

Addressing the issue of clothing

Student movement at School of the Arts sparks discussion

Francesca Mathewes

associate editor

Cultural norms, professional expectations and individual expression -- all concepts that feed into the recently controversial topic of dress code in public schools.

In the beginning of the current school year, students at Charleston County School of the Arts received media attention for organizing a protest against what they saw as an enforcement of dress code policy that targeted females more so than male. The group argues that girls having to be sent home or pulled out of class for dress code violations is much more of a distraction from one's education than the initial violation.

The movement at S.O.A has further amplified the ongoing conversation about school dress code.

Wando Administrator Gretchen Looney, who used to be an administrator at School of the Arts, hears student concerns about dress code, but has her own professional point of view.

"I can't really change the way people feel about the dress code, but honestly, I think I have to crack down on more males for dress code than girls," she said. "I definitely have to speak with males more about dress code violations in the forms of 'busting a sag,' hats or explicit T-shirts."

Looney said, however, that she also recognizes the potential for "unfairness" in the ways that males can fix dress code violations versus females.

"They can pull up their pants, they can take off their hats and if they're willing, they can turn their shirts inside out," Looney said. "Whereas, females who maybe aren't wearing an appropriate top can't always cover up or change clothes if they don't have extra clothes with them, which sometimes means a student has to be pulled out of class."

The dress code is described in the student code of conduct, something that all students Wando sign in the beginning of the year.

"The rules are there, and I don't think they're unfair," Looney said. "So when a student makes a choice to purposely break the dress code, there are going to be consequences."

Looney also notes that dress code in public schools have changed over time; jeans used to be prohibited in schools, and dress codes have evolved to reflect cultural and societal norms as they change as well.

"Ultimately, our dress code is designed to be as fair to as many different cultures, races, re-



Shriya Amin // photo

Senior Taylor Scott demonstrates the dreaded yellow shirt in accordance to the dress code policy. If a person breaks the dress code the shirt must be worn until clothes that appease the dress code are provided

ligions, and people as possible," Looney said.

However, some students argue that although a dress code is necessary to maintain a level of professionalism in a learning environment, the way the dress code is enforced and the particulars of the dress code are unequally enforced upon girls. They suggest alternate solu-

"The rules are there, and I don't think they're unfair"
Administrator
Gretchen Looney

tions.

Feminists of Wando Club President and senior Elizabeth Yaussy said she believes there could be positive, concrete changes in the dress code policy.

"I do think the dress code is wrong, because it is specifically targeted at girls. I know guys can get dress coded too because of logos or really short chub-

bies, but the dress code tells girls that their body is what is getting them in trouble," Yaussy said. "Girls get dress coded for having Nike shorts that might be a little too short or a dress with an open back or even shoulders showing. It's saying that a boy's 'distraction free' environment is more important than a girl's education, and that our bodies are distracting and over-sexualized. So we get sent home or are forced to wear a giant yellow T-shirt, which is even more distracting than what the girl was wearing to begin with."

Senior McKain Badger, a member of Feminists of Wando, shared a similar opinion.

"I think that there's definitely more of a focus on girls than guys," he said. "Rules are gonna be enforced more on girls than guys because there are just more rules for girls than there are for guys. I think there are more things that [an administrator] would be looking for."

"I think it's important to think about that the reason the dress code was put in place because administrators don't want to feel like they're looking at over-sexualized minors, and I don't think a lot of people think about it from that perspective," he added. "And it's equally important to understand that girls aren't dressing to be sexualized, and people are looking at it more as 'what I'm wearing is an expression of myself, so I shouldn't be restricted in the respect.'"

Although the perception and social effect of the dress code is something that is debated between individual perspectives, students who expressed disagreement with the policy also had possible solutions, and the represented administration is willing to hear ideas.

Sophomores and creators of the "Change Wando Dresscode" Instagram page Savannah Johnson and Elizabeth Grosso have taken initiative towards changing the way dress code is enforced.

"The finger tipped length and the rule that your hand has to cover your whole chest are rules that we think should change," Johnson said. "Some people are taller and some are shorter, and the rule is just inconsistent"

"I would absolutely change the yellow shirt policy," Grosso added. "It's completely humiliating, and it doesn't make sense because it's even more distracting than what you were wearing before you got dress coded."

Looney said she would welcome an open dialogue about the dress code.

"I would welcome an opportunity to discuss some alternative options to the bright yellow shirt," she said. "That can be changed, and I'd absolutely welcome the opportunity for students to discuss that change."