

Trustees Act on Recommendations

Following a year of study and input from alumni and the campus community, the Board of Trustees at its February meeting took action on several recommendations that relate to Davidson's Presbyterian heritage and religious commitment. [See sidebar on process.]

The board revised the Statement of Purpose in ways that it felt reaffirmed the college's relationship to its faith tradition, while making clear that this relationship is not simply an historic fact. A central statement that was strengthened in the revision is, "The Christian tradition to which Davidson remains committed recognizes God as the source of all truth, and believes that Jesus Christ is the revelation of that God, a God bound by no church or creed." In conjunction with that change, the Board instituted a requirement that strengthens the trustee pledge supporting the Statement of Purpose as part of the oath of office.

The second enacted recommendation was an amendment to the Trustee By-laws to allow those who are not active members of a Christian church to be eligible to serve on the Board of Trustees. The new amendment reads:

"Historically, persons elected as Trustees have been active members of a Christian church. In openness to and respect for the world's various religious traditions and the variety of religious preferences among the



graduates and friends of Davidson, the Nominating Committee and the Alumni Association may recommend persons for the office of Trustee who are not active members of a Christian church but who meet all other criteria for serving as a

Trustee. As part of continuing the historic commitment of Davidson to the Reformed Tradition of the Christian faith, the Nominating Committee shall insure that at least 80 percent of all elected Trustees are active members of a Christian church."

"This action represents the best Christian theological tradition," said John B. Rogers, Jr. '63, pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church in Charlotte and a member of the trustee committee that drafted the proposals. "As long as a credible majority of board members will be Christian, it seems to me there's room for non-Christians who are willing to support the college's Statement of Purpose."

In addition, the board passed a resolution recommending the creation of a new endowed professorship in the Department of Religion, whose focus would be Christian theology

The Trustee Process Leading to Changes

Recent actions by the Davidson Board of Trustees began with a retreat held in February 2004, continued with study and discussion throughout the year, and ended with the February 2005 vote. Here is a chronological summary of this twelve-month process.

- ◆ February 2004 trustee retreat on the Reformed Tradition and its implications for a church-related institution, with speakers, religion faculty emeriti panel, college chaplain presentation, small group discussions.

Retreat results in overwhelming reaffirmation of Davidson's Christian commitment and church affiliation.

Trustees request reexamination of the Statement of Purpose and the religious requirement for trustee membership.

At the direction of the executive committee, board chair selects members of ad hoc committee to study issues raised at the retreat and report to the board, appoints Tom Ross '72 as chair.

- ◆ Committee meets and studies issues; presents recommendations at October 2004 meeting; extensive trustee discussion.

- ◆ Committee processes feedback, edits recommendations.
- ◆ In December 2004 Kevin Hanna '81, trustee and president of the Alumni Association, mails recommendations to 17,000 alumni; recommendations posted on the college Web site.
- ◆ Committee reviews alumni responses and reports to trustees by letter in January.
- ◆ February 2005 trustee meeting:

President presents a review of alumni responses and reports on feedback from alumni events and college functions.

The Statement of Purpose proposal is amended to include a change suggested by several alumni.

Trustees discuss and vote on the proposals.

By-law and Statement of Purpose changes pass 31-5.

Creation of professorship in department of religion passes 36-0.

On behalf of trustees, Ross reports results to all who had sent written comments.

and, in particular, the Reformed Tradition.

President Robert Vagt expressed his appreciation for the board's process and its decision to involve the extended college community in the conversation. "Although this was not done during previous considerations of these issues, the trustees decided that we should send a copy of the proposals to the 17,000 alumni. These were discussed with alumni, parents, and friends at Alumni Chapter events, with former trustees and parents during on-campus meetings, and in many other formal and informal gatherings. I am proud of the fact that we engaged the broader college family in this important discussion."

Tom Ross '72, who chaired the trustee committee, said that the lengthy discussion during the February 2005 meeting was characterized by meaningful involvement, describing it as a thoughtful, civil debate, where everyone was given the opportunity to speak. "I believe that members on both sides of the issues felt, from their fellow trustees, a sense of concern and consideration, and a commitment to disagree in a respectful way—both before and after the decisions were made," he said.

The motions to amend the Statement of Purpose and the Trustee By-Laws were passed by an affirmative vote of 31–5.

Vagt said he responds to inquiries about the changes by inviting alumni to visit campus and witness for themselves the flourishing expressions of faith in

student gatherings both formal and informal. "Davidson's commitment to its heritage is as strong as it's ever been," he said. ♦

Harambee! **Davidson Sponsors Two Freedom Schools**

The college's recent commitment to sponsor not one, but two, Freedom Schools will give fifteen Davidson students the opportunity to experience "the toughest job they'll ever love."

Davidson is the first college or university in the nation to sponsor a Freedom School, according to Jeanne Middleton-Hairston, the Children's Defense Fund's (CDF) National Director of Freedom Schools. She says the rest are sponsored by churches, community-based organizations, and public and charter schools.

The CDF, in Washington, D.C., created Freedom Schools in 1993 as an educational enrichment program for African-American children who didn't have access to high quality educational services. There are now about sixty across the country.

"It's an opportunity that most people don't have, to be in charge of an entire classroom," said Derrick Thompson '07, who worked last summer in Charlotte's Seigle Avenue Partners Freedom School. "You have a chance to do some positive things with kids who don't have too many positive things in their lives."

Davidson's Freedom Schools program will also give about 100 elementary and middle school children and ten high school chil-



> *Freedom School advocates Marcie Leemore and Derrick Thompson '07*

dren a better chance in life through a five to six-week summer experience that focuses on instilling a love of literacy, self-esteem, and cultural awareness.

Middleton-Hairston hopes that other colleges will follow suit because she believes motivated, intelligent college students are the perfect role models for the Freedom Schools' literacy-based curriculum. "Children and young teens look up to college students because they're cool and hip," she said. "Children who see that college students are passionate about reading catch that passion themselves. They see it's not corny to be smart."

Davidson's Freedom Schools will be located in the Ada Jenkins Community Center in the Town of Davidson, and in Fairview United Methodist Church in Mount Mourne. The college has hired Marcie Leemore as director of the Davidson program, which is being funded by two Duke Endowment grants that total \$350,000.

Leemore is recruiting fifteen Davidson students to serve as interns for the two schools. Each will receive a \$2,000 stipend, and will be provided summer housing

in Davidson residence halls. The program will also employ three adult site directors.

An all-school "Harambee" session begins each day, and it ends with a debriefing for interns and administrators. "Harambee, in Kiswahili, means 'let's pull together,'" said Leemore. "It's a time of gathering for students, staff and volunteers to share each other's company, ideas, and stories used to help foster a positive sense of self and a spirit of community among the children of the school."

In the end, Freedom Schools are intended to be as transformative a program for college interns as they are for young students. "It's intended to be a summer of service building a lifetime of commitment," said Middleton-Hairston. "It's not just a summer program, it's a movement. The CDF uses college kids in this way to create the next generation of child advocates. The experience for the interns is so impressive that, no matter what job they have, they'll always be advocates for children." ♦