

Mixed-gender halls

raise concerns

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to share a room – although this option is usually only open to upperclassmen.

Despite its growing normalcy, many students are curious as to why schools institute any form of mixed-gender housing in the first place.

Dylan Goodman '15, a campus LGBTQ advocate and Resident Advisor (RA) on Fourth Belk, one of the new gender-neutral halls, helped explain the necessity of such living spaces. Goodman believes that, fundamentally, "The purpose of the hall is to promote LGBTQ awareness and inclusivity, to fight sexual assault and to reduce violence, and overall just to create a safe space for all kinds of expression."

These principles are not simply student ideals about mixed gender halls, but are RLO's stated principles as well. Brian Lackman, Belk Area Coordinator and RLO Residential Curriculum Coordinator, explained that research shows that, "... it helps decrease domestic violence, it helps to better support LGBTQ students and creates better environments with them. They especially have great potential in creating conversations and breaking down hegemonic masculinity, disruptive male behaviors, and group-thinking issues."

The advent of mixed-gender housing at Davidson is a result of student advocacy last year, credited by Dean Shaffer to Jamie Durling '14, the then president of the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA), now the Q&A (Queers & Allies), to create a more inclusive campus culture.

Such advocacy led to RLO deciding to explore how responsive the student body would be to the idea through a school-wide survey, which according to Brian Lackman, showed "... [a] really overwhelming response, with students wanting to create a gender-neutral space on campus and residence halls."

The survey revealed that students were 72% in favor of mixed-gender halls, with only 14% opposed and the rest reporting as neutral. Dean Shaffer summarized why RLO took action, saying, "...that's really where it started. Student interest and a student leader who was representing it, and then a survey which showed that it wasn't just a tiny group of students who thought this would be a good thing to have."

Now that mixed-gender halls are a part of life at Davidson, how have students adjusted to the new living spaces? The program and its advocates have started with lofty goals. There have been no major problems with the implementation of the program.

That being said, murmurs of discontent amongst students living on mixed-gender halls are of some concern. Many students had not known that the halls they would be living on were going to be mixed gender. Ian Kelly '17 of Fourth Belk said he "actually didn't know" the hall would be gender-neutral, instead choosing the hall because several of his fraternity brothers were plan-

ning to live there.

He also added "the majority of people he'd talked to [on his hall] had no idea." Kelly, however, wasn't bothered by the news, in fact he told us he had a "positive reaction" and was "excited about the opportunity to learn what the term [mixed-gender] even meant."

Frustration over the new spaces thus seemingly stemmed from those who had signed up for philosophical rather than social reasons—expecting a more comprehensive experience.

Additional frustration comes from those who were unhappy with the idea of mixed-gender halls yet had ended up on one regardless based on the housing lottery dynamics. Bathrooms were the source of such controversy. Dean Shaffer explained the RLO policy, stating, "Our default is a [specific gender] designated bathroom, [unless] there is consensus in a community."

In other words, any hall's decision to have a gender-neutral bathroom must be unanimous. Of all the residents and RAs we spoke with, only Kseniya Kuprovska '15, the RA for Akers, had been able to put in place fully gender-neutral bathrooms. She explained how she broached the idea with her residents, saying, "I was like, okay, so we can start out with all four bathrooms being gender-neutral, and if that doesn't work out, if you have any complaints whatsoever, any sort of concerns, you can come to me and we will reevaluate this. And so everyone is in agreement, and so all the bathrooms are gender-neutral."

The other halls all took anonymous surveys or had group discussions where at least one resident felt uncomfortable enough that gender-neutral bathrooms were not implemented. With many halls having to forgo gender-neutral bathrooms, certain students felt that the gender-neutral experience they had signed up for – and were passionate about – was being diluted.

