

# Students as consumers: rights in the classroom

This week's editorials are devoted to reform of the Carolina classroom experience. In conjunction with the Individual Rights Colloquium, our approach will be to examine students' rights as consumers in the classroom. This, we feel, is a key aspect of a formidable and urgent campus problem. Already there have been serious breakdowns in the present system.

To cite a few examples, the School of Education admitted this summer that it graduated a number of semi-literate teachers every year. The Journalism School gives spelling tests each semester and last time half the students failed. Most Carolina students have only minimal writing ability, but the best English professors teach Shakespeare, not the basics. Men in such vitally important departments as economics are willing to share their knowledge in the classroom, but when it comes to educating the student body through newspaper columns and other media, they shrink from their duty. Last semester, there were 4,418 denied requests for overcrowded courses here at UNC. This semester, over 9,000 drop-add transactions had to be processed in the single hectic week now allotted.

This list could be continued, but we should note that it doesn't even include deeper problems such as the way most students now treat college as a four-year, liberal arts employment agency. When studies are important only as a guarantee to a higher salary, little wonder that many teachers are profoundly disillusioned. But students and faculty are always quickest to notice each other's failings. This pessimism and animosity must stop in order to meet the present educational crisis. Together we must rise to the challenge.

Our approach is student-oriented (naturally) and very simple, but it is a concrete beginning. Does the average student get his money's worth from the institution? Are his consumer rights protected? Is the present student-faculty relationship satisfactory? As one may expect, the answer to all these questions is a quick, resounding "No."

In an effort to remedy some of these problems, we propose:

- an underground, non-statistical Teacher Evaluation program,
- an end to the inflation of academic credit,
- mandatory department course previews for each semester,

- extension of the drop-add deadline another week,
- a two-level system of course classification,
- a revitalized Honors Program, and
- an end to student meekness here at Carolina.

Articles on each of these topics will appear this week and hopefully will provoke discussion, if not solution, of our classroom dilemma.

The overall effect of this reform package is to move toward a free market system of education by 1) improving communication in the university, 2) adding guaranteed flexibility and variety to the present system, and 3) stabilizing the value of the basic course credit.

We realize the inherent limitations of our policy in this university. After all, colleges as a whole do not operate on a free market basis because few students can, or will, transfer out. Secondly, state colleges (because of low in-state tuition and government subsidy) are not very accountable either to students or taxpayers. Lastly, this unresponsiveness is only reinforced by the size and complexity of large institutions, which mummify all existing practices in red tape. But a free market system can work well within the university, as an automatic mechanism to balance the supply and demand of courses here, and to insure the quality of the product. Students are participants in the educational process, not just stockholders, and as such have certain inalienable rights with the administration.

Students have the right to develop their abilities as well and as quickly as possible, unhindered by the university. They also have the right for their grades to mean something, so that graduate schools can judge them on past performance, not just aptitude scores. Taxpayers have the right to see that their children are trained to be responsible, if not learned, citizens. And finally, students and taxpayers have the highest right, the opportunity to make the existing structure better fit their needs. This is the task before us now.

We encourage response to our proposals, whether pro or con. Faculty comments are especially welcome, if any faculty dare contribute to a student publication. The academic situation at Carolina is now critical, and the *DTH* is a serious forum for discussion of this problem. We urge complete university participation in its resolution.

Gerry Cohen

# Small group making a fast buck

Each day's news carries bigger and bigger stories about the worsening shape of the nation's economy. One of the worst parts of the situation is the widespread public feeling that a small group of people is making a fast buck.

The oil, antifreeze, sugar and coal situations are perhaps the worst. Most Americans suspect that the oil companies deliberately encouraged the crisis to raise the price of oil products. In the last year, for instance, oil companies profits have gone up from 30 to 120 per cent, depending on the company. Business page speculation also indicates the oil companies buried even larger surpluses in their account books to make themselves look less greedy.

The antifreeze crisis was pure corporate ripoff. One company, holding eight percent of the market, went out of the market. Additionally, one of the major ingredients in antifreeze is supposedly an oil derivative, which might indicate a 50 per cent jump in the price of that one component for the manufacturer.

But a large part of the price of small quantity items is usually transportation, retail markup and advertising, and the cost of the ingredient is small.

With only an eight per cent drop in production capacity (and we don't know if all that capacity was even used last year), why should prices rise from \$2.50 a gallon to almost \$8?

In the sugar caper, sugar prices at the wholesale level have risen in the last 11 months from \$13 per hundred pounds to \$50.

Industry spokesmen indicate a nine per cent increase in world sugar demand, coupled with a two per cent drop in production. Why should this cause a 380 per cent increase in prices? Sources also indicate Amstar, the biggest sugar producer, will report a 1,128 per cent increase in profits this year.

