

Young Trustee Application

2010-2011

Please submit the entire application by January 9, 2011 at 5:00pm.

Email an electronic copy to Christine Larson (cel31@duke.edu) Chair of the Young Trustee Nominating Committee

Name: Matthew Davis

School Address: 715 Ninth Street; Apartment 17; Durham, NC 27705

Telephone: (207) 467-5731

E-mail: mtd9@duke.edu

Class Year and School: Pratt 2011

Please sign the following pledge:

All of the information I have provided in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge. I have followed the Duke Community Standard in filing this application. I understand that failure to adhere to the highest integrity will result in the forfeit of my application. If selected as the Undergraduate Young Trustee, I will fulfill my duties to the best of my ability.

Signature: Matthew Davis

Date: January 8th, 2011

1. The Board of Trustees is the governing body of Duke in which “all powers of the University [are] vested in,” as is stated in the University’s bylaws. It is imperative that the Board be comprised of a diverse body of professionals, alumni that bring with them a vast array of experience and expertise spanning a multitude of industries and professions, and scholars whose combined breadth of knowledge reaches across many disciplines of academia. The Board of Trustees is concerned not only with the esteem of the University and the approval of major initiatives, but also its long-term direction and the overall quality of the student experience. Thus, the Board must be constituted by a body that is both representative of the University over which it presides and familiar with the long and short term impact that the decisions it makes will have on students. Many of the members of the Board, however, graduated decades before being appointed and may be out of touch with the plight and concerns of current students. To remedy this shortcoming, Terry Sanford created the position of Young Trustee.

The Young Trustee is a member of the student body elected by his peers to serve a three year term as a recent graduate on the Board of Trustees. A Young Trustee should be capable of fulfilling all of the normal responsibilities of any other Trustee, but in addition he must be capable of communicating the impact that the Board’s actions will have on the most important people at the University, its students. That is to say, a Young Trustee must be able to make informed and lucid decisions on any of the most important matters faced by the University, while contributing to the Board his unique viewpoint as to what matters most to undergraduates (in this case). He is not a representative of any contingent of the student body, but instead a Trustee whose area of expertise is neither finance, politics, nor law, but rather the student experience.

2. Over the past three years I have become involved in a number of organizations at Duke which have contributed to my personal development and qualifications for the position of Young Trustee. Moreover, my rigorous academic course load has tested me as a student and developed my work ethic. It is not however simply an impressive list of accolades, a litany of campus appointments, or a strong academic record that makes someone qualified to serve as the Young Trustee, but rather a balanced experience at Duke and a wide variety of soft skills developed through practice but not necessarily guaranteed simply by an impressive resume.

The most critical skill required of any Board member is his ability to communicate effectively and efficiently. It is even more important that the Young Trustee be an apt conversationalist and debater since he is both younger and less established than his peers on the Board. Despite being an engineer, I have had a number of opportunities since coming to Duke to work in a variety of board room environments and to hone my communication skills. As President of Wayne Manor I spoke on behalf of the group with administrators and represented it during judicial hearings. In my lab group I have been called on in the board room to defend my research to professors and PhD candidates. During my summer internship I further built my confidence in presenting to and speaking with professionals who were many years my senior.

As an undergraduate representative and member of the Executive Board of the Duke Student Publishing Company I have been a vocal and critical member, especially when it comes to matters of finance. I have gained experience overseeing an operating budget of a million dollar non-profit organization and my business insights have helped determine the direction of the group that publishes *The Chronicle*. This January I will be moderating a two hour session on the DSPC's long term strategy for rising out of the

recession while still facing declining ad revenue, an experience that will help prepare me for the role of Young Trustee.

My focus on impact is perhaps my greatest asset and would be crucial in making the most of a short tenure as Young Trustee. Since stepping down as President of Wayne Manor I have taken on a new role as the steward of the Manor Alumni Network. I have formalized the alumni network of Wayne Manor by collaborating with a junior in the group and compiling a database of contact info for over 200 alumni. We are in the midst of our first formal recruitment season with the MAN in place and I hope to see many of our younger members secure internships through the network I've helped to create. Throughout the fall I've helped sophomores and juniors revise their resumes, draft cover letters, and research industries of interest. I know that as Young Trustee this emphasis on making a lasting impact would remain intact and would manifest in the amount of time and passion I'd put behind seeing that the Board pursue the best initiatives with the students at heart.

