

## Musical Fraternities

STAFF EDITORIAL

It is poker night for Davidson's administration. Deans and staff sit in a smoky room, sunglasses on, cards face-down on the green table. One player throws in a scrap of paper with the words "Kappa Sigma Phi" scrawled across it. Another throws down the deed to the "Sigma Alpha Epsilon" house.

Or maybe our administration plays the game of musical fraternities. Last one to sit down gets kicked off campus for a year. Wheel-of-Fortune? Sorry, Pi Kappa Alpha; this time you're bankrupt.

Many students believe that the Davidson's big wigs have it out for Patterson Court, the fraternities in particular. Every decision and every mandate handed down from on high seems to bring the Court one step closer to obliteration. The majority of us do not understand it - it might as well be a game of craps.

Most recently, Sigma Phi Epsilon has found itself in the deep end without their floaties on. Again. To say that fraternities do not screw up and never deserve punishment would certainly be wrong, but SigEp's most recent fiasco just does not make sense. For one thing, the SigEp event was completely non-alcoholic. What's even stranger is that the frat is only just now being held accountable for an incident that occurred during Self-Selection Night, the first weekend of the semester. Maybe this scheduling issue is not the administration's fault, but how are we, the students, to know?

SigEp has received their formal charges but has chosen to keep them confidential until they receive permission to share the information. SigEp members want to encourage better relations between themselves and the administration, but the rest of us continue to speculate what in the world the fraternity could have done to warrant another trial mere weeks after its year-long suspension.

Popular opinion is that the whole trial is a conspiracy against the Court, that it is meant to phase out Greek life on campus gradually. We all know that several members of the faculty have expressed their aversion for both fraternities and eating houses, and perhaps this is just the administration acting out the faculty's wishes.

Whether or not this is the case, there is no doubt of a disconnect between students and the rest of the Davidson community regarding to Patterson Court. Regular faculty-student exchanges have addressed such issues over the last few months, but they haven't reduced massive student cynicism that has escalated over the last few years.

SigEp's trial has been scheduled for next Thursday, May 1, at 7 p.m. and will be open to the public. We encourage concerned students to support the organization.

## The Davidsonian

ALANDA LUX UBI ORTA LIBERTAS

**Editor-in-Chief**  
Suzie Eckl

**Managing Editors**  
Michelle Jester & Katherine Miller

**News Editors**  
Kate Kelly & Nina Mace

**Perspectives Editors**  
Laura Van Oudenaren & Matt Petit

**Arts & Living Editors**  
Jennifer Errington & Caroline Wood

**Yowl Editors**  
James Boswell & Alex Hoyt

**Sports Editors**  
Mike Frongello & Patrick McArdle

**Photography Editor**  
Ben Ellinor

**Copy Editor**  
Gretchen Hoffman

**Business, Advertising and Circulation Manager**  
Robbie Squibb, Laura Fontaine & Jamie Hofmeister

The Davidsonian is published Wednesdays during the academic year by the students of Davidson College. One copy per student. Please address all correspondences to: The Davidsonian, P.O. Box 7182, Davidson, NC 28035-7182. Phone (704) 894-2148.

E-mail Davidsonian@davidson.edu. Our offices are located in Room 411 of the Alvarez College Union. Opinions expressed in letters to the editors or commentaries do not necessarily reflect the views of the Editorial Board of The Davidsonian. Subscriptions cost \$50.00 per year. Advertising rates are available upon request.

Copyright is held by the Trustees of Davidson College.

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### HIV/AIDS posters play important role

In her April 16, 2008 editorial, Laura Van Oudenaren criticizes the Student Health Center posters promoting HIV testing. Here are some facts she should consider: Today, HIV/AIDS is the sixth leading cause of death among all women in the U.S. between the ages of 25 and 34. HIV/AIDS is also the leading cause of death among women of color in the U.S. between the ages of 25 and 34.

Roughly 80 percent of women, newly infected with HIV in the U.S. are exposed to the virus through heterosexual contact. Today, approximately half of all new infections in the U.S. occur in people under 25 years of age.

Does the poster suggest that a confident, trendy woman may be HIV-positive? Yes. Does the poster suggest that a woman who wears make-up may be HIV-positive? Yes. Does the poster suggest that a woman with a nose piercing may be HIV-positive? Yes. In fact, the poster suggests that every woman who is sexually active may be HIV-positive and should be tested. That is the message this poster conveys.

Ms. Van Oudenaren concludes by contending that the poster "damages the image of the school." I contend that knowing one's HIV status and preventing even a single HIV infection greatly outweighs any concerns about image.

David R. Wessner, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Biology

The Davidsonian welcomes letters to the editor. Please e-mail submissions of fewer than 250 words to davidsonian@davidson.edu. We reserve the right to edit for content, brevity and grammar. Anonymous letters will not be printed.