The American people seem willing to make sacrifices to fight inflation. But small groups of people should not be able to profiteer. The commodity exchanges, which were designed to

stabilize world markets and assist farmers, have become a tool of the rip-offers.

Big financiers and Arab interests have apparently used their financial reserves to bid up the price of sugar in a possibly contrived panic.

The working man is asked to take the brunt of the attack. In the last year, coal prices have gone from \$9 a ton to \$31, because coal is a substitute for oil. Many of the big coal mines are owned by big oil and power companies enabling them to manipulate prices in a non-competitive situation.

Coal workers have asked for better health and safety conditions, portal to portal pay, and hefty wage increases. Coal executives refuse, saying they will have to increase prices, and consumers would not like the result.

But the demands of the coal workers are not inflationary. It is not a special case. The big coal moguls have

exploited the energy shortage to triple coal prices. They could probably triple miners wages, and have higher profits than in 1973. But they are unwilling to pay the miners by cutting profits, and keeping prices stable.

American society creates many of its own problems by incredible amounts of waste. Spending in unproductive areas, like defense, should be curtailed. While much of the decisions will have to be made by the federal government, such as an energy conservation program, we can do our own part.

To begin with, we should stop buying quarter pounders at McDonalds, with all the cardboard packaging and garbage that wraps it up. This kind of excess is one of the most visible elements of waste in our plastic food society. Secondly, stop buying and using sugar. It isn't dietarily necessary, and we can stick the speculators with big surpluses.

Another solution is a hard one for many Americans to accept. It includes

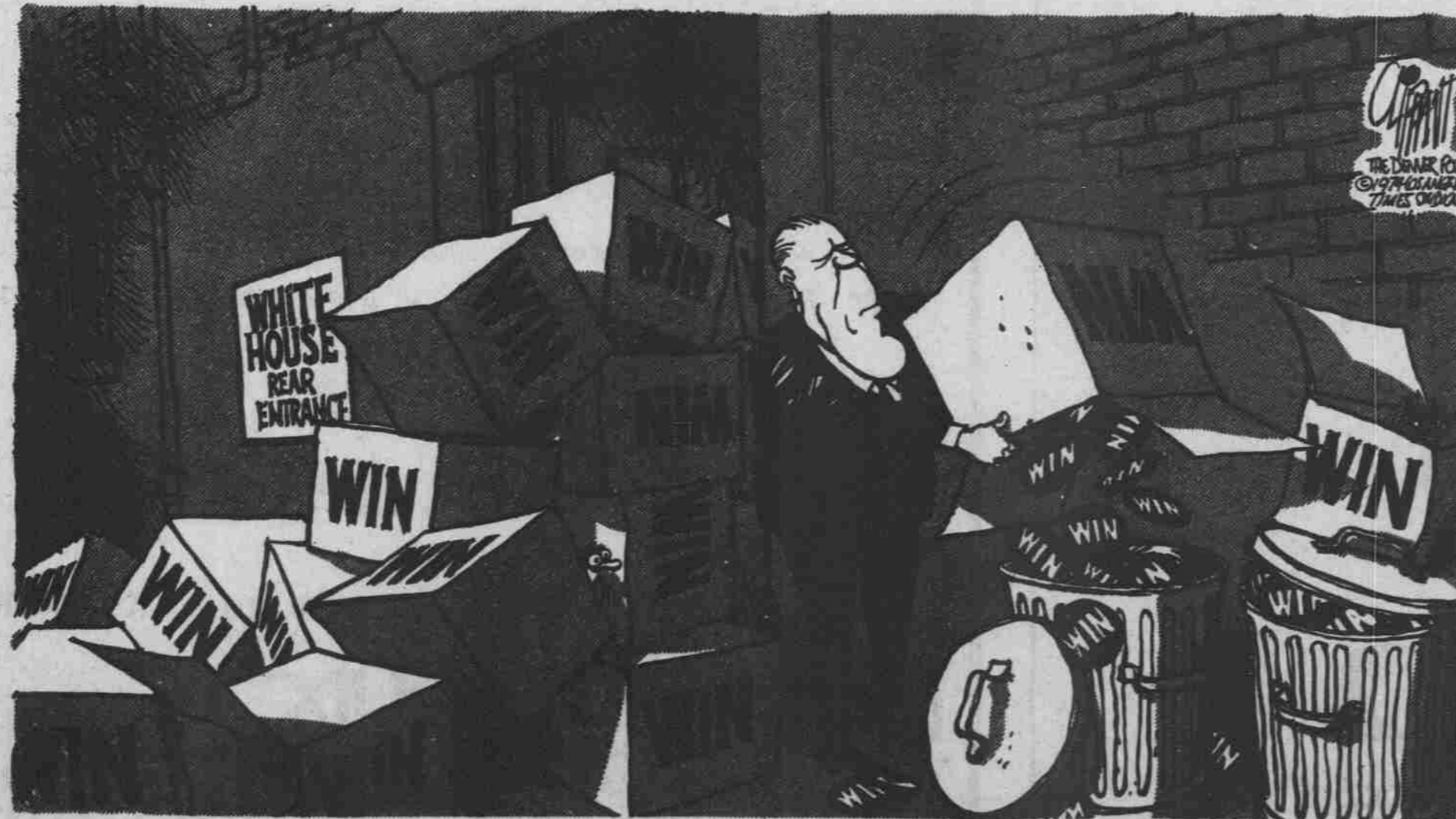
the realization that our capitalist economic system, with its incentives to ripoff, waste, and destruction, is one of the major components in our economic mess.

