

The Meredith Herald

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Brothers in Our Sisterhood

Mimi Mays, Staff Writer

Anyone could recite the objective of Meredith College: to educate women and prepare them for the world. As Meredith women we enter society confident, inquisitive, Strong, and armed with a college degree. We 1,685 female undergrads live and breathe the Meredith sisterhood, trusting in all the glory a women's college will provide. The narrative of this sisterhood is almost routine, and though it empowers us, by nature it leaves some people behind—our male students.

Male students at Meredith can exist in two ways: members of Meredith graduate programs, or undergraduate students from one of the five Cooperating Raleigh Colleges (NC State University, William Peace University, Saint Augustine's University, Shaw University, and Wake Tech Community College). This is likely a surprise to many, probably because Meredith hasn't hosted any male undergraduates in quite a while. But any student from a CRC can enroll in a course at Meredith, provided that course isn't available at his or her own institution or isn't offered at a preferred time. To President Jo Allen, the CRC program is of great value: "It's a great way to test other institutional environments or other subject matters, and a good way to just have a different kind of experience." She likens it to studying abroad... "just in your own backyard." As the 50th anniversary of the CRC program approaches, Dr. Allen hopes that we'll be able to increase the visibility of the program and its value and welcome more students from other colleges—including men who may be curious about a women's college. "The older you are, the more you have to unlearn," says Dr. Allen; "so, the advantage of younger men being on our campus

is an opportunity to learn in a culture of women, when these men's ideas are not necessarily so hardened and rigid." But, learn what?

As women, we have plenty of opportunities to learn and work in predominantly male environments, but how many female-oriented settings exist to which men can be exposed? That's how Meredith's platform is so unique. A male student in a marketing class, for example, learns how to recognize (and perhaps even represent) a woman's point of view in a marketing campaign. A male student in the School of Business, for example, learns how to respect women's career paths and leadership abilities. "A lot of us think we're very empathetic, that we can always imagine what it's like to be in somebody else's shoes, and hopefully we can," Dr. Allen muses, "but it surely does help sometimes to be immersed in a culture, to really understand the cultural differences and make adjustments."

Graduate student Allan Avellanet's journey to a Meredith post-bac program initially had little to do with our all-female environment; like many students of many ages, he was drawn to our institution for the close student-to-faculty relationships, small class sizes, and the industry success of the program graduates. However, since spending time on our campus, conversing and learning among women has taught him humility; how to be cognizant of different ideas, backgrounds, and thought processes; and how to have relationships with women that are more substantial than what he'd traditionally learned in how he was raised. "If you're raised with strong-looking male figures and by women who don't hold similar

positions of power, it can probably play into the subconscious thought of men being better," or at least more powerful, "than women." Avellanet modestly cites some bad habits he picked up from his father—or, more accurately, chose not to pick up—and some of the less favorable Southern conservative customs and attitudes gently ingrained into his upbringing. Now, at Meredith, the narrative has shifted: his peers are women, his mentors are women, and even his favorite professor is a woman who, in his opinion, unquestionably lives up to the "Meredith Strong" slogan. When asked to describe the lessons he's learned from being at Meredith, he worried his responses were too cliché, but insisted they were surprisingly accurate: learning the patience to hear others out, respecting others without automatic prejudice, improving his relationship with his wife, and, in all sincerity, getting a better sense of what it feels like to be a minority. He says, "I've learned how not being the majority actually does have its disadvantages," both by being a literal minority as a man at a women's college, and by being privy to real and unmistakable obstacles to women that everyone can learn to overcome.

Every experience a student has at Meredith is a teachable moment, and many of these teachable moments are lessons that are truly vital ones to learn: how to respect women, how to listen to women, how to value women, and how to build a community that does those things, too. Meredith, and all women's colleges, are more relevant than ever in their ability to build a better foundation for a more equal society by educating Strong women and men.

Umoja Means Unity

Nikki Wertz, Staff Writer

I'd rather be telling you of the wonderful all-female village of Umoja from the Umoja itself. Instead I'm writing about it from my dorm room. With the many things (both good and bad) that have been happening in our country in the recent year, I yearn to take a pilgrimage in search of life and knowledge in their rawest form. No commentator, no propaganda. On this pilgrimage, I need to stop in the village of Umoja, an all-female village, located in the Samburu district of northern Kenya. Umoja was established by a group of Samburu women, including its chief and matriarch, Rebecca Lolosoli, in 1990 in response to local British soldiers raping

more than a thousand women in the area. Under the patriarchal Samburu tribe, women who are victims of rape are often beaten by their husbands for "dishonoring" the family and, along with their children, were often thrown out of their homes. More than two decades later, the Samburu tribe has changed little in regards to the culture's treatment of its women. The patriarchy is known for its practice of female genital mutilation for centuries. Once a girl has undergone circumcision, she is seen as marriageable. As a result, girls as young as twelve are being married off to men more than twice their age. Because Samburu men pay a

dowry to his potential wife's family, a wife is seen as property of her husband. Samburu wives are sometimes abused and/or sold by her husband. In fact, it likely a Samburu man will not be punished for the killing of one or more of his wives if he has paid the dowry of livestock.

Umoja has understandably become a refuge for abused women seeking to escape the Samburu patriarchy for a better life for them and their children. Google Umoja now and you'd likely see beautiful dark-skinned women in brightly colored clothes and beads or a collection of huts surrounded by grassland. Some of you may even question the idea of a refuge

in Africa. According to its residents, life is good in Umoja. The women are allowed to work and care for their families in peace. A regular day involves tending to livestock, caring for children, and making jewelry that will be sold to tourists travelling to and from the Samburu National Park. Children also attend the small school, which was funded with ten percent of each woman's earnings.

What I admire most is the extent at which these women go in protecting one another. They live by the no-men rule, attacking a majority of men with sticks with the exception of lovers, male workers, and a few unconventionally (cont. in the News section)