

Campus course for Christ

Contributed by Aisys Adona
Wednesday, 28 September 2011
Last Updated Thursday, 29 September 2011

Course promotes discussion and fights stigma by allowing students to issues of faith and religion in an open and safe environment

Faith and spirituality don't often come up in conversation, but they still play a major part in the lives of people who hope to spread the message.

Through the campus ministry at Algonquin College, Marvin Sinclair and a group of young volunteers have teamed up to offer a unique course called Campus Alpha that helps their peers explore the Christian faith and life in general.

The seven-week course, which is on its second stint at the college, has garnered a very positive response from the students who have attended. It is based on the original Alpha course, which is normally 10 weeks long, and is tweaked to appeal to a younger audience.

Open discussion forums and a welcoming approach has factor greatly into the success of Campus Alpha and by making it easy for students of all backgrounds to join in. The group stresses that there are no right or wrong answers and any and all questions or comments will be accepted.

"This was something our young adult age group took last year and we felt it would benefit students," said Sinclair, who is a pastor at Woodvale Pentecostal Church and has been working with Algonquin's campus ministry for the last six years. "I think people are always searching, we're spiritual beings looking for something more."

Woodvale is directly linked to the Campus Alpha course. Their volunteers are all young parishioners at the church, including a few Algonquin students.

"I'm volunteering to help reach out to students and help them get a better understanding of Christ," said Albert Li, a computer-programming student. "The reaction has been good, we had quite a few students come out last year and they began going to church, even our home church at Woodvale."

Meetings are held every Wednesday until Oct. 19 in the Algonquin residence building and begin with something most students can't say no to: free food. A delicious home cooked meal is served in a very relaxed, informal setting and a video from the Campus Alpha course is shown to ease people in. From there, students break into small groups to build trust and make sure all comments are heard.

"It's basically a

look at Christianity in a different light,” said David Burke, an intern at Woodvale finishing up a bachelor of theology from Master’s College and Seminary. “We go back to the basics and find out why we believe what we believe.”

“I started going to church in Grade 10,” said Mike Kubisewsky, a fourth-year nursing student. “I was looking at different services on campus and found this one, I’ve heard good things, that it can be very reaffirming.”

While there is still a stigma towards Christians and the subject of faith, the open discussion portion of Campus Alpha plays a large role in that everyone can express their opinions in a safe environment.

“I don’t think it’s necessarily that they’ve had a bad experience with Christianity but with people,” said Sinclair. “At every age group, more importantly at this age, everyone needs someone in their life, it’s all about relationships.”

For those who are looking for more beyond the Campus Alpha course, Woodvale offers a young adult group that meets every Thursday at 7 p.m. They offer variety in their meetings, everything from a college band and performing community services.

“There has to be no pressure or heavy sales pitch, it has to be real,” said Sinclair. “A lot of people haven’t tried it themselves and a lot of it is hearsay. We encourage them to try us out and let their own mind do the judging.”