

## The Organization Behind U of I's Most Talked About Event

At the heart and center of campus, students gathered at the Foellinger auditorium waiting with anticipation and cameras readily on hand to capture the momentous occasion of Badgley and Mowzoon walking out on stage to greet them.

*Gossip Girl* and *You* actor Penn Badgely, and Dr. Nura Mowzoon came to speak at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

The two visited the Illini campus on October 14th, for the "Can We Talk?" series, where both Badgley and Mowzoon discussed matters relating to impersonal relationships. "Can We Talk?" is a discourse series held at various universities with available online streaming services.

Why did the pair come together in order to kick start this production? Badgley stars in Netflix's adaptation of *You*. The show is based off of the novel of the same name, written by author Caroline Kepnes. The psychological thriller follows serial killer, Joe Goldberg, and his obsessive tendencies pertaining to relationships.

[Dr. Nura Mowzoon](#) is an instructor at Arizona State University. Mowzoon teaches social sciences, focusing on the infrastructure of dating, marriage, family life, race, and diversity. She has written for the Huffington Post and is recognized as a published author for 'The Qualitative Review.' Dr. Mowzoon specializes in relationships and even calls herself, 'the love doctor.'

After the release of *You*, many viewers have romanticized the idea of obsessive and unhealthy relationship patterns. In response to this, Badgley and Mowzoon have come together to educate individuals about the importance of boundaries and self respect in the development of social connections.

The event was free, and took place at U of I's Foellinger auditorium. The collaboration between six registered student organizations on campus sold over 700 tickets.

The clubs that worked together to co-sponsor this event were Gamma Phi Omega International Sorority, Sigma Lambda Beta International Fraternity, In Living Color, Reaching Across Classes, the Latino Student Association, and Organic Oneness.

[Organic Oneness](#) is a non-profit, Baha'i inspired organization promoting social justice, change, healing and wellness for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. The organization has growing programs in Chicago, South Minneapolis, and Urbana-Champaign.

From their official website page, "We believe education is the tool to help us discover our talents, passions, and purpose. When provided with the proper environment and basic necessities to develop emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually; we can all flourish into the person we were meant to be and humanity will ultimately benefit from our advancement."

Organic Wellness UIUC focuses on social justice topics to heal individuals and communities on campus. The organization emphasizes constructions of inclusion, in order to uphold and promote unity, and to build a strong network of students. They have started a “Speaker Series,” to increase awareness and conversation amongst the various identities and backgrounds within the Urbana-Champaign area.

While at the event, the audience got to be introduced to some of the members.

I got the opportunity to talk to Zoe Nielsen about her involvement with Organic Oneness and her chair position as Treasurer. Nielsen is responsible for all of the finances, and the collaboration with guest speakers, and other registered student organizations on campus.

“Organic Oneness is a grassroots organization that helps fight for social justice on all aspects. It stands for helping others. I think that’s one of my favorite things about the organization,” Nielsen said, as she expressed her appreciation. “It does a great job of encompassing fighting for all rights and people.”

“Organic Oneness started last spring, by [Steve Sarowitz](#), an alumni from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign,” Nielsen said.

The organization’s Treasurer stated that Sarowitz has always been passionate about social justice and acts of inclusion throughout his life and career.

When Sarowitz was a student at the University of Illinois, he recognized the mistreatment and antisemitism he and many other students faced while on campus. In an effort to end this, Sarowitz centered his focus around activism and change in order to utilize his own voice, as well as the voice of many other marginalized communities.

I got the chance to speak with Sarowitz over the phone to ask him a few questions about his role as the founder of the organization and the overall message Organic Oneness is trying to convey.

“We’d like to wipe out hatred,” began Sarowitz. “We’d like to share the message that everyone is noble, and as a student, you can be a part of the solution instead of feeling hopeless.”

Today, Sarowitz stays actively committed to bringing awareness to topics of equality and justice. He emphasizes the act of society and individuals working together as a whole to achieve global progress.

Malika Sampson, the secretary of Organic Oneness, described the club in her own words, “Organic Oneness is a community that strives for the improvement of our communities and connecting all identities.”

Organic Oneness does not have a singular face to represent it, nor does it try to be exclusive to only a certain group of individuals. It is acceptive and welcoming to all newcomers.

“A lot of members like to say that we’re all one human family,” Nielsen said. “While we look and act differently, we still are one big family.”

Nielsen found out about the club through a close friend, whose mom personally knows Sarowitz. She talked about how though she was hesitant at first, Nielsen quickly felt as if she finally found a forever home at college.

“I kind of got roped into it,” laughed Nielsen. “But I ended up absolutely falling in love with the club, and for me, it feels good to advocate for groups I’m not a part of even if I can’t always personally speak on some of the matters.”

The “Can We Talk?” event was posted by the official Organic Oneness UIUC Instagram page and was shared on [Instagram stories](#) to gain traction and spread word of the two speakers’s arrival to campus.

How exactly did Organic Oneness reach out to Dr. Nura Mowzoon and Penn Badgely?

“Penn Badgely and Dr. Nura are actually friends of Steve Sarowitz,” laughed Nielsen. “It’s kind of bizarre that Steve just knows everyone.”

Nielsen credited Sarowitz for doing what she refers to as ‘all of the footing,’ and setting up the conversation and connection.

In terms of specifics, Nielsen told me what it was like to have lunch with the pair and the other members of Organic Oneness on the main quad.

“I remember Penn looked at each person individually and told us that he wanted to know more about who we are,” Nielsen said. “I was like, ‘Wow! This man who I’ve watched on *Gossip Girl* for years wants to hear my story?’ I think that having him hear us say that we’re passionate about what we do, helped him start the conversation at the event later as well.”

Although it is just the beginning, Nielsen said that she hopes to see it’s continued growth and development. For events being held later on this year, Nielsen hinted towards what audiences can expect from the organization in the near future.

“Definitely expect more cool people, and just more conversations. I think a lot of Organic Oneness is just creating those conversations, whether you’re informed or not, we’re here to help you start.”

Nielsen encourages those who are interested in finding their voice to come out and join the Organic Oneness family.

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