

# Dear Durham,

## *An open letter to our readers.*

After another successful semester of Durham VOICE publication, student reporters reflect on experiences.

By Katie Rice

As a student at UNC-Chapel Hill, I often find myself stuck in the “Chapel Hill bubble,” the detached environment of privilege and academia surrounding my campus. I go to class with people who, for the most part, look like me and have had a lot of the same experiences as me. It is easy for students to get stuck in ruts like these, even though college is supposed to be an exploratory time. Before working on the VOICE this semester, I visited Durham a couple of times with friends, but it was usually on odd trips to a friend’s house, The Scrap Exchange or to the Museum of Life and Science — places not representative of Durham as a whole.

This spring, I was thrust headlong into covering Northeast Central Durham, a community I did not feel connected to and knew next to nothing about. In my role as co-editor, I was expected to help my team cover places, people and topics nobody on the UNC staff was familiar with either. To further complicate things, writing for the VOICE was the first experience a few of the staff writers and photographers had reporting on a beat with a tight deadline. We were guided by hope, deadline pressure and one of the cardinal rules of journalism — that you dig in, you discover your community and its stories, and you write them.

I am surprised by the leaps and bounds the VOICE staff has made this semester, covering difficult topics and confronting ethical dilemmas with the zeal of seasoned reporters. And I have been, and will continue to be, moved by the overwhelmingly positive and supportive responses from

our readers. You are the driving forces behind this publication. Your support in allowing us to uplift your stories is what keeps the VOICE going, and you are teaching us lessons we at UNC and NCCU could not learn in any classroom. Your stories matter, and we will tell them for as long as you allow us.

Through writing for the VOICE, I have had the opportunities to meet people I never would have had the chance to meet



otherwise: Xavier Jackson, the young feminist with words wise beyond his years; James Sanders Jr., a dynamite actor and former teacher who keeps black history alive; and Michelle Valladarez, an artist and DACA recipient who chatted with me about horror movies when she was not talking about her work helping immigrants. Every

person I have talked to has left a mark on me that will continue long past my time here.

My time on the VOICE wasn’t always easy. When you try to corral 14 people under a deadline, things can get messy.

There were last-minute pleas for story ideas and requests for corrections. There were blurry pictures, questionable quotes and a lost laptop. The VOICE is a learning paper for all of us, and there were times when we got things wrong. During these times, our readers have been nothing but understanding of students trying their best, and I thank you for that.

The VOICE has had its triumphs, too. This semester, we started publishing Spanish translations of some of our articles, a project that is near and dear to my bilingual heart. I am thankful for the efforts of the bilingual members of our staff who made translation possible, and especially for the work of María Elena Vizcaino, our special projects editor. I hope the VOICE can continue publishing in Spanish so we can reach our audience in a more inclusive way.

As my time as co-editor and staff writer and photographer at the VOICE draws to a close, I wanted to extend my thanks once more to the vibrant community I have had the fortune to get to know this semester, and to everyone who has helped make this publication possible. As our adviser Jock Lauterer says, “Onward and upward!”



VOICE Co-Editor Katie Rice, right, and Special Projects Editor Maria Elena Vizcaino, center, listen as PYO intern Qaadir McFadden talks about his latest story for the Durham VOICE at the newspaper’s headquarters at the ReCity co-working hub in Durham. (Staff photo by Carlton Koonce)