

UCLU Sikh Society

University College London

UCLU Sikh Society
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Annual Report

“The UCLU Sikh Society promotes activities which appreciate the culture, history and ideology of the Sikh way of life.”

Our Vision - Our vision is to create an accessible society for all students, both Sikh and Non-Sikh, to experience Sikhism through spiritual, sports, educational and social activity.

Our Values - Our key value is to *appreciate* Sikh values, culture and ideology, whilst still being an *accessible* society. In order to achieve this *accessibility* we have following values; a friendly community; being student orientated; understanding what our members want from the society and an empowering nature to learning.

Our Aims - Our primary aims were to continue to hold a weekly Simran, provide a social event at least once every two weeks, promote Sikh teachings via discussion and talks, be a well represented society at other universities' events, for the society to have a healthy number of regular members and finally continue the tradition of an annual Keertan Darbar and Guru Ka Langar event.

Introduction

The Sikh Society at UCL has beginnings from over 100 years ago, starting with only a handful of individuals when UCL was the main college of the University of London. Although over the years the society has almost gone into non-existence, today we find the society is firmly on the map, and getting bigger and better.

While, I have only seen the society for 2 years, I have been fortunate to hear of past successes from recent presidents and members and even successes from 20 years ago! Because of this, I felt an immense pride and responsibility to bring the society further forward.

I could describe the many successes of 2010/2011, and likewise the many challenges any society faces. But I will do what you probably expected and talk about Guru Ka Langar! It is hard to talk about this society with out mentioning Langar. Although this may sound very cliché, once you take part in the organising, preparing or even the eating, you'll understand why. Fear not, I'm not going to simply babble on about Langar and its successes. The reason I mention it is, I feel Guru Ka Langar well and truly achieves the two main aspirations all Sikh Societies thrive for, creating friendships and learning about the Sikh way of life.

Take a group of students, all completely different: differing in background, opinions, understanding of Sikhism, friendship groups, everything. But give them a challenge, a task at hand, something special happens. Spontaneously a unity occurs. I saw some of our members, whom didn't really know each other, or rarely spoke, become friends. I remember this bringing a beaming smile to my face on the morning of Langar, when some of the most unexpected friendships had been forged. Differences

were no longer there, just similarities. Something every society aims for.

Next, I saw members and the general non-Sikh UCL population, suddenly being informed about Sikh teachings. These weren't facts and figures from Sikh history, but the deepness of ideas such as humanity, equality and self-sacrifice. Our members and thousands of non-sikhs were all learning the deep messages Guru Nanak Dev Ji has given us and learning them through first hand experience. This was all done through everyones natural enquiry, not anyone trying to preach a message. And with this a few more society aims are crossed off.

Finally, smiles. What a society is really about, is fun and laughter, and Guru Ka Langar had this in abundance.

I hope the above gives you a flavour of the aspirations and modus operandi of UCL's Sikh Society. Please do read on for the details of what we actually do and please come along to our Monday Simran, or join our facebook group to attend an event.

Membership and Officers

Selection Process

The 2010/2011 committee was formed at the society's AGM in March 2010. Candidates whom felt they would like a particular “committee role” would submit themselves. In case of multiple applicants for a given role (very often the case), a vote would take place. The vote took the following format. The candidate is given 2-3 minutes to explain why they felt they should be voted in. Then a secret ballot would take place. I feel as a society we pride ourselves on including all members, thus a “role” is found for everybody.

Society Officers

Before I begin naming the official roles, in our very first Sikh Society meeting we came to the common understanding, although specific roles do work, a committee member should be committed to engage beyond his/her role. Individuals who later wanted to be involved in organising events and weren't in the committee, would be added to the committee.

President - Bhajan Virk
Treasurer - Rumanjeet Dhaddha
Vice President - Anisha Seth
Social Secretaries - Harpreet Dhiraj and Charanjot Jutla
Sports Secretary - Anek Mhajan
Publicity - Amandip Panesar
Simran Coordinators - Eeshar Singh and Dalmeet Singh
Inter-faith Officer - Ranjit Atwal

Society Membership;

37 Fully Paid Members, costing £ 3 per Member.

General Attendance figure would vary, summarised below:

Weekley Simran - Range from lowest at 10 to the highest at 40;

Social Events - Some events such as End of Term Dinner and Cha and Somasa achieved high attendance numbers, other socials average at around 15-20;

Guru Ka Langar - 1700 attendants.

UCLU Keertan Darbar - 50+ attendants.

(All figure are approximate)

Educating

For the duration of the year, the way in which we decided to offer our members the opportunity to learn more about the Sikh way of life was through a weekly Simran that involved discussions or a talk to follow. As a committee, we felt that our members appreciated learning about Sikhism, from their peers. The reason we felt discussions worked was because it was always student orientated, non-judgemental and all perspectives were seen. Students enjoy learning from other students and with such a vast knowledge base existing within our members, this worked very effectively. With regards to talk events, we always aimed for speakers whereby we knew what we were getting, were student specific, interesting and knowledgeable on the Sikh Religion.

One workshop/class that took place on a weekly basis was “Tanti Saaj Classes” . One of our very own society members proposed the idea of the class. He literally took it upon himself to provide an outstanding class, jam-packed with knowledge of our real instrumental traditions and expert teaching of the Dilruba. This class will continue next year.

Looking back on this class, it gave myself an understanding of how the society should aim to provide students opportunities/education. I felt the class’ attendants gained so much because of the fact we were being taught by a fellow student. I believe that students should be offered opportunities to learn about the Sikh faith, and it is their decision to take on these opportunities. But a student-centred approach is always key because this best targets the society members and increases their likeliness to attend, but moreover their likeliness to learn and benefit. We are all, especially students, continually learning from one another without even consciously knowing. Giving the nutrient for a society to flourish with

positivity and enjoyment, naturally an individual will begin to learn more about the Sikh way of life from their peers.

