



PHOTO BY CHRIS RECORD / DAVIDSON COLLEGE

# Combining History with Innovation

## THE ADMINISTRATIVE SPACES OF DAVIDSON COLLEGE

BY DAVID VINSON, PHD

Located north of Charlotte, Davidson College is a private liberal arts college that enrolls approximately 2,000 undergraduates, offering a student-faculty ratio of 9:1. In 2018, *Kiplinger's Personal Finance* rated Davidson as the #1 college for value across all colleges and universities in America. Moreover, the 2021 annual ranking by *U.S. News and World Report* placed Davidson in elite company as America's second "Best Undergraduate Teaching" institution. Davidson has also been nationally recognized for the accessibility of its faculty to students, the intuitive and convenient manner by which students can navigate campus grounds, and the quality of life it offers.

Such is the appeal of Davidson and its campus that 95% of its students live on campus—and despite its small enrollment size, the institution has attracted students from all fifty states, as well as from forty-six countries. The diversity of the student body at Davidson allows students to engage and experience new perspectives and traditions, all in an intimate setting that includes beautiful greenery, brick walkways, towering trees, and Lake Campus, a recreational space located on the largest manufactured lake in North Carolina. The campus cross-country trails provide opportunities for campus residents to engage in fitness activities and to seek peace of mind on the hiking and jogging routes.

The inclusivity of Davidson extends to its community of faculty. For instance, the Faculty of Color Caucus (FoCC) functions as an advocacy group and community network for members who identify as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and/or people of color). The FoCC's mission is to collaborate with social justice-oriented organizations and interest groups across campus, and they work diligently to facilitate a campus culture that embraces social justice, inclusivity, and equitability. Similarly, Davidson's community has created an affinity group for administrative staff called Staff of Color, which includes those who identify as "people of color." Their goals are not unlike the FoCC's but with particular attention assigned to professional development, inclusive hiring efforts, and seeking work-life balance, as well as outreach and collective advocacy.

Davidson's campus reflects its commitment to inclusivity in its approach to exterior and interior design, most notably in architectural spaces that signal the institution's historical origins alongside emergent, state-of-the-art learning and working spaces. Such spaces gratify a variety of cultural and professional needs, allowing for a level of comfort and a sense of belonging that brings the entire campus community together.

**Honoring Tradition: Davidson's Long-Standing Administrative Spaces**

Part of what makes Davidson College special is the manner by which its history is reflected in the architecture of the campus. Davidson was established in 1837 by the Concord Presbytery, and the institution is named after Revolutionary War general William Lee Davidson, who was killed at the nearby Battle of Cowan's Ford. The 469 acres of land that became home to Davidson were purchased from Davidson's son, William Lee Davidson II, and much of the architecture constructed

on campus grounds still stand in some form today. Take, for instance, Grey House, home to Admissions offices and the starting point for campus tours and on-campus information sessions. Grey House was built in the 1850s, remodeled as Admissions office space in 1991, then expanded in 1999. The exterior echoes 19th-century colonial architecture accomplished with simple, clean design elements, that of a wood frame which has aesthetic roots in Palladian classicism. The two-story structure has the appearance of a charming home, a welcoming space complimented by a central door and symmetrical facades and windows. Harding House, now the home of Davidson's Financial Aid office, was built in 1890 and remodeled in 1994 for administrative space. This building's exterior aesthetics are similar to that of Grey House, and the structure is framed by a pair of lush trees that shade the entryway.

The president's house, now located near the Fine Arts Building, was initially a simple two-story structure when it was built in 1836, measuring a modest 22x32', with two rooms

upstairs and two downstairs. Renovations began in 1860 and included the unveiling of the original front door that had for some time been hidden. The windows to the house are asymmetrical in appearance and remain this way today. Amidst several successive renovations—including the addition of a dining room, pantry, an upstairs room overlooking the dining room, and a downstairs guest room—the main objective has always been to uphold the home's history and to maintain the original 1830s farmhouse style, thereby reflecting the growth of Davidson while still preserving the past. For a period in the late 1950s, there were suggestions to tear down the President's House. The serving president, D. Grier Martin, refused, stating that "the house had been the administrative cradle of the College and was intimately associated with the administrations of men who had made Davidson great." A neo-classical portico was added at that time, as were columns at the front of the house; the roof was also remodeled, in addition to a one-story south wing that expanded the living and reception

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area. The house currently stands as a grand structure, a symbol of Davidson's history and culture to welcome visitors, students, faculty, and staff alike.

Jackson Court is another fine example of Davidson's commitment to preserving its architectural history while adapting to the needs of a growing institution. Comprised of nine small houses in a semi-circle on the southeast side of campus, Jackson Court is home to a variety of administrative offices and services for the college. The buildings were constructed in 1928, and today they form a picturesque scene worthy of a postcard. Not all buildings are exactly alike; some have white-columned entrances, while others feature screened patios. All of the houses in this campus area have ample windows which attract natural light and allow administrators to admire the scenery outside—gorgeous trees, lush grass, bright pink flowers, along with stone benches providing outdoor space for socializing or eating. The offices in the court include Business Services, the Education Office, Grants & Contracts, Planning

and Institutional Research, the Chidsey Leadership Development Office, Freedom Schools, Purchasing, Human Resources, and Theological Exploration of Vocation. Indeed, Jackson Court functions as a gorgeous hub for Davidson's administrative staff.

### Administrative Spaces and Innovation

As the wants and needs of any campus-based community continue to evolve, such is the need to adapt. In the case of Davidson's technology-specific services, Technology and Innovation (T and I) functions as the information technology department, providing support with technology facilities and technology infrastructure on campus. T and I offers computing, innovation, and free printing facilities where users can work with 3D printers, laser cutters, a podcast studio, two virtual reality labs, and a media lab. T and I partners with students, faculty, and staff to use and apply existing and emerging technologies that support and transform teaching, learning, research, and administrative processes. The

interiors of the facilities are designed with open spaces that are amenable to collaborative work; they are also arranged for individual work, where users can operate privately and in comfort.

As an extension of its commitment to providing innovative spaces, Davidson College also purchased industrial space in downtown Davidson. The space was originally built as a cotton mill in 1920; today, it is a gorgeous 23,000 square foot, cutting-edge, LEED Gold-certified facility where campus and community integrate to spark vibrant technology, innovation, and entrepreneurship. The facility is called The Hurt Hub@Davidson; the facility originated from the idea of uniting Davidson students, faculty, staff, and alumni with local companies. These companies collaborate with faculty and students on projects and internships. Classes are also available to all members of Davidson College; offered is a rotating selection of courses and workshops focused on critical topics for any entrepreneur whose aim is to bring an idea to life.

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### Core Values and Cultural Identity

Davidson's campus embodies its belief that campus history informs its values and cultural identity. The architectural spaces of Davidson honor the past while also nurturing the college's physical, technological, environmental, and human resources with new and innovative workspaces. Administrative spaces that range from the Grey House to the remarkable off-campus collaborative environment of The Hurt Hub@Davidson all signal the institution's commitment to providing each member of Davidson with the support to thrive both on campus and beyond.



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Dr. David Vinson has a PhD in English with specializations in transatlantic literature and cultural studies. He is a committed scholar, teacher, and dad. If you ever meet David, avoid the subject of soccer. His fandom borders on the truly obnoxious.



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