

Opinions

The Blue Banner

Editorials

Where to go from here

According to the findings of a recent task force, fewer than half the students who begin their college career at UNCA graduate. Does it surprise you that this isn't exactly a statistic we'll be flaunting in *U.S. News & World Report*?

Why is it that a school revered for its status as N.C.'s public liberal arts college has such a low retention rate?

We can point fingers at any number of factors — location, lack of diversity, lack of majors for the non-artistically-inclined student — the list goes on and on. Do that many entering freshmen really get so fed up with humanities lectures? Is the food in the caf really that bad? Or is the task force going to have to dig deeper for answers?

UNCA is trying to increase diversity within the student population, which means that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to our retention woes.

Some students might be more inclined to finish their college career at UNCA if we had an NCAA football team and received the national publicity of some of our neighboring universities. Football is fine and good, but it's not reason enough to stay in Asheville.

Same goes for most other obvious avenues of change. We can become a smaller school to attract students, but there will always be a smaller school somewhere else. We can offer more majors, but we can't offer all possible majors.

Therefore, communication may be a good start. If we can just get people talking about the issue, there's a chance someone might just come up with something that works. Good luck.

Jump on this bandwagon

If there was ever a time to actually make a change in the development of this university, it is with the bond referendum to be voted on Nov. 7.

Yes, it sounds a bit like your basic political bandwagon, but there actually seems to be an incredible amount of merit to this bond.

We, as an active student body, (which no one can doubt we are) can actually give direct input into whether we want UNCA to maintain its current level of operation (satisfactory, but not up to par) or expand its facilities by almost \$50 million.

So here's your chance, UNCA — quit your yelling and do something productive.

Who knows? The improvement of our facilities might lead to the eventual resolution of other problems as well.

Better facilities might attract a more diverse range of students, allowing an expansion of diversity and cross-cultural learning. Bigger buildings can hold more classes, allowing the university to keep class size down to its current average of 19.

Old buildings will no longer smell like feet, and new buildings will house better lighted, spacious labs and studios.

All praise the all-mighty dollar.

Keep talking

In the interest of improving communication at UNCA, it is impressive and heartening to see such an influx of letters to the editor that respond to and address current issues on campus.

This week's issue marks the record number of letters to the editor published in *The Blue Banner*, and it is thanks to those interested parties who took their time to make their voices heard.

In attacking, supporting and discussing events that occur in our campus community, we come closer to an understanding of how we relate to each other, and a realization of policies and ideas that will work in our university's structure.

The Blue Banner staff thanks you for your contributions, and continues to ask for your input in the spirit of open communication.

Letters to the Editor

Identification

Dear Editor,

Jared Weston, the young man who possibly intended to commit suicide at UNCA on Sept. 24, is my son. My purpose in writing is to correct any misrepresentation and/or misinterpretation of him as a person due to the issuance of a bulletin from the vice chancellor's office regarding the incident.

I fully appreciate the need to protect and inform all students, faculty and staff at UNCA when there is a threat to their safety. However, at the time the bulletin was issued, Jared was already at the hospital (as stated in the bulletin) under an involuntary commitment order. Jared was in no way a threat to the safety of others at the time the bulletin was released. Hence, the bulletin served no valid purpose in terms of protecting anyone.

While a general alert to staff and students to be careful of an incident may have been appropriate, there was absolutely no reason to include Jared's name and personal information. This was clearly an invasion of Jared's and his family's privacy. It is important that everyone know that the gun was never taken out of the automobile and that no verbal or other threats were directed toward anyone. Any intent to harm that Jared may have had was directed only toward himself.

Jared is a most remarkable and caring individual. From toddlerhood onward, people have been drawn to him because of his friendly, outgoing, cheerful and thoughtful man-

ner. He is able to develop a wonderful rapport with people of all ages.

Jared is dedicated to helping others and protecting our environment. He has been very active in both these areas through community outreach programs, Crop Walk, Run for Life and volunteering at the Environmental Center, just to name a few.

The summer after his junior year he was a camp counselor. This past summer was devoted to the Appalachian Service Project and a Hurricane Floyd project.

He has received excellent references from employers. Faculty from UNCA have told me what a pleasant and intelligent young man they found him to be.

While at UNCA, Jared was assigned to write about someone who had a great influence on his life. He wrote, in part, "(the person) has been for me an incredible example of what it is like to be a truly genuine, kind, humble human being... I have never seen him turn someone down or walk away from anyone with a need he could do something about."

