



Retreat addresses issues of race

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“Do we still need to talk about race?”

In the age of Obama, is race still in issue? Or is the United States of America now, as several prominent figures have suggested, a post-racial society?

The Posse Plus Retreat, held on campus from February 12-14 with Saturday evening spent at the Elks Club banquet hall in Waterville, sought to address the question of race, both in the country as a whole and specifically on the Hill.

The answer to the question, as evidenced by the very existence of the weekend, is, of course, yes. Discussions surrounding the topic of race ran deep, as event attendees explored both their own experiences with race and their understanding of themselves and society in the context of race.

The Posse Foundation sponsored the event. Posse “identifies public high school students with extraordinary academic and leadership potential who may be overlooked by traditional college selection processes,” according to the Foundation’s website. “Posse extends to these students the opportunity to pursue personal and academic excellence by placing them in supportive, multicultural teams—posses—of 10 students. Posse partner colleges and universities award Posse scholars four-year, full-tuition leadership scholarships.”

The Class of 2013’s Posse—Posse Eight—represents the eighth Posse at the College. This year’s event, consequently, marks the eighth retreat. Posse members, mentors, facilitators and guests from both the student body and the faculty gathered for a collective 22 hours of workshops, meals, thought-provoking discussion and activity. For Lia Engelsted ‘11, a first time retreat attendee, it was “the longest and shortest weekend of my life.”

“I think deep down everyone is racist,” Annie Chen ‘12, member of Posse Seven, says. Chen says that society has dictated racial distinctions and we as members of society are inextricably linked to feelings that these distinctions are either good or bad. “I don’t think that there’s a solution to racism. The way to deal with the personal and collective conflicts of racism is to talk about it,” she says. If it goes unaddressed and unacknowledged, it perpetuates ignorance, which in turn fosters racism. The retreat offers the opportunity to address these conflicts.

“I think the Posse Retreat is the one place on campus where healing takes place...a lot of minorities feel really comfortable here. We need more healing around campus,” Sakshi Balani ‘10 says. This is Balani’s third retreat as a guest.

Dean of Students and Coordinator of Multicultural Student Programs and Support Joe Atkins says that Posse can have a huge influence on campus. He commends the first-years in particular for their participation in the weekend and says that he feels a growing sense of community “from the bottom up.”

Many who attended the event say that forming close connections with unexpected people was one of the most special parts of the retreat.

Del Perez ‘10, a member of Posse Five, says that the retreat is her favorite part of the year. “It’s a chance to get to know people...to reconnect,” she says. “There’s a feeling of euphoria after the weekend....It feels good. It’s like Christmas.”

For Senior Associate Dean of Students Paul Johnston, the retreat serves as a “strong and powerful affirmation” that support for the topic of race is here on campus, but also that “we don’t discuss race deliberately enough. We don’t pause enough in our daily lives to talk about it.” The retreat is a reminder and an encouragement to continue these valuable conversations.