

Communiversity: Revising His-Story

By **Melanie Mullen**
Ink Staff Writer

Wanted: University of North Carolina African-American students to dedicate their Saturdays to teaching. Communiversity, an

Afrocentric Saturday School, sponsored by the Sonja Haynes Stone Black Cultural Center, is in need of student volunteers for this semester's sessions.

In its fourth year of programming, Communiversity has begun a series of classes

designed to get children interested in learning about their African-American heritage and history.

During the all-day sessions, students ages 8-to-12-years-old, participate in rap sessions, history classes, cultural sessions and arts and crafts.

Kathryne Brewington, a graduate student in Pharmaceuticals, said, "It's up to the up-and-coming middle-class to help insure the future of our people, and the children are our future."

Unlike other programs that focus on young people, Communiversity is unique.

"We try to give the kids community building skills," said Brewington, a Communiversity volunteer for two years. "We are not just preaching history. We are just not preaching heritage. We are trying to make it applicable to their lives. I think that is what makes us different."

Founded by Michelle Thomas, former president of the Black Student Movement and now a graduate student in Geography at the University and senior Denise Mathewson in 1991, the program has grown. In its infancy, the program attracted only a few dozen students. Today, there are about 70 students from the Chapel Hill-Carrboro area.

"Communiversity was founded in response to criticism from area parents, who said that blacks at the University were not involved in the community. As one parent noted, 'there were no black students at UNC,'" Mathewson said.

The idea of a Saturday school was adapted from a similar program begun by two sisters in West Virginia. It was designed to be a whole community effort involving students, parents, children and area volunteers. This university's program has been successful in cultivating children's interest in their African heritage and raising their self-esteem.

"When you see that a kid is understanding the concepts that you are trying to put across to them and when a child brings back a book from the library...well, you get that little warm fuzzy feeling," Brewington said.

Volunteer Lisa Pullen said although volunteering can sometimes be tiring, it is well worthwhile.

"I get a lot out of working with the kids...and its fun," Pullen said.

A typical Communiversity day begins with the arrival of the volunteers at eight and the children at nine. In the next seven hours the children attend classes in culture, arts and crafts, and history. Whenever possible traditional Afrocentric ways are used in interacting with the children. For example, the children respond to African commands and always sit with the volunteers in a circle of unity.

Particular attention is given to family involvement. Parents and children are urged to take time to prepare for and discuss the lessons. Parent volunteers are always welcomed.

Meanwhile, student and community volunteers are recruited mostly through word of mouth in order to find people who will be dedicated to the program. Volunteer roles are very diverse, however, with some not even seeing the children or the program on Saturdays.

Communiversity's curriculum is designed to build a sense of responsibility and community in the children, with volunteers taking a very active role in that process. For instance, senior Crystal Heilig developed the initial set of classes on the accomplishments and history of African Americans, which focused on the positives of black cultures.

With the classes purposely designed to be unlike school, the of Communiversity volunteers is to try and get the kids interested in the news process.

"The ultimate goal is to get the kids to value themselves in a sense of mutual responsibility," said Mathewson.

While its an ongoing process, Mathewson said, "I see that it's working."

For further information about Communiversity, contact the Sonja Haynes Stone Black Cultural Center Office at 962-9001.

Melvin Davis: Phi Beta Kappa Inductee

By **Renita Mumford**
Ink Staff Writer

For University of North Carolina senior Melvin Davis, becoming one of the newest members of Phi Beta Kappa, national honor society stirs up mixed emotions.

"It felt good because I had accomplished something," said Davis, 21, of the induction, which took place last semester. "But it was also sad, because I was the only black in attendance."

Davis, a Political Science and African-American Studies major from Kinston, said being inducted into Phi Beta Kappa has always been one of his goals.

"Graduate and professional schools look at that," he said. "It is representative of how well you've done."

Phi Beta Kappa is a collegiate honor society open to all undergraduate students in the College of Arts and Sciences and the Schools of Education, Journalism and Mass Communication and Business Administration. One of two national honor societies on campus, the first chapter of Phi Beta Kappa ever, was established at the University in 1904.

Because many students come to college and don't meet the same level of success as in high school, Davis said he sees his induction as "an outstanding accomplishment for myself, my family and other blacks on campus."

Also happy about Davis'

induction was his mother, Annette Hawkins.

"My mom is real proud," he said. "It makes her happy to see people in the community coming up congratulating her on my accomplishments."



Rosalind Fuse-Hall, former associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, said Davis joins the ranks of individuals like Harold and Harvey Kennedy of Kennedy, Kennedy, Kennedy and Kennedy law firm in Winston-Salem. The Kennedy twins, as they were known, were the first black UNC students inducted in Phi Beta Kappa.

"I think it's outstanding," Fuse-Hall said of Davis' accomplishment. "It shows the level of academic excellence in our community."

Students are considered for eligibility in Phi Beta Kappa based on one of two requirements. One, a student must complete at least 75 semester hours of graded course work at UNC with a quality point average of at least 3.750.

The second option is having completed at least 105 semester hours which include at least 45

semester hours of graded course work taken at UNC with a quality point average of at least 3.600.

Grades that have been transferred from other colleges are not considered for eligibility. The quality point average should include course work taken and counted toward a candidate's degree, and no physical activity courses and grades nor classes taken after receiving a degree are considered.

As for his future plans, Davis wants to attend law school and later do something related to sports or become a corporate attorney. Among his choices of law schools are Harvard and Yale. Stanford and Duke are also on his list. But whether he goes North or out to California or stays here in the Triangle "depends on where I get accepted," Davis said.

When Davis isn't working to improve his "3.7 plus" grade point average, he's busy as vice president and the chair of the Service Committee of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. Davis is also a Senior Class Marshall, the Selection Chairperson for the North Carolina Fellows Leadership Development program, an emergency Justice for the Student Supreme Court and a former Residence Assistant.

With all that he is involved in, one wonders how Davis manages to keep it all afloat.

"I lose sleep a lot of the time, but I'm trying to cut back so I can enjoy the rest of my senior year," Davis said.