

Religious freedom taken to extremes

Quad chalking presents biased, offensive portrait of the university.

On April 14, ideological vandals struck the main Quad with colorful chalk and scribbled hundreds of Christian clichés and drawings on nearly every inch of the concrete sidewalk. The day before prospective college students toured the campus,

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religious fanatics scribbled messages on the sidewalks. Hidden under these brightly colored messages, many of which were lighthearted and simply theological while others were offensive or messages of anti-Intellectualism, was a juvenile act of colorless intolerance and intellectual weakness.

Some of us prayed for rain, while others ran for water, and yet others attempted to sweep away or obscure the words and biblical passages. We were simply outnumbered by the number of messages.

Outnumbered is a good word to describe the situation.

With a large majority of Wake Forest being of Christian background, the minorities here were people who had different beliefs or none altogether.

Not to neglect the large group of Christians who were indeed upset about the situation, because there were several people of the Christian persuasion looking in shame.

In fact, everyone I noticed around the Quad seemed to be looking at the messages in horror or dismay.

Prospective students who were not under the influence of religious fanaticism would have probably been repelled or felt isolated by such messages.

I know that personally, such an act would have frightened me and would have probably resulted in me looking at another school – or imagining a future of isolation and estrangement at Wake Forest.

Some of the messages were targeted towards Nietzsche, while others were targeted toward Charles Darwin.

The former struck me as odd;

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to argue philosophy with religious dogma seems like an uphill, irrational battle.

Additionally, college students – students at a highly-ranked liberal arts school like Wake Forest – that do not “believe” in evolution is a frightening proposition.

A person’s beliefs should always be personal; however, by refusing to acknowledge the scientific theory of evolution is as academically wrong, for lack of a better word, as not “believing” in the theory of gravity.

One is entitled to live one’s whole life rejecting a theory; however, I do not see a place for this type of person at an institution of higher learning.

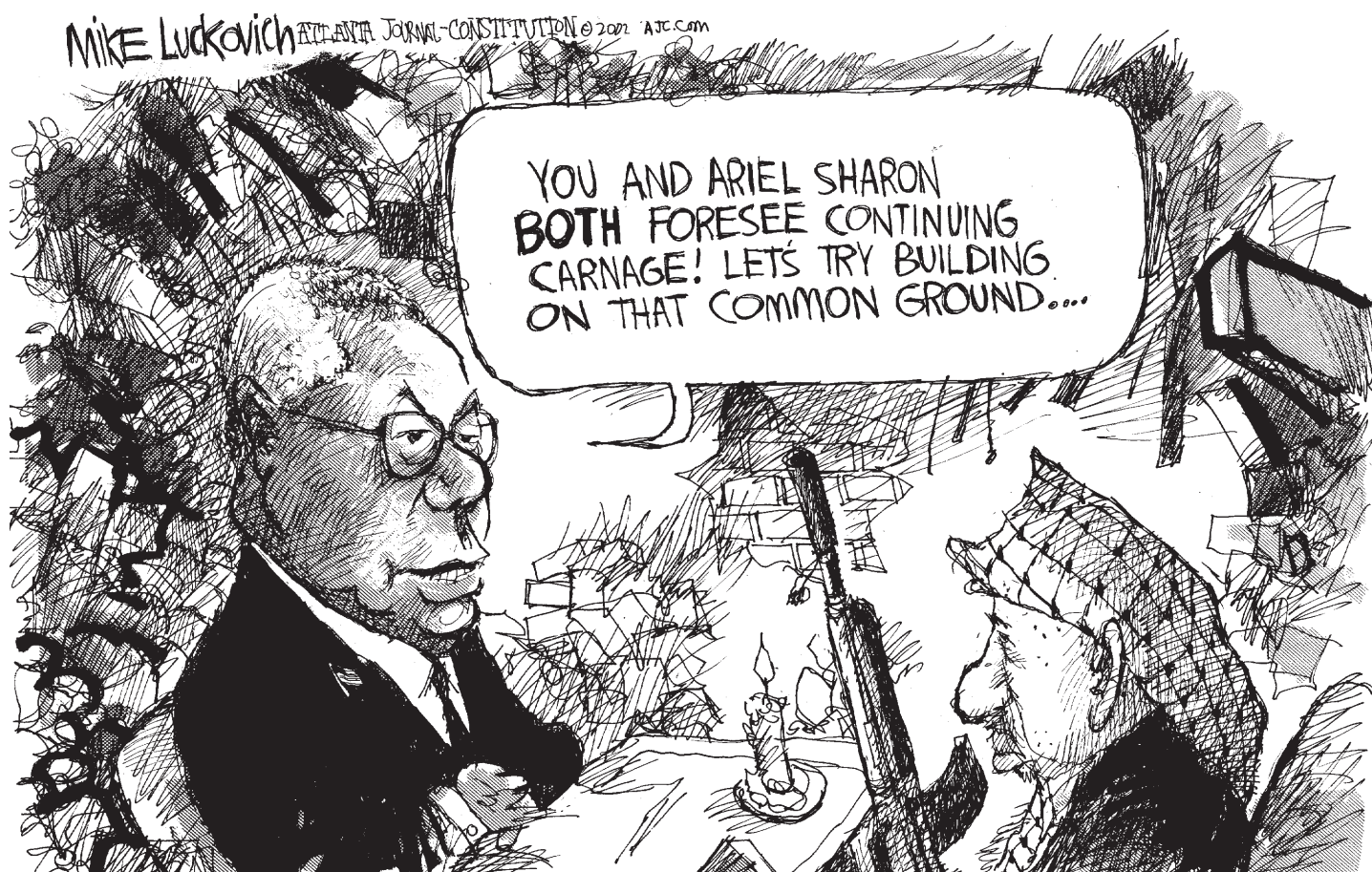
I am a strong supporter of the freedom of speech, and I consider myself very tolerant of other beliefs and opinions. In fact, I would still be very offended had a group of atheists scribbled retort phrases on the sidewalks like: “Darwin isn’t alive, Ignorance is!” “Live for humanity, not for (name of a deity),” and “God-less America.”

