

SORORITIES AT DAVIDSON: THE CCRL VOTE

Maintain current academic atmosphere: No to sororities

Healthy debate involved mutual respect, but choice is clear

I've appreciated the recent discussion on sororities because it has introduced me to some committed, kind, sharp students on both sides of the issue and because it opens an opportunity to study one of my favorite topics — argument.

Since all of us are expected to recognize and build strong arguments daily in and out of class, I wanted to take this chance to reflect on argumentation and sororities simultaneously, by presenting my own argument for opposing sororities (in the first section) and addressing some of the specious arguments put forth to support sororities (in the last two sections).

Alenda Lux

I oppose sororities because I believe they could change academic life at Davidson for the worse.

Please note the difference between "would" and "could."

None of us knows exactly how sororities would affect academics, and rather than guess that they would weaken academic life (which seems to me no more persuasive than guessing that they wouldn't), I prefer to argue that the very possibility that the arrival of exclusive groups on campus for the satisfaction of a few *could* weaken academic life at Davidson is reason enough to oppose their arrival.

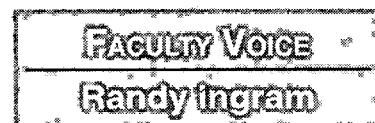
By "academic life," I don't mean any grand abstraction; I mean what students and faculty do every weekday of the school year in every classroom at Davidson.

In his inauguration speech, President Vagt put that academic life first in his description of the College's mission. And as a faculty member, I obviously put that part of the College first when making decisions.

I ask, "Will this help or hurt what I do everyday in class?" And believe it or not, very often I think that a co-curricular activity does enrich our time in class. A proponent of sororities wondered whether the faculty who opposed

her view simply want students to live in the library, and I can assure her and you that I, for one, do not.

See a movie at the Union, go to a swim meet, be a DJ on WALT, volunteer at the Ada Jenkins Center, put on spandex and mousse your hair for the



glam rock party, walk on the cross country trails, talk to a professor about something other than class, write cranky letters to the Davidsonian, write even crankier essays for Libertas, play flickerball, have a Big O at the Soda Shop, let Matthew Hobbie drag you out of the library — all of these things, I honestly believe, can make our time in class more lively and productive.

But sororities could potentially change who comes to our classes, because some women here now say they would never have applied to a Davidson with sororities.

Many of us have heard at least one friend or acquaintance make that claim during the past month or so, and the several women who have said to me that the absence of sororities helped them decide to come to Davidson are consistently among the brightest, most interesting and creative people I teach.

I don't know (I don't think anybody does) what kinds of women apply to Davidson specifically in the hope of joining a sorority, but I know that I respect and admire women I teach now. Just the risk of changing the applicant pool from which these students come would be enough to confirm my opposition to sororities, and that risk seems to me only one of the academic risks posed by the "colonization."

I oppose sororities, then, because I am not willing to risk even the slimmest possibility that social gratification of a few Davidson students could alter for

the worse the academic experience of all Davidson students.

Waving the FLAG

At Wednesday's Council on Campus and Religious Life meeting, several people of unimpeachably good intentions linked the position of sororities now to past positions of Black Student Coalition and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. Just as a majority of the Davidson community may not have favored founding those groups then, and just as those groups served and do serve an under-represented constituency on campus, so too should the College permit the "colonization," even though the majority of the Davidson community opposes it.

This is a powerful parallel because it invokes the rhetoric of protected groups and the responsibility of a well-

feminist, but...I don't yet understand how sororities will bring gender equity, certainly not any kind of gender equity we can feel good about.

Should the colonization occur, I'm told, sororities would not have houses on Patterson Court. Sisters would meet elsewhere, in rooms in Chambers or the Union.

But as a colleague very shrewdly pointed out at the first CCRL meeting on the topic, proponents of sororities are not asking for equity, but for a severely compromised version of a female Greek organization; unlike all the male Greek organizations on campus and off, sororities would have no rooms of their own.

My colleague seemed to understand, as Milton and Orwell before he, that adjectives like "equal" and "pregnant" don't admit degrees — either you are equal or you aren't. And as they are

permanently content with their "less equal" status, they should abandon the rhetoric of gender equity.

If, on the other hand, the proponents truly want the equity within the Greek system, they should proclaim clearly that they do hope eventually to move sororities onto Patterson Court (and the women's eating houses will know up front that sororities are indeed the threat they are perceived to be); or, conversely, the proponents of sororities could use the language of gender equity if they announced their hopes to move all fraternities into classrooms in Chambers.

At a more basic level, I as a male faculty member cannot feel comfortable dictating gender equity to female students. The overwhelming majority of female students do not want sororities at Davidson, as anyone who attended the Union's forum or the SGA's survey results knows.

