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Muneerah Maalik

Muneerah Maalik 2000
Illinois Wesleyan University

SEP, Illinois Wesleyan University

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Oral History Interview with Muneerah Maalik '00,
Conducted over phone, July 21st, 2005

Muneerah Maalik: Yeah, I'm not sure. I think it was actually incorporated on campus the year after I graduated.

Student: Oh, okay. Well, someone told me you were in it, so-

Maalik: No. We- we had regular prayer services on Fridays-

Student: Uh-huh.

Maalik: -but the association was not actually established until a year after I left.

Student: What year did you graduate?

Maalik: 2000.

Student: Oh, okay. Okay. Well, they told me that they started it in 1999, so-

Maalik: Oh. I don't- I don't think it was established in 1999.

Student: Okay. Well, do you still want to answer the questions?

Maalik: I- I sure can. Did you- did you get the email that I also sent you for Samir and Hanif?.

Student: Yeah.

Maalik: Okay.

Student: I checked my email and I tried to email them and Samir's email doesn't work and Hanif never emailed me back, so-

Maalik: Which one?

Student: Samira's doesn't work and Hanif never emailed me back.

Maalik: Samir's doesn't work. Okay, I'll give Samira a call. I knew he said he was going to take a while, but he said that he was going to answer the phone. He's studying for the BAR right now.

Student: Oh, okay.

Maalik: So he'll get back with you.

Student: Oh, okay. Alright. Thank you though. First, can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

Maalik: Yeah. I- I graduated from Illinois Wesleyan in 2000 with a Bachelors in sociology. I was very active on campus, part of the organization that formed a solid triangle, which is now Savvy. I don't know if Savvy is still active on campus. I was an RA on campus. I played two sports, was in BSU. I currently work in Chicago for Columbia College Chicago doing community outreach at the Chicago public schools, where I run a community school program, which is just development of a whole list of job resources and programming at the school. I've been doing that type- that work for four years now and still very active with the university because I- I co-chaired the Minority Alumni Network and I sat on the selection co- committee for the new dean, so- and I'm currently trying to get back into track and field but...with finishing up my graduate degree right now it's been pretty tough to kind of to manage both of those and work full-time, but that's me in a nutshell.

Student: Okay. Can you- I don't know. I kind of have to tailor my questions since you weren't really in the MSA. But-

Maalik: Right.

Student: Do you remember hanging out with Muslim students on campus?

Maalik: Yeah. Actually, I lived in the international house for a while and we had several Muslim students in the international house, so I think it was three of us living in the international house for a while. Hanif and I were the only two African-American Muslim students on campus for a very long time and really, outside of, you know, the Friday jummah prayers, we didn't come together- or at least I didn't come together a lot with the Muslim students outside of the month of Ramadan.

Student: Okay. What kind of things did you do during Ramadan?

Maalik: We mostly broke fast together, had our evening prayers together and Hanif and Samir and (unsure, 3:47??) were all very instrumental in getting the university to start a celebration of Eid every year. So I know that that did began around '99 but I did make the assumption that the Muslim Student Association had been formed just because we were celebrating the Eid of the campus.

Student: Okay. Do you remember any types of events that MSA did besides just during Ramadan or was that it?

Maalik: For what I can recall, that was it. I know that- actually, I know that Hanif and Samir and some of the other guys did things off campus with ISU with some local organization, but again I'm not fully aware of what those things were.

Student: Okay. Can you describe an event that took place during Ramadan, those Ramadans that you celebrated together that really stands out?

Maalik: The Eid took place mostly in...what's the name room...in the- in the-

Student: Davidson?

Maalik: I'm sorry?

Student: The Davidson room?

Maalik: The Davidson room? Is it like when you- when you come into Hansen?

Student: Oh, okay.

Maalik: I'm- I'm not sure. But it was usually an evening event just explaining to the campus what the month of Ramadan was, listening to the Muslim students on campus, inviting them to a day of fast, and us breaking fast and having a small feast.

Student: Okay. Would you say that the Muslims on campus impacted the Wesleyan community at all?

