

Editorials

Thursday, November 29, 2007

Page 11

Fight student apathy, see the AIDS quilt at Western Carolina

A 2004 episode of *Cold Case*, one of TV's numerous police investigation shows, brought viewers to the crime scene against an openly gay man in San Francisco during the 1983 outbreak of AIDS.

The show, entitled "It's Raining Men," depicted flashbacks of the murdered hero's life as he confronted homophobia and worked to curb the spread of AIDS, finishing with the show's usual cheesy musical montage.

Such depictions, while noble in intention, confirm many American's notion that AIDS is a disease of the past—a disease of a distant continent. But sadly, this is not the case.

Last year 19,996 people living in North Carolina had AIDS or HIV, including 404 people in Buncombe County. Others likely contracted the disease but failed to get tested.

The AIDS quilt, a collection of more than 40,000 panels dedicated to individual AIDS victims, helps bring home the personal impact of the disease.

The quilt travels to our sister school in Cullowhee in honor of World AIDS Day from Dec. 3 to Dec. 6.

While our student body supports numerous human rights groups like SDS, ACLU, Amnesty International, SDA and the Student Global AIDS campaign, it often seems the campus body is more interested in the most recent band to rock the Orange Peel than standing for basic human rights.

While UNC Asheville talks the talk of the premier liberal arts school in North Carolina with a reputation for leftward thinking, the student body often falls short of backing classroom discussions with actions.

Traveling to Cullowhee to see this symbol of international compassion gives students an opportunity for action. Hopefully students will shake off the frazzle of pre-exam stress from Monday to Wednesday to support the NAMES Project Foundation, a nonprofit organization that maintains the quilt.

Currently, nurse and outreach coordinator for the student health center Linda Peyeritz is looking to organize transportation for UNC Asheville students to check the quilt out. But as of yet she's the only faculty member interested in driving students. Hopefully, more health and counseling faculty and members of UNC Asheville's chapter of the Student Global AIDS campaign will organize easy transportation to see the quilt.

North Carolina colleges have an illustrious history of supporting human rights.

In 1960, students from Greensboro's N.C. A&T organized mass sit-ins at Woolworth's stores to protest segregation. UNC Chapel Hill served as a hotbed for Vietnam protests later in the decade.

As products of this legacy, we have to cut back on apathy and stand up for human rights.

Earlier this semester, SDS memorialized the U.S. soldiers and Iraqi civilians who have lost their lives since the 2003 invasion in a refreshingly nonpolarizing display on the quad.

This is the trend that UNC Asheville most follow. Hopefully this means that plenty of Bulldogs will make the trek to Cullowhee next week.

Ben Smith
Managing Editor

Gun control still a U.S. taboo

By Laura Eshelman
Contributing Writer



Laura Eshelman
Contributing writer

Despite popular notions, Americans traveling abroad commonly encounter less hostility from others than they do curiosity or confusion about cultural norms in the United States. It is an effort in vain to explain some of them.

The peanut butter and jelly sandwich remains the ultimate, scrumptious staple of energy and protein for Americans. But its significance is lost beyond U.S. borders where, oddly, many people find it disgusting. Still, to really baffle a non-American, bust out the righteous spiel about your Second Amendment rights.

Our infatuation with guns is a bigger mystery to the rest of the world than anything we could put on a sandwich.

Perhaps Americans are simply protective of their constitutional rights and feel the need to interpret them as strictly as possible, while carrying a big stick, just in case history repeats itself.

The purpose of the Second Amendment ensured that the country would be able to defend itself in the event of another revolution, which considering the circumstances in the 18th century, was not unrealistic. But in 2007, it's improbable the Brits will strike again, especially considering that only five percent of the United Kingdom's households have guns versus 39 percent of households in the United States. Also, considering the United States consistently beats the rest of the developed world in annual

gun-related fatalities (15 per 100,000 people, versus an average of roughly six in 35 other countries). Americans kill each other off as efficiently as a foreign army would. In Washington, 31 per 100,000 people are killed by a firearm, yet gun-toting advocates still balk at an upcoming Supreme Court review of whether or not handguns should be banned in the nation's capitol.

It's not that other countries don't allow guns for personal use; some countries such as Finland and Switzerland actually rival the United States for gun ownership percentages. The difference is that they seem to realize that guns are not tinker toys, as evidenced by the fact that all of them require licenses. Not even all states have yet put that into effect.

For example, Virginia laws allow residents to carry firearms with up to 20 rounds without a license, which made it easier for Seung-Hui Cho to legally purchase his weapons two months before his deadly rampage at Virginia Tech. In his native South

Korea, the acquisition would have been monumentally more challenging, if not impossible.

Random killing sprees still occur every once in a while around the world, but only in the United States will several consecutive office and school shootings in a matter of weeks not draw widespread national concern. More distressing than its relative frequency is how much the problem gets ignored in the country which coined "going postal" over two decades ago, and still hasn't gone to lengths to prevent it from being used.

