: his life based on the earliest sources*

Murad, Khurram, *In the Early Hours*

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, *A Young Muslim's Guide to the Modern World*

Imam an-Nawawi, *40 Hadith*

Qutb, Sayyid, *In the Shade of the Quran*

Appendix B

Halaqa Topics

Should your members decide they do not want to all purchase books, nor do they want to stick to a single series of topics, we've included a few possible topics below. Each week, appoint a member to prepare for the week to come. It will then be that person's responsibility to do the research and present an interesting (and hopefully interactive) session at the following *halaqa*.

The compilation of the Quran

Selections from the seerah of the Prophet (peace and the blessings of God be upon him)

Manners in Islam
Brotherhood/ Sisterhood in Islam
The sources of shariah
The conflict in Kashmir
The Nation of Islam
The importance of dua
The rules of business
Selections from the history of the Islamic Caliphate
 The Hijra
 The Battle of Badr
 The Battle of Uhud
 The reign of different Caliphs
Stories about the Companions
Scientific discoveries from the Muslim world
The rules of marriage in Islam
The tafsir of surat al-Asr
The Muslims brought over as slaves from Africa
The conflict in Palestine
Islamic Jeopardy (a variety of topics put into one game)
Islam and the Environment
Jihad and what it means for students
The scholastic tradition in Islam
Selections from famous Muslim poets
The crisis in Iraq
The rights of women
Various political movements in the Muslim world and here in the States
Angels
Islamic Pictionary (a variety of topics put into one game)
The signs of the end of time
The arrival of the four mathahab

Appendix C

Social Event Ideas

Below are just a few possible activities (aside from the generic dinners) your MSA can host to help get Muslims on your campus to bond.

Ice cream social
Paintballing
Bungee Jumping
Sister/ Brother cook-off dinner
Getting together for a sleepover followed by tahajood prayer
Meeting for sahoor during Ramadan
All day at an amusement park
Mountain climbing (if there are nearby facilities)
Camping (if feasible)
Sledding (weather-permitting)
Hiking
BBQs

Road trips to attend activities hosted by MSAs at other campuses
Poetry reading contests
Cultural shows
Basketball and other sports (yes, for sisters too)
Social events planned with other MSAs
Ski-diving

Appendix D

Important Points:

- 1) Many students may be intimidated by the educational portion of the MSA activities (*the halaqa*). This is mainly due to the lack of knowledge we have about Islam as students and also the ability of being able to teach Islamic Material.

There is more than one way to solve this problem:

- a) To have more confidence in ourselves and try to improve as Muslims while we are trying to teach or share what we know with others. We can always research a small topic and try to come and share it with the group. This could be an Aya from the Quran, or even a Sura, or a Hadith of prophet Muhammad (may the peace and blessings of God be upon him). As long as you do your research, then *Insha'a Allah* Allah SWT will help you out in running the meeting. Also, try to encourage other students to research a topic, Sura, Hadith and try to come and share it with the group. Of course we always should be careful with what we present and if we are not sure of something we should ask those who know or avoid speaking about it.
- b) The second way of solving this problem is to invite guest speakers to your MSA. These speakers do not have to be Shaykh's, but someone who is knowledgeable enough to guide you or inform you about a needed topic.

- 2) What is a Social Event?

A social event could be any event where the MSA creates an atmosphere where its members socialize and interact with each other. It could be a BBQ picnic, a Pizza day, a meeting where you have a Islamic Trivia game, etc...