The energy industries, such as coal, natural gas, petroleum, and all the utilities, should be nationalized. Energy determinations should be made not by profit motive, but by national needs, and this can only be made by the government.

It is, in the interest of the private energy companies to produce, produce, and produce, and manipulate supply for private gain.

But some simple calculations will show that a coal supply of 1000 years at no growth in demand can last only 160 years if we grow at 4 percent per year. We can't let this happen.

Gerry Cohen is a UNC law student and a member of the Chapel Hill Board of Aldermen.



Kevin Roddy

# Criticize, become aware

As Mark Twain once said, you don't know me without having read my "Asleep In the Back of The Bus" and various other pieces that I have had the good fortune, thanks to the *Tar Heel's* unusually lenient literary standards, to have printed on this page.

The discontent that I express is not limited to the subject of education or its by-product, student apathy, but rather embraces and is embodied in the cynical attitude with which I regard Carolina as a microcosm of our faulty society.

If the purpose of my writings is to awaken my fellow students from their slumbers of apathetic ignorance, then I don't think that I'm succeeding as an alarm clock. For most Tar Heels, it is traumatic enough to awaken in merely the physical sense long enough to trudge to one boring class after another, content in their existence as students, convinced that they *must* be learning—isn't that what school is all about?

If it is sheer folly for me to expect to awaken their sleeping consciousness to their mundane existence, then I am a fool. I admit it, and if my periodical attempts at forcing you all to confront a situation that is dulling your lives and corrupting your meager values, then I'm sorry—go back to sleep.

My proposals are many, but the principal philosophy that they embody is rather simple. I fail to understand why so many students are happy and contented in this existence of pseudo-education; of learning, not for learning's sake or for your own benefit, but for the

grade and for the instructor. I am totally disheartened to realize that our apathetic age, successor to the years of awareness, however brief they were, has permeated the existence of everyone.

We may remove Richard Nixon from office for his wrongdoings, then completely fail to see that he is merely the prodigal product of our political system. We can laugh at people like our own Mike O'Neal for his absurd housing fiasco until we finally realize the time (our time) he wasted by being more concerned with his personal ego trip of holding the office, and not caring enough to get around to representing the minions that elected him in the first place.

The politicians that urge us to participate in the political process—to merely be able to vote, it turns out—fail to consider the farce of the elections themselves. We are labeled as apathetic citizens when we don't vote, but what do you do when it comes down to Morgan vs. Stevens? Move?

My cohorts urge me to channel this discontent into positive action within the system, not as a cynical outside observer, but as an interested participant. But cynicism is participation. It is only through repeated attempts will we begin to raise the level of awareness of our fellow students. But I do not feel that we can accomplish the necessary change of reality through the system.

Just as the educational combine has processed all those bright, young

people of yesterday into becoming its "lackey automatons," so will the system operate upon all of us—unless we become aware.

Spend some time taking a good, honest look at yourself and your existence. If you are satisfied with the world in which you live, and what is going on, then stop and look again. But if you are dissatisfied, please do two things.

First, direct your criticism to those who have inspired it. If you are unhappy with an assignment, for example, let the teacher know. Don't just write that paper for your teacher, the way he wants it written, do it the way you want to write it. Wouldn't it doing it for yourself, your way, make the whole process more valuable? Unfortunately, our process of education is still controlled by the educators. But if we, in the process of achieving some awareness of the deficiencies of the present educational system can inspire some of the educators to do the same, then we all shall be better off.