This most admirable person is the one my son Jared most aspires to emulate.

My letter cannot undo all the damage that has been done. I hope that all those who know Jared only through the e-mail bulletin about the incident now have a more accurate portrait of Jared.

If you are fortunate enough to have known him before, you had the right picture already.

F. Sue Weston
Mother

Identification

Dear Editor,

In my three years of attending this university, I have never been so bothered by articles released in this newspaper. The recent articles on harassment and diversity are dangerous in their implications toward campus organizations.

First of all, as a co-leader for UNCA-OUT, I am very displeased to be pitted as an organization against our basketball team in a war of who did what to whom.

As an organization, we advocate for our members and help them seek aid from university resources whenever necessary. However, it should be mentioned that the members listed in the harassment article had already sought assistance from UNCA before contacting us about the events that had transpired.

I feel the students have been belittled in all of this by implying it as a "versus" battle between the basketball team and our group.

Secondly, I would like to express that our group holds no ill will in any way toward the basketball team or the athletic department as a whole. Instead of pointing fingers of who is in what group, we should follow a more holistic approach and realize this is a campus problem, not a department problem.

I have heard more than once in

Defending SGA

Dear Editor,

It seems every time I tell someone that I am a senator in Student Government Association they scoff at me, saying "Don't you know that the only reason we have it is because the university is required to? They never get anything done."

I am proud to be a senator in SGA, and I feel that we could accomplish great things, but not by ourselves. If students don't tell us what needs to be done, then there is nothing we can do to help.

Often times, I hear people complaining about everything on cam-

Space for all

Dear Editor,

As members of Equal Access, a UNCA student association dedicated to working with students with disabilities, we are concerned that students with disabilities were not included in the diversity forum. It is important that students with disabilities be included in the diversity conversation at UNCA.

passing conversations around me on this campus of the dislike and outright hatred at times of students toward many minority groups beyond our fellow gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students.

Let us make sure our focus is where it needs to be. How is our student population as a whole interacting with and understanding one another?

"I do not think harassment is a problem on campus. From what I can tell, the incidences that occurred this semester are relatively rare," said Ryan Southern in the Sept. 28 issue of *The Blue Banner*.

SGA's president's response to this entire situation is probably the most disturbing of all. Not all students feel they have the support from other students to come forward and make their harassment situations known, while others are outright scared of publicizing their name for fear of retaliation by the original perpetrator.

I have to say, after seeing comments like that from our SGA leader, who can blame them? Nine harassment cases have been reported this semester alone.

Without any doubt, I see this as an increasing climate of intolerance. I would like to know when this will be seen as a problem on our campus by our SGA president.

Joshua L. Kumm
Senior, psychology major

pus from computer labs to building hours to the cafeteria meal plan, but how often do these people seek out a SGA representative to tell them their views and what we could do to make the campus a better place?

How many people know how to get to the SGA office, or where the SGA suggestions box is located? Students at UNCA have a responsibility as well to inform SGA when there is a problem.

Please, students, take advantage of us. The whole reason we exist is for you.

Jenny Bowen
Sophomore, multimedia arts and sciences

We would also like to express our concern regarding the harassment of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students on this campus, and express our solidarity with those students.

It is important that all students at UNCA are honored and respected. This campus needs to be a safe space for all members of its community.

UNCA Equal Access
A campus organization

Acknowledgement

Dear Editor,

I am writing this letter regarding the reports of harassment occurring on our campus recently. Members of the UNCA athletic department have been involved in unfortunate and regrettable occurrences involving other members of the university community. These events discourage the openness, acceptance and joy we all want to experience in our diversity.

As director of athletics, I fully acknowledge the responsibilities the athletic department has to represent the university in a positive and appropriate manner. Clearly, this was not evident in the behavior exhibited recently, and on behalf of all members of the athletic department, I apologize for those actions.

I have met with the persons involved and my staff, taken action and planned education sessions for members of the athletic department to prevent this from recurring. Furthermore, I have reminded our staff and student-athletes that this de-

Yearly event

Dear Editor,

I am writing in response to the two articles printed in the Sept. 28 *Blue Banner* regarding the issues of harassment on this campus. I believe that it is important to start with pointing out that there has been an atmosphere of disrespect and even hatred (in some cases) at this university for years.

