

Staff Editorial

The face of diversity

Three highly-qualified students who are active in campus life currently sit on the Presidential Search Committee. Chosen by the Student Executive Council headed by SGA president Mac Skelton '07, Elizabeth Henry '08 and Ashley Moore '07 have joined Skelton on the committee. All three are recognized leaders on campus, but despite their impressive accomplishments, this combination of individuals is problematic.

One of the key concerns in selecting the student representatives was to represent the diverse nature of the student body. While the student contingent to the committee is two-thirds female and one-third racial minority, the selections are not nearly as diverse as they seem to be. One criterion for selection was that one member be a senior, one a junior and one a sophomore. Instead, we have two seniors and one junior.

Geographically, all three are from the Southeast (Texas, Arkansas and North Carolina). Religiously, all three are active members of Protestant organizations. Academically, their majors all lie within the humanities and social sciences: religion, political science and anthropology. All three are also Belk Scholars.

Does the College believe that the only diversity that matters is the type that becomes immediately visible upon viewing an individual? The 63 percent of students who hail from outside of the Southeast have no voice on the committee. The largest religious presence on campus, Catholicism, is not represented. Neither are the 18 percent of students who identify themselves as non-religious. Also lacking representation are science majors, arts majors, athletes and those who are paying for their Davidson education either by themselves or with their parents' help.

We understand that there are only three student seats on the committee, but the final composition of the student contingent is still unrepresentative of the student body. Perhaps this problem is an example of elitism, in which the SGA senators make nominations for the consideration of an even more select group—the Student Executive Council. Perhaps the focus on external diversity reflects a wider trend at Davidson to limit views of diversity to gender and race.

Regardless of the reason, it is essential for all members of the Davidson student body to attend open forums and public discussions concerning the presidential search. Although one could say that the student representatives on the Presidential Search Committee are distinctly Davidson, each of us has the responsibility to ensure that every group at Davidson plays a part in making a decision that will affect every student who seeks an education on this campus for the next decade.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

By JC BOYLE
Staff Columnist

Recent efforts to diversify the Student Government Association (SGA) are making the wrong assumptions about what SGA's big problem is, and how it is possible to improve it. The Diversity Coordinating Committee (DCC) was right in one regard: A fundamental failing of the Senate is a lack of diversity. But all of this arises from the way senators are chosen, and it's clear that any substantive reform will have to start with an overhaul of the electoral system itself.

The student body only elects about half of the Senate on its own. Various social groups—the Patterson Court organizations, along with one or two others—combine to appoint the rest. The procedure is a strange one, to say the least. An entire class votes for its senators, and then pockets of the school select extra representatives from the clique they eat dinner with.

No one knows why this was ever considered a good idea, but it has been done this way for as long as anyone can remember. The elections system manufactures a rift between Patterson Court and the rest of campus and then uses the opportunity to give Patterson Court special privileges. Fraternities and eating houses already have their own legislative body to decide their own issues—they don't need to govern the rest of campus any more than the chemistry majors or the volleyball team do.

Beyond the simple issue of campus equality, Patterson Court representation inhibits diversity of every variety. It's no secret that PCC organizations are overwhelmingly white (hence last year's successful push for a historically black sorority). By skewing the Senate in the direction of Patterson Court, the bylaws themselves ensure that SGA will be just as racially and socio-economically monolithic as the majority of Patterson Court. These representatives, of course, will then report only to their social organizations and not to the campus as a whole.

The DCC and the others who pushed for more minority representation argue that the current senators are not receptive to the needs of minorities on campus. How could they be, when so many of them represent such little diversity? And to whom are minority students expected to address their concerns?

It is so easy to get elected to SGA that hardly anyone needs to engage in constituent services. Because there are so many appointed positions, each campaign season attracts barely the minimum number of candidates. In a typical example, the junior class voted on three senators and had five candidates to choose from. If it is easier to get elected than it is to lose, senators don't have much reason to place their constituents above themselves. As a result, SGA has become a loose collection of individual crusades, and the organization has devolved into an item to put on law school resumes instead of a student legislative body.

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The electoral system is the problem with SGA, but the sad truth is that, after sticking with a flawed structure, all these years of lost opportunities and broken promises mean that we get exactly what we deserve. Every year, presidential candidates talk about making SGA more transparent, more accountable, more productive and more receptive to student needs, and every year they fail to follow through. Instead of outrage, we greet this with apathy. SGA, we rationalize, will always be a disappointment.

The elimination of appointed positions would reorient SGA from a group of organizations representing themselves to a group of students representing their peers. Everyone would be accountable, and every voter would have an equal voice in selecting the student legislative body. Minority representation should happen organically, and even if the percentages don't add up, every senator will answer to a more appropriate constituency, and anyone who feels shut out of the process will know who's at fault.

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G O R A N G T N A A G

State of the Ship

Andrew Gorang



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