

WHITE W&M STUDENT IS TRYING TO ORGANIZE LOCAL NAACP CHAPTER

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Body

The white student president of the College of William and Mary is pushing to start a campus chapter of the NAACP. On Thursday night, about 200 students and area residents attended a meeting to back the cause.

"It's a really encouraging number," said the student, junior Greg Werkheiser, "and it shows a lot of interest in starting an organization here."

Werkheiser said his race is irrelevant to the effort. He has been a member of the primary black group on campus, the Black Student Organization, for two years, and he says it's time the college also had a chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

"This college should have had a chapter a long time ago," Werkheiser said. "The NAACP will provide a racially integrated approach to solving problems of all races."

Werkheiser tried to distance the chapter from the state and national leadership. Last month, the national NAACP's board fired its leader, the Rev. Benjamin F. Chavis Jr..

"It's obvious that the work will get done at the local level," Werkheiser said. "(Students) are living in and with the problems they are trying to address. We know what the issues are, and we don't need the leadership" at the state level.

David Garrow, a Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer of Martin Luther King Jr. and a visiting professor of history, echoed Werkheiser's emphasis on local involvement.

"What really counts is not national controversy," Garrow said. "What really counts is when people, working at the local levels, bring about major change. What really counts is affecting people's daily, weekly and monthly lives."

Senior Dan Tunstall, a member of the Black Student Organization who unsuccessfully attempted to start a chapter last year, backs Werkheiser's efforts.

"The NAACP can provide students the ability to develop leadership and can supply a forum for discussing important issues," he said.

To start a chapter, a college must have 25 dues-paying members, a faculty or staff member who belongs to the organization and a constitution accepted by the NAACP and recognized by the college. Werkheiser is confident that he can meet those requirements.

Sarah Curtis

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He said the controversy over Chavis' ouster could even help the group gain membership. "The press coverage brought out a lot of people" to the meeting, he said. "They were curious where the group is headed."

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