

# Perspectives

## Letters to the Editor

### Give HUM a chance

Dr. Editor:

One of the best things about our humanities program is that it's always changing. Its 60 faculty, from different departments, come and go, encouraging change as they go. Each year, the "fluctuating faculty" for each humanities course meets to review and revise that course's syllabus. Since the humanities deals with are perpetually and intentionally controversial, it's a course of questions, more than of answers. Thus the program's vitality requires lots of conversations.

Can the program ever hope to overtake the development of all civilizations? Such a program would be hilariously superficial, and impossible to teach. And no humanities program, today, in any decent college, could be "just focused on the Western civilizations." Yet, we tend to see issues such as this as dichotomies—as framed in exclusive "either/or" categories—a way of seeing which can hide truths (Maybe this is part of our Western way of thinking).

On reserve in Ramsey Library are the current humanities course materials: syllabi, the Fiero text *The Humanistic Tradition*, and other readings. Go look at these before making up your mind about the current state of the humanities program's attempt to merge "global" with "traditional Western" (As things change we'll update that collection of materials on reserve.)

Also, talk with the faculty who now (in Hum. 124) are teaching the new Fiero text, after you yourself have looked at it closely, to judge whether or not it has a global approach, or is lacking in history. Here's what one recent review says: "*The Humanistic Tradition* is quite simply the finest book of its type. Fiero manages to integrate the political, cultural, and social history of the world into one coherent and fascinating whole" (Sonia Sorrell, Pepperdine University).

The review is wrong, though. Fiero does not manage this complete integration, nor does her book present a "completely successful integration of non-western and western cultures." However: *The Humanistic Tradition* is, our faculty believes, the best that can be found at this time (All humanities faculty had input during the long process leading to the selection of this core text.). Fiero herself isn't satisfied: that's why her book has just come out in a third edition.

I suggest to students and faculty alike (and to our administrators and staff) that we converse plentifully on a specific and important big topic: Are "we" (and let's start with "we" at UNCA, to have some grounding in some reality) united by any particular assumptions? Values? Ways of our people? Are there any assumptions we tend to hold in common—any common paradigms, ways of looking at things? What, for example, are our common assumptions about the self? Are we "rational beings"? Are we "split into body and soul"? Am I "autonomous"? Do I have a natural right to speak my mind, and to be heeded? Am I by nature equal to everyone else? What do I owe to my community? Is there only one god? If so, does "He" have any plans for me? Am I responsible for the environment, or is it separate from my "true being"? Is there such a thing as "an American"? People in other countries tell us they can identify us by our assumptions: are they right, or are we such a "mixed salad" that we have no commonalities? If we have commonalities, where do they come from? Are there any "primary sources" out there, any historical record, that might clue us in? If we

have any roots in common, is it healthy and helpful to examine those roots?

We seem to agree on the value of learning about other cultures. And I am unquestionably in favor of that: they're both familiar and strange, and teach us essential things about ourselves. But what I want to test, now, is whether there's "an American way of thinking"—no matter what your gender, or skinshade—and, if so, what and how we should learn about the roots of those preconceptions about ourselves, about others, about nature, and about deity? If you have a quick answer—either yes or no—check yourself: think harder; talk with others. And please keep things in context—including these remarks of mine.

This conversation should be fun, actually, and in the best spirit of the liberal arts tradition. So gather your evidence. Converse. Develop ever more informed opinions—and be ready to re-tailor these, as life and the big conversations go on and on.

Peg Downes  
Director, humanities program

### Humanities, Part II

Dear Editor,

Last week's main editorial claimed that "progress" will not be made in the humanities sequence until the program "moves away from its Eurocentric viewpoint and attempts to integrate those groups whose voices are, at present, virtually unheard." The editorial was reflecting on a page one article where my colleague, Dwight Mullen, raised concerns over the paucity of non-western materials in the program. The article concluded by quoting Dr. Mullen on the need for "campus talks about how the humanities should be taught." I believe that both the editorial and the story address a key issue in the intellectual life of this university community, and I am pleased that *The Banner* has entered the discussion. But I would like to clarify some points about the program in general and about the process of text selection in particular.

