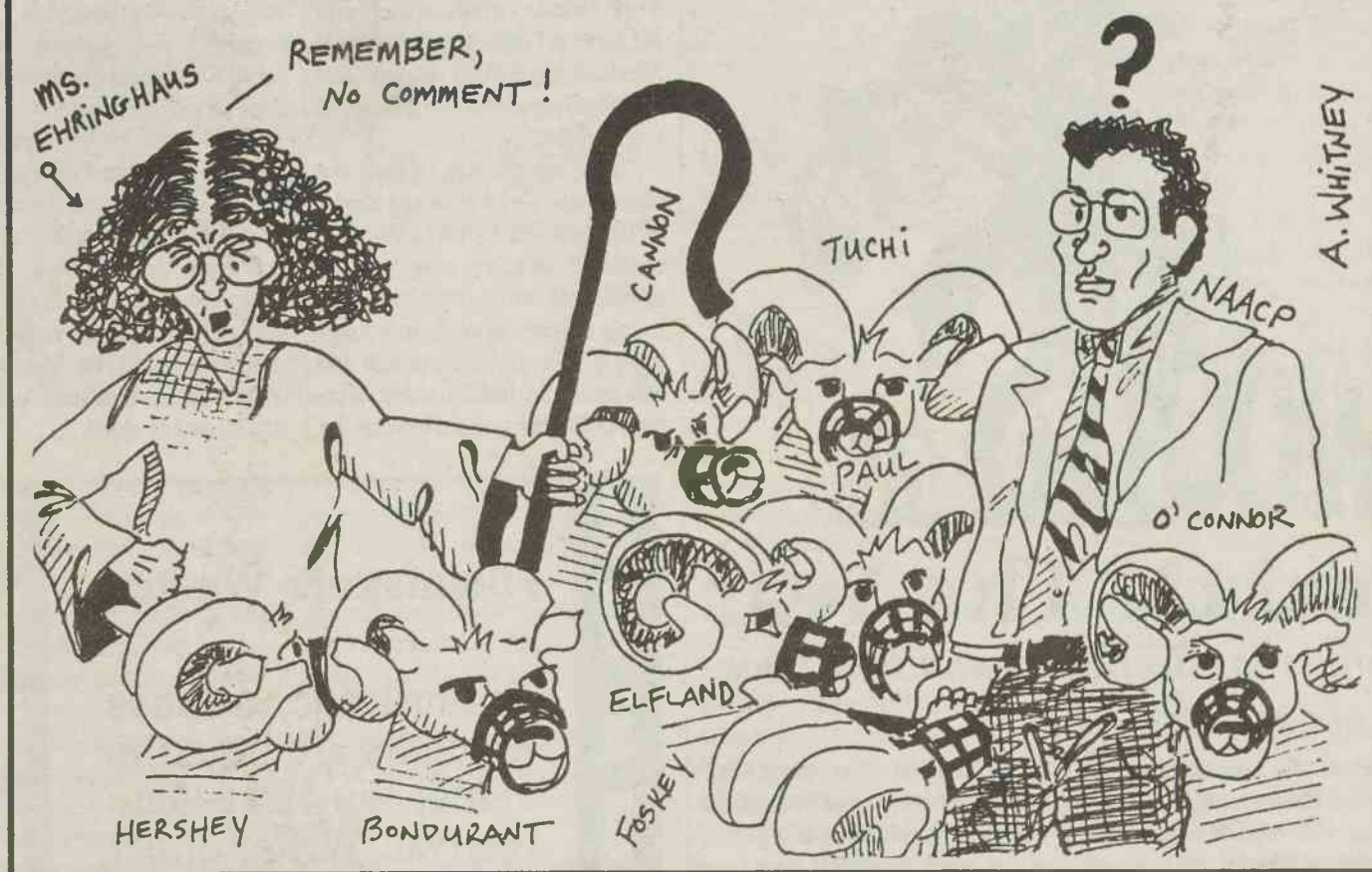


SILENCE OF THE RAMS



UNC-Chapel Hill Under Fire

Administration quiet on subject of federal investigations

By Akinwale N'Gai Wright
Editor

It is no big secret that UNC-Chapel Hill is under investigation by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the U.S. Department of Education for alleged discriminatory hiring and promoting practices and other civil rights violations. But the big secret is the actual investigation itself. How is it unfolding? What is the latest concerning the investigation? If the University is in fact found in violation of federal government restrictions, what will the consequences be to UNC? How much money could be lost? What services or areas will this loss affect? It seems no one at all dealing directly with this federal investigation knows, or is willing to volunteer, any information about these and many other questions on the subject.

