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Election protests on UR's campus take positive spin

BY KARIN KAPSIDELIS
Richmond Times-Dispatch

The week after protests blocked traffic in downtown Richmond, post-election stress syndrome is taking a different turn on campus.

Nearly 100 University of Richmond students, faculty and staff demonstrated Wednesday on the lawn outside Boatwright Library — careful not to block the sidewalk.

"It's a positive march about the good things we support — a march of solidarity," said Ladelle McWhorter, one of the faculty organizers.

At Virginia Commonwealth University, a public interactive art project will run through Sunday in what organizers say is an effort to combat the "divisiveness and negativity of the national political conversation."

The UNITY Project, which will be launched Thursday outside James Branch Cabell Library, will feature a circular arrangement of 32 poles, each with labels such as "I identify as LGBTQ."

The project is designed to symbolize that everyone is unique but also connected as visitors are invited to connect the poles with pieces of yarn to form a canopy. The idea is "to spark a renewed spirit of optimism, camaraderie, inclusiveness and respect," according to the university.

Anti-Trump demonstrations near the VCU campus resulted in 12 arrests after the election.

At UR, McWhorter said, students were upset and tearful, "feeling that some of the things they care about now are jeopardized."

"We decided that instead of talking about bad things, that we would talk about things we care about that might be in jeopardy but actually are still here," McWhorter, a philosophy professor, said.

Cassandra Ceballos, a senior from the Vir-

gin Islands, said she was grateful that faculty and staff had organized the march.

"To me that was huge because I think a lot of students have felt lost about who they could go to and who they could turn to for solidarity and support," she said. "There has been a lot of fear in general since November 8."

She hasn't seen instances of "open hate" on campus, she said, but there has been some divisiveness.

"It's really not in the University of Richmond's character to have flagrant in-your-face tensions," Ceballos said.

But she said there is subliminal tension and that "can be almost worse because it's not acknowledged and it can't be called out. And that's how it becomes normalized."

That the march drew representatives from so many different backgrounds and ages, she said, shows how wide-reaching the concerns are on campus.

"It's not just young millennials being spoiled," she said. "It's not a black thing; it's not a gay thing; it's not a student thing. It is a human rights thing."

The marchers, chanting "This is what democracy looks like," held signs supporting an array of causes they fear are threatened, from Medicare to a free press.

"It's all what you support, not what you're against," said Andrea Simpson, a political science professor whose sign supported Planned Parenthood and the Environmental Protection Agency.

She said she had taken part in civil rights marches in the 1960s in Memphis.

"I thought I'd never have to go through this again," she said. "I just didn't think things would be rolled back."

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