There have been several repercussions of mixed-gender housing, notably in regards to gender imbalance, with some halls having either a large majority of males or females, rather than the normal 50/50 ratio most Davidson students are accustomed to. According to Fourth North RA Dara Ferguson '17, her hall has only eight males to 22 females. Similarly, Fourth Belk has a preponderance of males. When we spoke with Dean Shaffer about the issue, he suggested that RLO is already preparing to deal with the problem.

According to Shaffer, "...when we are looking at our lottery process for next year, we are talking about whether or not we need to put a cap on the number of people who are on a floor to make sure that we don't throw off our ratios of facilities, or to be able to designate bathrooms and make sure that the facilities are available to anybody, so we don't mess up our ratios."

Gender-neutral implies things around gender identity that some people find really hurtful, and when we think about how would we best describe being able to live on a hallway where men are living on one side of the hall and women are living in the room right next door or across the hall, mixed-gender seems to be an easier explanation about what that means...

- Dean Shaffer

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- Kseniya Kuprovska '15



Porter Halyburton '63 describes his experience in Vietnam. Photo by Shea Parikh.

Vietnam War POW Porter Halyburton '63 gives talk about honor

Lecture series prompts discussion about the Honor Code

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"Man's most basic need is to find a meaningful life," Porter Halyburton '63, U.S. Navy Commander and former Vietnam War POW, said during his lecture titled "Honor Under Pressure: Reflections of a Former POW in North Vietnam." On Monday night, community members, faculty and students filled the Duke Family Performance Hall to listen to Halyburton's talk.

Halyburton arrived in Vietnam two years post-Davidson, and five months after his arrival, his fighter plane was shot down 40 miles north of Hanoi. He then started his seven-and-a-half years in captivity. For five of those years, his wife and family thought he was dead and eventually conducted a funeral in his prolonged absence.

Halyburton first discussed how his Davidson background, and his English degree specifically, shaped his experiences in Vietnam. Since his captors did not allow prisoners of war to converse with each other, Halyburton said he depended on his own thoughts to occupy his time. "We are stuck with our minds, and of course I was very fortunate, because I was one of very few liberal arts graduates," he said.

Halyburton described how, as a prisoner of war, the concept of honor becomes even more complex. "There was a lot of discussion about what's the right thing to do," he said. "How do we hold up the code of conduct under this difficult situation?"

Halyburton's slogan, along with his fellow POWs, became to "return with honor." Subjected to "torture, extreme isolation and boredom," honor takes on an even greater level of meaning and significance.

"It wasn't enough just to survive. You had to survive with honor and the idea you had done the best you possibly could," Halyburton said. This mindset affected all of his decisions, such as the daily decision whether to cooperate with

his captors. The Vietnamese soon paired him in a cell with an injured officer, Fred Cherry, an African-American U.S. Air Force pilot. "They thought that was the worse thing they could do to a young, Southern white guy," he said. "That was the very best thing that could have happened to me."

Halyburton's life took on a new purpose in nursing Cherry back to health. While Cherry attributes his life to Halyburton's care, Halyburton credited Cherry with saving his own life in a sense as well. "We knew we were in this together," Halyburton said.

"You learn the most about the meaning of life through suffering. That common suffering causes a common bond among people."

Halyburton connected these experiences to one of the lessons that he took away from Vietnam, the importance of communication. In the next phase of his captivity, when the torture hit its peak, he and a prisoner in the adjacent cell were allowed only to tap on the wall between them to communicate. Despite these restrictions, however, his neighboring officer became his life-

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line. He contrasted this simple method of communication, to the abundance of channels of communication now. "Today, it's not the method of communication, but the effectiveness of it," he said. "Communication is, as it was with us, the glue that binds together families and communities and towns and countries. Communication is how we learn about each other."

The other of his two most important lessons learned came at the end of his captivity. As they were preparing to return home, he overheard other officers discussing their plans to seek revenge on the Vietnamese. He realized in that moment, that "hatred was really a prison in itself." As he walked out of the prison, he turned around and symbolically said, "I forgive you."

"I walked out of two prisons that day. And I'm still free," Halyburton said.