

CU students use grant money for real change

Puksta Foundation scholarships include requirement of civic volunteerism

By Kate Larsen
Camera Staff Writer

Mahdi Abosedra wants Muslim and Jewish students at the University of Colorado to be friends.

Abosedra, a Muslim, founded No Pork, a Muslim-Jewish dialogue group he hopes will foster a community of respect and peace among the two groups. The CU senior has time to organize events and discussion groups thanks to a unique scholarship from the Puksta Foundation.

"The scholarship has allowed me not to worry about financial matters," Abosedra said. "A lot

of my friends become really consumed with that and it takes away from their chance for civic engagement."

The \$4,500 annual Puksta award receives some funding through the CU Parent Association. The majority of the money comes from the foundation, which was started as the last will and testament of Harry and Eva Puksta of Denver.

The purpose of the scholarship is to help underprivileged students pay for college. Once they are there, the students are expected to create lasting change through civic engagement — beyond volunteerism.

Abosedra hopes the No Pork group will last long after his graduation date.

Through potlucks and other events, he hopes that friendships will transform into religious understanding and more

peaceful relations — on campus and out in the world.

"You can't approach people unless you have a fundamental respect for them — it's very easy to get in a fight with someone you don't know," Abosedra said.

The intent of the Puksta program is to create a "sustained commitment to something really worthwhile," said Michael Grant, CU's associate vice chancellor for academic affairs. Grant oversees the program at CU. There are also scholarship recipients at Colorado State University and the University of Denver.

"It's a rededication to those early ideals in higher education," Grant said.

There are 15 Puksta scholars at CU. The scholarship was created in 2002 and students must reapply each year, as well as turn in reports each semester and meet with an adviser.

While Abosedra works on re-

solving the roots of conflict, senior Sharon Bates is attempting to improve health care for Latinos.

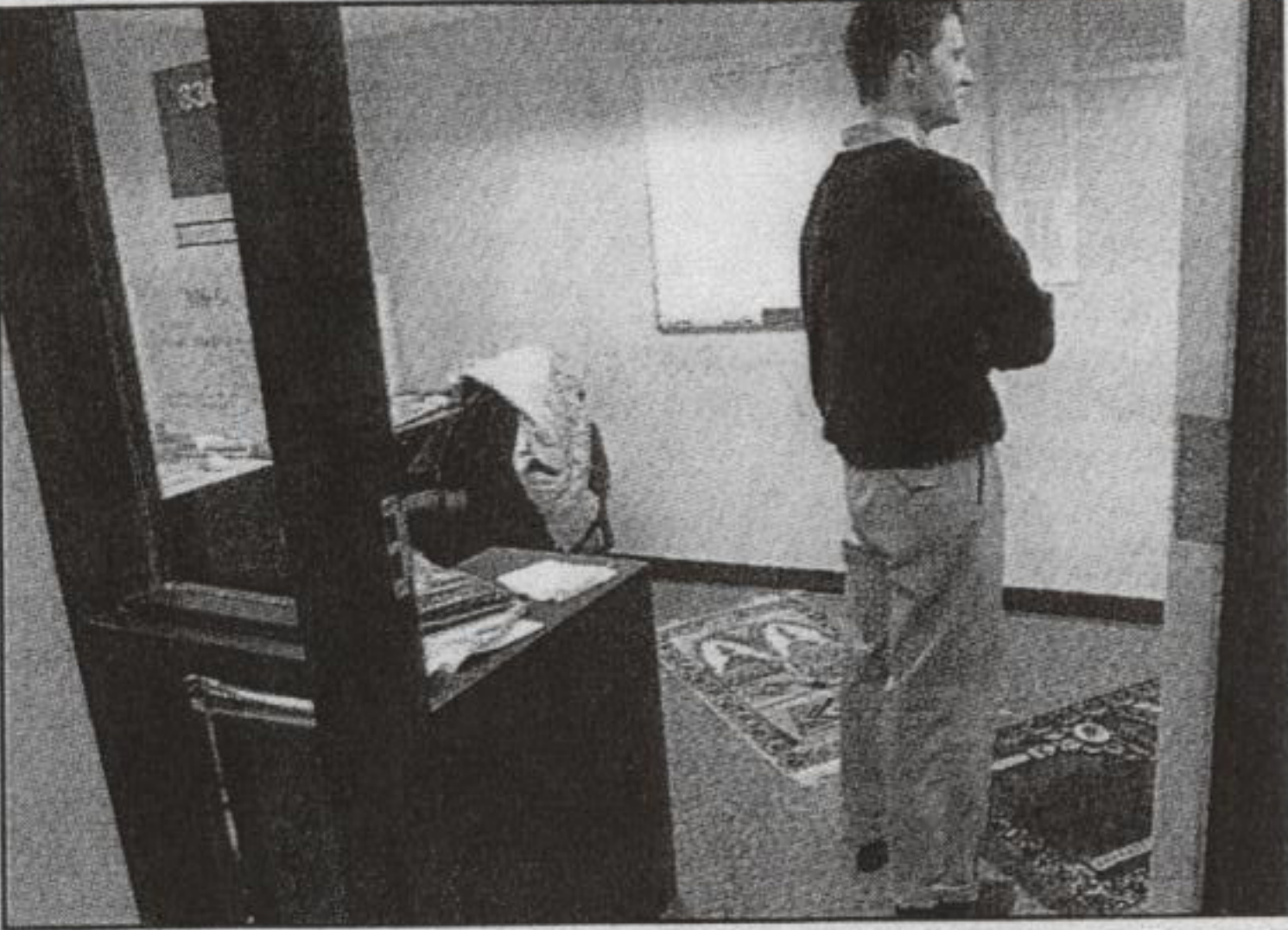
"I think if there were some kind of state mandate requiring a certain number of translators in hospitals, that Latinos would receive better health care," Bates said.

The Puksta scholar is translating locally for a nonprofit that provides care for teen mothers and researching the translator shortage statewide.

After medical school, Bates wants to dedicate her life to improving health care for migrant farm workers. The Puksta scholarship has helped get a head start.

"It really does distinguish between simply volunteering and finding something about which you're passionate," Bates said.

Contact Kate Larsen at (303) 473-1361 or larsenk@dailycamera.com.



BARTON GLASSER / For the Camera

Mahdi Abosedra, a University of Colorado senior political science major, prepares to pray in the Muslim Student Association office in the University Memorial Center on Tuesday. Abosedra, one of 15 Puksta scholarship recipients at CU, started the student group No Pork, which he hopes will build a sense of community and trust between Jewish and Muslim students.