

# Diversity forum results in more talk than action

Diversity from page 1

ty.

One student at the forum said this has a lot to do with visibility on campus and the already low enrollment of black students, which stands at 277. When presentations involving Greek Life are given to classes, the majority of time is spent discussing the fraternities and sororities with higher numbers, according to students at the forum. These do not include the NPHC fraternities and sororities.

Students also cited the predominantly white Interfraternity Council weekend parties as reasons for low numbers of students in NPHC fraternities and sororities. The largest NPHC organization, Delta Sigma Theta, has 16 members, compared with the largest Panhellenic Council organization, Phi Mu, which has 113 members. An organization with 16 members is not large enough to hold a house, so the NPHC groups lack recognition in Loy Center.

While students are encouraged to join a particular Greek organization based on what will best suit them, students said there is some pressure to join a sorority or fraternity based on historical race affiliation. Sophomore Darris Means said when he joined Pi Kappa Phi instead of a NPHC fraternity he heard that many of his friends began talking about his decision to join the historically white fraternity.

Junior Elliott Rushing said the decision to join an organization in Interfraternity Council is not looked down on by all black students. But he asks, "Is that the right thing to do?"

According to the National Survey of Student Engagement, 52 percent of Elon students have had a serious, meaningful conversation with a student of a different race. The same study showed that 47 percent of students believe Elon's campus environment encourages contact among students from different backgrounds.

Students at the forum said not all Elon students seek diversity. "What do we do with people who think like this?" Rushing asked.

Black students shared stories of discrimination and general ignorance during the forum. Means said he often feels like he excels in the classroom and in extracurricular activities as an attempt to represent his race. "In a small population you carry the weight of the race on your back," Means said.

"You shouldn't have to represent the

black race," junior Latoya Marcus countered. But students pointed out that if black students are not representing their race, they are often singled out as the exception. Comments such as, "You are not like the rest of them," referring to black Americans in jail or peddling drugs, lead others to believe they are the exception rather than the rule. Students voiced concern that people make defensive comments without realizing the weight of their words.

Students also questioned the university's dedication to the topic of diversity. Is it a priority? Nationally, 11 percent of students at colleges and universities are

black, compared to 6.3 percent of Elon's total enrollment. While percentages may not seem significant, Rushing points out that it is the number of students that stand out. "Here, it is on a smaller scale," he said, referring to the 277 black students out of 4,432 total enrollment.

But Smith Jackson, vice president and dean of Student Life, said diversity is a priority for the university. "The university is saying diversity is important," he said. "We want students to feel comfortable, mingle and appreciate each other."

While the main issues raised seemed to be black and white, many students voiced concerns about the representation

of other races and religions at the forum. "Where are our Asian Americans?" one student asked, referring to the Asian population at Elon, which accounts for 0.7 percent of total enrollment, with 33 students on campus.

Diversity may not be a black and white issue, but the forum brought to light many concerns regarding relationships between black students and white students and faculty. "Throughout history it has been just black and white," Rushing said. But he said people understanding people should define diversity. "Not until you understand other cultures will you be diverse," he said.

The freshman core class, the Global Experience, was cited as a class that does not offer diverse views or ideas. Students said a medium should be found between what is being taught and what the institution is doing. They said they believe people don't feel they have access to events that will be dominated by another race, such as Black Cultural Society dinners.

While a lot was said about diversity, many students said they were "preaching to the choir." While students talked, many wanted instant solutions. But the point was addressed that change will not come until people are willing to teach and people are willing to learn.

Christian Wiggins, Student Government Association president, said he wants SGA to stay in contact with the Office of Multicultural Affairs, attending more events and offering to co-sponsor many of them. "I would also like to work with administration on diversity awareness," Wiggins said, adding he would like to incorporate a diversity discussion into a possible roundtable lunch with faculty and staff. "It's a challenge," he said, questioning how to get more minorities on Elon's campus. To recruit more students, Elon needs more money. The percentage of alumni who contribute to the university's endowment is larger at other institutions, so Elon does not have as much money to spend on recruiting minority students, Wiggins said.

Shukis left students with a look toward the future of racial unity. "I challenge each of you to change your worlds."

Contact Erin Cunningham at [pendulum@elon.edu](mailto:pendulum@elon.edu) or 278-7247.

