

# OPINION

This column represents the views of the Old Gold and Black Editorial Board.

## Hosting Powell a true step forward

The university announced this week that U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell is slated to deliver the keynote address to university graduates at this year's commencement exercises.

The university has had a number of political figures in the past, with Powell's stature the most impressive in recent memory.

University administrators spent a great deal of time and effort to secure a commitment from Powell, and they are certainly to be congratulated for their success.

As the university continues to strive to secure its reputation as a major national institution, the consistent presence such important and well-known speakers on campus will go a long way in fully realizing such a goal.

Powell is an excellent choice for a commencement speaker for a number of reasons.

As the Secretary of State during a time of war, he has remained in the worldwide spotlight for several years and continues to play an essential role in the realm of international diplomacy. When Powell speaks, much of the rest of the world tends to listen.

Also, despite the fact that Powell is a Republican figure, his moderate stance on many issues means that his message is likely to be one that those of all political persuasions within the campus community will appreciate.

Many tend to view Powell not necessarily as a partisan figure, but instead as a true American representative.

In this sense, he is likely to be a choice that will please nearly everyone.

Powell's address is also likely to hold importance for several more particular groups within the larger campus community.

As an African-American, his invitation to campus should be welcome news to many multi-cultural students and will contribute, if modestly, to the goal of increased diversity that the university is continuously striving to reach.

Furthermore, Powell is a retired four-star general in the Army and former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Powell's background as a professional soldier should be particularly significant to the members of the university's strong and active ROTC program.

Although the topic of Powell's address is currently unknown, we hope that his speech will be of particular significance not only to the graduates, but also to the rest of the nation and world.

Unfortunately, some commencement speakers in the past have delivered

standard graduation messages that were of little practical consequence. Powell, however, has the opportunity to provide a speech with quite substantial content.

Because of the nature of his current position in the Bush administration, we especially hope that Powell will touch on various aspects of U.S. foreign policy.

He has recently spoken of the many efforts that the administration has made in the area of international diplomacy, and Powell would do well to address such issues, as well as the more obvious topics of the Iraq war and the war on terror.

In previous years, the *Old Gold and Black* has expressed concern with the university's recent tendency to favor political figures when extending speaking invitations.

Powell's presence, of course, will maintain such a pattern that has brought Republican political speakers to campus for the past four commencement exercises.

Although Powell is exactly the type of prominent individual that the university should seek out, the administration should also not forget that bringing speakers from other professional fields, as well as other political ideologies, to the university could help to strike a balance that more accurately reflects the diversity of our liberal arts institution.

And in that very spirit, the university has done well in inviting writer Anna Quindlen to speak at Founder's Day Convocation.

Quindlen, a journalist perhaps best known for her regular columns in both *Newsweek* and *The New York Times*, is generally known to fall to the left of the political spectrum, and will therefore provide a nice professional and ideological balance to Colin Powell.

The *Old Gold and Black* is particularly pleased that a journalist of such prominence will be visiting campus. We understand how difficult it is to make it to the top of the field as Quindlen has done, and we look forward to learning from her own experiences.

And just as with Powell, we hope that her message is of weighty substance. Quindlen has made a career of commenting on important and difficult social issues, and she has the opportunity to address many such worthwhile topics in her address at convocation.

The *Old Gold and Black* encourages all students and faculty to support this year's major speakers on campus and aid in continuing the tradition of regularly bringing professionals at the top of their respective fields to the university.

# Increasing unity a labor of love

New thinking about the meaning of community for university students.

I recently traveled on the great Mississippi River and decided the boat ride would be an opportune time to turn the pages of Mark Twain's life. In his autobiography, he claims in his preface, "The frankest and freest and

Rosita Najmi

GUEST COLUMNIST

privatest product of the human mind and heart is a love letter; the writer gets his limitless freedom of statement and expression from his sense that no stranger is going to see what he is writing."

Since my freshman year, I have kept random lists of things I have noticed and experienced and ideas that have distracted me from studying or popped into my head while walking on campus or learning in class. However, what my friend Michelangelo and his statue of David remind me of is that ideas, even great ones, are worthless unless you put them into action using your hands. While I have shared many of these crazy visions and proposals, I have been encouraged to share them with others ... or at least those who invest eye exercises on the *Old Gold and Black*.

I hope not to use this writing as a venting session or an opportunity to attack individuals or groups. Neither have I decided to do this because I am bored or have little to do. Trust me,

At the second annual Lighting of the Quad last December, I shared some thoughts about this word. Since you might have been busy being a good student in the library, I will highlight a little bit of what I shared.

five classes and an honors thesis for an economics major will do a great job of keeping a girl busy. And anyway, isn't everyone oh so "busy" here in the Forest? Rather, I hope to share with others observations and experiences that I have gained in my tenure; I desire to offer ideas and information that is not available on most away messages or chatted about at Benson tables; I wish to challenge the process; and fervently hope to inspire and enables others to act and be a part of positive change. And I hope to uphold the frankness and freeness to which my boy Twain refers and will do so because I secretly love and care about this thing we call the Wake commUNITY.