Last year I chaired a committee of humanities faculty whose assignment was to review a very wide range of textbooks and documents readers. Faculty from physics, management and accountancy, history, literature, and classics joined me in this effort, and in August 1997 the committee made a formal recommendation to the director of the program, Peg Downes.

Before we made our final recommendation, however, the committee provided regular updates to faculty on the selection process, and in April 1997 we sponsored a Saturday workshop where potential texts were evaluated and discussed, and where the issue of "how the humanities should be taught" was at the center of the exchange. In addition, faculty in the humanities are now engaged in the work of editing new custom readers for the program. As the editors meet to discuss reading selections and introductions, we are very sensitive to the need for greater diversity and the inclusion of non-western voices. We will continue to consult with our valued colleagues for feedback and criticism.

Dr. Mullen is correct to insist that we need to understand the rest of the world. My greatest satisfaction as an undergraduate instructor comes when I am teaching the history of world civilizations in my home department. Indeed, I spend the bulk of my time in that course teaching non-western civilizations. But I also believe that students in humanities need to know about a predominant western tradition which in the late twentieth century

informs every aspect of global cultures.

Knowing more than a little about the history of monotheism, individualism, civil equality, constitutional government, personal rights and freedoms, and indeed respect for diversity, is in my view an important and worthwhile goal of the program. While many of these ideals and practices are yet to be realized in our own day, in most cases their inception and growth is to be traced to the western tradition. And in my judgment the major voices within that tradition need to remain at the center of what we do in humanities.

Bill Spellman  
Associate Professor, history, humanities

### Sports: nobody cares

Dear Editor,

It's another cloudy day at UNC-Asheville. Students in the Highsmith Center play pool on ramshackle tables, and use ping-pong paddles with broken handles. In the philosophy department, a professor prepares his lecture in a barren classroom full of desks that are different shapes, sizes, and colors. In Rhodes-Robinson, an instructor hunts for a piece of chalk. Down the hall, a geology student searches vainly for an empty glass bottle to contain a sample for his senior research project. Back in the dorms, a student athlete rolls out of his double length, double mattress bed, and prepares to decide which pair of basketball shoes he's going to wear today.

As the most expensive school out of 16 in the UNC system prepares to raise costs again for the 1998-99 school year, the priorities of the Board of Trustees and the chancellor become painfully clear. They believe that the primary function of this university is to promote athletics. According to the total student fee distribution, athletics are more important than health services, recreation, education, tech-

nology, parking, safety, and cultural events combined. Add this to the fact that the university encourages its students to attend cultural events (through the first year experience courses) and you have a unique double-standard.

The course structure of UNCA stresses humanities as a primary part of our education, yet the majority of the academic fees go to sports, as opposed to areas which would support the humanities curriculum. The administration of this university needs to reevaluate its priorities. If this school prefers to be athletically oriented, then I don't want to be a part of it. If it does not intend to concentrate on sports, why are we spending 34 percent of our fees on something nobody cares about?

The sports program at UNC-Asheville is, to say the least, not very attractive. However, the high quality of education at this university is. So let's concentrate on what we're good at, what's important, our education. Some of the students are here to play sports, all of the students are here to learn.

Michael Sears  
Freshman, philosophy, economics

### Communicate!

Dear Editor,

I have noticed in my first three semesters of school here one problem that often goes overlooked despite the fact that everyone knows about it. There exists at this university a phenomenal lack of communication between the various branches of the administration at UNCA.

Last semester, while trying to clear up my account in order to register for this spring, I padded up and down the stairs in Phillips Hall four times in one day because the Cashier's Office could not give me information about the status of one of my loans and needed a note (!) from upstairs to release the hold on my registration. Even more recently I had a friend

whose mother told her that messages were arriving saying that her schedule would be canceled unless she came by the registrar's office. It turns out that they merely wanted to make sure she was returning to school this semester, despite the fact that she lived on campus last semester and has a housing contract on file. At times this campus can operate in a much more backward way than my former school, which was (hold your breath) a community college in rural Virginia, with regard to information handling.

