

The pentagram, a five-pointed star in a circle, is a Wiccan symbol for the Earth

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come to symbolize Satanism. It was originally — and still is — used by Wiccans as a symbol for the Earth. Wicca itself is anything but Satanic. John Robinson, a member of Webweaving, suggested that “people think of natural things as evil. We are more nature-oriented, and people think it's evil...We have no concept of Satan. That's a Christian symbol.” Knupp said, “Satanism is a religion of rebellion. Wiccan is a religion of poetry and beauty and positive affirmation.”

Being a witch, according to many members, is really about being able to control your own thoughts. “Things that we do are exactly the same kind of exercises or visualization that people do in acting classes or in therapy,” said Lathrop Preston, a first-year student and Webweaving member.

Wicca, an ancient religion originating from Europe, began in the United States in the 1950s. Since then, many people have found their niche in Wiccan ideology. Most of the group's members are the first in their families to have such beliefs. Webweaving at Drake started two years ago, when Jill Gathercole (a former student) put an ad in the personals of the *The Times Delphic*. Sarah Straight answered the ad, and together they began putting up signs and finding members.

“When we started out, I hoped to have representatives from [different] pagan groups [religions that worship more than one god],” Straight said. Webweaving was originally going to be made up of Native American religions as well as those descending from Europe. However, the responses came from Wiccans and those interested in Wicca. Today, Webweaving has just over thirty members, with only a few attending meetings regularly.

While most members of Webweaving are practicing Wiccans, a few still search for their own beliefs. “I'm just trying to find a religion that fits,” Carrie Waisanen, a first-year student, said.

Others, like Preston, learned of Wicca before coming to Drake. He says, “I simply found a name for the beliefs that I'd already developed.”

No matter how they discovered the religion, almost all of the members of Webweaving found it uncomfortable to tell their parents and friends about their new beliefs. “My parents say that it's just a phase,” Waisanen said. “One of my friends asked me, ‘Isn't that a bunch of Satanists, or something?’”

It's true that the words used in describing Wicca sound as if they were derived from one of Grimms' fairy tales. Robinson pointed out that “the word ‘pagan’ has a bad connotation.” Webweaving hopes to become more widely known and better understood. As some members pointed out, not all parents react negatively. Stacie Brown's father, a United Methodist minister, was not upset when she shared her religious beliefs with him.

Most members of Webweaving agree that they wish more people at Drake knew more about them. Next time you're in a crowded lecture hall, take a good look at the people around you. You never know who might be a witch. ☾