

Opinions

The Banner

Editorial

Atomic Dog(s) Closer to equality

According to Amelia Morrison's story "Athletics battles gender equity problems" on page one, UNCA's athletic department is moving forward in its quest for gender equity. Gender equity is a particularly hard problem to solve in an athletic department that is already a drain on the school's finances with its current Division I status. How do you solve a gender disparity such as that between men's and women's basketball (almost \$60,000 more was spent last year on the men's team), when more money must be spent on the men to generate more money.

The gender gap, which has decreased to what some consider acceptable levels, merely brings the problem of Division I status into sharper focus. When the feds came down on UNCA for the low number of female athletes compared to the overall female population at the school, not to mention the later troubles from the self-study and peer reviews that shed light on funding differences, the program couldn't react by simply adding more women's sports and athletes. By cutting a men's scholarship here and there, and by dropping the men's golf team entirely, the department made progress by, in effect, weakening the men's program.

We have to remember that UNCA is not like Carolina, where a former player's aunt's best friend's cousin gets to sit on the bench next to the Michael Jordans of the world because the program has money to piss away, and Dean Smith has a heart as soft as the Snuggles bear. The fact of the matter is that the university needs men's basketball to be its cash cow in order to stay afloat in Division I (unless the heretofore sleeping alumni wake up and the millions start flowing in from all over the Carolinas, or, as always, STUDENT FEES RISE AGAIN).

The sentiments expressed by the athletic powers that be are nice, but let's not be too smug about our progress, gentlemen. For Athletics Director Tom Hunnicutt to say, "We're not doing it because it's the law of the land, but because it's the right thing to do," is taking things a little too far. We didn't see any progress toward equality for women in UNCA athletics until the a federal civil rights office, the faculty and staff, and, finally, the committee made up of officials from peer institutions all said that we had to eliminate the preferential treatment given to men, so preferential, in fact, that UNCA had the opposite male/female ratios to the Title IX requirements.

Still, the bottom line isn't whether or not the people who run a department have had some sort of epiphany on equality, it's the fact that women are, in deed and not just in word, making progress at UNCA. But with the budgetary constraints caused by playing at the NCAA's highest level of competition with almost non-existent outside support, we have to wonder if we can ever reach Associate Vice-Chancellor Tom Cochran's goal of "zero disparity."

Pray for sunshine

Only a month before the May 16 commencement ceremonies, word comes from above about a contingency plan that would move the graduation ceremony to the Thomas Wolfe Auditorium in the case of inclement weather. If it rains, graduating students will only be permitted to bring four guests to the graduation ceremony due to limited seating in the auditorium.

This contingency plan is ridiculous. Heaven forbid (literally) that a graduate may have more than four important people in his or her life who would want to share in this important event. Many friends and family members of graduates have already made expensive travel plans, and have taken off of work to be in Asheville for this event.

Imagine this scenario: Mom lives in Raleigh, dad lives in Nashville, grandma and grandpa live in Chicago, aunt lives in Houston, and they all have spent hundreds of dollars to attend the ceremony. However, if it rains, will the school reimburse each guest who could not attend because the administration did not have the foresight to come up with a halfway decent contingency plan? There is no good reason that the administration should inform graduates about this hair-brained scheme only one month in advance.

This current plan is simply unacceptable. You would think that the administration would have learned their lesson two years ago they barely escaped disaster when the contingency plan site was the Justice Center, and only two guests would have been allowed to attend if it had rained. But they didn't. Instead, they failed to find a building large enough to hold thousands of guests.

There are no acceptable excuses for this mistake. The administration has known about this graduation for years -- it is not a spur of the moment event. It is reasonable for the graduating seniors, all of whom paid a \$50 graduation fee, to expect to bring more than four guests (or at least be informed more than a month in advance about the contingency plan.)

Chancellor Reed and other administrators should make it their full-time job to solve this problem. If they don't, and it happens to rain, all graduation fees should be refunded immediately.

As UNCA enters the fundraising arena, what a great way to alienate the next generation of potential donors.

Time to end the War on Drugs



Chris
Polhamus
columnist

Communities and neighborhoods have been destroyed because of gangs fighting over drug turf. Every year, thousands of men, women, boys, and girls are killed or injured due to drug-related crime. The United States government invested \$15 billion in 1997 through countless agencies and programs to get people to stop using drugs. Yet every year more people are incarcerated for drug-related crime. The never-ending issue of prison overcrowding can be linked to drug use and the fact that these substances are illegal.

