



# PERSPECTIVES

## Our Davidson

STAFF EDITORIAL

Last week's staff editorial ignited an old debate regarding campus on the importance and purpose programs like S.T.R.I.D.E. and the International Orientation. We recognize the important role these organizations play on campus. That being said, reaction to last week's article has been strong, and has reminded many of the unfortunate fact that Davidson is frequently split along ethnic lines.

When one walks into Commons or the Union, there often is a division by race. Arguments often arise that social clicks are also formed by athletics and social organizations, like fraternities and eating houses, but there is a difference between those groups and racial groups. It is unlikely that those clicks will exist outside of college. Our ethnicity, however, stays with us.

It is often the case that this racial splitting between ethnicities arises from misconceptions rather than reality. For example, criticism of last week's article came exclusively from minorities, while many other students agreed with the article. The gaps between the perspectives from the two sides are based on misunderstandings. The lack of dialogue and interaction between some minorities and some majority students here is staggering. By integrating more, there will be less misunderstandings and misconceptions, and perhaps, the debate on the importance of S.T.R.I.D.E. and the International Orientation will end.

Of course, how we bring about integration becomes the question. In the end, I know that integration is ultimately up to us, the students. With this article, I appeal to all students of Davidson, regardless of race, gender, religion, or opinion. While it is easy to form clicks with those you feel comfortable around, break out of that comfort zone and just talk with people. It may be hard, but the experience will be rewarding in the end, and you never know whom you might meet.

Some may ask why they should break out of their comfort zone when the "real world" is often just as divided. While these people are exactly right, since when did being ordinary and mediocre become a part of the Davidson curriculum? By refusing to address the problem ourselves, we are letting it live. We can leave this place and follow the status quo of the nation or we can use what we learned from this place and change it.

Others may argue that socially integration is impossible on this campus. I do not know whether or not this is true but I am reminded of a conversation on justice I recently had with my History professor. We agreed that it is impossible for pure, objective justice to exist in our society. Nevertheless, he told we must still strive for it. Even if complete racial integration is impossible, we should still try. The harder we try, the closer we get to achieving the impossible.

## In Response to Davidson and Division

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With regards to last week's staff editorial "Davidson and Division," we would like to thank the author for bringing up this important issue of division on campus. We agree with some of the points raised about Davidson and Division regarding the Students Together Reaching for Individual Education Program (S.T.R.I.D.E) and the International Office, but would like to counter some misperceptions. Further, we feel like any real discussion of division at Davidson must go beyond looking solely at minority groups created by the institution, such as S.T.R.I.D.E and the International Office, and instead broaden the discussion to include other institutionally sanctioned social groups and to really question how social groups form at Davidson, how these groups lead to division, and how we can address division from all angles.

First, we will respond to some questions about S.T.R.I.D.E and the International Office, and then we will expand our gaze to Davidson in general.

The question was raised about the inclusivity of S.T.R.I.D.E and the International Office's events. Are events open to the campus? Why or why not?

The International Office is an institutional organization created for a particular purpose, therefore, it is not necessarily going to have events for the whole school. The advisors talk to students about things such as visas. Does the whole school need to participate in this event? This organization is needed for the international students. Now, if one would like to participate in an "international event," one could look to the Davidson International Association (D.I.A.) who does have events for students interested in international topics and where one could have the chance to meet fellow international wildcats.

S.T.R.I.D.E on the other hand is a different program. It is not about having events for the school either, but rather, is a mentor program that, as the author of last week's article pointed out, has eased the transition to Davidson and increased retention rates. Maybe S.T.R.I.D.E can open up to students who are not ethnic minorities but are coming to Davidson from a high school where they were the minority. Davidson would definitely be a culture shock for them as well. But many of S.T.R.I.D.E's events are targeted at developing the relationship between the mentee and mentor to ease that transition to Davidson and keep the retention rate at a high. If one wants to meet students that are ethnically different, there are student run organizations that host events for that very purpose, any of the Diversity Coordinating Board's (DCB) events, whose purpose, according to the Davidson website, is "to highlight Davidson student groups that promote diversity -- in terms of religion, sexual orientation, and ethnicity."