Is it my job, is it the job of the mostly male CCRL or of President Vagt to define "gender equity" for most of the female students and then to enforce that definition? I cannot assume that the intelligent and informed women I know who oppose sororities need me to explain to them their opposition and then free them from it. If that is feminism, it seems to me an oddly paternalistic feminism. Whatever comes of this debate on sororities, it has often been a real debate, with arguments, counter-arguments, and respectful listening on all sides.

There has been a lot to admire: the tenacity and courage of the women who want to bring sororities to Davidson; the loyalty with which their opponents have defended women's eating houses; and above all, the genuine good will on the part of all participants.

It has been wonderfully civil, and I can't help but hope that President Vagt will bring this discussion to a civil close not by issuing an immutable fiat — a flat "yes" or "no" — but by expressing and then supporting his views, by making an argument, as the rest of us have

The mere fact that sororities could adversely affect Davidson's academic environment should be reason enough to keep them off campus.

meaning majority to protect the rights of some groups. I don't want to linger long over this flimsy analogy — I'll trust you to compare the persecution of any other protected groups to the persecution of would-be-sisters at a college without sororities — but I do want to point out first, how it provides a handy language for discounting the voice of a majority and second, how it inadvertently belittles the real suffering of other minority groups.

Equity, more or less, like it or not

In the classes I teach, students sometimes preface their readings of literary works with this disheartening disclaimer: "I'm not a feminist, but..." I preface this section with just the opposite disclaimer: I do consider myself a

proposed now, sororities would not be.

One might argue that historically equity does not come at once, that it must be won in steps, and that these meetings in classrooms are but a first step towards gender equity in Davidson's Greek system.

Fair enough. But if those meetings in classrooms are only the initial changes of "colonization," proponents should not be disingenuous but should say openly that this interim period will end when sororities move into houses on Patterson Court, presumably the houses currently held by Connor, Rusk and Warner Hall. If that is not the plan, then the argument of gender equity makes no sense. Again, if the proponents of sororities are willing to accept classrooms as meeting places indefinitely (would you?) and are willing to remain

It's a matter of equal opportunity: Yes to sororities

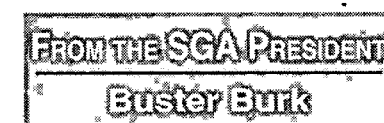
A useful historical precedent: FLAG was not — and probably still isn't — accepted by the majority, yet it belongs

It seems as if the debate on sororities has finally come to some sort of conclusion. The Council on Campus and Religious Life decided this week on a 8-8 vote — with one abstention — to recommend to the president that chosen sororities be given formal invitations to come to Davidson.

I know what a lot of you are thinking — you're hurt, you're excited, you're angry, you're scared. Well, I want to tell you why I think we voted for their invitation instead of their rejection and how the students ought to look at this idea. Our decision was a recommendation to President Vagt, and he decides if they can come or not, and the sororities decide if they even want to come or not.

First, we have a hard problem with

the whole Greek system. Complaints were that it's not fair, that it promotes exclusivity, that it's not academically stimulating (although 80 percent of the houses have a 3.0 GPA or above), and that self-selection doesn't work the way it's supposed to work on paper.



There are problems to work out, and there's going to be a self-study done in the future to check all of these problems.

But what we were mainly talking about was the issue of whether sororities should be invited to be a part of the

College. There are a lot of people against sororities, against the Greek system, against a lot of things.

The reason why we granted an invitation to sororities was that we shouldn't infringe on another's rights. Not granting this option would infringe upon the rights of the two women who introduced the idea last year, as well as to anyone who wanted to be in a sorority.

As long as the school has a Greek system, and as long as that Greek system is around, and as the issue was brought up not as some cloudy idea by

the Patterson Court advisor or someone a bit outside the realm of students, but by two students who really wanted to have this option, the Davidson community should not say no to this request.

We would be saying "no" to sororities on the basis of majority opinion. As long as we believe in or admit fratern-

ities or any other organization. The issue was whether the school has a right to infringe upon a student's freedom.

I'm sure that when Friends of Lesbians and Gays was established, that idea wasn't too popular except for those who wanted to be in it. The idea of sororities isn't too popular except for those who want to be in it.

I think we made the right decision, and now the school can see what sororities will be like.

Along these lines, if you want to start a club or student organization that's not Greek, you do it through the SGA. It's called getting "chartered."

After you are chartered, you can use the name "Davidson" with your signs and petition for money from the Student Activities Budget.

The opinion of the majority matters little. For sake of gender equity, sororities belong.

ties to be a part of Davidson, and as long as we believe in personal rights, we ought to grant the same system to women.

The issue was not about whether

To submit letters to the editor

Submit all letters to the Davidsonian office on the third floor of the Union by Friday at 6 p.m. Or e-mail any submissions to editor in chief Michael Kruse at mikruse@davidson.edu.

Please turn in any submissions on a Macintosh-formatted disk, preferably in WordPerfect. Keep all submissions under 400 words.

The editors reserve the right to cut and otherwise adjust submissions as space requirements mandate.

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