But these sidewalk scribbles were much more than beliefs and opinions, they were written for a reason: To directly offend many potential students with different beliefs and repel them from enrolling.

If this were to have been allowed to continue, uncontested (by not having been cleaned up), we would lose a great majority of prospective students, making Wake Forest’s incoming freshmen year less diverse in values and beliefs.

This would not only be harmful to all Wake students, this would also be severely damaging to our school’s reputation.

In my opinion, such cowardly acts should be investigated and punished by the university as severely as possible.



Faith lies behind Quad chalking

Consequences of chalking allow students to explore beliefs of Christianity.

The night of April 14 many students, including myself, gathered on the steps of Wait Chapel to collect chalk in order to write messages about the love of Jesus Christ to prospective students that would be arriving the next day.

Our sole purpose was to show

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prospective students that Christ is working in the lives of students at Wake Forest.

However, we did not know that we were not allowed to chalk the Quad because one of the students there that night had seen the Quad chalked on the day he visited Wake Forest as a high school senior.

The basis of Christianity is that we as humans are all sinners, and the only way we can have a relationship with God is by accepting forgiveness given by the sacrifice of His son Jesus Christ, who died for our sins. Even though we acknowledge forgiveness, we understand that we as Christians still sin.

Living in unity does not require that students accept the idea that everyone’s opinion is right for himself or herself, but merely that each person respect the lives of those in the community with love and consideration. It doesn’t mean that we all must agree, but that we should be unified in thinking that each person has value.

Those of us who chalked the Quad on Sunday night broke the rules and were wrong in doing so. I assure you that our intention was not to break rules.

Although our messages were not intended to offend people, I understand that they did. I expect that any declaration of truth today is not politically correct. Any belief, though, in anything is an exclusive declaration of truth; otherwise, you wouldn’t believe in it. To believe that there is no truth is a truth in itself. To be a Christian is to acknowledge Jesus as the way, the truth and the life and that no one comes to God except through Him.

I understand that many people have a problem with this ideology being expressed on such a large scale partially because this is “The Year of Unity and Hope” at Wake Forest, and this ideology appears contrary to the theme. However, living in unity does not require that students accept the idea

that everyone’s opinion is right for himself or herself, but merely that each person respect the lives of those in the community with love and consideration.

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I certainly can improve in that respect, and I agree that we all need to be accepting of people of other religions. If we demand, however, that people accept all religions as true, we are demanding that people sacrifice their beliefs, which is clearly unacceptable.

Had there not been a rule against chalking the Quad, I would have felt justified in expressing my faith on such a broad scale, and I would not be writing this.

Hopefully, though, out of this violation came an opportunity for a community generally regarded as self-righteous to show that we, too, are not perfect and that we fully recognize it. Because we sin all the time, our message of God’s love is usually clouded by skepticism and hypocrisy and understandably so, but I ask you to see that our message is not of moral superiority but of forgiveness.

Our message is not about what we have done, but what Jesus did. We only want to share the joy that we have in Christ Jesus.

I personally apologize to everyone for breaking the rules.

If anyone wants to talk to me about anything I have said in this article, e-mail me or come find me. I can listen better than I can write.

Diversity without sense of community fosters alienation

A renewed commitment to ‘Pro Humanitate’ is our best hope for diversity.

As I have sown seeds in the garden of *Pro Humanitate*, I wonder, although not callously, when they will germinate into the fullness of a new day. The investments that I have made within the Wake Forest community have been well diversified and managed with an unfaltering policy of sincere discipline, and I am pleased by the dividends of these actions. My

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creation of The Academy for Future Leaders has been a heart-felt outcry to create new realities at Wake Forest University while opening new ambitions within some of America’s most promising high school students (www.wfu.edu/affil).

