

# Conference unites diversity, gender

Looks at current issues, politics

BY ALEX GRANADOS  
STAFF WRITER

People of every age, shape and gender identity came together this weekend to discuss issues of diversity at the first-ever Unity Conference.

Trevor Hoppe, director of the Unity Conference and co-chairman of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered-Straight Alliance, said there were about 40 presenters and 110 registered attendees at the conference, held on campus.

Hoppe said he got the idea to hold the Unity Conference after attending the Creating Change Conference in Portland, Ore., and hopes to make it an annual event.

The conference kicked off Friday with a speech from Debra Davis, executive director of the Gender Education Center.

Davis, a transgender person, talked about diversity and gender and the uncertainty of their meanings. She said blacks once were considered the group that faced the most discrimination, then gay people. But now, she said transgender people are most in need of recognition.

Davis was a librarian in a high school in Minneapolis, Minn., when she made the move from living her life as a man at work and a woman during her free time to living as only a woman five years ago.

"The school district was very accepting. They had no idea," she said.

Freshman Michael Jerch said he thought Davis' speech was interesting and informative. "I didn't really get one thing from it because the point was that gender and sexuality are part of one great, big

nebulous cloud of roles," he said.

Mandy Carter, development coordinator of Southerners on New Ground who spoke about multiracial, multi-issue mobilizing, said there is a need for LGBTQ members to pursue issues relevant to people outside their community.

"We should promote work that is about equality for all," Carter said. "Are we about justice or just us?"

Graduate student Stephen Whitlow said he didn't know quite what to expect from the conference but was interested in seeing what issues are important in the modern-day world.

"I don't have that many expectations," he said before attending his first event. "I'm just trying to see what is out there, what some of the current issues that people are talking about are."

The keynote speaker Saturday night, Urvashi Vaid, a board member of the American Civil Liberties Union, talked about some of the problems the LGBT movement faces, including the new hurdles that must be overcome in a nation that is engaged in a war. "I believe that the GLBT movement is a coalition and not a monolith," she said.

In addition to the speeches, there were workshops held Saturday and Sunday, covering a variety of topics such as war as a queer issue and LGBT politics in North Carolina.

Hoppe said that overall, he thought the conference was a success. "It was amazing," he said. "I got positive feedback from everyone."

Contact the University Editor at [uodesk@unc.edu](mailto:uodesk@unc.edu).

# Achievement gap addressed

BY SARAH CORICA  
STAFF WRITER

Minority students say they feel discouraged by the system intended to help them.

The need for more encouragement in school was emphasized at the youth forum hosted by Youth Creating Change on Saturday that aimed to find possible solutions to the achievement gap in local schools.

The forum brought together a small group of parents, town and school officials to hear the challenges students face.

The handful of middle and high school students also offered possible solutions that would help them overcome obstacles and bridge the achievement gap.

John French, a former teacher at Estes Hills Elementary School and Smith Middle School, said teachers want students to achieve and students want to achieve, but the problem is poor communication. "I saw kids who were taking their education for granted, and the system just rolled over them," he said.

"I know there are teachers in the system that stereotype. Black kids think they don't have a support system," he added.

Joal Broun, a member of the

Carrboro Board of Aldermen, echoed French's statements. "Starting in the third grade, there is an assessment that black students don't achieve as well," Broun said.

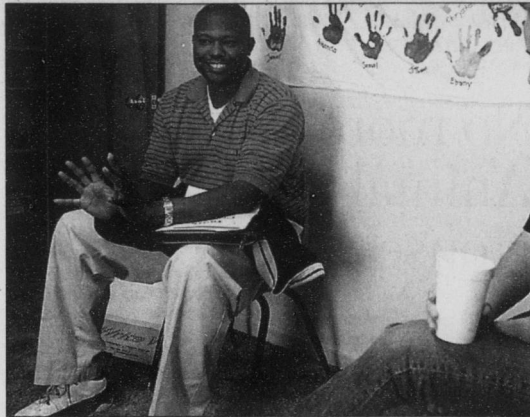
David Thompson, a junior at Alamance Christian School, attended Orange High School for his first two years but found that the environment was not encouraging him to be successful. "The system, to tell you the truth, is not built to help us — it's an obstacle," he said.