Activities

Sport

The primary sport that took place during the year was football. Our society came 1st in the UCLU inter-society football tournament. We were also well represented at the all inter Sikh society football tournaments.

Another annual event that our society came runners up in was the UCLU dodge ball tournament. This was a great event, which we all joined together to have a great time in aiming to win.

Looking back, sport is a great instrument to get society members involved and get to know one another. Being part of a team brought about a unity between our members, a chance to keep healthy and all sports events never fail to be enjoyable.



Arts

We organised a trip to visit the Sikh Turban exhibition at the British Museum.

Simran

Simran is the foundation with which the society stands on. I found that all other society activity was almost built around the regularity of Monday Simran. Each Monday we have Simran for 30mins followed by discussion and refreshments. Simran becomes a weekly excuse for everyone to see each other and relax with amazing Simran. The continuity of Simran being on every Monday in the same room, means that all members know it will always be on even if they haven't planned to come. I think the success of Simran does comes from the society being open and welcome, where people feel they are getting to know other like-minded Sikhs. What Simran also does well is it give the opportunity to tell students what is happening for the rest of the week.

Social Life

Freshers Fortnight

The first contact we get with our Freshers is at our Fresher Fayre, where the Sikh Society has a stall to welcome our freshers, tell them about the society, what events are coming up and take down contact details. Most importantly, we wanted to have a conversation with every fresher because we wanted him or her to go away from the Fayre knowing one Sikh society member already.

The next event is the following week, our Cha and Somasa event whereby we noticed that many students from the fayre attended. Here they have another chance to

meet fellow freshers and older society members. Here, we advertised the first Simran of the year and the social we planned to put on.

The following week, we held a Simran and a Social which always prove to be the best of the year. Only after this 2/3 week period do we ask students to join the society if they have enjoyed it. After this period we feel we know the freshers and have given them a chance to know us.

Celebrations

At UCL, we feel the need for celebration each and every week. Simrans are almost always followed by a trip to our local Nandos and a trip to the cinema or bowling alley is a regular occurrence.

At the end of the Term we do an even more special dinner. Our end of term dinner is always a well-attended event!



Excursions

As a society we organised trips to the cinema, bowling etc as social events. We were also extremely well represented at other Sikh Societies events, such as at Collaborations; we were among the best-represented universities. This was the case for most events; we felt the importance of making our members aware of what was going on at all London Universities.

Major Events

Guru Ka Langar;

2010/2011 brought about UCL's 4th annual Guru Ka Langar. Guru Ka Langar is an event whereby we literally set up a Langar Hall within the University and give the whole of the University the opportunity to experience every aspect of this great tradition. This year we served approximately 1700 individuals, almost reaching the 10,000 attendance mark since the first langar at UCL. Often voted as UCL's event of the year and Top 10 events to attend while at UCL, the event has become better and better, year on year.

Guru Ka Langar gives the opportunity for Non-Sikhs to become aware of who Sikhs are, what Guru Ka Langar is and most of all the opportunity to experience Langar. Guru Ka Langar is something of normality to Sikhs, but when the wider community have the same experience, they are completely in awe of such a tradition. Each and every attendee comes away with a huge smile on their face and the message of equality in their minds. As a Sikh I feel we need to promote who we are to the world, and Guru Ka Langar at UCL has successfully done this yet again.

Bringing Guru Ka Langar to UCL is a complex challenge and is only possible with the wider Sikh Community -

Gurdwaras, Local Businesses and Local people. One could write pages and pages on the details of how to organise such a large-scale event. From shoe racks to keeping food warm took one huge effort from all those connected to the society. For the first time I saw all of our members pitching together to make sure the event was a success. Over the weeks of organisation I witnessed many new friendships being made and the Sikh Society at its strongest. Guru Ka Langar is an event whereby everyone comes away feeling they have been part of something extra special. We really showed the whole of UCL that the Sikh Society is still well and truly on the map.



Modes of Communication

Our two modes of general communication were facebook and groupspaces.

With facebook, we sent out messages weekly about what was going on during the week. We also made event pages for larger, one off events.

Groupspaces was used predominately for its quick and simple email database system. It allowed us to send out weekly emails about what the society was doing. Also groupspaces also has a profile system (similar to facebook), where all UCL societies were able to see what one another were doing and anyone was able to see our profile posts.

External Organisations

External Organisations were mainly involved with the larger events, Keertan Darbar and Guru Ka Langar. These included Gurdwaras, Local Businesses/People who were willing to help and donate. Help would vary from booking external rooms, donating a projector, offering transportation... Anything we required which we didn't feel we were able to provide through the society itself; we sought help from contacts that our committee members had in the Sikh community.

The UCL Sikh Society Alumni were also contacted especially during the preparation of Guru Ka Langar - they provided assistance and support whenever required.

Accounts

Available on request. Society is in a small surplus.

The Future

5 pieces of advice for the future;

- Discover you're committee members' individual qualities, skills and contacts. Realise everyone has positive qualities - you just have to find them (and you definitely will, some take longer than others).
- Keep the momentum going each week, and keep variety but maintain some continuity.
- Don't leave things to the last minute - plan in advance.
- Provide for all members, those who are really into Sikhism and those who aren't (although remain in touch with Sikh ethics). Don't see a member with a lack of Sikh understanding as someone who needs understanding instilled in them - all people have something to offer.
- Finally, enjoy everything, the good and the bad.