

# THE PATH

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## Emerging Professionals Group: Bridging the College-to-Career Gap

In the fall of 2004, Vincent Benjamin '04 and Donnie Johnson '00 established the Emerging Professionals Group (EPG) to give motivated students real-world tools to move into meaningful, appealing professional opportunities. After all, for many students of color and their families, 'meaningful' opportunity means a job after graduation.



"The primary purpose of Davidson College may be to help students develop humane instincts and disciplined, creative minds for lives of leadership and service, but what good is a Davidson degree if you're unemployed?" asked Vincent Benjamin. "A professional resume coupled with a deliberate networking process, empowers students to transform collegiate potential into real-world ability. It also helps them avoid the professional paralysis that besets many college seniors."

EPG comprises 10 students (five sophomores, five juniors) and five alumni mentors: Tiara Henderson '97, Boris Henderson '01, Jarred Cochran '03, Erika Dean '05, and Brandon Zeigler '05.

"I noticed a distinct disconnect between Davidson's African-American alumni and its African-American student body and did not understand why it existed," said EPG co-founder, Donnie Johnson. "A group like this seemed like a great way to establish a connection and teach these young adults a great deal in the process."

Donnie and Vincent wanted to ensure EPG members left the program with the tools necessary to be competitive in Corporate America: Excellent résumés and impressive internship and employment offers. Since September, EPG has focused on specific components of professional development by facilitating interaction with Charlotte area professionals and hosting monthly meetings featuring guest speakers and representatives from Davidson's Career Services Office.

The result? Ten amazing students with amazing résumés confidently interviewing for diverse internships and jobs across the country. Companies such as American Express, Wells Fargo, Wachovia Securities have offered internships. Organizations such as the Charlotte Bobcats, the Congressional Black Caucus and NASCAR are interviewing EPG members.

EPG mentor, Brandon Zeigler '05, stated, "I only wish a program such as this existed when I was a freshman. EPG gives students the edge to thrive in any environment, from corporate America, to graduate school and the non-profit sector."

## The Roses in Our Garden Lenny McAllister ('93/'02)

Everyone has a favorite time of the year. Mine is spring, which, for me, starts right around February 14.

It's not just the surprise of those precious few harbinger days that promise more to come, but also the appearance of flowers, especially roses. From high-end florists' shops to street corners, they're everywhere. And so are all the loved and in-love, rushing to buy them for their someone special. But beautiful as these cultivated beauties may be, ask a few gardeners where to find the prettiest ones of all. Most likely, they'll point to their own yards.

Their gardens, you see, are filled with roses they've tended. They are testaments to the toil involved in caring for them, working each day with water, plant food and minding to ensure they grow to their full beauty. Unlike florists' roses, garden roses have thorns, but with those thorns come a natural beauty and presence florists' flowers cannot match. I can think of a couple of

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## **It's Not Working; It's Networking**

### **Calvin E. Murphy '70**

If you give any credence to the adage, "it ain't what you know, but who you know and who knows you," you probably take networking seriously. And we all should. Your chances of being successful in any given industry or profession are greatly enhanced by networking.

On a very broad scale, networking is contacting friends, family, colleagues, classmates—anyone you know or have known—for fostering personal and business relationships and opportunities.

As businesses and professions grow more specialized and the world grows smaller, the value of networking can only increase. In my field, the general practitioner is being rapidly replaced by specialists. And, I suspect the same is true in other professions. Years ago, I had a "dentist". Now the dentist who cleans my teeth doesn't do root canals, the specialist who does root canals doesn't do implants, and the guy who does implants doesn't do braces.

According to one networking tip I recently picked up from the Wall Street Journal, "...don't waste your time at big events catering to people in many industries, but join the dominant group in your area of interest." You must be where things are happening in your area of interest. More often than not, you need a 'dance card' to dance and that card usually comes from someone who already has one.

Just being a Davidson graduate plugs us into a network with certain benefits and opportunities. For example, Charlotte is a significant banking community with two of the largest banks in the country headquartered here. It's no coincidence that Davidson graduates hold a high percentage of leadership positions in these financial institutions. In my opinion, bankers are some of the best networkers there are.

Davidson graduates tend to be business and professional leaders, which is especially significant for such a small, southern liberal arts school. These folks are in position to extend invitations to the big dance in their fields. Several months ago, I attended a national conference of Bar presidents. Seven of the leaders of state Bar Associations were Davidson alumni. During a portion of 2005, (our terms overlapped) the presidents of the North Carolina State Bar and the North Carolina Bar Association were Davidson graduates. However, the network of black and minority Davidson alumni is just coming into season. We are beginning to have a cadre of alums who have been out there long enough to become leaders in their professions and who are in position to mentor and help other black Davidson alums along the way.

And networking is particularly important for black folks. Historically, we have been left out of the corporate boardrooms and country club settings where networking flourishes. If we managed to reach a pinnacle of business and professional success despite that lack of access, we have traditionally felt awkward about reaching down and bringing other minorities along. We have to get over that. If we share with our brothers and sisters the formulas for our own successes, many more will travel the paths we have forged. Because it IS lonely at the top for us. There are seldom many others with whom we can readily identify, who share a common cultural experience. And it's even lonelier trying to be something or somebody you're not. Moving up the corporate ladder normally means it just gets worse, especially for blacks. The need to maintain old relationships and build new ones becomes more important than ever.

