

PERSPECTIVES

New connections in South Africa

STAFF EDITORIAL

The Davidsonian's staff editorial is usually reserved for topics that relate directly to life here at Davidson College. At times, however, it's necessary to look at the world outside the Davidson Bubble to gain a better perspective on the global society in which we live and how we, as Davidson students, connect to it. A recent project for a journalism class brought to my attention how new means of communication are uniting communities to a degree never before imaginable. The project I'm studying recently received a grant of over \$600,000 from the Knight Foundation, a non-profit group dedicated to promoting worldwide journalism initiatives, to develop a system of delivering news to politically disempowered communities outside of its normal readership area. What makes this proposal particularly interesting is that it is based in a socially and racially segregated city in South Africa.

Grahamstown, South Africa still suffers the effects of apartheid. Most of its black residents remain outside the predominantly white city center. The black residents form a community of outliers cut off from the news and even basic information technologies that are easily accessible to the nearby urban environment. The proposal, organized by Guy Berger, a professor of journalism at Rhodes University, intends to disseminate news stories from the local newspaper, *Grocott's Mail*, to the outlying black townships via cell phone—the only modern communications system available in the surrounding communities. Additionally, the grant has been used to found a "Citizen Journalist Newsroom," which opened on September 8, 2009, in the *Grocott's Mail's* main news office. In this "Citizen Journalist Newsroom," community members have free access to computers, USB cables (compatible with existing cell phone technologies), Bluetooth and data card readers to upload their own digital photos and videos from cell phones and cameras onto *Grocott's Mail's* website. The Citizen Journalist Newsroom also provides educational journalistic technology courses to the citizens of Grahamstown and its adjacent townships. The title of the project, "Indaba Ziyafika," is in IsiXhosa, the language spoken by the majority of Grahamstown residents. In English, this phrase translates to "The News is Coming." With the project's success in the past year, it appears that the news has already arrived in Grahamstown.

Journalism is a voice. It is empowerment. As we at Davidson make plans to study abroad or search the job market in the near future it's vital that we recognize our role as community members—whether in the town of Davidson, the greater Charlotte area or, indeed, as world citizens. New technologies facilitate communication with our neighbors. As the Grahamstown project shows, our job is simply to find a way to connect.

The Davidsonian

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Diversity problem a red herring

SPENCER COWAN
Guest Columnist

Chris Marsicano's heart is in the right place. In last week's *Davidsonian*, Chris expressed his desire for a harmonious, cohesive campus, one which I think exists today. And to his credit, Chris addressed a touchy subject openly, not hiding behind a veil of anonymity like so many students, faculty, and staff have done in writing to the SGA's Voices series. Anonymous authors cannot facilitate dialogue or discourse—to whom does one respond? I'll take this opportunity to respond to Chris' interesting column, continuing the dialogue. Chris is mistaken in worshiping diversity without ever making a reasoned plea on its behalf.

Chris tells us that Davidson suffers from a "racial diversity identity crisis." Where is the evidence pointing to this crisis? What are the symptoms of this crisis? And why must we "improve" our diversity? Chris, unfortunately, neglected to provide any answers.

Diversity, to Chris and to so many Americans, is kind of like a fetish. Diversity worshipers cannot explain what it is about diversity that turns them on, and they cannot stop thinking about it, no matter how hard they try. They walk into a crowded room or open the cover of a magazine, and the first thought to cross their mind is diversity. Was Chris really counting the number of white performers at the last Shades of Brown step show?

Chris' reliance on university fact sheets and demographic data is silly and suggests a certain insecurity. Yes, the Wildcats are more diverse than the Furman University Paladins. No, Davidson is not as diverse as Williams. So what? Davidson is a unique institution, and we need not look to Williams, to Furman, or to any other college or university to boost our self-confidence or to provoke feelings of shame. We should also avoid perceiving individuals as data in an Excel spreadsheet used to convey some sort of socially engineered racial balance. This mind-set, which is symptomatic of diversity worshiping, is cynical and perverse.

I'd like to play the part of a psychologist. I think that some Americans like Chris are sincere about their hope for a happily integrated society. In fact, they want desperately to prove to the world that they are enlightened and progressive. To do so, they promote ideas like diversity with a bullhorn. Chris, however, does not have to prove that he is not a racist. Neither do the members of the historically black fraternities and sororities at Davidson, nor do the pasty white geeks—myself included—sitting at a round table on the dark side of

Commons. Everyone take a deep breath and relax. Though we are studying in North Carolina, the year is 2010, not 1861.

I would not want the thankless job of an admissions counselor or a faculty search committee member. But if I were in such a position, I suppose I would look for students and faculty who would excel at Davidson and who would grow to have a lasting love for the institution. If these standards would keep the college from extending a single invitation to a black candidate, so be it. If these standards would keep the college from extending a single invitation to a white candidate, so be it.