The current amounts of violence witnessed on the streets of America are not unlike those that existed during the alcohol prohibition years, according to a 1992 issue of *Forbes* magazine. The rise of organized crime and violence on our city streets forced the legislature to overturn a Constitutional amendment to correct the problems of alcohol-related crime.

The "War on Drugs," according to a study conducted in 1997, has actually increased the crime rate due to the shifting of resources from fighting non-drug crime to fighting drugs. Actually, the "War on Drugs" does not fight drugs; it fights people who use drugs, and, herein, lies the problem. Something in the human psyche desires some escape from the mundane world. Some people write fiction, some

paint abstract art, and there are some who find drugs to be the most effective escape. But due to the nature of these substances, people need them more and more, and we call them addicts. By treating an addict like a criminal, when he or she has done nothing more than smoke, snort, or shoot a substance that has been deemed undesirable by the powers that be, we deny that person the care that he or she desperately needs. At the same time, that same power enjoys a Winston ("No Additives") while sipping on an Icehouse ("Quit, Dump Her, Go Fishing") even though cigarettes and alcohol, independently, will kill more people this year than any of the illicit drugs in use today.

I heard a story a year or so ago about a guy who was doing laundry at a local laundromat. He decided to journey out to his car for a smoke. Someone saw him do this and called the police. He then walked into a store, and when he came out, he was arrested. My mom was telling me about a co-worker who was involved in a car accident. The woman is employed by the state, and, as such, was required to take a drug test and could not return to work until the test came back. The accident was not the woman's fault. Drug testing for a job at Blockbuster Video and Sears and other businesses where there is no machinery to operate is absurd, until

you realize that the government looks favorably upon the businesses that promote a drug-free workplace. However, seldom are all of the employees truly drug-free. Sure, they passed the "whiz quiz," but there are a ton of tricks to pass that type of test. Furthermore, the drugs that are more addictive tend to leave the body more quickly, some within 48 hours, so proper planning can usually ensure a clean test. But after the test, an individual is free to use whatever substance is most appealing until an accident occurs. It is this kind of madness associated with this never-ending "war" that calls for its immediate end. It is time to admit, like Vietnam, that we cannot win this battle. No politician is actively going to call for an immediate cease-fire to the war on drugs, because to do so would be political suicide, so the duty rests on us to pressure our representatives to end this "war." How are we ever going to encourage kids in the inner city that education is important, when they can sell drugs and make more money in three months than the average college graduate can make during his first year in corporate America? The only way to solve the problem is to take the incentive out of selling drugs, namely the cash. We can do this through legalization.

With government control, we can regulate the sale and manufacture of these drugs that so many people feel they need to make it through the day. I saw an article somewhere that said the price for marijuana, were it legal, would be comparable to tobacco. I saw further studies that indicate the legalization of marijuana would reduce the amount of cocaine and heroin use, since most drug users generally go for the

most bang for the buck under the current system. Sure, there would be some initial increase in drug use, but in the long run, as the social stigma is dropped, people will not feel the need to use it. Essentially, the rebellion factor is removed. A Monitoring the Future study conducted in 1992 reported that high school students substitute marijuana and alcohol on a one-to-one basis, depending on the availability of each substance. Since marijuana is generally easier to come by in most locales, students use marijuana. If it were regulated as hard as alcohol, they would have a harder time getting it. The same study also reported that a student is more likely to be involved in an automobile accident after consuming alcohol than after consuming marijuana.

The facts are clear. We need to call an end to the "War on Drugs." What's in it for us? According to a story in the November 16, 1997 issue of the *Asheville Citizen-Times*, the drug industry is a \$400 billion business. All of that money is tax-free. No other industry in the free world is allowed that kind of freedom. \$400 billion taxed could pay for a lot of programs desired by both the Republicans and Democrats across the country. California witnessed a reduction in crime following the passage of its Compassionate Use Act, and the rest of the United States can witness the same phenomenon. As Chris Rock so eloquently put it on his HBO special, "Bring the Noise," "The war on drugs is not about drugs, it's about gettin' more mutha f****s in jail." Let's end the madness of wasteful government spending on another ineffectual program. Call, write, or e-mail your representative today.

Come on and play 'Find the Bigot'



Kenneth
Harrell
columnist

In last week's *Banner*, Reformed University Fellowship campus pastor Berry Stubbs submitted a letter that implied that homosexuality is a sin. Accordingly, he interpreted the Gay and Lesbian Conference as evidence that our current generation is lost. In his article, columnist David Rothman said that Berry Stubbs' position on homosexuality was the result of bigotry and ignorance. The morality of homosexuality is not the issue I want to address in this column. Rather, I think that Rothman is simply suggesting that beliefs other than his own are automatically bigoted. Is it possible to hold Berry Stubbs' position without being bigoted? Is a person who believes that homosexuality is wrong necessarily unreasonable and ignorant?

