First Hindu prayer space opens on campus

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The first Hindu prayer space opened on the University of Connecticut Storrs campus this month.

An effort spearheaded by the Undergraduate Student Government and Hindu Student Organization (HSO), the space is a place students can sit in peace, meditate, pray and practice their faith on their own time.

Sreeja Terala, co-president of the HSO, said it has been a longstanding goal of her organization to create a location where students could practice their faith in a safe and welcoming environment.

"For HSO, this marks a historic milestone, one that reflects our commitment to preserving and celebrating Hindu religion and culture while creating a sense of belonging and home for students at UConn," Terala said.

The space, located in Arjona Building room 122, is open during building hours, 7 a.m. to 10 p.m., and is available for anyone to use.

USG began working with the HSO over the summer to plan logistics and work with university administration to obtain permissions and secure the space. USG President Andy Zhang said the effort reflects a broader commitment to ensuring that students of all faith backgrounds feel seen and supported on campus.

"Meaningful institutional change often spans multiple USG administrations, so I am especially grateful that we were able to both initiate and complete this effort within a single term," Zhang said.

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> SREEJA TERALA

This, however, was not the first time that students tried to create a Hindu prayer space. Tanya Sinha, USG ex-officio senator for the Asian American Cultural Center, said the proposal had been discussed for nearly a decade and when she took office at USG last spring, she was determined to make the longstanding goal a reality.

Sinha, who grew up in a predominately white school system, said she often felt disconnected from openly celebrating her faith. When she arrived at UConn, it became a priority for her to create a space where students, like herself, could practice their faith comfortably.

"Connecting the Hindu Student Organization with university leadership to make this prayer space a reality has been one of the most meaningful experiences of my college career," Sinha said. "This project was the result of collective perseverance, and it stands as a testament to what determined student leadership can accomplish."



The Hindu Prayer Space on the University of Connecticut Storrs campus. The room is in Arjona Building, room 122, from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m.

PHOTO BY SREEJA TERALA



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In addition to student collaboration, the planning required meetings with Dean of Students Fany Hannon, Senior Director for Inclusion and Cultural Engagement Angela Rola and Assistant Director of Space Planning Maria Groza, which Sinha said were essential to the success of the initiative.

The official inauguration of the space was Feb. 15, during Shivaratri, an annual Hindu festival. The event included a ceremony performed by Priest Jignesh Ji, a celebratory dinner and a performance by UConn Sanskriti, the competitive Indian classical dance and singing team.

The prayer room initiative was supported and sponsored by Dr. Madhu Reddy, president of the Indian Arts Foundation and the Wilton Hindu Mandir in Wilton, Conn., Terala said.

"This achievement is not just the fulfillment of a dream," Terala said. "It is the beginning of a lasting legacy that will continue to inspire and support generations of students to come."

The Daily Campus

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