This word commUNITY is a very intriguing concept. At the second annual Lighting of the Quad last December, I shared some thoughts about this word. Since you might have been busy being a good student in the library, I will highlight a little bit of what I shared. As early as my freshman year here at Wake, I quickly identified some room for growth in our campus unity. I remember coming up with proposal of a commUNITY unity day with a 5K "race against racism" filled with balloons, t-shirts, banners. It was while sharing this naive idea with a

more sage senior that I came to realize that it will take much more than a one-day event to build what most people do not realize is the last five letters of the word commUNITY.

This somewhat cynical senior shared with me his argument that if we (Wake Forest) wanted campus unity then we would already have it. Coming from a religious tradition that is founded on principles of unity and the oneness of humankind, I could not begin to imagine that it was possible that people would want things any other way. That day, I pledged to wait until the spring of my senior year to see if I, too, would reach this same grim conclusion.

If you break it down to its Latin roots, you find com-mun-ity. The "com" refers to a shared, a common. "Mun" is actually a wall, and the "ity" just means that it's a quality/state, an abstract idea. This discovery perplexed me because all I had ever heard was how we should work on destructing barriers and walls that keep us from unity. However this finding suggested to me that we have some CONstructing to do.

So, as you start formulating your resolutions for 2004, I encourage you think about what your individual role is in the construction of this abstract thing that has capacity to enclose and protect us all. Some of you may have heard me say that if you want something bad enough, you will make it happen. My wish is that I can graduate this spring holding on to my idealistic thought that unity really is something people do want ... and that we will not busy ourselves so much that we cannot allocate enough time and heart to build it.

Rosita Najmi is a senior economics major.



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Whole story not told in letter about faculty prayer

Occasionally the *OGB* prints letters that raise important issues in light-hearted ways; so that it is not always obvious whether to excuse them for their levity or to challenge them for their seriousness.

The letter from Adam Wells ("The practical upshot of faculty prayer decision," Dec. 4) is a case in point. It was ostensibly light and sarcastic; but underpinning the sarcasm were assertions and implications of a serious and potentially disturbing kind: hence this response.

Adam Wells' side swipe at the 'Weinstein AAUP' was particularly unfortunate in our view. The vote was not a one-man show, or an AAUP coup.

The faculty decided to abandon the practice of beginning its meeting with a prayer on a vote of 81 to 24 (with 6 abstentions), taken by secret ballot after the dean had invited a defense of the existing practice that no one there chose to make.

Nor was it a vote that divided the faculty between atheists and Christians, as the letter seems to imply. Among those voting for the abandonment of prayers were many serious Christians.

They, like the rest of that very well attended faculty meeting, responded positively to the argument that prayers of any kind before a business meeting are unusual in the university and inappropriate, and that the use of a Christian prayer in this particular context had for years generated a sense of exclusion in the minds of those many members of faculty who hold to other faiths or to no faith at all.

Nor do we accept that in making this decision the faculty was either being

"lazy" or "intellectually trendy," or indeed cavalier with the university's Baptist heritage, as again the letter strongly implies.

That heritage is a vital part of what makes Wake Forest special; but so too is the presence among the faculty of high quality academics who are not Baptists by religious conviction. The pluralism and diversity of the university is not threatened by the decision taken by the faculty; but it could easily be threatened if those unhappy with the decision now begin to claim - either directly or by implication - that *only* those holding Christian religious beliefs are committed to the values of a liberal arts education in the modern age. We do hope that Mr. Wells was not making such a claim.

It is by facilitating high quality dialogue within and between intellectual traditions - both religious and secular - that this university best meets its commitments to widen and extend human understanding *pro humanitate*.

Letters that casually disparage positions that the author does not share add nothing to that process, and potentially jeopardize it.

**Katy Harriger**  
Professor of political science  
**David Coates**  
Worrell professor of Anglo-American Studies

Abandoning prayer shows lack of commitment

A recent article in the *Old Gold and Black* concerning the removal of prayer from the faculty meetings tells me that there are some people at Wake Forest who are teaching our children that prayer is not necessary.

I want to thank God for the

people who are in charge of Facilities Management.

More than one time in our weekly Supervisors' meetings, I have heard someone request prayer for a sick employee.

I am proud to say that we still ask God's blessing before we eat at the Facilities Management Christmas Luncheon and also at the Employee Appreciation Picnic.

I thank God for allowing me to work with men like Bill Sides, Bill Shotton, Mike Draughn, James Blackburn and many others who still believe in the power of prayer.

More than once, I have asked them to pray for my 14-year-old son who has cystic fibrosis (who I was told would not live to be 7 years old).

I would hate to think that I had to work with a group of men and women who either did not believe in prayer or did not have enough guts to stand up and voice their opinion when someone wanted to do away with prayer.

I would like to believe that we still have some God-fearing teachers here at Wake Forest University, but, unfortunately, actions speak louder than words.

**Keith Wise**  
Superintendent of Special Coatings

Our letters policy

We welcome letters. Send yours via e-mail to letters@ogb.wfu.edu, by campus mail to P.O. Box 7569, Winston-Salem, N.C. 27109, or deliver it to Benson 518. We reserve the right to edit all letters for length and clarity. No anonymous letters will be printed.

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