

Exploring Diversity and Multiculturalism on Davidson's Campus Part One: Examining a Commitment to Diversity...and Multiculturalism

MULTICULTURAL AWARENESS COMMITTEE

Davidson College is a place full of possibilities. Besides a few standard rules and limitations, students have the agency to pursue whatever interests them. This pursuit is not limited to learning more about different people, different cultures and different experiences. One of the best ways to learn is through cultural immersion—an argument that is often stated about the importance of studying abroad. It is the individual's conscious decision to seek more understanding about a given topic or experience on Davidson College's campus. Just as the college asks that students commit to the Honor Code, its commitment to diversity asks that students commit to diversity as well.

Davidson College recently revised its commitment to diversity. The commitment states: The college seeks to foster mutual respect and understanding among and for all people of different races, cultures, ethnicities, religions, sexual orientations, genders, ages, national origins, socio-economic backgrounds and physical abilities.

- We strive to enrich our community by attracting, supporting, and retaining students, faculty and staff from diverse backgrounds and perspectives who bring a variety of talents, passions, and world views.

- We believe Davidson should be a place where those who live, work, and study see difference as an opportunity and stimulus to learn about themselves, each other and the larger world.

- We are committed to assisting students in developing humane instincts and discipli-

plined and creative minds for lives of leadership and service.

- We are intentional about deepening our knowledge, awareness and understanding of all people, and we seek to develop skills to interact constructively across our differences.

We are compelled to act to make our community and the world more socially just because WE RECOGNIZE THE DIGNITY AND WORTH OF EVERY PERSON.

This year, Davidson College brought in the most diverse class this campus has ever seen through the largest freshman class to have entered Davidson at one time. This has allowed Davidson College and its students to continue to examine student life as it applies to all students, whether we realize it or not. This article is part of a mini-series discussing initiatives that already happened on campus and that and provide an in-depth look into serious questions about diversity, multiculturalism, and its meaning and place within Davidson's Student Life from students' perspectives.

On Monday, August 30, the College had a soft opening of its Multicultural House (former PiKA house). The space is open to all students and will serve as a meeting space, social space, and space for educational events. Student-staff members and advisors will define the purpose of the house throughout the semester. Currently, it is open every day from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. for students to use, observe, and learn more about the space.

Multicultural Awareness Week occurred August 29-September 4. The week-long

series of events intended to re-evaluate the term multiculturalism and its meaning on this campus. The theme of the week's events was, "Multicultural Awareness Week: Celebrating the Davidson Mosaic." Merriam-Webster Dictionary defined multicultural as "of, relating to, reflecting, or adapted to diverse cultures." The committee stated the following in regards to their efforts in Multicultural Awareness Week: "Our goal was to educate and introduce diversity in a broader definition than previously depicted on campus. One of the initial steps we took is to establish the true definition of "multiculturalism" by stepping outside the mold of race/ethnicity and stepping into aspects including, but not limited to, sexual orientation, gender, socio-economic status, expressiveness through the arts, religion, and ability."

The most popular events from the celebration include a performance by comedian Hari Kondabalu, a cookout and a party at the Black Student Coalition house. However, the committee hosted more educationally focused events to supplement the entertaining events. Throughout the week, the committee held open discussion forums to discuss the meanings and intersections between the ideas of diversity and multiculturalism. On Tuesday night of MAW, the committee showed the Oscar-winning movie, Crash with the intention to hold though-provoking discussion about racial and ethnic relations. On Wednesday night of MAW, the committee hosted student-led discussions with topics that included autism, homelessness in Charlotte, and race bending in the media.

However, even with these interesting

events, attendance was low or completely non-existent. The committee stated, "This was a learning experience, but we provided a good variety of events. Perhaps the timing of the celebration affected attendance at our events, but we're proud that we could bring the college its first student-run Multicultural Awareness Week. We hope that the impact of this events and events like it in the future will echo within our community for many years to come and help to catalyze a new era of Davidson student life involving Davidson students, faculty, staff, and administrators."

Prevalent in the name of both of these initiatives is the word "multicultural." Although the term is inclusive of all Davidson College students, a stigma still exists that the word excludes those that are part of the racial and ethnic majority. Wikipedia defines "culture" as a set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterize an institution, organization, or group; so, "multicultural" can be defined as cooperation and harmony within these groups. With that being said, everyone has something to contribute to the idea of "multiculturalism."

Davidson College has made its commitment to diversity and multiculturalism clear through the opening of spaces and increasing the number of events that it hosts to bring awareness to different issues around different cultures and inclusion. However, even in definitions and descriptions of the term multiculturalism, the term "diverse" appears a number of times. How do we navigate the meaning of diverse and how does it differ from multiculturalism? The next article will begin to tackle this issue.

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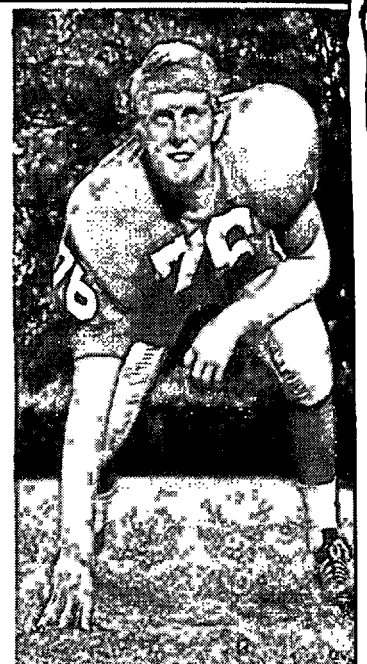
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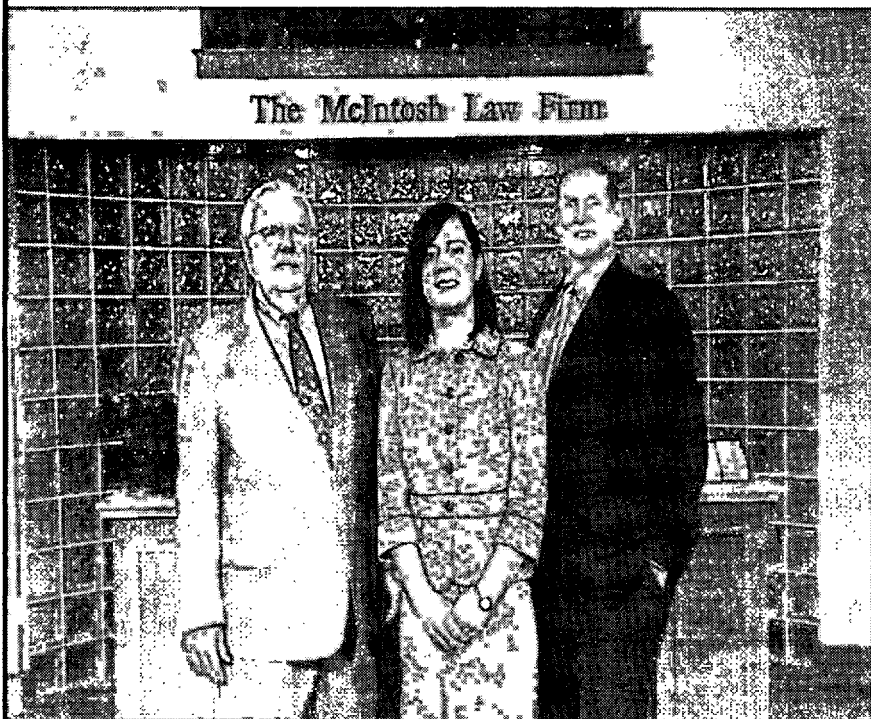
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