Though I think I have the skills to be an effective Young Trustee, my experience with matters of Duke policy is sparse. I have never served on a Board committee nor have I had any experience with DSG, Campus Council, or any other group on campus associated with the formulation or implementation of policy. I am an outsider with no connections to any member, past or present, of the Board of Trustees, and because of that I would be starting my term with a blank slate. That said, I ask that you consider me for what I am capable of contributing to the Board as Young Trustee and not for what I already know or don't know.

3. The hot button issue at Duke today is campus culture and public opinion of Duke as an institution. Though the last Campus Culture Initiative was issued only four years ago and some of its recommendations remain unaddressed, I believe that it would be unwise for the Board of Trustees to ignore the ever-heating social climate at Duke and the discontent many students feel with not only how campus culture is represented in the media but also its actual state on campus. Because I believe in the dividends paid by improving the quality of experience and the relatively low cost of the initiatives required to improve campus culture, I think this should be an issue addressed immediately.

The incident this fall involving fraternity late-night invitations being posted on bulletin boards around campus and the ensuing uproar heard around campus brought into daylight serious gender issues that have existed for some time. The passion with which people debated the issues at hand reminded me of why I'm proud to be a Blue Devil. Duke should be a place where men, women, independents, and affiliated students can all feel comfortable and belong, and the Board should know that simply creating a women's center does not solve gender issues just as building a fire station does not put out a fire. It is the responsibility of the Board of Trustees to address campus cultural issues, but before they can do that, they will need to facilitate the type of discussions that occurred in hallways, dormitories, and on the editorial pages of the *Chronicle* after this shocking incident occurred. To remedy Duke's social ailments we need to better understand all parties involved and make sure that Duke culture has not and will not become what the media portrays it to be.

The second most important issue, and one which is not unrelated is the effort the Board of Trustees will have to put into ensuring that New Campus is truly integrated with the rest of the campus. The plans for New Campus have already been drawn, but what

matters more in its success at bridging the gap between East and West will be determined by how the University sells it to students and how Duke chooses to populate it. To really improve on Central Campus, we need to change more than just the floor plans of the apartments; we need to make the place an appealing alternative to West for segments of the student body and not just a consolation prize for losers of the housing lottery. Ubuntu has proven to the University that with the right value proposition, in its case the opportunity for students interested in service and civic engagement, can attract students to even a lackluster location.

Will it be wise to put fraternities on New Campus? Will sorority housing be an attractive option for women at Duke? Will New Campus be a good spot for ELGs, SLGs, a wellness community, a new religious center, or a cross-cultural community? I think it's safe to say that no one knows for certain the answers to any of these questions, and that includes the Board of Trustees and the rest of the administrators involved with decisions about New Campus. It's imperative that the population of New Campus be performed in a calculated fashion and that the method is determined with the help of significant student input. Nobody wants to see a New Central Campus. To ensure that the University's expenditure yields a return on investment, the Board of Trustees will need to determine what demographics will be best served by New Campus and what services and offerings will be required to make this alternative to West Campus appealing to sophomores, juniors, and seniors.

Finally, the Board of Trustees will be faced with the same trying task as the rest of the country, how to grow out of the recession while remaining fiscally responsible and without sacrificing the quality of the student experience. We will need to finish trimming the fat from our operating budget, though this task has been largely completed already.

More importantly, we will need to decide how and when to invest short term returns on the endowment. Interest rates remain near rock bottom as the economy crawls out of recession, and now is a great time for an institution like Duke to invest in capital-heavy projects like the construction of New Campus, K4, or a new addition to the medical center. What's next? This is a pivotal decision that the Board of Trustees will have to make over the next three years.

I have put this at the lowest priority of these three simply because improving campus culture is an immediate need and things are in motion on New Campus already. Deciding how to spend tens or even hundreds of millions of dollars is never of minimal importance, but these are the types of decisions Boards are designed to make. It will be the first two issues that I mentioned that will require the hardest work and most earnest thought to solve.

4. One issue that the Board may not face during my term but which should concern all of us is Duke's downward trend in college rankings. The US News & World Report placed Duke in a 3-way tie for ninth place for 2011, putting her back one place since the time I applied, and six ranks back since her peak in the early 1990s. Though the school's appeal is buoyed by our quality athletic programs and our prowess on Coach K Court, we need to thinking seriously about what the country and the world think of the caliber of our academic programs, faculty, and students.

