

## [Worried about Davidson's future? Prominent alum write letter | Charlotte Observer](#)

# Key alumni decry Davidson's 'political correctness' after slavery apology, bylaw changes

[By Brian Murphy](#)

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A powerful group of Davidson College alumni, including a former governor and a current U.S. congressman, are speaking out about changes at the school and encouraging fellow alums to do the same.

The group's initial email roiled some at the school and led the alumni association to respond with a rebuttal email and to open an investigation into how the group obtained alumni's email addresses.

Former Gov. Jim Martin, U.S. Rep. Greg Murphy and nine other alumni — many prominent business leaders — signed the May 18 letter titled “Challenging Times at Davidson.”

It was written “out of profound concern for our alma mater,” they said, and focused on bylaw changes made by the Board of Trustees around the religious affiliation of the school president and board members.

Previously, the college's bylaws required the school's president to be an active member of a Christian Church and that 80 percent of the board members be active members of a Christian Church. The revised bylaws allow the president to be a person of any faith and expanded the number of seats on the board that don't include a personal religious requirement, [according to the school](#).

In their letter, the 11 alum said “we find it difficult to envision how the religious component of the Statement of Purpose will be adhered to in the future if the President and potentially up to 75% of the Board were to have no personal Christian affiliation.”

Further, they wrote, “While it remains to be seen what the full effects of these changes will be, the Christian foundation that has served the College and its students so admirably for 184 years has clearly been fundamentally altered.”

The college [was established in 1837 by Presbyterians](#) of North Carolina and maintains an affiliation with the Presbyterian Church (USA).

### **‘Political and social activism’**

In the final section, the writers outlined another concern, titled “What Direction Will the College Take in the Future?”

“Separate from the bylaw changes, many of us feel that Davidson has gone a direction that veers away from the College’s traditional academic focus and wandered into the realm of political and social activism,” wrote the signers, all 11 of whom have served on the school’s Board of Trustees and all 11 of whom are white men.

“The fundamental goals of the College appear to be sublimated to other goals, namely the orthodoxy of political correctness.”

In August, [the school issued an apology for supporting slavery](#) and “its embrace of the racist laws and policies” in later decades, The Observer previously reported. The apology came after a commission spent two years examining the school’s ties to slavery and racist policies in later decades.

The commission was headed by Davidson alum and former Obama-era Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx, who is Black. Foxx, a former Charlotte mayor, is also a member of the school’s [Board of Trustees](#).

Among some “first steps” announced by the college in response to the report was anti-racism training for faculty, staff and students, The Observer reported.

“We have much work to do to understand the pain and injury the college has caused, as well as to appreciate fully the strength, gifts and power of enslaved persons and our foundational indebtedness to them,” Davidson College President Carol Quillen [said at the time](#).

### **Davidson’s response**

A day after the initial email, Davidson’s Office of Alumni and Family Engagement sent out its own message, distancing itself from the previous email.

“You may have received a message yesterday from an account called ‘Davidson Alumni.’ The email did not originate from the college or the Alumni Association. We did not authorize the release of alumni email addresses, the use of our name or the contents of the email. Our IT staff are investigating what occurred and are taking this matter very seriously,” wrote Marya Howell, the director of alumni and family engagement, and Eileen Keeley, the vice president for college relations.

One alum, in a Twitter thread highlighting the signers of the original email, said the group [“hijacked the Davidson alumni email list.”](#) The school is “still examining what list was used and how it was obtained,” Jay Pfeifer, Davidson’s director of media relations said in an email Tuesday.

In an email to alumni Thursday, Howell and Keeley wrote that the school’s investigation found no “evidence that our college systems or servers were breached or the alumni data on them” was accessed improperly. Instead, the 11-man group used “a printed alumni directory that was offered for sale to alums in 2018” to create the email list, they wrote.

The directory included a written prohibition against use for the purpose of mass emails.

“We are addressing that issue and have informed the group that they are in violation,” Howell and Keeley wrote.

Martin graduated from Davidson in 1957, taught organic chemistry at the school, spent 12 years in the U.S. House of Representatives and served as North Carolina governor from 1985 to 1993 — the only Republican governor to win two terms in state history.

“We’re not promoting the letter. We want it to stand on its own and be read. A lot of people are misinterpreting it,” said Martin in a telephone interview with The Charlotte Observer on Tuesday. “The letter speaks for each of us and therefore it speaks for itself. ...

“If we were to try to interpret the letter, we might end up saying something that letter doesn’t say. We will stick with the letter to speak for us.”

Murphy, a Republican, graduated from Davidson in 1985. He was elected to the U.S. House in 2019 in a special election and re-elected in 2020. Murphy, a urologist and former state House member, represents much of Eastern North Carolina. Some alumni [were upset by remarks Murphy](#) made in October about Vice President Kamala Harris and her qualifications for office.

As for the reaction the group has received since the letter’s release, Martin said, “I don’t think we’re ready to discuss that at this time.”

The email from the alumni association included links to [a story about the bylaw changes](#), the [college’s working group](#) of Presbyterian pastors and theologians and [a summary of the survey](#) administered before the board vote.

Martin said the group will see what steps it takes next.

The school's official Twitter account retweeted several messages of support, specifically donations to the school's [diversity, equity and inclusion efforts](#), on May 19.

“We are gratified by the overwhelming support we have received from our alums, as our social media channels show,” Pfeifer said.

Read more here:

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