

The Power of Partnership



Photos by Erik Jepsen/UC San Diego Publications

Muslim Student Association and Union of Jewish Students collaborate on proposal to expand campus dining hall menus

Two student groups are partnering on an initiative to increase the variety of Kosher and Halal food options in campus dining halls. The joint initiative by the Union of Jewish Students and the Muslim Student Association has been in the works for about a year.

“Our group was looking at improving the Kosher options, and we recognized that we are not the only religious student organization on campus that has diet restrictions,” said Zev Hurwitz, executive president of the Union of Jewish Students (UJS).

Although Halal and Kosher diets differ, both groups decided to work together on a proposal finalized in April that advocates for increased food options that fit both the Halal and Kosher diet criteria.

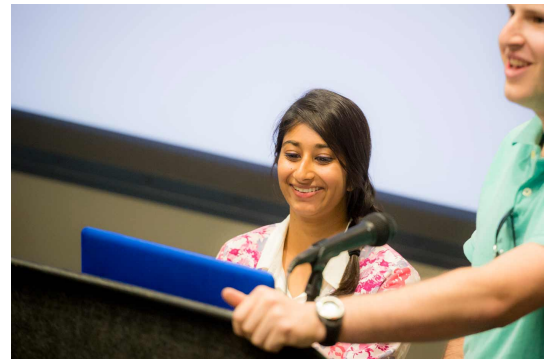
“Dietary restrictions are something both Muslim and Jewish students struggle with,” said Ramsha Shakil, vice president of external affairs of the Muslim Student Association (MSA). “We are very fortunate to be working together to address issues that concern our members, especially those living on campus.”

Hurwitz and Shakil, as well as other members of both the MSA and UJS, have had meetings with campus leadership to outline their shared vision of increased dining options for both groups of students.

“It has been a wonderful experience hearing from these students who envision an inclusive dining experience for members of both student organizations,” said Assistant Vice Chancellor of Housing, Dining and Hospitality Mark Cunningham. “Housing, Dining and Hospitality is designed to respond to students’ needs and wants, and we’re always aiming to improve our services to the campus’s diverse student body.”

One of the goals outlined in the proposal is to have Kosher and Halal dining stations adjacent to each other in the dining halls to help foster increased interaction among students of both Jewish and Muslim faith.

“We’ve long thought this is not a political issue, this is a food issue,” Hurwitz said. “And food can always bring people together.”



Hibah Khan, MSA



Zev Hurwitz, UJS

Interim Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Alan Houston noted, “The partnership between these two groups is inspiring. Working together, these students hope to improve the experience of both Jews and Muslims at UC San Diego. This is a powerful example of how collaboration can strengthen the campus community as a whole.”

Shakil, who is a third year Sixth College student majoring in chemical engineering, works in the external affairs component of MSA, which focuses on providing a community for Muslims on campus. The mission of MSA is

to help create an environment for the development and networking of Muslims on the UC San Diego campus, while fostering a sense of community between Muslims and non-Muslims through education.

Hurwitz, a third year political science major at Warren College, has been an active member of UJS since 2012. The student organization is designed to create a vibrant Jewish campus community. UJS is responsible for creating welcoming Shabbat experiences as well as planning holiday celebrations and other events that celebrate Jewish traditions with the campus community.

In addition to finding a common cause for which to jointly advocate, members of both student groups also made new friends in the process.

“UJS and MSA have found things important to both our organizations,” Shakil said. “Through working on this project, this collaboration has also made new advocates for MSA.”



Hurwitz echoed Shakil’s sentiments.

“I personally value my new friendships with individuals in the Muslim community,” Hurwitz said. “It has been a great opportunity to work with members of another faith. We have come a long way, and we are very excited about this partnership. We think it is a great opportunity for us.”

Shakil said she thinks other groups on campus can learn from the MSA and UJS partnership.

“I hope that other organizations will learn that there are things that one can find in common with other organizations and those things in common can bring them together,” Shakil said. “I respect UJS coming to MSA to collaborate on this project, and we all hope that this project will be a success.”