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Julia Raimondi
University of Richmond

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Campus community marches outside Boatwright Library in reaction to election

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Students, faculty and staff organized outside Boatwright Memorial Library to positively protest the presidential election.

Photo by Will Kremer / The Collegian

On Wednesday afternoon a large group of students, faculty and staff held an “I Support” march outside of Boatwright Memorial Library in reaction to last week's election.

Participants marched in a circle around the lawn, holding signs that proclaimed different organizations and causes that they supported. They also chanted statements such as “This is what democracy looks like” and “When they say step back we say fight back.”

At the end of the march, protesters staked their signs in the ground, leaving messages for the rest of the campus community to see. The march attracted the attention of many people who stopped to watch and record the event.

Sophomore Michael Signorile stopped with his friends to see what was going on.

“I like the energy here,” Signorile said. “I really like the march because everyone has their own opinion and they’re all supporting their own individual cause. I saw a sign supporting National Parks and I thought that was pretty neat.”

The event was led by Ladelle McWhorter, who is the Stephanie Bennett Smith Chair of the Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies department. She encouraged people to pick up signs and join the march while wearing a rainbow LGBTQ flag.

“No specific group organized this march,” McWhorter said. “People started talking and this is what emerged as the most positive thing we could do to bring people together and bring a lot of energy and bring people’s spirits up and find ways forward.”

McWhorter's main objective was to instill hope in people and energize them to become active in civic life.

“I’ve just been looking for a way to feel a little more hope since the election results,” Jennifer O’Donnell, lab manager of the biology department, said. “I’m here as a woman who is raising two daughters. I have major concerns over women’s rights and inclusivity. Environmental issues like the Paris Climate Agreement and Clean Water Acts are important to me as well.”

Other causes the demonstrators declared support for were LGBTQ rights, voting rights, Black Lives Matter, Planned Parenthood and more. Many expressed concern that these rights were now at risk after the election.

“As a woman of color, I feel like my life has less value than the lives of people who aren’t of color,” Shannon Jones, director of biological instruction, said. “I feel like my reproductive rights might be under

attack and like my voting rights might be under attack. I work just as hard as every other American and I feel like my life matters just as much as anyone else's."

Freshman Georges Leconte expressed concern over the right to protest being jeopardized.

"I will admit on both sides that there have been people trying to silence others," Leconte said. "I think that right now is a time for all of us to come together, not to support any candidate or support any party or political beliefs but just that everybody has the right to certain things."

The university did not try to stop or move the march. Steve Bisese, vice president for student development, went to participate.

"As long as it's not disrupting education and it's safe, I do think the university supports events like this," Bisese said. "People probably believe different ways for different things but they come together for something like this."

The Center for Civic Engagement and the grassroots group Virginia Organizing tabled at the event to encourage participants and people walking by to take an active part in their community. They offered information, resources and sign-up sheets for volunteer list-serves.

Contact reporter Julia Raimondi at julia.raimondi@richmond.edu