The impression that harassment is a sudden concern arising this semester is based on the fact that more and more students are willing to speak up and take action.

Some brief examples of negative attitudes I have encountered on campus include the defacing of signs for the GLBTQ group when I was a freshman. Last fall, UNCA-OUT had signs for meetings repeatedly torn down. As I went around campus and continuously replaced these signs, I kept finding the old ones not only thrown into the recycling bins, but ripped into smaller and smaller pieces.

Last, let us not forget about the flyer taped up around campus in the spring of 1999. For those of you who may have forgotten or are unaware, let me give you the gist of this flyer.

"DO YOU FEEL LEFT OUT...BECAUSE YOU ARE A WHITE HETEROSEXUAL? Non-gay whites represent the majority of the UNCA campus, and yet our voice is not heard. Homosexual and African-American concerns are expressed widely here, AND IT HAS GONE TOO FAR."

These are just a few items to show an atmosphere that discriminates on a continuous basis against mi-

Problem child

Dear Editor,

Whose fault is it that kids today are becoming increasingly problematic?

Everyone is so quick to blame everything entertaining for society's problems.

If kids didn't start smoking when they were young, they would not smoke as adults.

If kids didn't play video games, then they wouldn't have violent tendencies.

If kids didn't listen to music, then they wouldn't be violent.

These statements are a cop out. They are an excuse for people to not be parents.

If Lil' Johnny hadn't played Doom on his PC, then he wouldn't have shot those people.

No, if Johnny's daddy hadn't kept an Uzi under his pillow, then maybe Johnny would have had to try harder to get the firearm, and he might have changed his mind in the end.

Everyone wants to censor everything. Regardless of what politi-

partment has and will continue to support diversity in our actions and words at all times.

Participation in intercollegiate athletics is a privilege, and not one that will be taken for granted or considered a right of any student. One of our goals is to create school spirit, campus pride and enthusiasm for our university. We are committed to doing so in a positive and mature manner that contributes to a healthy and accepting atmosphere on our campus for everyone.

The behavior exhibited should not have taken place, but we must use it as a tool to become a better department with stronger, more mature individuals as representatives of the university. I will do all I can to prevent this or similar behavior from taking place. I will take swift and appropriate action to stop it, and revoke the privilege of participation of those involved.

We value the support of the campus community for intercollegiate athletics and ask that you continue to have interest in our endeavors.

Dr. Joni Comstock
Director of athletics

norities on campus. Indeed, at times the atmosphere leans toward open hostility, and this semester is one of those times. Students have every right to be worried.

I am appalled by comments that show people believe harassment is not a problem at UNCA. Nine reported incidents in the first six weeks of this semester are more disturbing than I can express. How many more incidents have gone unreported?

Silence is a problem at this university. More people need to be willing to speak against prejudices that they see taking place as well as truly listen to differing view points without personal assumptions. The most effective way to prevent further harassment is to change the atmosphere here, and to change the atmosphere more people need to be willing to speak out and listen.

Finally, while it seems to be important that the two young men accused of harassment are basketball players, and as such are representatives of UNCA, I must state that it is dangerous to place special importance on the charges just because these gentlemen are athletes.

The real issue of harassment will get lost in worries of how the university chooses to represent itself. The high number of harassment charges this semester already show poorly on behalf of the campus community at UNCA.

This issue is not about athletes, freshman, or even GLBTQ students, it is about how everyone in this university interacts while respecting and valuing the difference of others.

Julie Witt
Senior, art

cians and district attorneys say, kids who play video games and watch movies grow up normal. I spent many childhood hours playing shoot-'em-up games, and I have yet to shoot anyone.

It is when the parents just leave the kids to the games and never attempt to nurture their children that they turn weird.

These politicians and lawyers who are against these issues are only using them as a scapegoat in order to further their careers.

They know people will jump on their bandwagon, so they act adamant about the causes and start multi-million dollar lawsuits against companies only trying to make a living.

The whiny complainers need to stop whining, take a look around, and raise their children.

Instead of spending your time griping, play catch with your child, take them to the zoo and play games with them. Just interact with them and teach them values.

James Winker
Freshman, undecided

Submit letters to the editor to RH 244 or e-mail banner@unca.edu. Deadline is Tuesday at noon. Please include your name, year and major or other relationship with UNCA.