

NC-PIRG takes an active role

By Kathy Neckerman
Staff Writer

The Public Interest Research Group (PIRG) is unique among student organizations at Guilford for its state and national affiliation and its full-time staff members.

It is also remarkable for its rapid growth at Guilford at a time that many complain of student apathy. In the year and a half since the first PIRG staff member came to Guilford to organize, the group has gained a core of active members, with thirty to forty students being a least marginally involved.

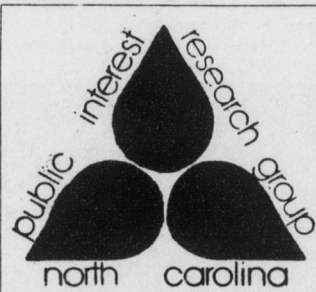
PIRG as a national organization began in the early 1970's as an off-shoot of a Nader-type consumer group. Founded to use student energies on consumer and environmental issues with guidance from a professional staff, the group was welcomed by many college administrations who saw it as a way to channel students' efforts in positive ways.

During the 1970s, the idea gained popularity. PIRG eventually took hold in twenty-six states.

NC-PIRG is one of the smaller state-levels PIRG's. Its annual budget of about \$40,000 is dwarfed by that of NY-PIRG, which spends \$1.5 million a year.

But recently, NC-PIRG has been growing rapidly. Its four-member staff is the largest ever in North Carolina, and a new state office was opened last August on the Guilford College campus.

Why is PIRG growing so quickly? Are students more aware of and concerned about the environmental and consumer issues that the organization tackles? PIRG staffer Art Donsky characterized today's students as disillusioned with big government frustrated by the feeling that they have no influence on social and economic problems. PIRG is a chance for these students to join forces and do something.



with environmental and consumer issues through Biophile, Energy Awareness, and other student groups. Perhaps for these reasons, Guilford's PIRG chapter is one of the most active in the state.

PIRG's staff members are part of the key to the group's success. Art Donsky and Elisa Wolper in the Greensboro office are both hard-working and enthusiastic about their jobs.

Donsky is a recent graduate

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With PIRG, students can get experience with research, writing and publishing reports, press releases, press conferences, and work with government officials, gaining skills that will be useful both in and out of college.

have. One example of the effectiveness of this type of structure is the generic drug bill action. Last spring, PIRG coordinated a survey of 69 pharmacies in five different cities to compare prices of name brand and generic drugs.

This evidence was used to convince legislators to vote for the generic substitution bill, which passed in North Carolina last summer. Now PIRG is distributing brochures providing information about generic drug substitution.

PIRG has been criticized by some as negative, one-sided, and even radical or left-wing. Wolper has observed that many think PIRG has only one stand on some issues such as nuclear power.

She points out that the topics of PIRG research reflect the views of the students involved. In a few cases the State Board may vote to endorse a particular position, but generally students in local chapters have autonomy as far as issues are concerned. In addition, she and others add, PIRG's role is first to provide information on subjects of public interest, letting others decide for themselves what they think.

PIRG aims at balancing research and advocacy. The organization works within an orientation that can be best described by four areas of concern: consumer protection, environmental quality, corporate responsibility, and government responsiveness.

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But Elisa Wolper, another PIRG staffer, attributed the growth to hard work by previous organizers. She and Bill Des Jardins, active PIRG member, aren't as optimistic about the 80's as a time of increased student activism.

While PIRG is unique among student organizations at Guilford, staff members agree that Guilford is not typical of colleges and universities they have worked with. Wolper observed that faculty and administration here are very supportive of student efforts, and that many students were already involved

in Political Science from UNC-G; he has done community organizing with Carolina Action and Georgia Action. Wolper has an Economics degree from Harvard. Both value their work as an important learning experience as well as an opportunity to work for social change.

But both staffers and students are quick to point out that the students are the ones who run the organization. Students make the decisions in local chapters and on the State Board of Directors. The staff member's role is strictly advisory.

Student involvement is

PIRG also offers personal satisfaction to students who want to work for constructive change in our society. Suzanne Sullivan, active in PIRG for over a year, said that the most important thing about PIRG for her was the chance to really do something about problems she saw every day. Bill Des Jardins agreed, adding that a rational argument about an issue can actually have some impact.

Full-time staff members and the network of chapters across the state give PIRG more continuity and power than a typical student organization might

Guilford College Notebook

The French House will be selling carnations for Valentines Day. So start thinking of that special person you've always been afraid to confront head-on and stay tuned for further details.