The college should give consideration not to our differing perspectives, which are more similar than Chris would let you think, but to our objective. Why is it that we want to be here, studying and working at this old institution in sleepy Davidson, North Carolina? I suppose we are here to learn about ourselves and about the world around us. I am not sure that a more diverse student body would help us meet our objective any better, but I could be mistaken. I would like Chris, or someone else, to explain this rationally, not beginning with the assumption that diversity is vitally important to this institution.

Chris is dead on with respect to the cultural diversity requirement, though; it needs to be revamped. The college, for example, should remove the cultural diversity tag it places on courses like African American History Since and After 1877. The cultural diversity tag suggests that these courses examine exotic events and ideas, when, in reality, the Civil War, the Reconstruction, and the Harlem Renaissance are integral pieces of our nation's history. These courses do not "deal principally with one or more cultures that differ from the predominant cultures of the United States or Europe," as the college-defined cultural diversity requirement states.

To strengthen the cultural diversity requirement, the college could demand that students truly master a foreign language, taking language classes well beyond the 201-level. Fluency in a language like Spanish might help facilitate the integration that Chris so desperately seeks.

Finally, to Chris, I say this: do not congratulate yourself for attending a school that is more integrated than Duke, Pomona, and Swarthmore. But do not flagellate yourself this evening for attending a school with a measly 25 percent ratio of minorities to whites. At the end of the day, we are all Wildcats.

— Spencer Cowan '11 is a political science major from Cincinnati, OH. Contact him at spcowan@davidson.edu.

Working through decennial blues

SUNNY LEE
Guest Columnist

Something in the air feels like a change. The sun is bright, and as color slinks back into Davidson it's almost hard to remember what Tomlinson looked like under the blanket of snow just a few weeks ago. Somewhere on campus, a can of spray tan is being perpetrated. Spring is coming.

This is a special time of year when the whole world seems to be in a state of transition, and as I start down the home stretch of my junior year I find it hard not to look around myself and reflect on what brought me here to this day. When I look at myself in the mirror, I wonder about the man there looking back at me. He looks about the same as he did when he was a freshman. I guess he packed on a few pounds, got himself a new haircut. If Williams hadn't wait-listed him would he ever have gotten that Mohawk? Perhaps it's best not to speculate. Still, there are times when I wonder what he would think about how much has changed in the world since he first crossed the Mason-Dixon.

The world's been moving pretty fast, and now they say it's the end of the decade. Did he ever dream he'd see a black president in his lifetime? His GPA's up, the economy's down. What else could I tell him? Apparently Toyotas are the new Ford Pinto. Spell-check knows who Michael Phelps is, but hasn't caught up to Bernie Madoff yet. Saddam is dead, but the war's not over. Ted Kennedy and Michael Jackson are dead as well—and who can replace them? I can't remember the last time I heard the name Guantanamo. Putin and Castro out, Putin and Castro in. Citizens United? Maybe some day.

Sometimes it can be overwhelming. In the midst of all this, where was I? What did I manage to accomplish? Sometimes I can't help but feel like life was what happened when I had other plans. Friends have come and gone, and things I used to care about just don't seem so important anymore. My love

affair with Superchunk is just a memory and now Crosby, Stills and Nash are back on my playlists again. I turned 21, learned how to mix a mean white Russian. I still haven't learned how to play the guitar. A stack of LSAT books quietly gathers an impressive coat of dust under my bed. It's the same place the MCAT books used to go.

As I think about all the things that I've done, in many cases haven't done, I can't help but think about the man I saw three years ago. I try to remember what his dreams were, to remember what he went to sleep imagining he would be like in the future. I wonder on his journey from there to here if he ever realized how far he was going. If he could see what he would become, would he be happy?

The man I see in the mirror now looks unfamiliar to me. It's true, he looks pretty much the same as he has ever looked—still just as short unfortunately—but something changed. He walks and talks like the boy I knew, but something is eerily different about his face. It is strange and a little unsettling. I wish I had taken more time to get to know him a little better. He may have made his fair share of mistakes in the past, but good or bad, he is what made me who I am today.

Roger Daltrey is screaming in my room. One of my three papers is an hour late.

Outside, faint traces of winter still linger in the air. It will be back, but when it comes who will the man in the mirror be? Will he remember me? Tomorrow is a new day, and when it comes we will forge ahead with the narrative of our lives. But if we ever get so caught up in the plot that we never get to know the characters—what a meaningless narrative becomes.

Mid-terms are here, but that's alright. Take five for a bit. Have lunch with yourself.

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