



Students appreciate culture during Coming to America: Saudi Arabia at Herr House, sponsored by International Student Services. Photo courtesy of Najla Alkhalifa

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When it comes to expressing, celebrating, and appreciating culture, Najla Alkhalifa, president of the newly-founded Saudi Club and a second-semester graduate student, says she wants fellow students to know that the Saudi Club is open to anyone who may be interested.

While Alkhalifa, originally from Riyadh, the country's capital, says Saudi Arabia is not al-

together different from other Middle Eastern cultures, she says her background is marked by certain Islamic traditions, the interpreting and practicing of beliefs found in the Holy Quran, and how much they treasure their privacy.

"In general, we are a private community," said Alkhalifa, "[so] the world may misunderstand [us] or create rumors because they are not sure of who we are. One goal [of the Saudi Club] is to be open to other cultures and to let others see who we are as well."

Privacy should not be mistaken for exclusiv-

ity, as Alkhalifa says all students from all backgrounds, religions, and cultural differences are welcome to join the Saudi Club and attend their celebrations.

Alkhalifa says those from her country value sharing their culture and celebrating with all sorts of people. She says wants students to know that the Club will be planning and organizing several celebrations that are directly tied to Saudi culture. Two well-known holidays are National Saudi Day, which was celebrated at the end of September according to Alkhalifa, and

Eid-al-Adha.

She says that Eid-al-Adha is the second largest holiday in her culture back home. According to timeanddate.com, Eid-al-Adha is an Islamic festival celebrated by Muslims around the world. During the event, many Muslims make special efforts to pray and listen to a sermon at local mosques. They also wear new clothing and jewelry, and may provide a symbolically sacrificed animal. The Web site also states that Eid-al-Adha is celebrated in other places aside from Saudi Arabia, such as Indonesia, Jordan, Malaysia, and Turkey and is considered a public holiday in these countries.

According to Alkhalifa, Eid-al-Adha is nicknamed "The Meat Day" due to the preparation and serving of several kinds of meats during the festival. Depending on the Middle Eastern background, some native delicacies include lamb, goat or sheep, and camel and the celebration lasts the entire day. Alkhalifa says the club plans to hold the festival on the afternoon of Oct. 26, starting with a small informative presentation and every student who may have the slightest interest is welcome.

When asked what she appreciates most about her culture, Alkhalifa says she loves the discipline and self-control that her background has taught her.

"There are a lot of rules in Islamic culture," said Alkhalifa. "You have a choice to follow or not to follow, but it teaches you how to experiment with your [personal] limits. It's a good lesson on life."

Alkhalifa said she does not consider herself the president of the Saudi Club, but says her role is more of an older sister to club members. She says anyone who is Saudi is automatically a member, whether active or inactive, and due to their similar backgrounds, they are all considered a part of her long lost family.

Alkhalifa says everyone who may be curious about her country, religion, or cultural celebrations should not be afraid to ask questions. She says it's important to get clarification on the ideas others may have concerning the club.

"Park has been a very friendly place and in the last few years I have made more friends [than I expected]," Alkhalifa said. "Don't set up walls between you and different people. Don't believe what you hear, [but] experience it yourself."