Maalik: Probably around religion. I'd say yes, because I mean, it- it always adds an element of diversity, and I think- I'm sorry. Hold on. I'm sorry, someone just stopped up my car. I think it adds that element of diversity and awareness because a lot of people are not aware of the numbers of Muslim students on campus and they're not aware of the diversity within the religion, and it always brings up interesting conversations when they notice we're observing the month of Ramadan and they're noticing we're not taking part actively in Lent which is big on campus.

Student: Mm-hmm.

Maalik: And I think that the awareness impact- like not a large portion of the campus, but a small enough portion so that, you know, people are more, should I say, sensitive to Islamic religion and, you know, the Muslim culture.

Student: Okay. Do you think that people at Wesleyan show any interest in wanting to learn more? Like what types of ways would people show interest on campus?

Maalik: Of course some of my friends did. I can't speak to the greater Wesleyan community. But I know like when I was in the- the international house, especially the international students, I would say yes.

Student: Okay. And in what- were they, like, interested in like asking you questions or would they like want to participate in things with you?

Maalik: Yeah. They would ask me to show them how we pray, wanted to the discuss- wanted to dispel some of the myths and stereotypes that they share within the religion, and the- the biggest thing was the observation of Ramadan and the fast and wanting to somehow participate in that.

Student: Okay. Did the events of 9/11 or anything else significant change Muslim students' dynam- dynamics on campus?

Maalik: I wasn't on campus for 9/11, ever.

Student: Oh. Okay. I'm sorry. [Maalik laughs] And what can you tell me about MSA origins? I know we talked about it before, but do you know anything else about it?

Maalik: No. I don't.

Student: Okay. Did Muslims on campus face any challenges?

Maalik: Not that I- not that I'm particularly aware of. I know that (unsure, 8:39??) was just very supportive of making sure that we had space and opportunities to share and practice when I was there. And I- I never felt as though I was an outsider or that I was being challenged or threatened because I was a Muslim student.

Student: Okay.

Maalik: I actually participated in an elective on the life teachings of Jesus Christ, and I- I could honestly say that that class and that experience- I drew a lot of close friends just from

participating in that class and being able to tell my side and my relationship with Jesus Christ and having that discussion, you know? So-

Student: Okay.

Maalik: -and again, I think (unsure, 9:36??) was very supportive in that.

Student: That's good. How can Wesleyan recruit more Muslims?

Maalik: I think that they have to do a better job of saying that it's a non-denominational school-

Student: Uh-huh.

Maalik: -and that it's open to any religious denomination and any person of, you know, any religious background. I also think that our students and our alums need to do a better job of just bringing people- making people aware that we do have that population of students on campus and that they have a need and that the Muslim community in the US is one of the major communities.

Student: Okay. If you could tell someone who- you what this project is about already?

Maalik: No, not completely. I think it feeds off of everybody. [laughs] But you're the first to actually call me and follow up with me so it will be bits and pieces, but I'm not sure exactly what it's about.

Student: Okay. Well, we're trying to add to the archives in the library. They have archives about student organizations, about all types of things in the library from really far back, and one of the- one of the girls in the SEP was looking through the archives. She worked at the library. She was looking through the archives and she was noticing that a lot of stuff was lacking as it...about Muslim organizations. So she- she suggested that we do this project to add stuff to the multi-cultural organizations file in the archives because she wanted us to be able to have our mark when someone like, you know, a hundred years from now, they would be able to know that, "Okay, these organizations were on campus," so that's what we're going to do.

Maalik: Okay.

Student: And if you could tell someone who was looking through the archives fifty years from now about anything about the MSA or Islam, what would you say?

Maalik: I'd say that though small, it's an org- it's growing, and a unique element of diversity on

campus that we need to nurture, and I think that as Wesleyan moves to more diversity, it's definitely going to be something that we pay- that we need to pay a lot more attention to.

Student: Okay. Well, that's all I have. Did you want to mention anything else that I didn't ask you?

Maalik: No. You're a really great interviewer.

Student: Thanks for that. I really appreciate it.