People argue that the rating metrics are flawed or that a difference in ratings from one year to another may be arbitrary, but let's not be fooled into thinking that ratings don't matter. The reality is that a score even one point lower in 2011 would have knocked us out of the top 10 universities in the United States and that college students do not apply to an infinite number of "good schools". The success or failure of our University hinges on more than just the quality of students that apply, but the strength of students who ultimately matriculate. The quality of the student body, measured not simply by GPA or SAT scores but also by their ability to lead and work, their passion and aspirations, and their character, is what attracts recruiters to employ Duke students after graduation. It is the reason that graduate programs around the world seek out Blue Devils, and it is a reason why top-notch professors seek tenure at this University.

Whether it be the unsavory press coverage we've been receiving of late, or because we are failing to improve at the rate of our competitors, we are slipping in the rankings and that is a fact. The value of our degree is slowly decaying and we all have a responsibility to protect our investment and the reputation of the University we love to be a part of. The Board will need to start exploring viable measures that it can take to make Duke's position in the rankings better reflect the quality of this incredible institution.

5. Because I would be one of the youngest and least experienced members on the Board of Trustees I would need to work harder than the rest to make sure that my voice is heard and that it is backed by the weight of my own credibility. This does not mean that I would speak louder or more frequently than others in the board room, but that I would speak with others thoughtfully and often outside of it. I would make sure that I am the most prepared and versed trustee going into each meeting, and I would work hard, especially early on, to connect with each member of the Board. By forming relationships with the other Board members I would build my credibility and by discussing issues on the wires before meetings I would aim to make my opinion known and sought out on a quarterly basis.

The second unique challenge I would face would be maintaining my grasp on the student experience while becoming accustomed to a new job, a new city, and a new school. Because I believe that the Young Trustee is in no way a delegate of the student body I do not think that this challenge would be insurmountable, but I would still have to make a very conscious effort to keep abreast of current events on campus and how students feel about them. Throughout my term as Young Trustee I would benefit from at least a limited network of younger contacts on campus through which I expect to be able to connect to campus leaders to hear their voices. Of course, keeping up with the *Chronicle* would help, but more importantly, keeping up with my own friends and classmates would help remind me of my time and experience at Duke.

6. I remember sitting in the back seat of my mom's minivan while we rolled up Chapel Drive during a family trip to visit colleges for my older sister. I was fourteen at the time, but it was love at first sight. I'd been a Duke basketball fan for years, but it wasn't until I was standing on main quad, chin up, eyes fixed on the Chapel rising toward the (dare I say it) Carolina blue sky that I knew I wanted to go to Duke. She had me at hello.

But Duke is more than just a pretty face. Duke is more than just a world-class academic institution. Duke is a place of truly unlimited opportunity, and that is why she continues to attract many of the finest students in the world. College is a time when many young men and women change, but Duke is a place that facilitates these normal transformations to allow students to reach their fullest potential both academically and socially.

Through the opportunities Duke has afforded me I have become a more competent leader and a more confident speaker. At Duke, I have been surrounded by peers who challenge and push me to greater height and those who make me smile and support me. Duke has taught me the hard sciences of engineering and exposed me to the worldly insights of economics. Duke has allowed me to transcend my small town lot to seize hold of a bright future and empowered me to achieve my goals and fulfill my dreams.

When I think of Duke I think of the opportunities it has granted me and students like me. But I fear that when much of the rest of the country thinks of Duke they associate her with simply sports and scandal. Though the former is fine, the latter is an image we students need to work hard in the coming years to shake and outgrow.

7. I want to be the Young Trustee because I want to ensure that future classes benefit even more from their time at Duke than I have. The University is in the midst of an incredibly exciting and transformative time, but as Duke grows, contracts, and changes, we need to be very conscious of the student experience. I want to help make sure that as the Board trims the operating budget of the University that they are not doing so in a manner that sacrifices unnecessarily the caliber of a Duke education or the breadth of student extracurricular offerings. As Duke expands its footprint to a new campus in China and increases the emphasis it puts on its student's global awareness, we need to consider strongly what effect, if any, these new expenditures will have on current students and Duke's ability to attract others. When the Board decides how to re-polish our tarnished public image and move forward with new initiatives, I want to see to it that they understand the realities of campus culture as it is rather than as the papers portray it.

My interest in the future success of the University stems from my belief that real achievement comes in the form of the impact a person has on the people around him and posterity. It is with this in mind that I engage fully with any of my pursuits, and it is for this reason that I want to be the Young Trustee. Because I love Duke and appreciate all it has done for me, I want to give back to it. I want to serve Duke and to make a lasting impact on the institution that has made such a lasting impact on my own life.