Let's play a game. I'm going to give you a picture of two people. You pick out the bigot. Man A is a middle-aged man who was reared within an American fundamentalist tradition which assumed that the Bible teaches that homosexuality is wrong. Man B is also middle-aged. Because of positive experiences with many friends who are lesbian or gay, he is easily offended by discriminatory actions directed at people because of their sexual orientation. Which one is a bigot? At first glance, many of us would consider the first man bigoted.

But wait a minute, I intentionally left out pertinent details that should have been available to help inform your own critical assessment of who the bigot is the first man, is

African American and gay, has recently published a well-reasoned book defending his position that homosexuality is not sinful. The second, a respected New Testament scholar, has also published a book that defends the current policy of excluding practicing homosexuals from ordination in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Upon closer inspection, the task of deciding whether Peter J. Gomes, author of *The Good Book*, or Marion L. Soards, author of *Scripture & Homosexuality: Biblical Authority and the Church Today*, is a bigot is not that easy. Because at first I simply described Peter Gomes as being reared as a fundamentalist, you probably assumed that Man A must be the bigot. Yet, it turned out that Marion Soards, the one who was offended by discrimination against homosexuals, defends the church's traditional position. Which information given should be considered most relevant in your determination of who the "bigot" is? My point is that David assumes that an "ignorant bigot" believes that homosexuality is wrong—but is it really that simple?

In last week's *Banner*, David Rothman suggested that a Christianity that believes homosexuality to be immoral must by definition be bigoted. Presumably this was employed rhetorically in an attempt to strengthen his argument that hostility to homosexuality must result from ignorance. Even if it is true that the majority of professing Christians are ignorant and big-

oted, no methodology currently exists that proves that opposition to homosexuality is a function of religious belief. Simply speaking, no evidence exists proving that atheists are more or less bigoted than Christians. Because metaphysical beliefs remain unmeasurable according to current critical methods, strong statements that disregard someone's opinion just because of their religious belief are simply unfounded.

While David's beliefs that gay rights should be legislated may in fact be true, his casual assumption that a reasonable person should agree with him, is unfounded unless his personal belief alone provides the basis for everyone else. To do so, he must first demonstrate why all the rest of us should have faith in his belief. Instead of making this kind of demonstration, he simply discounts the traditional Christian position as bigoted and ignorant. This neatly sidesteps the process by which the Christian tradition comes to its doctrinal positions.

Actually, the Christian faith's quadrilateral of scripture, reason, experience, and tradition is designed to limit bigotry. Maintaining a high view of scripture does not force a critical thinker to endorse any position held by a self-proclaimed biblical inerrantist (or a group of them for that matter), it simply expresses the Faith's confidence that Christian belief requires constant critical reading of the Bible. Believing that the Faith is reasonable is not a claim that all rational people will eventually become Christians, it simply means that Christian faith is not anti-rational.

Tradition is not simply dogma passed down uncritically to the unsuspecting masses, it actually is a safeguard designed to limit a particular culture's ability to determine biblical interpretation for the

Church. This is not to say that the Christian faith cannot change its opinions (it has many times), rather it severely limits any one variable's influence on the integrity of the Christian faith's claim that it represents the gospel on earth. Opposition to homosexuality in the Christian tradition is not necessarily the result of bigotry; it is a well established position that has been affirmed since the beginning of Christian history. This should not cause one to assume that opposition to gay rights is a Christian position. Like most other religious people, Christians are divided on how to live out their faith in a pluralist culture.

Holding a particular belief, regardless of its popularity, does not necessarily indicate bigotry. A bigot would be one who regards the most likely conclusions of evidence to be irrelevant if it seems to discredit what he or she wants to believe. David's assertion that people would not choose a lifestyle that is persecuted is evidence that homosexuality is biological is unfounded. Throughout history, many people have voluntarily chosen to be persecuted for any number of beliefs. Unless David can cite at least one scientifically certified study of the issue, his claim that "homosexuality is biological fact, period" has no foundation.

Since David's article rests sole authority on his personal conviction, his reasoning parallels that of his friend at the bar who believes homosexuality is evil simply because he was raised Southern Baptist. By pitting his own belief against the Christian faith, David sets up a scale which makes his singular belief more likely bigoted than that of a long standing self-critiquing collective tradition.

While I do not believe that David is a bigot, perhaps he should the term more wisely.