### Burton, Cook distort issue of low GPAs

ALISSA IREI

Guest Columnist

Last week, in response to the Student Government Association's recent report finding Davidson's mean GPA to be the lowest of 11 of its peer institutions, two members of our academic community wrote unconvincing and, at times, overtly insulting critiques of student concerns about possible grade "deflation," and the overall competitiveness of Davidson and its students.

First, Kevin Cook articulated an infuriatingly offensive and embarrassingly ill-reasoned argument in which he likened the Davidson student body to "someone running a race, coming in last and then claiming that the only reason they did so badly is because their shoes slowed them down." He dismissed the notion that Davidson's relatively low mean GPA is due to grade deflation here or grade inflation at other schools, chalking it up instead to poor performance.

Sadly, Cook seems to believe that Davidson students are either lazier or less intelligent than their peers. Or both. If Cook aimed to insult Davidson students, faculty and alumni, then I applaud his success. And while he implies that he is disappointed in the Davidson student body, I, as a Davidson student, am wholeheartedly disappointed in him. If the opinions Cook presented last week are truly his own, then I question his judgment in choosing to remain at an institution he holds in such low esteem, amongst people in whom he has such little faith.

Cook continues, "The problem is that most Davidson students have never been to another institution. We can not say definitively, one way or the other, if an English class at Richmond or Duke is graded the same way it is here." Having transferred from the University of Southern California Thematic Option honors program, I can attest to the fact that an A at Davidson is not the same as an A at all other schools. Not by a longshot. I know transfers from schools around the country—Haverford, Boston College and Georgia Tech among others—who make similar claims.

Our esteemed former SGA President Chris Burton wrote a letter to the editor in which he exhorted us to stop questioning our institution of higher learning and its lower mean GPA, and simply "Trust the Davidson education." I would argue, however, that the most vital lesson we can take from our studies in the liberal arts is to refrain from investing blind trust in anything. There is no virtue in accepting the status quo without exploration, comment or question. If there were, then there would be scant reason for this or any other liberal arts college to exist. An education in which there is no room for questions is an education on which I would waste neither my time nor my money.

In his defense of the status quo at Davidson, Burton asserts that recent graduates have "secured great jobs in the Charlotte financial district." This is undoubtedly both true and admirable, and most Charlotte-dwellers are inevitably familiar with our institution.

However, the Davidson community now boasts a student body with increasing geographic diversity. Gone are the days when all of Davidson students hailed from the Carolinas. And while Davidson is ostensibly fulfilling its ambition to take its place as a national rather than regional school, the fact remains that in much of the country Davidson is not yet a "name." I believe with total confidence that the day will soon dawn when a Davidson man (or

woman) will need no introduction. But that day is not today and it will likely not be a year from today when my classmates and I apply for jobs and graduate school admissions on the West Coast as well as the East.

Fortunately, as Burton suggests, our education and experiences here are preparing us to make our own introductions, whether in California or Connecticut, even if our reputation does not yet precede us. Still, forging our way into futures would be less daunting were we not both a.) explaining to potential employers where we received our education ("it's a small liberal arts college about twenty minutes outside of Charlotte, North Carolina") and b.) justifying our GPAs. This is assuming that we first land the job or admissions interview and thus the opportunity to a.) explain and justify.

*A grade does not necessarily reflect academic rigor, nor is it capable of representing all a student has or has not learned.*

I truly believe in this college and in the other people who call it home. I am proud of the education I have received here. And I hope it goes without saying that "Ultimately when we graduate, each of us is better and more informed than we were when we graduated from high school," Burton claims. What does not go without saying is that Davidson should stubbornly cling to a grading ethic that, not deflation in fact, is deflation for all intents and purposes.

If Davidson graduates are competing against job and graduate school applicants from better known schools with higher GPAs, then it is small consolation that we hail from the only school in our peer group that is using the right grading system, whatever "right" might mean. It seems reasonable that everyone affiliated with Davidson—faculty, alumni, even students like Burton and Cook—would want Davidson graduates to be as competitive as possible in the "real world." Right now, our lower GPAs are not necessarily helping us from success, but they are not helping us either.

Furthermore, it is a mistake to assume that adjusting college's attitudes toward grades will be to the detriment of students' attitudes toward learning. A grade does not necessarily reflect academic rigor, nor is it capable of representing all a student has or has not learned. How can one letter tell the whole story? If anything, I would argue that Davidson's grade deflation (or absence of inflation, if you will) encourages a grade-centric, some might say grade-obsessed, environment. It creates a mercenary culture in which learning for the sake of learning is sacrificed to studying for a material reward.

Ultimately, the issue at stake is not who is deflating or who is inflating their grades. To discuss grade inflation or deflation in this manner suggests that there is some irrefutable norm or standard to which all academic institutions should adhere. But defending such an argument is an exercise in futility. A grade is a human construction designed to measure something that is ultimately immeasurable. It is a symbol. It is arbitrary. Ceci n'est pas une pipe.

Alissa Irei '09 is a Political Science major from Scottsdale, AZ. Contact her at alirei@davidson.edu.