Reclaiming Democracy Conference a success

By Becca Heller
STAFF WRITER

The Reclaiming Democracy conference on Dec. 2 started out with a bang — literally — as Cakalak Thunder, a local percussion-based band, opened the conference up with an explosion of sound.

As more people began filling up the Bryan Jr. Auditorium, the band opened into a unified chant: "Stop the escalation!" — a resounding criticism of the recent escalation of the war in Afghanistan. This strong political statement invoked an enthusiastic sense of social justice that would set the stage for what was to follow.

The conference, coordinated by Associate Professor of Justice and Policy Studies Sherry Giles, was broken into three 30-minute segments and featured 10 presentations by students from Guilford College, Elon University, UNCG, and Greensboro College. The presentations focused on various issues dealing with reclaiming democracy, specifically in the Greensboro area.

"A lot of our class has been about telling stories that aren't usually told," said Guilford sophomore Maia Buess, one of the students who took the class Reclaiming Democracy with Giles.

Buess and a group of students from Elon and UNCG presented on the ethnography of the Morningside Community. They sought to derail the distorted, negative images that the Greensboro government and media have attributed to Morningside.

"Morningside is where the Greensboro Massacre occurred, and it's best known for this fact," said Buess. "But that's not the whole story."

Their presentation was geared towards telling a more complete story about the community — a story of abused democracy

(Left to Right) Members of the band Cakalak Thunder kick off the Reclaiming Democracy conference in Bryan Jr. on Dec. 2. A student examines photos documenting historical spots around Greensboro. Juniors **Scottie Mitchell** and **Lauren Jeffries** review the conference program events.

and oppression, of a community that has endured suffering at the hands of our government, which initiated the gentrification of the neighborhood with the help of a housing development called Willow Oaks.

Another group, consisting of students from UNCG and Elon University, tackled the controversial topic of the White Street Landfill in their presentation. They revealed the case of the landfill to be a modern instance of blatant disregard for the democratic principles our country was founded upon.

In this case, the Greensboro government voted to reopen the landfill, a decision that would have extremely detrimental effects, both economic and health-related, on the primarily low-income community that lives in the area. Many of the people living in the area weren't even informed about the initiative — despite the large negative impact it could have on their lives.

"The democratic process must be inclusive as well as humane," said UNCG student Crystal Cornine. "People were not even aware that this was going on."

The group's goal was to inform people of the situation and create change.

"There is a need to mobilize to bring together the public community," Cornine said.

Members of the group have already taken several steps; they have been attending and speaking at Greensboro City council meetings, created a Web site about the landfill, and spent time talking to people in the community, specifically those living in the White Street area. To learn more about their presentation, check it out at http://get2knowwhitestlandfill.wordpress.com.

"The recurrent theme of the presentation was knowledge and education," said UNCG student Kevin McIntosh. "If you're not knowledgeable and don't know what's going on, it's impossible to create change."

Another presentation, delivered by Guilford sophomores Yahya Alazarak and Erica Bailey and UNCG student Stephanie Skinner, examined racial inequality within Greensboro. The group offered a multi-

media presentation, including song, spoken-word poetry, and photographs to get their message across.

"What we really wanted to attack in this presentation was white privilege," said Bailey. "Our goal with this was to make you guys think, 'I'm so used to this, why am I used to this?'"

The presentation touched on racial stereotypes and the general injustices that were present in Greensboro and called for a greater solidarity in the community.

"We must recognize the range of possibilities exhibited by every person," said UNCG professor and community activist, Ed Whitfield, who attended the presentation. "We need to realize that you can look at the race of a person and still know absolutely nothing about them."

Each issue presented at the conference primarily focused on evoking change in the community by engaging and informing people.

Groups presented on the issues of the justice system, media bias, and the preservation of community in the face of expanding development. Many presentations focused on the struggles of individual communities with Greensboro, including the refugee community, the LGBTQ community, the deaf community, and the homeless community.

"Our overall goal was for students to present the results of their inquiry ... in ways that would inform and inspire their audience to learn more, and perhaps even become involved," said Giles in an e-mail interview after the conference. "Judging from the lively discussions that followed the presentations I attended, and the fact that the projects initiated by some of the groups are actually continuing beyond the course, I would say that the forum accomplished our goals quite well."

