



Getting Started

Collegiate Jain Associations

Why Start a Jain Club?

Jainism is a very old religion, rich in culture and tradition. It teaches us how to live our lives, both physically and spiritually, and at the same time gives us the freedom to live our own, individual lives. Even if you're not deeply religious, Jainism holds valuable gems of wisdom on day to day lifestyles that could make all the difference.

Many of Jainism's values and teachings are things that transcend the religious and are practical ideologies for the practical world. By helping to spread practical ways of applying ideas that many people feel aren't feasible, such as Ahimsa ("non-violence") and Aparigraha ("non-possession"), Jainism can help make a difference in the world.

Starting a Jain club can be what it takes to help teach your community about Jainism, whether there are many Jains locally or very few. Keeping Jainism alive in America will help keep America culturally and religiously diverse, as well as providing people with both a sense of community and individuality at the same time.

What You Need to Get Started

Although the details change from college to college, there is a simple checklist to keep in mind when you're getting started:

- An executive board (e-board)- most colleges require a president, a treasurer, and at least one other position, but this shouldn't be a limitation. The best way to start an organization is with interested, dedicated people at its core; you are bound to suffer some sort of setback(s) and things don't always go as planned at the start. A strong core helps to keep going through anything that may go wrong.
- Ideas- things will change as your club builds, but it's important to have an idea of what you want your first semester and first year to be like.
- Information on how to start a club at your local university- contact your student activities office and get information on how to start a student organization, funding requirements, etc.

The details change, but the general idea is the same. It's very important to think of an overall purpose for your organization. If you attend a college/university with many Indian, maybe you want to help bring Jainism into a new light or help the local community. If you are part of a small populace perhaps a Jain organization can help diversify your institution. If you know what you're shooting to achieve, it will help decide what sort of events to hold, what sort of information you want to spread, and how to organize as a whole.

Ideas for Events and Meetings

One big question everyone has is, how often should we meet? It's difficult to decide how often to meet if you don't know how interested people will be at first. A suggestion is to hold one small event every other week (5-6 in a typical 14 week semester). You can split this into two to three events and two to three meetings.

Meetings can be used for religious, academic, or extracurricular items. You can have discussions about aspects of Jainism, things going on in your college/university, or world events. Meetings can be used to help build a community by having movie or dinner nights. Remember that you are a Jain organization and so to keep it tactful; you don't want to be advocating things that contradict Jainism, even if you're not actively promoting them.

Here are some ideas for larger events:

- An introduction to Jainism- you can host an open presentation/discussion to help teach people about the basics of Jainism and to help people who know about Jainism to reinforce what they know. You can appeal to a large crowd by keeping it simple and teaching about the real world applications of Jainism. You can keep it peer-to-peer and have a student lead the event or ask a knowledgeable elder to lead the event.
- Religion comparisons- work with other local religious groups and have a comparative discussion between yourselves. Make it open to discussion and controlled debate. One effective one is with a local Hindu Students Council or other Hindu organization if there is one, as the two religions are very similar yet at the same time very different.
- Community service- host community service projects, which could be as simple as scouring around your campus for trash or going to a local community service site to help out to volunteering at large events like Habitat for Humanity. As with meetings, be tactful and avoid projects that blatantly contradict Jainism.
- Fundraisers- create your own or work with our groups to raise funds for appropriate causes. You can host a variety of events that people would come to such as talent shows, melas, date auctions, or put up a table at your campus center and ask for donations to the right cause.

Resources are Your Disposal

Though the population is globally small, Jain communities are normally very active. In addition to parents, family, and puja groups you might be involved with, there are many other sources. Many metropolitan areas have Jain Centers that can put you in touch with scholars and other resources. They run various programs designed for kids, young adults, and adults.

There are also two large Jain organizations in North America: JAINA (Federation of Jain Associations In North America) and the JVBNA (Jain Vishwa Bharati of North America). Both are active around the country and very open to helping Jain youth in America to building their roots as well as helping non-Jains to learn about Jainism. Many, if not all, of the Jain centers around the country are associated with one of the two groups.