



## Four U. Virginia students seek out sorority promoting diversity

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(Cavalier Daily) (U-WIRE) CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. -- Flashback to the Friday prior to Thanksgiving - the "Sisters of Diversity" are swaddled in sweats, heavy T-shirts and baseball caps, finalizing plans for the University of Virginia's first multicultural sorority. Second-year College students Bahareh Moradi, Po Soo-Hoo and Danielle McCamey, along with third-year College student Suhey Nevarez, compose the interest group that is striving to start the sorority.

It is fitting that these young women come from the four corners of the world. Soo-Hoo is an Asian American, Moradi a Persian American, McCamey an African American, and Nevarez a Latina American. They pull up their chairs to tell the story of why they decided to take on such a task.

"I wanted to be around people who were different from me, because I am a very different person myself," McCamey says.

Nevarez, the president, leans against a desk in Lambeth Commons and gestures with her pen. "We just basically want to say that you're more than welcome to join - we are here to appreciate differences."

Sisters of Diversity began as the brainchild of McCamey and Nevarez this summer. They began looking to other universities to decide which multicultural sorority they wanted to bring here. As a new chapter, the women must participate in fundraisers and charities like existing sororities. Currently they plan to sponsor underprivileged children for Christmas and to give salsa classes in February. They have already held a self-defense workshop.

But Sisters of Diversity say promoting multiculturalism, not participating in philanthropy and workshops, will represent the bulk of their work.

"We're hoping it's not just another sorority," Moradi says, leaning back in her chair. "We're hoping to be different."

Members of Sisters of Diversity said a motivating factor for them has been that existing traditional fraternities and sororities are fairly homogenous. Even though there are several outlets for Greek life, including the Inter-Sorority Council, the Inter-Fraternity Council, the Black Fraternal Council and the Multicultural Greek Council, none aim for a single organization with the multiculturalism Sisters of Diversity said they are searching for.

Founders said the reception they have received so far mostly has been a surprise.

"A lot of people are surprised. They'll say, 'Wow, that's different,'" Soo-Hoo says.

Nevarez nods excitedly. "It's like the big test to see if we pass. I want this to blow up."

Moradi pauses and then grins. "Get ready," she shouts. The girls burst out laughing.

Voice of the ISC

Comfortable in a pair of gray slacks and a soft red sweater, Allison White said the Inter-Sorority Council has tried to make the University's traditional sororities more diverse. As ISC President, she says the lack of ethnicity in the 16 sororities concerns her.

"We've done several things, such as going to the Black Student Alliance activities fair and trying to target events directed toward minorities," White says, pausing and frowning a bit. "It wasn't warmly received. I think of 255 people walking by five people probably picked up a pamphlet."

White says she has friends of multicultural backgrounds who have opted for ethnic sororities over ISC sororities. Sisters of Diversity, she says, will give them another option.

"We are happy for the ethnicity-based sororities if that is the path they feel they want to take, but we would love to have them try our system," she says. "I do see how being a

smaller group of one culture might make for someone wanting to join."

Statistics show that more minority first-year students live in Alderman Road houses as opposed to McCormick Road houses, which are mostly white. The ISC has made a special effort to stuff Alderman Road mailboxes with pamphlets to encourage all first-year students to rush.

"If you're looking for Britney Spears, you'll find her," White said of the sororities who are members of the ISC. "But that is not the majority makeup of sororities here at the University."

Still, White encourages students of a non-white background to consider going through rush.

"You can go through rush and not like it or like it. It doesn't hurt to make the most informed decision," she says. "It doesn't hurt to expose yourself."

#### Voice of Ethnicity

Second-year College student Sophia Ni heads the new Asian sorority tentatively titled Sisterhood of Young Asians (SoYA). She believes in the idea that some students are more comfortable in an ethnic sorority, such as the Sisters of Diversity and her own SoYa.

"I wanted to start another Asian sorority, because there's diversity between even Asians. Not all of us are the same," Ni said from a booth at Runk Dining Hall.

"Our main goal is to promote Asian sisterhood and the Asian culture - a sense of togetherness," Ni says.

Some of the girls of SoYA had gone through the process of formal rush, and decided it was not for them.

"They didn't feel a sense of belonging," she says. "What happens to those who might not fit into that world? As a sorority, we want to change that."

Though SoYA is set up to celebrate the Asian culture, Ni shuns the idea that SoYA is for self-segregation or promotes racism.

"I am not any better because I am in an Asian sorority, and I don't look down on those who are in a non-ethnic based sorority. We all want different things," Ni says simply.

"Our goal is to work closely with the University, to work for interracial harmony," she adds. "When you work as a group to connect people you have to start at the bottom and work your way up."

To Ni, who grew up in Long Island, N.Y., she knows attaining racial harmony is not a simple matter. "You can't just say, 'Let's all come together.' I mean, that is not going to happen. But you have to start somewhere."

Sisters of Diversity strives to do just that.

"To be absolutely honest," Sisters founding member Bahareh Moradi said, "there isn't any type of organization in this school that focuses strictly on multiculturalism."

They plan to be the first.

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