Anyone interested in working for the Carl Stewart for Lt. Gov. Campaign, please contact Bryan Taylor (294-5232) or Cynthia Dixon (292-9627).

"L'Ardeur" will be presented by the NC Dance Theatre at Wake Forest Jan. 16-19 and 23-26. Tickets are available by calling (919) 723-1666.

GREEN HILL ART GALLERY: "N.C. Invitational Fiber", until Jan. 27.

The Guilford, Rockingham, and Alamance County Democratic Party, along with the county's Young Democrats Clubs, will co-sponsor the first North Carolina Governor's Reception on Jan. 26, at the Carolina Theater. Tickets are \$7.00 for the reception, film ("Casa Blanca"), and speeches. Special reception afterwards will be included for \$15.00. Contact Patty Eckard (852-2068) for more information.

I am interested in forming a support group for students whose parents are divorced or are in the process of getting divorced/separated. The purpose of the group would be to offer the students an opportunity to share with others in a similar situation and to learn ways of coping with what is often a difficult and painful situation. Contact Paula Swonguer, Center for Personal Growth, Bryan Hall, ext. 128.

Nuclear Plant Tour: Energy Awareness is sponsoring a tour of the Catawba Nuclear Power Plant on Feb. 6. All those interested should attend the EA meeting Jan. 27, or contact Steve Lowe (292-3590) or Martha Meyers.

RECRUITING SCHEDULE: Greensboro City Schools, Jan. 29; Newport News City Schools, Feb. 4; Wachovia Bank and Trust Co., Feb. 5.

INDOOR BADMINTON: If you are interested in getting together to play badminton in the gym, please contact Linda Jesse, ext. 182, at the Information Desk, Founders.

The Dance Studio, located on Battleground Ave., is now offering classes in Classical Ballet, Modern Dance, and Jazz Dance. Special rates and college credit are available to Guilford students. For further information, contact Mary McGehee, 272-8484.

Country music's Statler Brothers at Greensboro Coliseum, Jan. 26, 8 p.m.

Steve Rosenberg will present a concert of Renaissance and baroque music with harpsichordist Webb Wiggins and Carol Marsh Rowan, and music instructor at UNC-G, who will play the viola de gamba. Aycok Aud., 8:15 p.m.

Iran! Afghanistan! Energy Crisis! Inflation! Pollution! Armament! Russia and China! Elections! Are you really interested in how your government is dealing with these issues? Would you like to attend committee meetings and meet with Congressmen? Join the Washington Seminar this March. Register NOW at the Center for Off-Campus Education, Frazier 21.

The Bill Taylor Trio will join the N.C. Symphony in the High Point Theatre at 8:00 p.m. Admission will be by season or by single concert ticket (\$6 for adults, \$3 for students, members).

Space and Shape, the third FILM FOCUS: DANCE offering, will be shown Sunday, Jan. 27, 2 p.m., Sternberger Auditorium. The Murray Louis Dance Company is featured.

The Guilfordian has information concerning the Second Annual Kennedy Fellowship Competition. Those interested in graduate work in public affairs contact the Guilfordian, Box 17717.

Do you say yes when you want to say no? Do you have an anxiety attack whenever you have to return something? Are you afraid to put your feelings into words? If you answered yes, you probably need to be more assertive. Learn what this means and how to do it. Contact Paula Swonguer, Center for Personal Growth, Bryan Hall, for information. The program will consist of 6 1/2-hour sessions starting Jan. 23.

Time is running out! If you wish to study abroad this summer with the Summer Schools Abroad, please send or bring your registration to the Center for Off-Campus Education, Frazier 21. You may get this form from the faculty leaders of the program of your choice, or pick one up at our office. We want to enjoy your company this summer.

The High Point Chamber Music Society opens its third season by bringing the Marlboro Trio to the High Point Theatre on Tues., Jan. 29, at 8 p.m.

Janus Theatre presents "Korda at the Janus" through Feb. 14, featuring 19 Sir Alexander Korda films in 35 mm. splendor. For information and show times, call 272-1200.

HUMAN WRONGS IN SOUTH AFRICA: The public is invited Wed., Jan. 23, at 3 p.m. in Founders Gallery, to hear Motlalepula Chabaku speak from her unique vantage point on Third World problems. Chabaku is a South African expatriate active with human rights issues.