Bridge, Anyone?  
Putting a New Spin on Math and Logic

By John Trotter  
Contributing Writer

Make your bets. A class covering the rudiments and complexities of the classic game Bridge is being offered this semester for students and faculty.

More than just a challenging card game, Bridge contains many components that may be life lessons. Bridge engages players' problem-solving approaches and logic. It also requires strong communication skills, quick thinking, an excellent memory, concentration, a fair amount of mathematical skill and an ability to read people. It is a partnership game with a strong emphasis on the fundamentals of bidding. Bidding involves a steep learning curve when beginning, but information which needs to be memorized before competition.

"Bridge is as challenging as any mathematics I've ever studied," said Owen Byer, instructor for the class, "and I think students are happy to be challenged in the context of a game." Byer added that the ideas got started when some students in the Honors Colloquium suggested that he offer a Bridge course, and knowing the complex and academic nature of Bridge, he wrote a proposal. "I've liked to play Bridge ever since John Horst [Mathematics professor] taught it to me when I was a student here."

"I think students will find it as challenging as any college course," said John Horst, who attends classes once a week and helps with the teaching, "but it is fun and it makes the player use logic, memory, communication and other traits that are important in all other areas of life. I especially enjoy the game because it is a partnership game."

There is a large national organization of Bridge players, the American Contract Bridge League (ACBL), which supports student interest in Bridge and furnished free textbooks for the class. Since bidding is much like a foreign language, many books have been written on the subject and studying it is a vital part of the course. There is a local chapter of the ACBL that meets in Harrisonburg. After preliminary study, students will play in club games, as well as attend a Bridge tournament in Charlottesvile.

"It's harder and much more academic than I thought it was going to be," said junior Grete Horst. "The actual play is a lot like Rook, but the bidding is incredibly complicated. When you bid a certain way, people understand what you mean. Players agree to play by a certain understood set of rules, and while a lot of games can be played more or less arbitrarily, Bridge takes constant analysis. Yet, it is still a fun and social game."

Some faculty members are also attending the class. "The class is a good way to interact with students and faculty, especially since this is my first semester here," said Ken Morefield, assistant professor of English. "My wife Cindy has been sitting in on the class, too. It's something interactive and social that we can do together while enjoying the life lessons that the game teaches: strategy, planning and thinking. Just about all aspects of the game are applicable to life in general."

Promoting Understanding:
Islamic Center Holds Open House

By Beth Klima  
Style Coordinator

Opening its doors, the Islamic Center of Shenandoah Valley and Harrisonburg held an open house for the community last Sunday.

"We did this last year...to introduce Islam in a positive way," said Ehsan Ahmed, director of Economics at James Madison University. The event included a variety of presentations on topics pertaining to the Islamic faith. Those in attendance were invited to participate in the several questions and answers sessions following each presentation. It was a time to learn and to share questions and ideas with other members of the community.

The Center was to reach out to the public and to help perpetuate a better understanding of the Islamic faith. As visitors entered the center, they were met by smiling greeters and treated to refreshments. The open house drew people of all different ages, races and religions for a variety of reasons. "I am interested in what our culture can do to bring peace to our globe, as well as what we can do to bring peace to our culture," said attendee Alice Lee Hopkins. Several visitors came to the open house hoping to find out more about a religion that has always intrigued them. "I have a very strong interest in Islam, and it basically worships the same God as Christians do," said visitor Liz Eisemil. "They are our cousins in religion and at the very least we need to honor and respect them."

"They are our cousins in religion, and at the very least we need to honor and respect them." - Islam, the world's fastest growing religion, centers around several key beliefs. Muslims must believe in the oneness of God, the prophets, the sacred texts and the Day of Judgment. During one presentation, speaker Ahmed Tori discussed Islam as a way of life.

"Every aspect of life is commented on in our religion, said Tori. Several participants voiced questions regarding differences between Christianity and Islam, and some of those questions were addressed during the presentations. Christians believe in the divinity of Christ; Muslims do not. "Jesus was a man, the word of God," said Tori. "Because of the manner in which he was created, Jesus is not one we worship."

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