SLRP II in development stages, limited by small endowment

By Ben Sepsenwol
STAFF WRITER

The Strategic Long-Range Plan II (SLRP II) has already been in development for 15 months and is expected to remain in development for another year. The administration currently has little specific information to offer.

SLRP II will determine the college's long-term goals in the next five years. The plan is a continuation of SLRP I, which was implemented in 2005-2010.

Jeff Favolise, assistant to the president for planning and management, said that SLRP II is far too early in development to say anything definite about the plan. Since everything is currently subject to change, Favolise said that he does not want the community to think that anything is "written in stone."

"If faculty, staff, students, and the community get this impression, it would be wrong," said Favolise. "It would also needlessly cause problems and — even worse — limit our chances to get more valuable input and participation from the students and community."

Favolise said that although SLRP II has another year before finalization, the SLRP committee is far ahead of schedule. In fact, Favolise said that the SLRP committee had to slow down in order to obtain more community input, as gathering this input stands

paramount for the administration.

Favolise said that the administration has scheduled open forums to discuss SLRP II in the spring.

"The first SLRP was everyone's," said Favolise. "We need to make sure SLRP II is everyone's as well."

However, an important issue in formulating SLRP II lies in finances. As Vice President of Enrollment Services Randy Doss explained at the Community Senate meeting on Dec. 2, Guilford College is constrained by the small endowment of $55 million.

"Everyone wants all these things," said Doss, "but no one wants to ask the question, 'what are we going to stop doing?'"

In spite of that, Patchouli Oerther, the academic affairs chair of the Community Senate and a student representative on the SLRP committee, said that right now the committee is primarily writing rough drafts for ideas for the plan, which is partly why nothing is finalized.

"We are focusing on 'blue sky' scenarios — the ideal situation if everything was perfect," said Oerther. "After we finish brainstorming, then we can look at how we can realistically implement these goals. Finances may be an issue later in development, but right now, it's not a factor in the decision making."

Favolise added that despite the intention of the SLRP committee to think boldly and not let brainstorming be limited by any

constraining factors, everything right now seems realistic and achievable.

The administration has already done a SWOT (Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats) analysis of Guilford with the Community Senate to help decide the direction of SLRP II.

According to Jack Zerbe, co-chair of the SLRP committee and professor of theatre studies, a key distinction between SLRP I, is SLRP I focuses more on institutional goals.

The main goals of SLRP I were to achieve financial equilibrium, strengthen Quaker influences, and expand the student body.

Guilford achieved financial equilibrium by balancing the college's budget and strengthened the Quaker influences by offering courses on Quakerism. SLRP I also focused on technological advancements for the college, like creating an e-portfolio for holding various works that students have done in college.

SLRP II, on the other hand, will aim for more student-centered initiatives geared towards strengthening programs that will help empower and prepare students for their goals outside college.

As a part of SLRP II, the administration has discussed enhancing programs such as study abroad, internships, and the Center for Principled Problem Solving in order to prepare students for life outside of college.

"We want students to be more engaged in

their majors," said Oerther. "We want students to think 'I'm majoring in biology. What does that mean?'"

Director of Center for Principled Problem Solving Mark Justad said that all these programs, especially the Center for Principled Problem Solving, highlight core values at Guilford College. The Center's goal is to apply the Quaker core values to working in the world. SLRP II, said Justad, focuses on making values Guilford holds, such as applying Quaker core values to working in world, more integrated in the college.

"This has always been something Guilford has been about," said Justad of the Center for Principled Problem Solving, "but with the Center, we are now being more intentional about it."

Overall, according to Zerbe, the administration has come a long way since SLRP I. Zerbe said back when SLRP I was being formed, Guilford College had a "culture of not-follow-through."

"We have filing cabinets filled with SLRP-like proposals that were never implemented," said Zerbe. "We weren't coordinated and no one delegated anything."

Today, the administration, said Zerbe, is far more efficient as an organization.

"We have overcome most of the issues that were in SLPR I," said Zerbe. "We now have the machinery in place to accomplish what we want to do."