

Intersect speakers address privilege, bias

Hannah Silvers
Copy Chief

Within minutes of sitting down for the opening session, attendees of Elon University's Intersect Diversity and Leadership Conference were back on their feet.

They were challenged by sophomore Olivia Ryan, student director for the Intersect Conference and opening speaker, to introduce themselves to two new people and share the story of how they came to be at the Intersect Conference.

"Tell your truth," Ryan said. "Telling your truth is as simple as meeting someone new."

And it wasn't too difficult to find someone new. Thirteen higher education institutions from across North Carolina and surrounding states came together Nov. 13-14 and formed a crowd of more than 250 people throughout the Moseley Center and Lakeside meeting rooms.

Presenters from Elon, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and other nearby schools engaged attendees with difficult discussions about privilege and bias in arenas spanning from multifaith efforts to analyzing rap music to preventing sexual assault on college campuses.

Karina Gonzalez, a sophomore at Salem College in Winston-Salem who traveled to Elon for the conference, said conference attendees demonstrated respect and open-mindedness when engaging with these difficult discussions.

"I think that everyone was willing to listen to everyone else's perspectives with an open mind," she said. "I think everyone exercised that [open-mindedness] really well, which was really awesome, since people can be closed-minded about these topics."

That open-mindedness was appreciated — especially since, according to several conference speakers, with current conversations about bias in university set-

tings and the recent attacks in Paris, Beirut and elsewhere, Intersect couldn't have come at a better time.

"There are obvious things that are happening that lead to disharmony and disconnection," said Dean of Multicultural Affairs Randy Williams Jr. in his keynote speech, specifically referencing recent events at the University of Missouri and Yale University. "Some people aren't able to tell their truths."

The discussion of how and why some people have the privilege to tell their truth when others don't followed attendees out the door of McKinnon Hall and through the rest of the two-day conference's sessions and speakers, all the way to teacher, poet and doctoral candidate at Harvard University Clint Smith's closing keynote.

"I think it's important to examine why we mourn the lives of some and not the lives of others," he said. "We should push back against the preconception of who is worth being grieved for."



"Other students are having experiences they don't feel they can share about because they don't feel safe in talking about it. Some people can't tell their truths... and that's a terrible thing."

SOPHOMORE OLIVIA RYAN
STUDENT DIRECTOR FOR INTERSECT CONFERENCE



"I have never seen as much radical and rapid change, and I lived through the 1960s. It's a scary moment, but my God, it's exciting. What an opportunity."

L.D. RUSSELL
SENIOR LECTURER IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES



"I think people are recognizing they have agency. You can demand something different than the world as it is."

CLINT SMITH
TEACHER, POET AND DOCTORAL CANDIDATE AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Asian Resource Room draws size critiques

Max Garland
Assistant News Editor

The Asian Studies Club had a problem. Members were running to and from different rooms in Elon University's Moseley Center to get enough chairs for the unusually high number of people present for its biweekly meeting Nov. 5.

Some had to sit at the entrance of the Asian Resource Room where the meeting was held, as there were too many people to fit comfortably in the small space. As more attempted to file in, freshman Annie Yang spent some time guessing the room's maximum capacity.

"It's about the size of an office," she said. "It can't be any bigger than that. It probably holds a maximum of 10, I think? But besides that, I don't think it can fit anymore."

In all, 12 people attended the meeting in the office-sized room, admittedly more than it could handle.

Many attending the meeting said the room wasn't ideal for the growing number of Asian students on campus, or for representing their different cultures.

Students there said they hope the room does get redesigned and resized at some point to better represent the diversity of Asian culture. Freshman Barang Phuk suggested a livelier room with more chairs and Asian paintings. Freshman Aye Aye Han said music from Asia, such as K-pop, a form of South Korean pop music, should be played in a renovated version of the room.

Though the Asian Studies Club

usually meets in the larger Center for Race, Ethnicity and Diversity Education (CREDE), members said they wanted to make a point that night that the Asian Resource Room was being used, an attempt to show Elon an expanded version of it will be worth the cost.

"I feel like the room itself isn't even representative of Asian culture," said freshman Nikki Valente. "I feel like the artwork on the wall is very stereotypical. I don't think that's who we are. I think Elon's Asian student body is more than this and can be represented in a better way."

A couch, two chairs, a few pictures of Asian art and a large television that fits tightly in between two bookshelves make up the entirety of the room.

Phuk said the books on the shelves were mostly Japanese-language texts with a smattering of Korean, not accounting for the rest of the Asian languages.

Elon adds resource rooms

The Asian Resource Room isn't old. It was opened last fall as a part of a second-floor multicultural redesign for the Moseley Center. A new African-American resource room opened up at the same time, and the Hispanic/Latino resource room and the Gender and LGBTQIA Center opened the year before.

According to Carla Fullwood, Associate Director for the CREDE, the creation of the Asian Resource Room was the result of conversations with and requests by the Asian Studies Club and faculty involved



Students gather for a club meeting in the Asian Resource Room Nov. 5.

with the Asian Studies minor.

"The purpose of the room is to be a social space as well as a space of intellectual development and to raise awareness about Asian identity on campus," Fullwood said. "So while it is not a big room, there are meetings that are happenings in the room that the Asian Studies club has used it for, and general gatherings."

Students at the Asian Studies Club meeting said the space was not being used for events that often because of its size. Instead, they use it mostly as a quiet study space.

"If you look at the CREDE and you look at the Hispanic resource room or the African-American resource room, there is so much more there," Valente said. "And it's a comfier environment."

Sophomore Ezequiel Espitia, a frequent visitor to the Hispanic/Latino resource room, said he uses the space to get work done and hang out with friends. It comprises a common room with several small-

er office-sized rooms. Sophomore Andres Cruz shared Espitia's sentiments.

"I'm definitely here a lot for studying," Cruz said. "I don't know why it's so big compared to other resource rooms, but my friends and I use it to relax."

Securing a larger space

The Asian Resource Room is the only space dedicated exclusively for Asian students on campus, a demographic that has grown from 96 students in the 2012-2013 academic year to 124 in the 2014-2015 academic year, according to the Elon Fact Book.

That's roughly 2 percent of Elon's undergraduate population, but Valente said she feels Asian students are left out of larger campus discussions. Phuk said the climate won't change much until Elon gains a bigger Asian presence.

"I think Elon does a good job

overall to try and get Asian students involved around campus and in student organizations," Phuk said. "I think that right now because we don't have that many Asian students, we have only a small space for us."

Fullwood said CREDE is actively listening to the concerns of Asian students through forums the center holds.

"We've been closely working with the Asian Studies Club to hold these forums for students that identify as Asian to gather together and to start naming the positives and what's challenging here," she said. "It helps us to consider what is important as a university and factor in these student experiences on campus."

Melody Harter, a program assistant for the Center of Leadership, said challenges for Asian-American students are common across the United States, but it largely depends on the size of the Asian population in that location.

"I think that at Elon our Asian demographic numbers are small, which can make it harder for Asian students to feel connected," Harter said.

One of the top priorities for the Asian students is securing a larger room.

"I find it interesting that we have a TV in here, but we can't hold a movie event in here because you can only fit like seven people in here," Valente said.

Fullwood said she isn't aware of any upcoming changes to the current room. As of now, Asian Studies Club meetings might have to remain cozy.