It's important for black folks to network in traditional ways, but we should also examine options that reflect our own cultural heritage and experiences, especially with each other. We started DBAN expressly to facilitate networking opportunities but we haven't fully utilized it. Perhaps we're just beginning to make the concerted effort it takes to make it work better for us. We can and should do a much better job of cultivating and maintaining the ties we have available through DBAN. We all need to work our network better.

In my business, professional listservs are working quite effectively these days. Though not as personal as face time, they can be useful and efficient in developing and extending relationships.

You can always start something. I'm a rafting enthusiast, so a few years ago I joined a group of folks who enjoyed whitewater rafting. I just appointed one of the members of that group to a leadership position at the State Bar. I knew him and his work, and I was comfortable with him.

### **The Roses in Our Garden** *(Continued from page 1)*

other things like those garden roses: Davidson College black students and love.

Growing from freshman to senior or from "just friends" to "just married" take care, nurturing, patience and persistence to flower. Some of us have been lucky enough to tend both types of blooms by marrying our college loves.

The Davidson experience bonds many for a lifetime with shared joys, obstacles and triumphs.

"I think sharing the Davidson experience only made us stronger," says Sterling Freeman '92, executive director of Wildacres Leadership Initiative. "I learned early on that my wife Michelle and I could make it. I feel that being on our own and together at such an early age actually created an expectation in me that we would be successful. I feel that same way today."

Sterling's wife, Michelle Graham-Freeman '93, explains, "We actually started dating my junior year in high school but continuing the relationship through Davidson was great. We had a chance to experience something unique -- an opportunity to grow together from teenagers to young adults. Together we helped each other deal with what Davidson presented, good and bad. Today, we can be happy together when we learn of classmates who have been promoted at a job, gotten married or become parents."

And the Freemans are not alone. Some couples' relationships started in college. Others, like Tiara ('97) and Bo ('01) Henderson's, were pleasant surprises that stemmed from post-Davidson experiences.

"I met Boris for the first time on November 22, 1997," says Tiara Henderson. "I graduated in May of 1997 and decided to go on an alumni trip with the football team to a game in Tampa. He was a freshman (on the football team) at the time (but) we did not start dating until after he graduated in 2001."

"I think one of the fundamental aspects of any lasting relationship is that the two individuals must generally be heading in the same direction," said Bo. "For example, most Davidson graduates are sensible, intelligent, extremely hardworking, (and) ambitious... Marriage and relationships are truly wonderful but, realistically speaking, they're also hard. Humor and common ground--your faith being first on the list--are at the core of lasting relationships."

After their first date, Tiara recognized the importance of that common ground. "I called my mom afterwards to tell her that I had just had my last 'first date.'"

It didn't take Bo much longer to share that sentiment.

"On our first fishing trip, she caught more fish than I did...and she baited her own hook! I never thought I'd find that type of woman. After that, I was hooked too."

We all know Davidson can be both a rewarding and difficult experience for Black students. We experienced it. But many of us also know that those ups and downs are like tending a garden in anticipation of its glorious blooms. Whether what blooms is marriage or lifelong friendships, few of us leave without knowing we've found some of the most beautiful roses in our own Davidson garden.

*Lenny McAllister ('93/'02) is a consultant and political activist living in Davidson, North Carolina. He has been married almost four years to his wife (and DBAN member), Lannie Bennett McAllister '94.*

### **It's Not Working; It's Networking** *(Continued from page 2)*

Personal, professional, social. Trade groups, fraternities, sororities, alumni associations, churches, professional associations, hobbies, volunteer groups...the possibilities are endless. But always have an objective in mind when networking. Advancing that objective at the family reunion might not get the same results as at a business reception. Know the difference.

And know what not to do. Don't abuse relationships. Don't ask for a job. Don't be selfish. Desperation is a real turn-off when you're networking.

Building relationships is paramount. In the words of Stacey Bradford, a contributor to the Wall Street Journal, "strangers won't put their reputations on the line for you."

*Calvin is a senior partner in the firm of Murphy & Chapman in Charlotte.*



Davidson Black Alumni Network

## Davidson College Black Alumni Network

Erwin Carter '79  
President

Janet Stovall Harrell '85  
Editor, The Path

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### Website

[http://www2.davidson.edu/  
alumni/net\\_dban.asp](http://www2.davidson.edu/alumni/net_dban.asp)

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Davidson College  
Office of Alumni Relations  
Box 7169  
Davidson, NC 28035-7169

## What's Up (and coming)

- Questions, comments, suggestions?  
Re: DBAN, Erwin Carter  
404.731.0821 or [erwin.carter@newboldonline.com](mailto:erwin.carter@newboldonline.com)  
Re: The Path, Janet Harrell  
404.377.6380 or [jharrell@thepointcomm.com](mailto:jharrell@thepointcomm.com)  
Re: Alumni relations, Nikki Sawyer  
704.894.2399 or [nisawyer@davidson.edu](mailto:nisawyer@davidson.edu)
- DBAN Yahoo Group: [DBAN-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:DBAN-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)
- Check out the 2006 recipients of the DBAN Scholarships:  
[http://www2.davidson.edu/alumni/dban\\_scholar.asp](http://www2.davidson.edu/alumni/dban_scholar.asp).
- **Mark your calendars now!**  
**Homecoming Weekend: September 29 –October 1st.**