South Asian American Community Initiatives

- Diya (South Asian-American Student Association) Status Report
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History of the Organization

Diya is the South Asian American Student Association of Duke University. As one of the largest student-run organizations on campus, Diya's mission is two-fold: First it is to actively promoting a greater awareness of social, cultural, and political issues concerning South Asia, and second to reach all members of the Duke community, encouraging a true cultural unity by celebrating our differences.

Duke University is home to many vibrant ethnic and multicultural organizations. These organizations have had a historically significant impact in exposing members of the Duke community to a broadly diverse set of cultures and traditions and have been instrumental in creating the atmosphere of tolerance and diversity that exists at Duke today. We strive to provide a forum for interaction among those interested in South Asian heritage and South Asian American culture. Diya promotes the sharing of these cultures with the Duke community and represents South Asian and South Asian American interests to the campus at large. Our organization consists of more than 350 members of both South Asian and non-South Asian descent.

One of the ways Diya seeks to increase university-wide exposure beyond the scope of the South Asian community is through cultural programming. The most distinguished of Diya's cultural events, with its goal of campus education and enrichment, is the fall cultural show known as AWAAZ.
Status Report

FUNDING

After last year’s Unity Through Diversity Luncheon, the University set up a special task force to deal with the thorny issue of funding for large-scale cultural events. This task force’s recommendations resulted in the creation of this year’s $100,000 Cultural Fund. Diya is grateful that the University has taken these steps to recognize the beneficial impact that our organization and other such cultural organizations have across campus, especially through the production of events like Awaaz (formerly Diwali), Lunar New Year, Latino Heritage Month, and Kwanzaa. This fund’s existence has undeniably eased Diya’s fundraising burden for Awaaz.

At the same time, this fund is simply a temporary solution, and the funding structure needs to continue improving. When the fund was first created, Diya and many other cultural organizations assumed that the funds would be reserved for established events with a broad-based, multicultural reach. This was the intention of our argument to add an addendum to the University Fund at last year’s luncheon. Because of the high demands on the Cultural Fund, Diya was granted only a portion of the budget we requested. Once again we were compelled to draw upon traditional methods of fundraising, such as lobbying other student organizations across campus—although on a smaller scale than in the past. While we are thankful for the partial relief afforded by the Cultural Fund, we believe that, ultimately, the University’s goal must be to provide full financial support for broad-based and established events like Awaaz, Lunar New Year, and Kwanzaa. We think Awaaz’s track record as the largest student-run annual event at
Duke should merit a place as a line item in the University’s funding scheme, so that we can devote the time and energy now spent on fundraising to improve the program itself.

**Access to Facilities**

One of the main necessities in putting together the AWAAZ is obtaining practice facilities for the 8-9 dance performances in the show. For about four weeks prior to the show, participants in the dances and fashion show meet approximately three times a week. In the two weeks before the big event, the dancers and performers meet almost every day.

Since Wilson Rec was built for Duke students, Diya feels it is the ideal place to practice and perfect their performances. But since last year we have run into numerous difficulties in obtaining their main recreation rooms. Because Wilson regulations limit each student group to only eight hours of access per week, we are caught with a serious practice space shortage, especially closer to the actual dates of the performance. Even more frustratingly, these rules prevent us from using the rooms, which are theoretically open to all Duke students, *even if they are empty*. If the performers for each dance were viewed as an individual student group, we would be able to find adequate practice space; but since current regulations consider Diya accountable for all 150 dancers as a single performance group, it is nearly impossible for us to find the space we so desperately need.

We understand the fair-access rationale behind the eight-hours-per-week rule. But Diya, as an organization, only uses the practice facilities for one month out of the entire year. Given the specific nature of the program (especially its time table), we urge the Wilson administrators to adopt a more flexible policy to accommodate our need for
longer access time in that one month. We hope this issue can be addressed by next year so that we may continue our annual preparations for AWAAZ.

**STUDENT RECRUITMENT**

Earlier this year, Diya met with the Admissions Office to encourage an increase in Asian American recruitment on campus. We see this change as an extremely crucial one towards increased outreach to general Asian recruitment. As students involved in issues related to South Asians and South Asian Americans on campus, we would like to also be involved in the outreach and recruitment procedures and hope to expand upon what has already been established. After talking to Ms. Pulido, we have set some goals for recruitment in the short-term and long-term.

In the short-term, we would like outreach efforts to include:

- A segment addressing Asian and South Asian student life in recruitment presentations at high schools and other community events
- The distribution of more detailed information packets in the general information and admissions packages to prospective freshmen
- Continuation of Blue Devil Days South Asian and Asian event

In the long-term, Diya would like to see:

- A recruitment weekend similar to Latino Student Recruitment Weekend and the Black Student Alliance Invitational
Beyond general recruitment, we would like to see a greater increase in recruitment of specific subgroups within this general category of South Asians and Asians. For example, the percentage of Pakistani students at Duke is significantly less the number of Indian students on campus. Another area that could be improved is the overall socioeconomic diversity of everyone on campus. Diya hopes that administration, faculty and student can work together in order to increase the number of Asians and South Asians on campus through short-term and long-term student recruitment.