

**Source:** Jessica Ice, [weiler2@k-state.edu](mailto:weiler2@k-state.edu)

**Photo available.** Contact [media@k-state.edu](mailto:media@k-state.edu) or 785-532-6415.

**Video available.** Access at <http://www.k-state.edu/media/webzine/research/index.html>

**News release prepared by:** Kristin Hodges, 785-532-6415, [khodges2@k-state.edu](mailto:khodges2@k-state.edu)

Media Relations

9 Anderson Hall

Manhattan, KS 66506-0117

785-532-6415

Fax: 785-532-6418

E-mail: [media@k-state.edu](mailto:media@k-state.edu)

[k-state.edu/media](http://k-state.edu/media)

*Thursday, Aug. 6, 2009*

## **K-STATE SENIOR STUDIES PAGAN CULTURE IN KANSAS CITY, LAWRENCE AREAS TO HELP DEBUNK MYTHS AND CREATE UNDERSTANDING ABOUT THE COMMUNITIES**

MANHATTAN — A Kansas State University senior is spending the summer at witches' covens and other pagan events in Kansas to create a better understanding of the pagan community.

Jessica Ice, K-State senior in anthropology, [Kansas City, Kan.](#), is debunking myths about paganism through summer anthropological work studying the culture in the Kansas City and [Lawrence](#) areas. She is conducting in-depth interviews and attending pagan community events for a documentary she is making and plans to make available through Internet blogs and YouTube.

"The communities are interesting because a lot of people come from all over the country, and pagan communities are different across the country because cultures are different," she said. "In the Midwest, pagans are a minority group, and there is a lot of misunderstanding."

Ice is conducting research through K-State's McNair Scholars Program, which prepares undergraduates for graduate study. She graduates from K-State this summer, and then plans to pursue graduate studies in an interdisciplinary program to study the brain and the nature of religious experiences.

"Most students thinking about graduate school or careers in academia don't know where to start," Ice said. "I think the McNair Scholars Program has given me a better idea of what I want to do and how to get into the programs I want."

Through the program, Ice has the opportunity to work with Michael Wesch, K-State assistant professor of anthropology, who is a world-renowned expert in new media and human interaction. Wesch, who also is the Carnegie/Case national professor of the year for research and doctoral universities, is serving as Ice's project mentor throughout her fieldwork and documentary production.

"I got lucky having Dr. Wesch as a mentor because he is so tech-savvy, and he has done fieldwork in Papua New Guinea and can give me plenty of advice," Ice said. "The anthropology program at K-State is excellent, and that also has influenced my research."

(more)

Ice said none of the stereotypes about pagans, such as an affinity for the devil, holds true. In fact, pagans do not believe in a devil, she said. Through her research, Ice has gotten a different perspective about the culture and has learned that the community is accepting, loving and open-minded.

"It's different because a lot of the time there's some truth in stereotypes, but in this case it's just plain ignorance," she said. "They're really happy people, and they're looking for love just like everyone else. Pagans here want a community and a place to belong."

Ice is attending pagan events in the Kansas City area four to five days a week, including different witches' covens, lively drum circles and festivals at Camp Gaea. She also attends a witches' coven in Lawrence. The covens include a circle of people who teach each other about pagan ideas and beliefs.

Most members of the pagan community are excited for and appreciative of Ice's project and have volunteered to be involved with her documentary, she said; although, there also are some community members that haven't wanted to participate in the research for fear that they may be discriminated against in the workplace.

"The pagan community is really close-knit, and it's where these people feel comfortable," Ice said. "They're often not accepted by other cultures in the Midwest, so this community is kind of their safe haven."

#