A Cover-Up?

Suspicious of a cover-up by the University administration arose when the Chapel Hill-Carrboro branch of the National

Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was made aware of a memo from senior counsel and assistant to the chancellor Susan H. Ehringhaus to nine UNC administrators.

"I write for the purpose of notifying you of those parts of the Complaint that relate to your particular jurisdiction," the memo said. "All responses to the Office for Civil Rights and to EEOC will be coordinated through this office, and any contact that any one of you have with anyone from OCR or EEOC should be referred to me. Bob Cannon, Laurie Charest, and I will be working with each of you to put together the necessary information as well as to coordinate the site visits, should they be held. We will let you know as soon as we receive any further word."

The NAACP subsequently notified the investigating federal organizations of the memo from Ehringhaus.

Ehringhaus said she was not "altogether free to comment on the status of the investigation," nor could she comment on the consequences of the investigation

if the University is found in violation of federal restrictions.

"I can't speculate," she said. "As an institution's lawyer, it would be wrong for me to do that."

Dr. Ben J. Tuchi, vice-chancellor of business and finance and one of the nine administrators to receive the memo from Ehringhaus, said he would be "wildly speculating" if he were to comment on the financial consequences of a cut in funds from the U.S. Department of Education as a result of the investigation.

"There are possibly a wide range of alternatives," he said. "I have no expertise and no idea. The person to talk to would be Susan Ehringhaus."

Laurie Charest, associate vice-chancellor of human resources, was mentioned in the memo as an aide to Susan Ehringhaus.

"I guess I should probably refer you to Susan Ehringhaus as she is dealing directly with the Office of Civil Rights. She is the most qualified to answer questions," she said.

Affirmative Action Officer Bob Cannon, also mentioned as an

aide to Susan Ehringhaus in the memo, also said he could not comment on the subject.

"I can't tell you anything," he said. "I just choose not to."

Keith Edwards, of the University Police, filed the complaint with the Office for Civil Rights that resulted in the investigation currently underway. She said the behavior of the University administration in its handling of the federal investigation was typical.

"Instead of setting an example by trying to solve any problems of racism in the University community, the chancellor would rather withstand the investigation and settle in court," Edwards said. "At the present moment, we don't have any administrators ready to deal with these racial and discriminatory problems. The University administration is conducting itself now the same way that it did in federal investigations of the past."

Although it may be pleasing to African-Americans and other students of color, Physical Plant

workers, professors and other staff to benefit from any action being taken against the University for alleged racial and discriminatory problems, one must wonder who will actually be affected by from any loss of money the University suffers. Budget cuts have already become the scapegoat for the denial or cancellation of minority interest programs on campus.

Women's studies and African and Afro-American studies have been cut and the possibility that the AFAM curriculum may become a department again looks very slim. And the thought of University monies funding a permanent Black Cultural Center seems but a dream. Raises for Physical Plant workers seem even more intangible.

In light of the cutbacks already present, it would be quite interesting to know what the funds from the U.S. Department of Education supported at Chapel Hill and who exactly would be affected, should this money be lost. Although neither Tuchi nor Ehringhaus would reveal this information, it seems reasonable to assume that if the University lost even more money, the already financially-strapped minority-oriented programs would not receive a great deal more money. A double-edged sword, indeed.

In spite of these things, the fact remains that UNC must realize grievances concerning sexism, racism and other complaints by non-affluent members of the University community and staff must be taken seriously. Although large cutbacks of any kind will more than likely hurt minority members of the University community, it is more important that we all suffer these tight times now and look forward to a better future than to sit and allow people to be harassed and threatened in their place of work or study.

