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Introduction

The Muslim student community has contributed to the USask mission of being what the world needs through academics or community-based initiatives. Hundreds of Muslim students on campus call USask a place to work, study, and grow as they progress onto a new chapter in their lives.

Muslim students have identified USask as their home, where they spend several hours studying, working, and building the community. Salah (prayer) is one of Islam's five key pillars, which states that one has to pray, and it comes only second after the Shahadah (declaration of faith) and is one of the criteria for a person to be considered Muslim.

Salah plays an integral role in the sustenance of Muslim students' mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical health. Researchers have found that religious beliefs such as prayer positively influence students' mental health (Kiyani et al. 2011). Challenges in performing prayer thus create barriers for Muslim students to excel in their studies. As such, Muslim students need a space where they can establish prayer.

We recognize that USask has allocated a Musallah (place of prayer) for addressing the needs of Muslim students, and we are thankful for that space. However, the current space in Saskatchewan Hall is not accessible, and it does not reflect USask's standards amongst its peers in other U15 universities.

Moreover, the relationship between the university and the Muslim Students' Association has not been as strong as it could be. This lack of engagement and communication creates a feeling of isolation and exclusion for Muslim students and leaves their needs unaddressed. It is important for the university to establish a strong relationship with the Muslim Students' Association, to engage in open dialogue to understand the challenges Muslim students face, and to find ways to support them.

We want to highlight the importance and meaning of Salah, its vital role in Muslim student life, and some of USask's current standards for spiritual spaces in the letter.

This Letter is drafted by
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The Importance and Meaning of Salah (Prayer)

For many Muslim students on campus, spirituality is part and parcel of our daily living, work, and self-development. We need to nourish that connection with our Creator by turning to Him five times a day in prayer. Our spiritual needs are multifaceted, spanning mental, emotional, and physical health. Salah is at the forefront of strengthening our abilities in all areas, especially as successful students. It is a protection and an anchor from all the challenges we face.

Muslims perform Wudhu (ablution) before performing Salah, which must be completed in a clean and quiet space. The Salah itself requires focus and proper Neeyah (intention). Each step is mindful and done with the etiquette of humility before our Creator. We do it to please Him and be reminded of our true purpose in any setting, including at university. A detailed description of the steps of Salah can be learned [here](#).

The Connection Between Spirituality and Academia

Prayer plays an integral role in the sustenance of Muslim students' mental and spiritual health. When the spiritual needs of Muslim students are effectively fulfilled, their performance as students is increased as well. Several students spend over ten hours on campus in activities, including classes, meetings, and studying in the library. Having only one safe space to pray is neither accessible nor conducive to their health. As such, it is incumbent that the university considers these concerns throughout all libraries on campus and major buildings.

Comparative Analysis of U15 Prayer Spaces

On average, when surveying other Canadian universities, four to six prayer rooms are available across campuses. Various prayer spaces are made accessible and accommodating for Muslim students:

Name	Number of Prayer Spaces	More Info
University of Toronto	6	Click Here
University of Waterloo	12	Click Here
University of Alberta	4	Click Here
McMaster University	6	Click Here
University of Calgary	4	Click Here
Queen's University	4	Click Here
University of Ottawa	4	Click Here

Western University	2	Click Here
University of British Columbia	4	Click Here
University of Manitoba	3	Click Here
University of Regina	1	Click Here
Dalhousie University	6	Click Here
McGill University	1	Click Here
Université de Montréal	-	No Information Available on University Website
University of Saskatchewan	2	No Information Available on University Website

The Musallah

With the help of the Muslim Chaplain, the Muslim Students' Association (MSA) established the Musallah on the University campus in Saskatchewan Hall 21. The Musallah serves as a place of solace and support for the Muslim Student community on campus and was established after a significant investment of \$20,000 from the Muslim Chaplain. Despite this, the Musallah has faced challenges in the past, including the threat of being taken away due to neglect of the needs of Muslim students by the University. The Musallah serves as the only designated space for Muslims to complete their five daily prayers on the entire university campus.

Conclusion

The Muslim Students' Association's (MSA) mission is to create a safe campus environment where Muslim students celebrate their Islamic identity while developing and positively impacting others with it. Our Islamic identity goes hand-in-hand with our health and wellness. A nourished and protected Islamic identity adds to the diversity and benefit of the University by contributing to a thriving campus community.

We believe that it is the collaborative responsibility of the University and the MSA to create an inclusive and welcoming environment for all students, which requires addressing the needs and concerns of Muslim students. We hope that the University will take steps to address the lack of accessible prayer spaces on campus and to establish a stronger relationship with the Muslim Students' Association.

Concerns and Recommendations

Below is a summary of the concerns and recommendations outlined in this letter. We hope to work together to bring this goal to fruition and take care of those that call USask a place to work, study, and grow.

Concerns:

1. Students require quiet and private spaces to perform their daily prayers, and the current facility on campus is often inadequate, overcrowded, and inaccessible. This creates difficulties for students who have to leave their classes, offices or study spaces and travel to pray, causing them stress and distractions from their studies and other activities.
2. USask's standards to operate current prayer spaces on campus as compared to other U15 Universities.
3. The current Musallah is not well-furnished or equipped enough to handle the rapidly-growing Muslim population on campus.

Recommendations

Short-term solutions:

1. A tour of the current prayer space on campus with the provost, appropriate representatives from the university, and the USSU president in Saskatchewan Hall 21.
2. A short-term renovation and minor fixtures to make the space more accessible.
3. Online presence of resources and prayer locations visible like other U15 Universities.
4. Considering Murray Library's current renovations and including a room/time dedicated to prayer.

Long-term solutions:

1. Identify other possible prayer and wellness spaces around the campus in the next three years. Specifically, in the libraries where students spend most of their time.
2. Consideration of prayer space and wellness spaces in the upcoming university renovations or new construction projects, including residences.

Kiyani, R. Mohammadi, A. Pourahmad, E. (2011). Investigating the Effect of Prayer in Increasing the Mental Health of College Students. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 30, 1875-1877. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.10.364>

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