

Editorials

Letter To The Editor

President Jo Allen

Dear Editor,

In response to "Sanctuary Campus?" in the March 1, 2017 issue of the Meredith Herald, I'd like to comment on inaccurate assertions regarding Meredith's response on immigration issues and our students' status and security.

First, I care deeply about each and every student at Meredith, and I am especially sensitive to the most vulnerable among us, regardless of the source of that vulnerability. I know that for many—regardless of political persuasion—a sense of angst became more acute during and following the recent elections. In response, we carefully followed (and continue to follow) all political activity on issues affecting our students and their families in general and in relation to educational opportunity, to women's well-being, and to immigration status. Along with presidents of other colleges and universities, I have signed a number of letters urging our new leaders to protect students in a variety of capacities—from DACA status to travel abroad to financial aid. In fact, I serve on the Executive Committee of the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU), the chief advocates in Washington, DC for private/independent colleges and universities. In this role, I went to Capitol Hill in February specifically to meet with our legislators regarding DACA students, financial aid for students, and other issues.

On campus, we have held

important sessions reviewing the perspectives, proposals, and actions on a variety of immigration points, including a session with political science faculty on the academics of the ideas (what do proposals actually say? Are they legal? Are they enforceable?), as well as programs from the counselors and chaplain and Student Life on the emotional and spiritual responses to the ideas (How do we support each other? How do we engage in civil disagreement? How do we engage in our rights to respond?). Indeed, I am proud that so many of our faculty and staff have reached out to students to reassure them of support, and I am pleased that so many of our students have accepted that support. That said, much happens in support of our students behind the scenes and on a highly individualized basis. Consequently, it would be a grave mistake to confuse the lack of public comment as silence.

In fact, full email messages to the campus community were written to demonstrate our concern for all who are struggling, as well as to recommit support for our DACA students and to remind us all of our responsibility to be civil in our discourse, open-minded in our thinking, and open-hearted in our feelings. But I also sent a personal, hard-copy letter to each DACA student in December. In that letter, I not only pledged Meredith's support for her safety and ability to remain safe at Meredith, but also

our ongoing effort to protect her privacy. The letter also offers contact information for legal consultation and representation for immigration matters, support from the counseling center and chaplain, as well as an invitation to see me personally. (I regret the writer of the opinion piece in the Herald did not choose to visit me to express her concerns nor to talk about the article she was writing.)

Further, I want to correct some misinformation in the piece. The writer claims that ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) is conducting "more frequent [raids] at colleges." That is simply untrue. In fact, no such raids have occurred on any college campus. Even the fear that these raids may happen has been ameliorated by President Trump's acknowledgement that DACA is a valuable program to protect students who are "good kids," as he says. Changes may yet happen, and we continue our vigilance. But as expressed in the letter I wrote to DACA students, I am heartened with the knowledge of the multiple organizations, attorneys, government agencies, and citizens who stand ready to file injunctions and other legal actions should aggressive acts be taken against our students.

As for sanctuary status, we have discussed such a status among the executive leadership, the board of trustees, the college's attorneys, professional higher

education organizations' leaders, and our colleagues at other institutions throughout the country. While some institutions have decided to adopt the designation "sanctuary campuses," most have declined to do so. The primary reason is they—and we—believe that such a declaration carries little weight because there is widespread disagreement as to what it means. Further, as the article writer notes, "A sanctuary campus essentially adopts policies that will protect undocumented students." Correct. And Meredith already has such policies in place. Most significant is that a public declaration, while flashy, may draw unwanted attention to our students and our College and actually invites dissension and unrest.

As I said in my letter to DACA students and have expressed multiple times in various forums, Meredith is committed to ensuring the safety and well-being of ALL our students. Our undocumented students are precious to us—they are, after all, the same young women we have known almost or even all their lives. Athletes, community volunteers, leaders, academic scholars, artists, scientists. They heal, they inspire, they befriend, they contribute, they honor us.

So if there is still any doubt where Meredith stands, I hope you will take me up on my invitation to come by and talk.

President Jo Allen, '80

United Nations' Commission on the Status of Women: Student Experience

Cristal Villalobos, Staff Writer

For the past 61 years, the United Nations' Commission on the Status of Women has held a two-week session for the promotion of women's rights, documentation of the status of women around the world, and establishment of global standards for gender equality. At the end of the two-week session, the Commission on the Status of Women drafts agreed conclusions which highlight the priority theme and negotiations by all UN member states. Ambassadors of the UN member states, national leaders, and non-profit organizations from around the world attend the session to present their findings, work, and concerns about women's issues and women's empowerment. The theme of the CSW session this year was "Women's Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work". As a fellow for the non-profit organization, WomenNC, I attended the first week of the session to present research and learn from leaders of different nations.

During my week, I attended various events that were hosted by ambassadors of the UN and non-profit organizations. I quickly learned that people were very passionate

about helping empower women economically under the current social context. Different leaders proposed various ideas for reaching gender equality. The most commonly proposed recommendation to reach gender equality and to reduce the gender pay gap that I personally heard throughout the week was to encourage young girls and women to enter the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) field. Jobs in the STEM field tend to pay more than caregiving jobs. Leaders of Canada and America suggested encouraging young girls to engage in science, technology, math, and coding at a young age. I had the opportunity of working with an Educational Outreach Specialist of Google, Abby Bouchon. Abby is a former WomenNC fellow that now promotes computer science to young girls in K-12. Abby explained to me that Google had such a high interest in having more women involved in this field and to further reduce the pay gap, that it created this job for her. She visits schools around California to discuss the idea of entering computer science to young girls. Google hopes that Abby's work will encourage

young girls to pursue careers in the computer science field in their future.

Although this is a great recommendation, it was more interesting for me to hear the forefront leaders of most gender-equal countries discuss ways that they have already reduced the gender pay gap and empowered women. I attended an event hosted by leaders of all the Nordic countries which include Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. Iceland is ranked #1 in gender equality while America is ranked #45. Gender equality has been achieved in Norway, Sweden, and Iceland through policies like the "father's quota" which is shared parental leave that requires a segment of the parental leave to be taken by fathers instead of just the mothers. Interestingly enough, someone in the room jokingly said, while some countries are still debating on whether or not to have maternity leave, Nordic countries are debating on how much to extend the shared parental leave.

Another way that Nordic leaders have achieved gender equality in the workplace is through

boardroom quotas. The number of women on boards increased from 5% to 40% since the quotas were implemented. However, still less than 10% of women are CEO's. I left that conference room realizing that if women and men has the same economic opportunities, the Global GDP would increase by 25%. Occupational segregation was discussed at this meeting also because the Nordic leaders believe it is time to change the way caregiving jobs are valued less than job dominated by men.

There is so much work to be done for women locally and globally which is both discouraging and encouraging as a women's rights advocate. However, I am grateful that I attend the 61st CSW because I got to meet the most kindred advocates for women which include the UN Secretary General. They hard work inspired me to continue "the good fight" for women. I look forward to seeing the final agreed conclusions that result from this year's CSW session which will help economically empower women all over the world.

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