



## Multicultural sorority embraces diversity at U. Virginia

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(Cavalier Daily) (U-WIRE) CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. -- Kate Spade bags, J. Crew wardrobes and Tiffany jewelry? Not for these girls. Forget the stereotypical sorority girl, because Theta Nu Xi Multicultural Sorority is breaking the norm in greek life and on the University of Virginia Grounds in general.

Many of the members of Theta Nu Xi said they would not have joined any other sororities if this one had not been an option. They said the sorority's unique appeal is derived from its mission, tenets and unique priorities.

"Our mission is to promote leadership, multiculturalism and self-improvement through academic excellence, involvement in and service to the campus and community, as well as being living examples of sisterhood across different races, cultures, religions, backgrounds and lifestyles," the national Theta Nu Xi Web site says.

Six University of Virginia students strongly identified with the mission and founded the Pi Colony at the University in the Fall 2002 semester, according to fourth-year College student and outgoing president Bahareh Moradi.

"I think we're bringing something new to the University by being multicultural," said Moradi, who was born in Iran.

Chris McGill, program coordinator in the office of fraternity and sorority life, said Theta Nu Xi is the first multicultural organization on Grounds that actually is true to its name.

"It sounds like they're going to be true to multiculturalism," she said. "That is one of my goals."

McGill said she helped the organization during its probationary period and is currently a faculty advisor.

She said bringing a new sorority to the University was a time-consuming process for the founders.

Before Moradi and the other girls could found the sorority, they first had to become a Contracted Independent Organization, which they named Ladies of Vision and Excellence, Moradi said.

Moradi also said LOVE had to undergo a four-month probationary period before being approved by the director of greek life and the president of the Greek Multicultural Council.

After University approval, the founders had to wait for national approval, Moradi said. The University chapter still is considered a colony and must meet national criteria to become a chapter, according to McGill.

Fourth-year College student Leah Mayoral, the publicity chair and a founding member, said she expects the sorority officially will become a chapter by the end of this semester.

A biracial student at the University of North Carolina founded the first chapter of the sorority in the spring of 1996, according to the Web site. The national organization was later founded on August 21, 1999.

The national organization was excited to add a chapter at the University, Moradi said.

In addition to national support, Mayoral, who identifies herself as Mexican and Mayan Indian, said many professors and students have been very supportive of the new sorority.

There was some concern about this year's graduation of five of the six founding members, though. Mayoral said they would overcome this obstacle by selecting a strong pledge class, a process that recently concluded.

She said each new pledge class is selected through a national process based on GPA, open-mindedness and an embracing attitude toward service.

One new pledge, third-year Engineering student Susan Larson, who identifies herself as white, queer and bisexual, said she heard about the sorority from founding member Danielle McCamey while participating with her in Black Voices.

Larson, the president of the Queer Christian Fellowship, said she had not considered joining any other sororities. She was particularly attracted to Theta Nu Xi by its mission statement's attention to "backgrounds and lifestyles," as opposed to limiting multiculturalism to a purely racial definition.

She said she feels stronger about change at the University.

"I'm very passionate in social justice and particularly in race relations at U.Va.," she said.

Larson also said although she feels sororities that cater to one specific group are important, this sorority offers more to the community as a whole.

"I just hope to really affect people at the University -- to really open minds towards full acceptance of all people no matter what race, culture, religion, background or lifestyle," she said.

She doubted, however, that a single organization could counter the tendency toward self-segregation that many students observe at the University.

Larson said she was unable to accept a leadership position next year because she will be abroad, but hopes to serve in a leadership capacity as a fifth year.

One of Larson's pledge sisters is first-year College student Pooja Phaltankar. Phaltankar, an Indian student, said she heard about Theta Nu Xi from a girl on her hall and decided she wanted to be a member after attending Theta week, a week designed to raise interest and awareness of the sorority.

"The girls are awesome and I really like their vibe," she said. "All the tenets of the sorority were close to home."

Like Larson, Phaltankar said she did not really consider joining any other sororities.

"I knew pretty much from day one that this is what I wanted to do," she said.

Phaltankar added that she feels the University really needs an organization like the multicultural sorority. She said she hopes to continue building the sorority next year as vice-president.

In this position, she said she will be working closely with first-year College student and incoming president Kim Parker.

Parker, who is Caucasian, said she was attracted by the tenets in addition to the size and feel of the sorority.

"It's small and intimate, and every chapter in the nation is in contact with each other," she said.

She said she was dissatisfied with the self-segregated community she found at the University because in high school she had a much more diverse group of friends.

As president, she plans to work with other organizations on Grounds, especially with other greek groups.

As part of this effort, Theta Nu Xi will be cosponsoring an event with the Native American Student Union Monday, April 28 at 5:30 p.m. in the Amphitheater. Mayoral said they are bringing a group of Native American drummers called Painted Horse from Idaho to sing and talk about Native American music and culture.

Parker said she is not concerned about the graduation of six founding members because the graduates still will be supportive. She also said she is confident the new pledge class will compensate for the outgoing sisters because they are all very excited and committed to the organization.

Larson and Phaltankar also said they are excited and optimistic about the future of the organization.

"This organization is just so wonderful," Larson said. "It's just so wholly and completely me. No other greek organization covers all the bases -- this is just so encompassing of who I am."

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