The whole point of gun-control is self-explanatory — it's about control, not prohibition, and there's a reason for it. The tragedy at Virginia Tech is one of many examples of how easily guns can fall into the wrong hands. This is in large part because background checks and restrictions are insufficient, and licensing and registration is not federally mandated.

In short, it is due to a lack of plain common sense. Furthermore, when our forefathers decided that citizens could "bear arms" (an ambiguous generalization to begin with), "arms" at that time meant single-shot rifles and muskets, not semi-automatics. There is no reason why any citizen should be granted the "right" to own a device that could take out a crowd with a couple of squeezes on a trigger. It's asking for disaster, and that's exactly what happens.

In all logic, if the issue was truly about safety, more

Americans would clamor for stricter gun laws to make sure only the most responsible and stable people could access limited artillery. The real issue is about exaggerated insecurity. Without living in a war-zone, Americans still like to pretend that they do for some reason, ergo it is crucial to be equally or better equipped than everyone else on one's cul-de-sac. Whoever keeps the biggest, baddest guns in their closet is obviously the biggest, baddest Rambo of the 'burbs, hence the fascination with killing machines. It's more compensation for lack of assurance than body appendages, though in some cases it is probably both.

There are certainly stranger, more disturbing obsessions than those Americans have with their beloved guns. The convenience of someone whose hobbies may include target practice or hunting is not worth another person's blood, whether that person is a mentally unstable young man or a 66-year-old vice president.

Though the Second Amendment may have a grounded historical context, it's high time to re-evaluate it in a present context, which is scarcely similar to the era in which the founders drafted the Constitution. Regardless of what one's spectrum of interests include, tools meant to cause death need to be regulated, and they need to be more heavily regulated. Unfortunately, it seems that numbers will keep rising before people realize that happiness is not a warm gun after all.

From SGA

School ups tuition for next year by \$98.50

By Tristyn Card
Student Body President



Tristyn Card
Student Body President

I hope you all had a wonderful Thanksgiving break leaving you refreshed and ready for the two-and-a-half week blitz to wrap this semester up.

The final recommendation of the fees committee this year was to raise annual student fees \$98.50 out of the maximum \$98.60 for the 2008-2009 academic year. This puts students' general fees at \$1,615.35.

To catch you up on the student fees outcome, the final figures recommend a \$46.50 increase for the student activity fee and \$18 increase for athletics. The education and technology fee was upgraded by \$19 and a \$15 increase was prescribed for the health services fee. I'd like to clarify how that does and does not effect the mandatory health insurance proposal.

The mandatory health insurance proposal that is currently in circulation is just that — an insurance proposal. Some of us have it, others don't. For those who don't and are taking more than 12 hours, come next fall, we will most likely need to scrape up another \$600-plus to get insured through the university, as a part of the cost of attendance. However, this has nothing directly to do with the health services fee, which goes toward the managing budget of the department.

The initial fee increase estimate

was off by less than \$6 over all from the final recommendation. These adjustments come after research and number crunching, department presentations and input from diverse constituents and students. Then members of the committee that represent the students, faculty and staff of the university, as well as the departments concerned with the fees, discuss and agree upon the final recommendation.

The initial proposal was presented to the Student Government Association for feedback. The SGA held a special session and called for the committee's recommendations to adjust the student

activity and health services by an increase of about \$2 dollars each. The student senate also voted to keep the athletic fee increase at \$14 from the previous year. This was a recommendation made to the committee whose recommendation will go to the chancellor, senior staff and other governing boards for final approval.

Also up for approval, is the Campus-Initiated Tuition Increase committee's recommendation on the tuition increase for the next academic year. The cap for this increase as a part of a four-year plan by University President Erskine Bowles is at 1.4 percent annually, which comes out to roughly \$80,000. Sure, there's a lot to be done with \$80,000 and the committee acknowledged this, asking that should there be a tuition increase, which goes toward student-based and academic needs. Again, this is only a recommendation to the chancellor and senior staff, and it asks for UNC Asheville to forego an in-state tuition increase for 2008-2009 and to raise out-of-

state tuition by \$212 per student, a 2.8 percent increase.

Finally, a look at transportation fees. The SGA passed resolution SSB007-0049, calling for a reorganization of the transportation fee. Currently all students, staff and faculty pay a \$70 parking fee, including those students who don't park on campus and freshmen who aren't allowed to have cars.

The resolution that stems from the transportation committee's discussions, proposes that all students pay a flat \$30 transportation fee and that those upper classmen who choose to drive, purchase a \$70 parking permit. Yes, this increases the total cost for drivers from \$70 to \$100, but it also makes the transportation fee fair to all students and will finance more bike racks, preferably covered, a shuttle and other transportation alternatives and hopefully better bus routes. The faculty senate passed a motion to support the spirit of the bill.

More when I have it, good luck with those exams.

The BLUE BANNER

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The Blue Banner is a designated public forum and welcomes letters to the editor and articles, considering them on a basis of interest, space and timeliness. Letters and articles should be e-mailed to banner@unca.edu and limited to 300 words. They should be signed with the writer's name, followed by the year in school, major or other relationship to UNC Asheville. Include a telephone number to aid in verification. All articles submitted are subject to editing.

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