Some may say that a student holds the responsibility of keeping up with the vast amount of data that must be juggled to insure one's safe passage through life here at UNCA. And, to some degree, I might be inclined to agree. However, when confusion stems from the fact that no one office desires to communicate with another, forcing the student to sort the issue out alone and without much support, the student simply cannot be held at fault.

I hope that along with the supposed fiber-optic network being installed on campus that someone installs

some wire attached to soup cans with connections running throughout Phillips Hall and into Lipinsky Hall's top floor.

Matt Peery  
Senior, mass communication

### Angry activists

Dear Editor,

Jim Kirk and Eric Millin's article "The baffling incoherence of modern activism" (Feb. 19) could be likened to someone building a strawman, giving it someone else's name, and beating it up publicly. Who are the relativists they speak of? None of us have ever said such a foolish and contradictory thing. We are not relativists. Next time, guys, find out the beliefs of those who you accuse of hypocrisy before you attack them.

Vanessa Harper, Amnesty International  
Greg Ripplin, GLARE  
Cerise Glenn, AASA  
Tiffany Drummond, NCSI  
Stephanie Grillo, A to Zebra

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### Correction

In the "Letters to the Editor" section printed on Feb. 12, I attached an editor's note to a letter submitted by Theta Chi member David Bruce Greene. I based the information in the editor's note on information given to *The Banner* for a Feb. 20, 1997 story on Theta Chi's return to campus. The information about Theta Zeta chapter's suspension from the university was given to *Banner* reporter Stephanie Hunter by then-Theta Chi Vice-President Sam Jones.

In the story, "Theta Chi back on campus," Hunter quoted Jones on the circumstances that led to an 18-month probation and a later five-year suspension of the fraternity in 1992. Jones described two racial incidents that led to the respective punishments of Theta Chi. After further investigation I have found that Jones' statements regarding the second penalty, the five-year ban of the fraternity from the UNCA campus, were incorrect.

This past week, I talked to Nina East, UNCA director of student development and the administrator assigned to coordinate the campus's Greek community, with the purpose of setting the record straight on the history of Theta Chi.

According to East, the university placed Theta Zeta chapter on probation for 18 months following an incident in which one of their members wore a cap with racial slurs written on it to a basketball game. She said that the school was prepared to deal with the student on an individual basis, but the fraternity accepted collective responsibility for the incident and the punishment for the entire group that followed.

East said that the second incident, a confrontation that involved a member of Theta Chi and African American students who had been hired to paint over the fraternity letters at the Weaver Boulevard entrance to the school (said by Jones to be "the central issue behind the five-year penalty"), was treated by the university as an individual matter. The university dealt with the Theta Chi member via the student court system.

According to East, Theta Chi received its five-year ban for another incident regarding the painting of its fraternity letters. While still under the original 18 month probation, Theta Chi pledges painted the fraternity letters on the Highsmith Center service road without first receiving permission from East (one of the terms of the fraternity's probation). Following the pledge incident, UNCA Chancellor Samuel Schuman then meted out the five year ban of Theta Chi. Throughout the ban (1992-1997), the fraternity's national organization supported Theta Zeta chapter.

Brian Castle  
Editor-in-Chief

*The Banner* is the student newspaper of the University of North Carolina at Asheville. We publish each Thursday except during summer sessions, final exam weeks and holiday breaks. Our offices are located in Carmichael Hall, Room 208-A.

Our telephone number is (704) 251-6586. Our campus e-mail address is banner@unca.edu. An on-line version of *The Banner* is also available at <http://www.unca.edu/banner/>

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*The Banner* welcomes submissions of letters and articles for publication. All submissions are subject to editing for clarity, content and length and are considered on the basis of interest, space, taste, and timeliness.

Letters should be typed, double-spaced, and should not exceed 300 words. Letters for publication should also contain the author's signature, classification, major or other relationship with UNCA. The deadline for letters is noon on Tuesday. If you have a submission, you can send it to *The Banner*, 208A Carmichael Hall, One University Heights, Asheville NC 28804.

The deadline for display ads and the FYI calendar is on Friday at noon. The deadline for classified ads is at noon on Tuesday.