

Cultural unity with cultural diversity

By JOANNE GORDON
Staff Writer

In the 60s students protested for civil rights and equality in order to break down prejudicial barriers. In the 70s students voiced their opinions in heated discussions to attempt to reduce prejudices; beginning this fall, administrators and 46 students will take another step to dissolve cultural and racial barriers.

It's called UNITAS.

To promote multi-cultural understanding, UNC student government has developed the living and learning arrangement in a wing of suites in Carmichael Residence Hall. UNITAS is similar to current health-science, French-Spanish and German programs. However, UNITAS students will not share a common language or have similar career interests.

Instead, they'll be representing all ethnic and cultural backgrounds, from the biggest majority to the smallest minority, and learning about other cultures, customs, languages and dialects by living together.

"The idea is that you get to know people, who you used to think were different from yourself, better," said Emily Asycue, a Student Government executive assistant and the student coordinator for the UNITAS program. "Then you start re-evaluating all your perceptions about people who seem to be different from you."

The idea for UNITAS originated under 1984 Student Body President Paul Parker's administration. Parker established a committee to explore the idea. The committee originally focused on black/white racial relations. "But," Asycue said, "as the committee looked at problems on campus, they realized that the problems are not just because of race, not just black and white and not just color-based. They are because of the cultural differences that exist."

"We want to deal with prejudices in terms of North/South of the United States, other regional prejudices like Eastern/Western North Carolina, religious prejudices, obviously racial — not just black and white but Oriental prejudices," Asycue said.

"What we are trying to do is to reduce prejudice in these people and maybe start some new things on campus and also to provide an example that people can work together — that groups don't have to be homogenous — all-female, all-white."

Traci Hopkins, a future UNITAS student and a health education major, is ready to live in a heterogeneous group. "People don't realize it, but groups are segregated. This is one group (in which) I can be myself and not be looked at as the black girl in the group."

In addition to living together, UNITAS students are taking coursework. In fact, the course will count for three hours of pass/fail credit and requires students to submit an observational report at the end of the year.

In addition to a weekly two-and-a-half-hour seminar, there will be classes each week. During alternating weeks, faculty members from different departments will present lectures on intercultural relations and students will prepare presentations on issues in which they are interested. In addition, students will be able to

to interact with faculty members at a personal level when faculty speaking at course seminars are invited to social functions.

Asycue and future members of UNITAS say this year's students will determine the future of the program. "Students who are doing this are going to have a lot to say and do about what happens the second year," Asycue said, downplaying her committee's function. "What the

UNITAS committee or the people who worked on it this year will do is provide the resources and information so that the students will have more than just input."

Andrew Moore, a future UNITAS member, sees his function. "I like the idea of spearheading a project like this and seeing how it develops in the future. It's exciting to be a first in a new program of this nature."

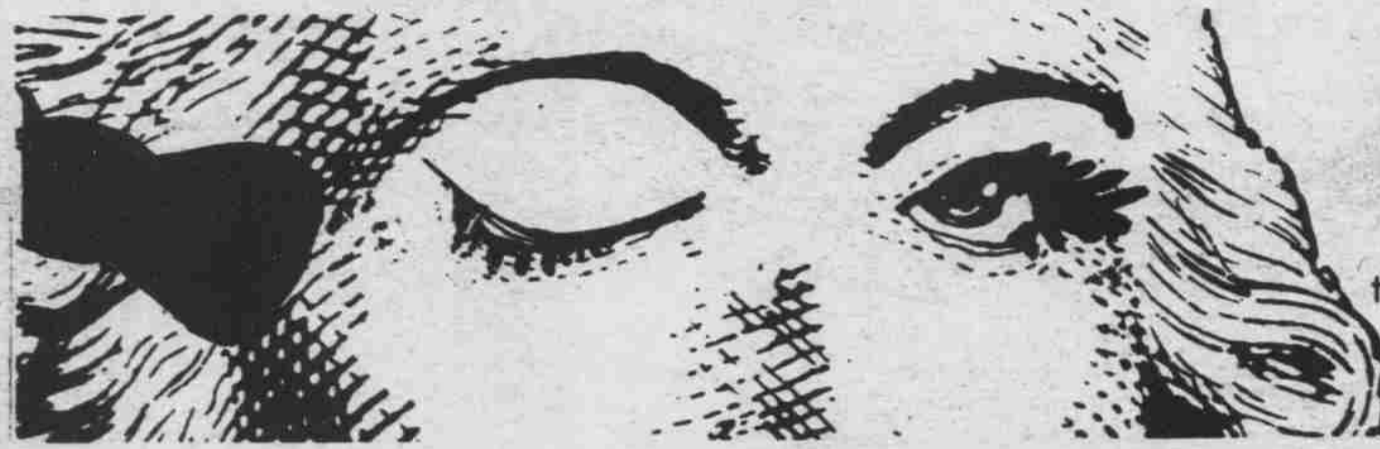
Jeff Cannon, the area director of

housing for Carmichael, said his staff's experience this year with the other living and learning programs will help them anticipate the kinds of problems that might arise.

He hopes that UNITAS will serve as a model for the other residents of Carmichael. "The concept that they have proposed in UNITAS and what they are trying to achieve in increasing understanding of people who are different from others is a

good one," he said.

Editor's note: UNITAS, although printed in all capital letters, is not an acronym. Student Government chose the name for the program under Parker's administration because it was thought to mean 'equality' in Latin. Yet UNITAS does not have a Latin etymology. According to Asycue, UNITAS stands for "this program."



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