So what is the problem? Some say the problem is division, and students in both of these organizations not straying away from them. But as we see, this is a fact of much of life at Davidson College. Shouldn't other organizations and other student's work on smoothly integrating themselves to these students as well? Institutional organizations and student-run organizations are two different things, because there are student organizations that are in fact open to all, who publicize their events, but do we as students participate?

This being said, we wish to look more broadly at some other institutionally supported social groups at Davidson. We acknowledge some good points made in the previous article, but we feel that in order to really have this conversation we cannot just focus on two organizations, a small portion of the student body. We need to be inclusive in our conversation.

Davidson, as well as many colleges, has sports teams, substance free housing, fraternities, sororities, eating houses, musical groups, Davidson Outdoors, Odyssey, athletes ball, formals, and the list goes on. These are also

organizations that are "united" on this campus, yet also cause division, but are never questioned -- at least not to the extent of S.T.R.I.D.E and the International Office.

For example, many sports teams move in early, and have the privilege of staying on campus over breaks, and travel together on trips paid for by the school allowing time for bonding, at the possible exclusion of other relationships, which is not questioned. Teams eat meals together, join Patterson Court organizations together, and socialize together, which is also not questioned as much as S.T.R.I.D.E and the International Office.

Another example: gendered halls create an automatic division on Davidson's campus in terms of our first contacts and important freshman connections, and yet we seem rarely to question this division. We instead laud the freshman hall bonding experience. Automatically, 50% of the population is divided from 50% of the population, roughly, and yet, we still manage to bridge that boundary and make friends of the opposite gender.

Also, Fraternities and Eating Houses host exclusive events for their members creating bonds of brotherhood and sisterhood that bring people together, and sometimes leave others out. And yet all of these things are justified, good and tradition.

The examples of double standards go on. We are not saying that any of these opportunities to make friends are bad or wrong, but just that these are parallels of S.T.R.I.D.E and the International Office in many social ways, and that we should really look at all of these social mechanisms and really dig into the excellent questions the previous author brought up about our divided campus. There is nothing wrong with individuals hanging out with whom they know. But we all need to be willing to reach out and get to know someone from another social circle. And if we really want to question Division at Davidson we need to question the groups we are a part of as much as those that we are not.

Why, amidst all these organizations that create bonds, do these two organizations continually get questioned? Is it just easier to point out ethnic minority groups, or groups that are targeted at individuals not of "the norm"? One must realize that the majority culture is in fact a culture. We all need to work to overcome division, and that does not mean assimilation to the majority culture.

The need to engage these questions of division does not rest solely with the students, so we would encourage the institution to speak up and explain S.T.R.I.D.E and the International Office once in a while as well, so that students are not always targeted. We feel that as students we are constantly defending the organization with little back up from the institution itself as to why it was created, why it should exist, and why it is always targeted.

We agree that Davidson is divided, but we do not believe that continuing to question, defend, and apologize for S.T.R.I.D.E and the International Office is really going to get anywhere. Instead, we need to redefine the terms for the conversation about division and put the International Office and S.T.R.I.D.E on par with the rest of the institutional organizations that bring students together (Bonner, Chidsey, Sports, Patterson Court...) and create close-knit relationships. The question is not are we divided, but rather what are we ALL going to do about it?

With that said, we hope to see you at an upcoming event on February 15 titled "S.T.R.I.D.E? What is it good for?" at 6:30 PM in the 900 room to discuss further responses to any of the articles on this issue. Come out to hear students, faculty, and administrator's talk about the S.T.R.I.D.E. Program.

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The Davidsonian is published Wednesdays during the academic year by the students of Davidson College.

Please address all correspondences to: The Davidsonian, P.O. Box 7182, Davidson, NC 28035-7182.

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