The success of this venture has been plural and it serves as evidence of the commitment of various faculty, staff, students, alumni and friends to work together under a shared vision, of *Pro Humanitate* in action, that acts to change the world. Yet I wonder if I am leaving behind a legacy of hope or misguided intrigue for those who would take this quest to heart.

My pride in Wake Forest University gives me the courage to hope for something more than a jaded reprise of complacency within the coliseum of *Pro Humanitate*. My ardent desire was to help make the meeting of student idealism and academic discipline a spontaneous reaction in forming a community where ambition and integrity are married.

The university has maintained an explicit commitment to attract and admit the students of alumni. The nature of this institutional

commitment provides parameters as we march forward and grow in stature within the landscape of higher education. But what of the institutional commitment for diversity – intellectual, socioeconomic, religious, ethnic, geographic, etc?

An institutional commitment is a forward-thinking policy, more than a tacit assumption that temporal decisions made by good people will create lasting precedence.

Intentions are not enough; these ideas must be made plain so that a covenant exists within the community.

I have been a vocal opponent of purposeless diversity, or diversity for the sake of numbers.

There is an ideology that has supported bringing large numbers of students from underrepresented groups to our community for the sake of diversity without consideration of our readiness as a community to truly integrate these constituencies instead of alienating them. Therefore it is important for us to come together as a community when considering our identity, strengths, and weaknesses in this regard.

Wake Forest University will never be all things to all people, but in those areas that we pursue we should be passionate, purposeful and effective. The plight of underrepresented constituencies is a great starting point for a multi-dimensional look into the soul of our strivings at this university.

Within the last four years the subpopulation of black students at Wake Forest University has dropped by more than 12 percent. At the same time the number of students from other underrepresented groups, Asian, Hispanic and native American, collectively has increased by 45 percent.

These changes in population have all occurred within the same 12 percent of the undergraduate population, give or take a few tenths of a percent. On one hand, the clear increase of ethnic diversity must be commended, but the fact that this variety comes out of the same piece of the pie makes this assumed progress hard to digest.

This predicament becomes even more challenging when one considers the university commitment to maintain an undergraduate college with a full-time student enrollment below 4,000

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and the fact that the percentage of black males in the college who participate in Division-I athletics will only increase as fewer blacks are admitted to Wake Forest University.

This would effectively mean that the vast majority of black males at this university would be athletes, and as such, they would be increasingly disenfranchised from a great deal of community involvement and recreational pursuit of the academic question.

The crisis of attracting a diverse faculty to effectually educate our student body has been quelled in one sense, by the impressive departmental hires of the past few years. Yet a new and more difficult challenge appears. How do we keep these talented faculty members in our community?

The current trends in higher education suggest our victory may be short-sighted, because many similarly situated institutions have found that their talented minorities do not stay at their first university after receiving tenure. If this trend is reliable, Wake Forest University may become nothing more than an elevator to other universities and lands of opportunity if we do not find ways to create lasting community for these new hires and current faculty.

Structured mechanisms for promoting involvement in current community networks are necessary to prevent our informal devices of habit from unintentionally excluding underrepresented members of our community.

The Association of American University Professors chapter at Wake Forest University utilized rhetoric, advocacy and inquiry to address

their wants and needs with respect to faculty salaries. But who will do so for our lowest compensated full-time staff, whose income will be drastically reduced by increased costs with a new health care insurer.

Who will give a voice to their angst? Should those who provide an education with conscience bring their teachings to life? Or does the responsibility lie elsewhere?

Cornel West spoke this past weekend to the Wake Forest University community on the topic of “Accountability: I am my Brother’s Keeper.” The truth that I synthesized from his address suggests that Wake Forest University need only rededicate itself to *Pro Humanitate* to move forward in addressing the aforementioned issues.

Dr. West suggested that we should hold optimism at arm’s length, and although I challenged him on this point, only time will resolve this matter completely. Continued community interest and sacrifice are necessary for Wake Forest University to make progress from blind faith and guided hope into an evidenced reality of sustained progress.

The armor of *Pro Humanitate* carries the mantle of respect and the mandate of encompassing vision. These simple tenants appropriate an environment where we aggressively strove first to admit and recruit talented students of high esteem whose character is met by a commitment to integrity and an internal quest for truth.

The community would be of such a gregarious nature that faculty of various backgrounds would have an opportunity to call this place home. Accountability would be more than a linear dialogue between two constituencies, but also a genuine concern for our collective triumphs and struggles – student, faculty, staff, administration, etc.

The legacy of hope at Wake Forest University must continue to serve as midwife to integrity, purpose and questioning as we face new challenges in the days to come. This must be our destiny as we become the sustainer of Winston-Salem and a beacon of excellence in principle and practice for other institutions of higher education.