

Forum continues South Carolina flag debate

BY RICHARD VINSON
Staff Writer

On Wednesday, April 5, the SGA presented proposal regarding the Confederate Battle Flag in Columbia, South Carolina to a packed Homeroom.

The Flag Forum gave students, faculty, and other participants the chance to discuss issues surrounding this controversial symbol's presence on the South Carolina State House. In addition, SGA members entertained suggestions on which direction to steer the Davidson College community now.

Reactions on Wednesday night were mixed. Debate was generally lively and open, though there was some obvious hesitation to speak openly and directly in support of the Confederate Flag. Still, most agreed that the forum was insightful and effective.

SGA Senator and flag committee member Allison Perry said she felt that the gathering was generally helpful. "We [the committee members] got some good feedback... and at least it got people talking about it."

Professor Scott Denham of the German Department, also in attendance, agreed that the forum presented most of the salient issues, "in a civil manner." Moreover, he praised the SGA for taking an active stance on this particular question. "I think the resolution is a good thing, if for no other reason than to foster thought and discussion on campus."

This forum came in response to the SGA's passage of a resolution presented by the flag committee on March 28. This resolution

committed the school to "actively support" the efforts to "relocate" the Confederate Battle Flag from its perch atop the State House in Columbia. No action was specified in the text of the resolution.

Partly in hopes of solidifying student support for this objective, and partly in an attempt to sound out the campus community on what kind of action would best achieve that support, the SGA extended the invitation to students and faculty to meet and to let their views be known.

Discussion focused primarily on reasons and issues supporting or condemning this particular display of the Confederate Battle Flag.

Roughly speaking, three main lines of contention emerged.

First and foremost, participants struggled to define the flag as a symbol. Some contended that its use by racist groups has irrevocably branded the Confederate Flag as an image of hatred, bigotry, and terror.

Professor Brenda Flanagan, Department of English, noted that she, upon coming to the South, perceived the flag as an instrument of intimidation against African Americans. Others maintained that it is an expression of respect for those fallen in defense of a cause and an attempt to preserve "Southern heritage." Nevertheless, some asserted that the

intent of the flag is irrelevant, as oppression and intimidation are realized in the personal experience of those who suffer under them.

Second, those present gave numerous political and legalistic arguments on both sides of the issue. Among the most notable, one student explained that while the Constitution does protect the freedom of expression for individuals, it does not do so for bodies such as the Government of the State of South Carolina. By flying the Confederate Flag, the government is implicitly espousing a particular

political and social view, one that is offensive

to a great number of people. Another countered that the South Carolina Legislature is the only organ with the authority to keep or maintain the flag. In other words, "outsiders" should mind their own business.

Junior Cashion Drolet took a similar tone. Speaking from the perspective of a South Carolinian, she said that the perception in her home state is that people are meddling in their internal affairs. However, many reaffirmed their conviction that South Carolina's business is Davidson's business due to geographic proximity, the large numbers of students and alumni from South Carolina, and participation with four South Carolina schools in the Southern Conference.

Third, a few participants made use of

historical interpretations to justify their beliefs. One noted that the Battle Flag was first flown over the State House in 1962 as a protest against federally mandated desegregation. Hence, in this particular context, its purpose and its message are clearly "defiant" and "racist," said Professor Denham.

One visitor diverted the debate even further back into history and claimed that the flag was a protest motivated by years of economic and social imperialism by the North against the South. Mr. Hugh Martin of Sebastopol, California voiced the opinion that the Battle Flag is an oppressed people's quest for a symbol of their identity, though his comments met with some skepticism.

Perry acknowledged that the discussion of issues was important, but lamented the fact that students did not present more suggestions for action.

"I was hoping to get more original ideas," she admitted.

Of the possibilities considered, one in particular met with apparent favor. Professor Ralph Levering, Department of History, suggested that the SGA send a similar proposal to the faculty. He thought that the possibility of uniting the entire college behind this issue was one worth considering.

Sophomore Nowell Zimmerman, based on his experience with Amnesty International, cited the "power of letter-writing," as an effective means of achieving political change.

Perry was reluctant to say definitively what the next step will be but restated the SGA's commitment to explore all options.

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Davidson Partnership comes together for families, children

PRESS RELEASE
By Bill Giduz

A grant from the Duke Endowment brought them together in January 1999, and now a group of agencies and institutions in the town of Davidson charged with improving the welfare of children and families is finally beginning to feel like the "partnership" of its title.

The Duke Endowment is a Charlotte, N.C.-based foundation with more than \$3-billion in assets which benefits health care institutions, churches, and four colleges in the Carolinas. In 1998 the endowment invited Davidson College to apply for the grant as part of a new foundation outreach toward children and needy families.