Secondly, please join together to try and raise the awareness of your fellows. Change cannot be effected by a mere few. If conditions must be changed, then it can only be accomplished by a movement, an aware feeling expressed by all of us. If you feel that change is necessary, and, if you all don't feel the same way, I will continue in my efforts to show you.

Kevin Roddy is a sophomore from Troy, Michigan.

## Letters to the editors

# No equality in discrimination

To the editors:

After reading Algenon Marbley's column entitled "Reverse Bias Is A Myth," I decided not to chastise the man, due to his being president of the Black Student Movement. Not leaving well enough alone, on the same day, the *Daily Tar Heel* ran another column on the subject, Tom Rice's "Equality and Institutional Racism."

I have not seen Mr. Rice in print before; his article seemed to parallel Mr. Marbley's, except that he put forward a ludicrous assertion, namely, "Furthermore, it is illegal for such institutions to ignore an applicant's race, if his race, due to no fault of his own, may have harmed his chances of meeting

specific mechanical requirements."

Well, as Mr. Rice probably knows but doesn't realize he knows, Marco Defunis was discriminated against because he was white. If he had been a Negro, the University of Washington Law School would have rolled out the black carpet.

If blacks want equality, why have quotas at all? If blacks feel discriminated against because of their color only, why don't they appeal to the numerous local and federal agencies that are specifically designed to handle this type of discrimination instead of broadly claiming that blacks should be hired or admitted simply because they happen to have dark skin?

Assuredly, we will never eliminate racist beliefs, but by the same token, we will never foster equality by discriminatory measures, regardless of what has taken place in the past. And any way you slice it, reverse discrimination is discriminating.

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'tied' to crime

To the editors:

Kevin Roddy's "Asleep at the Back of the Bus" is indicative of the outright disgust one can safely express for systems on the whole. I agree with him in theory, but unfortunately, find it difficult to practice what he preaches: especially since the paper he used to generalize on the ills of education was mine.

Tuesday morning "the system's lackey automaton" (my teacher) and his diffident students bound me with red tape to a standard (Style No. 475) plastic chair, and stuffed down my throat not only my biographical B.S. on Kesey, but also hundreds of pages filled with the factual garbage of every other dempsy-dumpster department on campus. To further punish me for being an accessory to the crime of Kevin Roddy, I was forced to watch a movie over 100 times, showing a boldface A plummeting into oblivion, my eyes stapled to my brows. Unsatisfied, they devised an "assignment" for me, "now tell the truth about education." Brainwashed as I was, I could not help but submit this letter.

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## Platt's opinions best kept to self

To the editors:

We would like to comment on the depths of ass-ininity he projected in his article "Discrimination Immoral" in the Nov. 5 *DTH*.

We are delighted to know that Mr. Platt has been given the authority to decide who is qualified and who is not as far as entrance into this university is concerned. Considering that he gave no facts to substantiate his arguments, Mr. Platt's conclusions are apparently only his personal opinions, which would have been better off kept to himself.

If Mr. Platt just happens to have enough "intelligence" to use standardized tests as a measure of qualification, then he fails to realize that blacks or any other minority group cannot be judged accurately on the

basis of a white middle-class standardized test. Of course, we don't know what Mr. Platt used to measure the qualifications of every black, woman or other minority on this campus, because he skillfully avoids any factual data. Moreover, if Mr. Platt's allegations were correct, the academic challenge of this university would automatically eliminate all of these "unqualified minorities."

As far as Mr. Platt's reference to the supposedly discriminatory nature of the BSM is concerned, if the activities on this campus were diversified enough to include special interest, there would be no need for groups such as the BSM. The BSM also serves to support the rights of black students, who, because they are a minority group, are often neglected by this "liberal" establishment.

Furthermore, we wonder if Mr. Platt has even had a black instructor or for that matter a black woman instructor. Can you imagine

Rorin Platt in Afro-American Studies?

Mr. Platt audaciously states that "a university which appoints a faculty whose numbers correspond (percentage-wise) to the racial or sexual composition of its students will lower the quality of its education." This is obviously an implication that the mere presence of minority instructors lowers the educational quality of the university. This thought is totally ludicrous, however, if the educational quality of this university has been lowered in any way, Mr. Platt is evidence of what substandard education can do to a person.

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## Ballet marred by faulty sound

To the editors:

Kudos to the good people who brought the excellent "Six Stars Ballet" to Chapel Hill on last Saturday evening. It was an enjoyable experience to see these fine dancers. One complaint: Why can't this great University borrow, buy or rent a decent sound system for Memorial Hall. The recorded music's reproduction for the ballet evening was scandalously bad and must have been difficult to dance to. Surely this is not a difficult fault to correct.

R.C. McLaughlin

## The Daily Tar Heel

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