

Student body narrowly votes to amend College nondiscrimination policy

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During the campus-wide elections held last month, students narrowly voted to include the phrase "sexual orientation" in Meredith's student nondiscrimination policy. The results of the referendum were:

Freshman:	62.7 percent Yes	37.3 percent No
Soph.:	45.7 percent Yes	54.3 percent No
Junior:	52.2 percent Yes	47.8 percent No
Senior:	65.3 percent Yes	45.6 percent No
Total:	54.4 percent Yes	45.6 percent No

Following the elections, the proposal for amending the current policy was presented to the Academic and

Campus Life Committee of the Board of Trustees on Feb. 28. The committee voted, with one negative vote, to endorse the proposal. After this initial vote, the proposal was presented to the entire Board of Trustees the same afternoon. The Board of Trustees passed the proposal, receiving only one vote not in favor of endorsing the proposal.

Many students feel that including the phrase in the student nondiscrimination policy is beneficial to the Meredith community in many respects because the policy will better represent the College.

"SGA believes this is an important step toward diversity and acceptance at

Meredith," Lora Tillman, Student Government Association president, said. "This policy is meant to encompass and protect all students from discrimination of any kind while attending Meredith, and the addition of this phrase will ensure that all students are granted such protection."

Spectrum President Kathryn Bailey said, "I think that it is important to pass the sexual orientation statement because it is time to put in writing what is already understood: Meredith College welcomes everyone regardless of who they are. Education is supposed to be available to everyone. I think that adding sexual orientation to the anti-discrimination

clause will help show people that Meredith has enough class to rise above all labels and focus on the goal of education."

Freshman Jane Langford said, "To put forth in official documentation that Meredith College welcomes women without regard to sexual orientation is to establish an environment that not only allows for open education, but also promotes social acceptance, which is a far greater education than one can ever learn in books."

Some students were surprised that the results of the referendum were so close. Juniors Krista Kearny and Christy Kimball said they expected the results to be

overwhelmingly in favor of changing the nondiscrimination statement.

"I am surprised and disappointed that the vote was so close," Kearney said. "I fully expected an overwhelming majority of students to vote yes to add the phrase."

However, some members of the community disagree with the addition of this statement.

"Because the student body is so closely divided, I'm not sure that the change is really great for the health of the institution," Professor Clyde Frazier said. "I abstained when the faculty voted on a resolution calling for the change."

Budget

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She estimated that the College receives most of its revenue from tuition.

Student Government Association President Lora Tillman, who served as the student representative on the budget committee, noted that these cuts to the faculty and staff will also indirectly affect students.

"These changes will make it difficult for many full-time and part-time employees to afford their own insurance, and many part-time employees may have to look into other employment options," Tillman said. "Students should continue to be extremely supportive of their professors, faculty advisers and staff at this time."

Many faculty and staff expressed their concerns about the budget at a forum Monday afternoon held by the members of the budget committee.

Faculty, staff and administration filled Kresge Auditorium to ask questions of members of the

budget committee, which includes Hartford, three of the College's vice presidents, and representatives from the administration, faculty, staff and students.

At the forum, Hartford emphasized that the committee was faced with a difficult situation in formulating next year's budget. "Our highest priority was not to let people go," Hartford said. She said the committee "worked the budget to the bone" to be able to avoid cuts beyond the ones that have already been made.

She said the only viable options the committee could see other than layoffs or raising tuition were the cuts that made it into the final proposal. According to Hartford and Tillman, raising tuition was presented as a possible option but rejected because the cost of tuition for next year had already been set and announced to students.

Many adjunct faculty and part-time staff attended the meeting and expressed concerns over the loss of their health and retirement bene-

fits. However, Hartford noted that Meredith is currently one of the few schools that do provide benefits for part-time employees.

Many full-time employees also expressed concern over the situation of their part-time colleagues. Several praised the contributions of adjunct faculty to the campus and noted that many of these individuals have worked at Meredith on a part-time basis for most of their careers and depend heavily on the benefits they have received in the past.

"All faculty are generally very sad that employees are hurt financially," Oatsvall said. "Full-time employees believe that as a caring community we must be concerned about the well being of our part-time colleagues as well as our full-time colleagues."

However, Oatsvall did note that full-time faculty are also concerned about their own changing situation. She said that the pay freeze, combined with the increase in required faculty

contributions to insurance, will seem to the faculty like they are taking a pay cut.

Also in attendance at the forum was Michelle Rich, the chair of the Board of Trustees. Rich explained that, while the Trustees sympathize with the conditions employees will be facing, these cuts were no different than the ones that a harsh economy is requiring businesses across the country to make.

Rich, as well as the other speakers at the forum, emphasized the need to increase enrollment in order to pull the College out of this undesirable budget situation. She expressed the Trustees' commitment to fundraising for the College and recruiting new students.

Hartford said the target enrollment for next year to help the College meet its financial demands is at least 450 freshmen, 110 transfer students, 65 graduate students and 75 non-traditional-aged students. She also emphasized the need to improve student retention rates and pointed out

several ways the College is attempting to do this, including building its Web presence and encouraging recruitment of new students among alumnae chapters.

While no changes to the approved budget were promised, Hartford did promise that the committee would consider the suggestions and concerns expressed and would consult the employees if any new funds were generated.

Although the budgetary concerns facing the College next year are very real, members of the budget committee said they are confident that this situation is only temporary.

"Meredith is in a transition period," Tillman said. "I have the utmost faith in Meredith, its students, faculty, staff and administration to pull together during this time rather than push apart. And when we come out on the other side of this, be it next year or five years from now, Meredith will be that much stronger for standing together."