The college was successful in applying for \$255,000 of funding, which it administers, for the first year of a possible three-year collaboration with local service agencies which had no prior history of working closely together. In evaluating their progress thus far, the six original members of the "Davidson Partnership for Children and Families" admit that learning to balance their new corporate responsibility with their pre-existing individual missions has been challenging. Monthly meetings and extensive reports for the partnership have placed additional duties on administrators who had their hands full with the work of their separate organizations.

"Getting these agencies together at the same table regularly was something that had never happened before, and it has taken patience and effort to learn to work together," explained George Guise, partnership grant coordinator. "Now, though, I think we've overcome those growing pains and created a mission that fits."

The mission, as members recently finalized it, is "to strengthen the impact and effectiveness of those organizations that serve children and families in the Davidson

community."

That broad statement emerged from specific initial partnership goals to increase the percentage of students who graduate from high school and go on to higher education, decrease teen pregnancy and drug abuse, improve access to social services, and heighten the sense of membership in community. Partners used the first-year funding for child care scholarships, after-school tutoring programs, health care services, substance abuse counseling, transportation, community dinners, and parenting and computer classes.

While proceeding with those efforts, the partners also realized a need to expand their membership to encompass other local entities with equal interests in strong families and healthy children. They have therefore created a partnership advisory board, and recently issued invitations to the town government, ministerial association, the YMCA, and parents of children involved in partnership programs to take a seat at the partnership table.

Mary Fox, director of the Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center, noted, "When you get all these people around the table, we make connections. In my dealing with preschool children, I may realize something that points to a need these same children will have in a few years, and someone else in the partnership can begin programming to address that."

The Duke Endowment grant is awarded year-by-year for up to three years, and will expire in 2002. Looking ahead, partnership agencies recognize the need for self-sufficiency, but also believe now that funding won't be the most important challenge they face. Tom Shandley, Dean of Students at Davidson College and chair of the partnership, said "As we expand to other organizations, we believe that our primary need will not be funding, but will be communication

between all groups so that we effectively serve the youth of Davidson from 'diaper to diploma.'"

Shandley said the value of communication became evident six months ago during a meeting at which partners lamented the need for a middle school tutoring program to supplement the existing elementary school tutoring program. "Because we had representatives from the Boys and Girls Club, the school system, and our Davidson College service office together, we figured out how to do it in a matter of two hours," he said.

About 80 students from Davidson College have provided the volunteer energy necessary to fuel many of the partnership programs, tutoring in the after-school programs, assisting at Friday night Boys and Girls Club social events, and staffing community dinners.

In addition to the college and the day care center, original grant partners were the Davidson Youth Activity Center (now the Boys and Girls Club of Our Towns), the Ada Jenkins Community Center, Davidson Presbyterian Church, and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. The partnership funds have supported its agencies in a number of ways during the first year.

The Davidson Cornelius Day Care Center, which enrolls 45 students and received \$31,200 of grant money, was able to provide staff training to meet requirements for new state certification, and to grant scholarships to 15 students who didn't qualify for other assistance.

The Boys and Girls Club of Our Towns (BGCOT) was founded in 1996 as the Davidson Youth Activity Center to provide a safe and constructive environment for middle school aged youth. The board voted in 1998 to affiliate with the national Boys and Girls Club, and an executive director was hired last summer. The BGCOT absorbed a new middle school, after-school tutoring pro-

gram, and averaged 10 students per day for two hours per day participating in its programs. Part of the BGCOT's \$69,900 portion of the grant financed its new executive director, while other funds supported 11 weeks of Friday night programs, leadership workshops, and field trips.

The Ada Jenkins Community Center received funds for its after-school program for 31 elementary school students, a Parish Nurse program, substance abuse counseling, computer training, and a program in parenting skills and family counseling.

The most widely acclaimed successes of the partnership during its first year were two community dinners, which brought a large number of citizens together for a program relating to parenting and family concerns. Congressman Mel Watt spoke at the first one about the importance of a strong home life, and Loraine Vega from the United Way talked at the second occasion about how that organization works to strengthen families.

Now that the partnership has evolved beyond its birthing pains, partners hope that the second year will be even more action-oriented. As other entities join the partnership, there will be more opportunities to identify and help children and families who need it. The partnership plans to sponsor more parent education workshops, the Boys & Girls Club will move into permanent quarters and expand its after-school tutoring and recreational programs for middle school students, and the Ada Jenkins Center will add new initiatives.

Bonnie Brown, director of the Ada Jenkins Center, said, "Sharing of information is really valuable. So often one organization can assist another in doing its job, and that's the biggest value so far. It's important to focus on what we can do together. As a rule of thumb today, you should never think about doing something on your own."