

# The Charlotte Observer

Sun, Feb. 24, 2008

## Davidson campus life, camera, action

JOE MARUSAK

Austin Bell is hard to miss in the crowded Davidson College Student Union.

He's the one in the bright red dress shirt, red-and-black striped tie and white-laced black sneakers with multicolored soles. I picked him out immediately last week.

"I wear a tie every day because I'm in television, and appearance in television is everything," Bell said.

The Davidson College sophomore writes, films, edits and produces a Web-based program called "The Davidson Show," now in its fourth installment capturing campus and community life in ways satirical and serious. The number of Internet hits has grown to at least 1,500 per show.

Bell also produced an 18-minute documentary last fall about a trip that 46 Davidson College students and two staff members took to protests on behalf of the Jena 6 in Jena, La. The college's Black Student Coalition sponsored the documentary's premiere on campus.

Bell's 14-minute documentary about the town of Davidson's ongoing growth, "What's Going on Down the Road?", drew 75 students and town residents to its Jan. 29 premiere. He also showed it at the Feb. 12 town board meeting, the same day he turned 19.

Bell said he's always been interested in media. He created a Web site in third grade and has made and edited films since he was 10 or 11. He published a satirical underground newspaper, The Daily Omphaloskeptic, his senior year of high school.

And he honed his video production skills working the past two summers at a motion graphics studio in Santa Monica, Calif.

Bell was sitting in economics class last year when the idea for "The Davidson Show" came to mind. "A news show," he thought. "We don't have a campus news show."

He soon created a show he describes as a cross between "The Daily Show" and "Saturday Night Live." His inspirations: satirists Voltaire, Swift and P.J. Rourke.

I also detected traces of the old "Monty Python's Flying Circus" British TV comedy when I watched the premiere of the latest "Davidson Show" in the Student Union late Wednesday. At least 100 students also watched and laughed out loud.

The installment includes a humorous tour of campus bathrooms, two bare-chested guys reviewing the movie "300" and funny on-scene interviews with students sampling food at the new Harris Teeter and lining up for chicken parm in the school cafeteria.

Even college police chief Fountain Walker appears in a skit that's serious about personal safety but still drew laughs.

Bell likes to include as many students and staff as he can in each segment, whether as actors or in person-on-the-street interviews. He included 40 or 50 students and faculty in the latest installment, including sophomore Liz Rollins in the chicken parm segment because she happened to be eating an *eggplant* parm.

"It think it's great because it incorporates everything on campus in a humorous way, and involves everybody from campus," Rollins said after watching last week's show.

Bell laughed as much as anyone in the room. But there's a hidden motive in the humor, he said.

"Video is a great unifier," he said. "I firmly believe that every student at Davidson College can do what I'm doing -- pick up a camera, tell a story and produce and edit it."

For the rest of us to come together to enjoy.

Austin Bell

Hometown: Lexington, N.C.

Parents: Lexington lawyers Frank Bell and Laura Lu Hedrick. Frank Bell is a Davidson College Class of '74 grad who rode around campus on the Peugeot bicycle his son now uses.

What you may not know about him: He plays bridge with other Davidson College students. In high school, he turned down a Presidential Scholarship in Entrepreneurship from Wake Forest University in favor of Davidson. He earned the scholarship offer for creating Web and logo designs for nonprofit agencies.

Campus mentor: Bill Giduz, media relations director whose back-office photo studio Bell used to create the pilot for "The Davidson Show" last year.

Famous endorsements: Davidson College President Tom Ross, who also liked Bell's red dress shirt so much that Bell gave him one as a gift; Davidson College basketball star Stephen Curry: "It's a pretty cool addition to our campus," Curry said after watching last week's premiere of the fourth installment of "The Davidson Show." "He does a great job."

What the future holds: No rush to decide. It's too early to even have to declare a major, he said.

Where to watch his videos: [www.austinbell.tv](http://www.austinbell.tv)