

The Pendulum

Standing up for your beliefs: Students travel to protest

Students for Peace and Justice participate in a 'weekend of activism' against School of Americas

John Planisek
Reporter

The weekend before Thanksgiving probably brought feelings of anticipation to most Elon students, knowing that there was only two days of classes before a much needed break was in order. But for a handful of students, the anticipation was much different. This was to be a weekend of activism and standing up for beliefs.

On Nov. 19, 11 students from Students for Peace and Justice, accompanied by adviser and professor James Pickens, drove to Columbus, Ga. to participate in the annual protest against the School of the Americas (SOA) at Fort Benning. For many, it was their first time at the protest, and for some it was their first experience in a nonviolent protest of any kind.

The SOA (now renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute of

Security Cooperation) gives combat military training to Latin American soldiers. The school, often called the School of the Assassins, has "left a trail of blood and suffering in every country where its graduates have returned," according to the SOA Watch, a nonprofit organization that was formed to close the school and also organizes the protest. Hundreds of thousands of Latin Americans have been tortured, raped, assassinated, "disappeared," massacred and forced into refuge by the more than 60,000 soldiers trained at the school since its establishment in Panama 56 years ago.

Activities filled the entire weekend, beginning with "teach-ins" that educated participants about various topics. One teach-in was about how U.S. money, U.S. soldiers and SOA graduates affect the South American nation of Colombia.

On Nov. 20, the participants wandered around the fenced-in Fort

Benning Drive, which was heavily loaded with Columbus police officers and nearly ten thousand other people from across the nation and beyond. The atmosphere on Saturday was one of a rally, bringing together activists, musicians, vendors, enormous puppets and celebrities like Susan Sarandon and Martin Sheen in a daylong event to promote awareness about the SOA and its surrounding issues.

On Nov. 20, a large mass of people migrated to the Columbus Convention Center to watch a new documentary about participants who purposely crossed the line into Fort Benning and had been arrested. In addition, the audience was treated to a cocktail of different musicians whose music supported their efforts.

Nov. 20 brought a more solemn and somber event. More than 16 thousand people gathered outside Fort Benning to form a processional up to the gates. The majority of par-



Photo submitted

Protesters at the event held up white crosses during a solemn service to remember those who were killed by SOA graduates. The SOA gives combat military training to Latin American soldiers.

Participants carried white wooden crosses and everyone chanted "Presente!" after each name on a long list of victims killed by incidents involving SOA graduates was read.

The sheer power of 16,000 people, who all believe in one particular

cause, being in one small area in togetherness is something that participants will not soon forget.

Contact John Planisek at pendulum@elon.edu or 278-7247.

SGA

We work for you!

Last Meeting of the Semester
Open Forum
TONIGHT!

Thursday, December 2
Starting at 7:30 p.m.
Moseley 215

Holiday Celebration at President Lamberts



Tuesday, December 7
4:00 - 6:00 p.m.

Luminaries

Thursday, December 2
6:30 p.m.
Scott Plaza