

# Lee, May discuss Council on Minority Affairs

On Sept. 21, COMA, the Council on Minority Affairs, had its first meeting. Carrie Arthur spoke first with co-chair Allen Lee, and then co-chair Rachel May joined them.

**The Davidsonian:** First of all, what are COMA's goals for the year?

**Lee:** COMA naturally wants to address minority affairs on this campus, but looking at the membership of minority affairs action groups on campus, they tend to be just outlets of the BSC and the ISA. No social movement has ever been successful without the support of members of the majority. Therefore, COMA's first objective is to pull together those majority members of the Davidson community who are able and willing to support our causes and to empower them to join in the fight.

So, the first thing is to get all the people who may be scared to speak up or unwilling to speak up, just timid, or thinking of other things empowered and joining in with everyone else. Then, once we see the warm bodies and spirits that want to help and are for the same cause, then we begin to tackle specific issues on this campus, like the classic argument of why the campus still has such a small number of minorities.

We feel like this campus gets labeled as a very conservative institution; however, there are many students who do not fit the stereotype. The Council on Minority Affairs wants these students who are willing to stand up.

The majority of what we want to work on to begin with is actually getting people to the table together to pass the superficial images and to talk truthfully about emotion on this campus on the issue of race relations and minority affairs. Once we get people to the table, then this new group, this larger mass, will decide the direction that COMA takes.

A lot of times, we set lofty, long range goals of what we would like and overlook the immediate gains that can be made. I think that's been our

problem too many times. We're looking for a final outcome without looking at the steps to get there. This year, we're focusing on the steps, and the first step definitely is to get everyone together.

**D:** In response to your goals, how was the attendance at the meeting?

**L:** Not including Rachel and me, there were about seven.

**D:** What does COMA do?

**L:** The Council on Minority Affairs was created to be an advisory agency to the SGA to find out what minority concerns were and to work as a watchdog and a consultation group in the area of minority affairs. Now that we have a co-chair and a committee, we're supposed to also address the concerns.

One of the problems of looking at our committee, except for a few exceptions, is that it's still just an outlet of the ISA, BSC, and OLAS. Most of our members are already active in one of those three organizations. So the question arises, What is COMA's responsibility? What is COMA in relation to this campus?

*(May then joined the discussion.)*

**D:** So do you have any short term goals besides getting people to the meetings?

**L:** We're right in the middle of a big planning stage.

**May:** Catching people's attention might be one of our goals.

**L:** We want to wake up the campus. In our meeting, it was said that the campus tends to be too

superficial, and truth and emotion don't come out.

**D:** What did COMA do last year?  
**L:** Last year, the chair at the beginning of the year and the committee wanted the same thing that we want, to shake up the campus and to bring people together. They decided that the second week of January would be called Diversity Week. Once we got back to school after Christmas, we began to advertise. Articles were written in The Davidsonian. As the week progressed, the turnout

was significantly less than expected. Some of events only drew attendance by COMA members.

After the week, there was a following week of discussion as to why that happened. It was a learning process for the Council, and that is why this year, instead of focusing on the entire campus, we really want to gauge the support of those on the campus that are willing first, because then, like now, the membership and the driving

force behind COMA was campus minorities, with a few exceptions.

**M:** But that doesn't mean we're not still trying.

**L:** We still want to work, but we realize that we've got to find another way, a more effective way.

**D:** What's your solution or your more effective way? How are you going to reach out to the rest of the campus?

**L:** One of the problems that we have run into: With just minorities focusing on minority affairs, you don't know how to reach out to the rest of the campus. So by getting members of the majority interested and working with us, they will have a very needed contribution and link, one that we didn't have before.

**M:** I think also being one of those goals is making our presence known, talking about the issues, letting people know it's there, and being a stronger presence on campus.

**L:** A lot of being a stronger presence has to do with the size of membership and the type of membership.

**D:** What do you think is the largest concern facing minority students at Davidson today?

**L:** Personally, balancing or finding out how to make this school and this campus somewhere that

I love to be a part of, not just like, not just attend because of some name on a diploma or some scholarship, but actually love being a Wildcat and love going to Davidson College. That's a challenge for any student, but particularly one in such a distinct minority. That was my biggest challenge coming into this school, and I was very fortunate to be able to find that early.

**D:** Gauging from your work with COMA, do you think that some minority students find Davidson to be unreceptive and unwelcoming?

**M:** I don't know if it's unreceptive, but definitely there are problems, but a lot of things at Davidson need to change so that it's a good place for everyone to be, and the campus works better together.

**L:** In addition to what you said, this is a special place. It's not representative of larger society. Being a special place, it takes an unique mind set or set of abilities to deal with it.

Not all people come here with that. Some students and some minority students are better equipped from their past 18 years or so to deal with a place like Davidson than others. And for those who are not quite as equipped, there will be COMA.

**M:** Even for the ones who are dealing with it. . .

**L:** . . . and need a little extra support, the Council on Minority Affairs is there for them, too.

**D:** How is the theme hall for African American studies affecting COMA's work, or is it?

**L:** The theme living hall fills a part of Davidson's campus which is lacking. At any other liberal arts institution, African American Studies is a valid and legitimate major for graduation; however, at Davidson, some individuals seem to think that the study of African American society and culture is ludicrous, absurd, unnecessary, and inherently separatist.

**D:** Has the negative criticism of the hall hurt COMA's work at all?

**L:** Those who negatively criticize the hall tend to do so among themselves, and COMA will not allow such an issue to interfere with greater campus issues.

**D:** Do you have any other comments?

**M:** I encourage everyone to get involved, to talk about the things that need to be talked about, and to be open about dealing with issues.

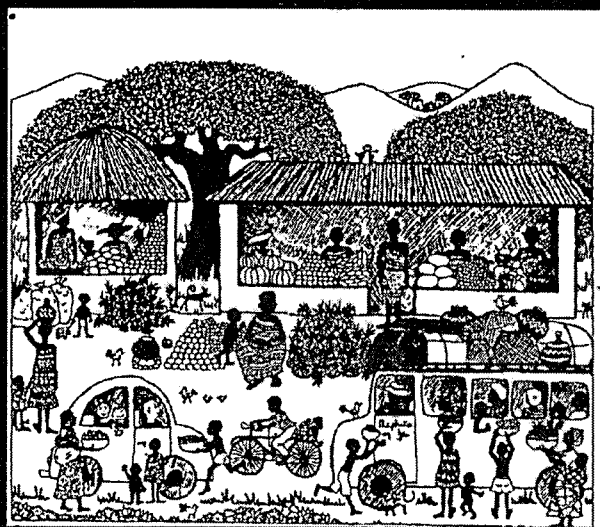
**L:** We just want people to stand up for what they believe and to understand that silence is consent. When you do decide to open your mouth to express your opinion, then we implore you to open your mind as well and be receptive to others' opinions and beliefs.

**M:** If you want to say it, then also listen to what other people have to say.



with Allen Lee and Rachel May

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