



**PRESS RELEASE: Understanding Religious Diversity - An Open Dialogue**

**Sandy C Gholston** to: Archive

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Included is a press release on the upcoming Global Reflections event on Understanding Religious Diversity which will be held on Jan. 20 (this Thursday) in FLITE 408 on the Ferris campus in the Office of International Education. The event will feature several panelists from campus and the Big Rapids community to discuss various religions and engage guests in an open and honest discussion. Any questions can be directed to Sandy Gholston, interim assistant director of News Services.

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**Understanding Religious Diversity: Global Reflections – An Open Dialogue**

Ferris State University's Office of International Education opens a channel of communication through a diverse religious dialogue and its Global Reflections series.

The next session in the series, which focuses on religious diversity, is on Thursday, Jan. 20 in FLITE 408 at 11 a.m. The event is open to the public. A panel comprised of campus and Big Rapids community representatives is scheduled to attend and participate in this open dialogue session. Panelists include Pastor John Bookshaw, of St. Peter's Lutheran Church; Ahmed Taha, a Ferris student and president of the Muslim Student Organization on campus; and Joseph Castano, who will provide the Jehovah's Witness perspective.

Each representative will speak for five to 10 minutes introducing themselves, while providing brief information and a set of questions.

"We picked religion, because it's generally a hot topic. It's not a debate. It's an opportunity to ask questions about misconceptions we create," said Shana Beisiegel, an administrative assistant in OIE.

The Office of International Education recognizes the importance of student voices and creating interactions between diverse groups.

"We encourage the presenters to briefly introduce their topics to the group, and then allow the students to reflect and discuss the topics with each other," said Thuy Karafa, a Global Reflections committee member and a Psychology instructor at Ferris. She added that the presenters are encouraged to help students discuss key religious issues and lead them to ask questions they may want answered.

Spencer Saxton, a student intern in OIE said, “Because we live in a smaller community, a lot of the people who come here have never even been out of the state. They have never met someone with different religious beliefs or ideas. All we want to do is educate and show people there is more out there than themselves.”

After the three speakers offer their initial statements, an open discussion will begin where questions are encouraged.

Saxton believes Global Reflections educates others about different cultures and people.

“I believe it’s very important to be open-minded to others who are different than you. I believe this topic will open people's eyes to other worlds,” said Saxton.

Global Reflections started during the fall 2010 semester. The discussions are held every other week at 11 a.m. The topic of religious diversity will be the only religious-based topic in the series this semester.

The series is sponsored by the Office of International Education.

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