He saw 30 people — not all minorities — drop out his sophomore year at Orange High School. "People just disappear like that," he said. "They feel like the setting at Orange High wasn't for them and just ended up dropping out."

Kevin Cruz, a junior at Phoenix Academy, faced similar problems during the time he attended East Chapel Hill High School. "They want kids who go to the universities, but not all kids are made to go to universities," Cruz said. "But I do know I want to be successful."

Thompson said he thinks it would be helpful if students and parents had a better understanding of how the school system works. "If you know about the system you're not as intimidated by it," he said.

Latoshia Currie, a sophomore at



DTH/LAURA MORTON

The need for more encouragement for minorities in schools was emphasized at the youth forum hosted by Youth Creating Change.

East Chapel Hill, expressed a need for more teacher involvement. "There are only a couple of people you can go to for anything," she said.

Currie said she thinks some teachers care about their student more than others. Some teachers hold study groups after school and during lunch, while "some put us all in one category and that's it,"

she said. Discussion leader Sharron Reid summed up the problem expressed by the students at the forum. "Unfortunately we've gotten away from the time when a teacher will come in early and stay late."

Contact the City Editor at [citydesk@unc.edu](mailto:citydesk@unc.edu).

# Schools want outside expert for study

BY MARY MCGUIRT  
STAFF WRITER

The Orange County Board of Commissioners recently asked the local school boards to help it complete a study on the implications of merging the two local school systems by August.

But as August is quickly approaching, city school officials have expressed concerns over their involvement in the study.

"We need to be involved in some way but have limited time and resources to devote to it," said Neil Pedersen, superintendent of Chapel Hill Carrboro-City Schools.

The CHCCS board plans to express these concerns at a semi-

annual meeting between county commissioners and both local school boards tonight.

At a meeting Thursday, the board discussed how it would present its concerns to the commissioners. Members agreed that they should remain a part of the study but said they would prefer for an outside, impartial consultant to perform the majority of it.

Commissioner Moses Carey made a proposal in January to merge city and county schools. Although this proposal was met with dissent from board members, commissioners decided to further study its implications.

They prepared a list of tasks

they hope will be accomplished in the study that includes reviewing the financial impacts, developing a timetable, reviewing funding opportunities and examining potential changes.

After reviewing the list, Pedersen said the board thought these tasks would require complicated research and analysis that could be best performed by an expert outside of the district.

Libbie Hough, a member of the Orange County Board of Education, said she recognizes the need for clarification from commissioners on the issue of merger but also said a merger study is needed.

Hough said it has been 20 years since a merger had been studied in the area and added that the community has experienced a lot of growth and change since then.

While no decisions will be made today, the meeting will allow the

commissioners and board members from each district to see where each group stands on the issue.

"It's really an information exchange as much as anything else," said Alice Gordon, vice chairwoman of the Orange County Board of Commissioners.

"My understanding is that (board members) are asking about resources and what they're expected to do," she said.

Pedersen said that while decisions about the study ultimately are up to the commissioners, he hopes they will consider the board's concerns. "Hopefully they will be receptive to some feedback and we can come out of this with an approach that will yield a high-quality study that will not overtax any of the staff members."

Contact the City Editor at [citydesk@unc.edu](mailto:citydesk@unc.edu).

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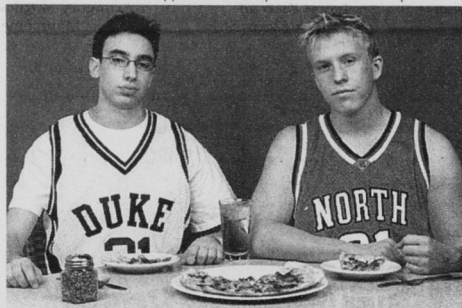
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