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Student firing raises questions

By Sarah Schmidt
COPY EDITOR

The recent firing of a UNCA resident assistant raised questions about the rights of student-employees in North Carolina.

Melanie Rhodarmer, student services manager, notified former RA Benjamin Walsh of the termination of his employment Sept. 12, in the second year of Walsh's employment as an RA.

"Obviously, I was stunned, as it kind of came out of the blue," Walsh said. "I want to know the reasons that led to my termination so I can learn from them and grow as a person. I want to improve myself if I have erred somewhere in my past."

Despite repeated requests to learn why Housing fired him, he still does not know the reason for the action, according to Walsh.

"I don't think anybody has ever just been told, 'Oh, you know, I just woke up today and think you don't fit with the program,'" said Nancy Williams, director of housing and residence life. "My bias is that it is very rare that nobody knows, but I also believe a lot of times it's better to just do what has to be done and move on, instead of just continuing to belabor a decision that can't be rescinded."

According to Walsh, Rhodarmer informed him Sept. 12 that Housing had made the decision to terminate his position as an RA. Walsh said that he asked for the reasons behind the decision and did not receive any.

"The only thing she would tell me was that I was not fitting in, or that they just didn't think it was working out," Walsh said. "When I asked about the reasoning, she informed me that she was not going to tell me, and told me if I had a complaint, then I could write a letter."

Walsh has no meetings with the Office of Student Conduct in the weeks prior to his firing, and does not know of any misconduct that would warrant his firing, according to Walsh.

Walsh's signed agreement with Housing states: "That if the staff member is to be dismissed after periodic evaluation because his/her performance is judged inadequate by the associate director of housing and residence life and the residence life coordinator, the staff member will be notified of his/her dismissal at least two weeks in advance. When the staff member has broken a university regulation, deemed to be of harm to the residence hall community, and/or fails to meet the obligations and conditions of this agreement, he/she may be dismissed immediately."

Walsh wrote a formal letter of inquiry to Housing asking for the reasons he was fired. Carol Schramm, dean of student affairs, wrote back to Walsh telling him that his firing was not subject to appeal.

"The letter went very poorly," Walsh said. "Her response was two lines saying that she believed it was an administrative decision that wasn't subject to appeal."

Both Rhodarmer and Schramm declined interviews.

Williams, who was not directly involved with Walsh's firing, said that employees do not always need to go through a formal conduct

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Rising above the call



CONTRIBUTED BY MEGAN GRAY

Elyse Fuller and Jennifer Nicolini, undeclared freshman, sort through donation boxes in Ocean Springs, Miss. They were among 19 students from UNCA and AB Tech who spent their fall break volunteering to clean up destruction left by Hurricane Katrina.

APO students spend fall break helping Hurricane Katrina victims

By Melissa Dean
STAFF WRITER

During fall break, while many students went home to see their families, Alpha Phi Omega (APO) volunteered in Mississippi to help clean up the destruction that Hurricane Katrina left behind.

"This trip has made me realize that one person can make a difference, despite the odds," said Megan Gray, president of APO. "Seeing the destruction and seeing the people going out there day after day helping distribute supplies, gear and necessities to the families affected, who continue to work and live out of tents and campers, has shown me human nature at its best."

A total of 19 people from two different schools volunteered to

help with the relief effort, according to Gray.

"There were two active APO brothers and two pledges that went," said Landon Rogers, APO vice president. "Eleven other UNCA students and four AB-Tech students went as well. We stayed on the grounds of the Hearts with Hands command post in Ocean Springs, Mississippi."

Once the volunteers reached Ocean Springs, they were assigned to help out with many different aspects of the relief effort, according to Rogers.

"We were assigned to sort through all of the donations and supplies to create food, water, hygiene, baby and paper environmental science student. "We also had to sort through supplies that

“It created an outlet and a unique experience for those that really want to do more to help.”

MEGAN GRAY
APO president

had been left out when Hurricane Rita came through and throw out the destroyed cases of water and various other donations. The sorting was done primarily in the mornings until we started the distribution line in the afternoon. We had a line of cars come through with survivors picking up the supplies that they needed."

Watching residents come back

to where their homes used to be and finding what the hurricane had left behind was very hard to see, according to Gray.

"We had several people from our group who referred to the area as similar to a war zone," Gray said. "The houses that were left 'standing' were ripped sideways off their foundations. FEMA or other searchers had left spray-painted markers that were looking for people or bodies."

"We saw several houses that weren't searched until three weeks after Katrina hit. We saw some people who were just coming back to see what was left, and the looks of bewilderment, sadness and shock on their faces

SEE RELIEF PAGE 12

Judge snuffs arson charge, student left with community service

By Allie Haake
STAFF WRITER

A judge dismissed the felony charge of arson against Eli Banikazemi on Oct. 5. Police arrested Banikazemi in February for the arson of the Highsmith University Union.

"I would have never come close to doing anything remotely similar to such an action if I knew what was going to happen," said Eli Banikazemi, undeclared sophomore student.

Banikazemi said he is incredibly relieved that the felony will not go on his record.

"The important thing is the felony charge was dropped, and I can still vote," Banikazemi said. "I feel a whole lot better. Felonies are really not good for your record at all."

There are a few reasons why the completion of the verdict took as much time as it did, according to Banikazemi.

"We have been in and out of court for nine months," Banikazemi said. "We've had at least six or seven postponements where we were waiting for a more favorable district attorney or judge. We were also waiting for me to do more community service hours."

Banikazemi, received three drinking citations before the February arrest, said the whole

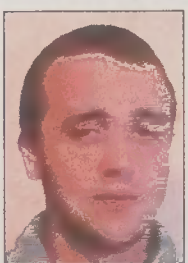
thing started because of extreme boredom.

"Me and my friend were in our room by ourselves watching a Woody Allen movie where Woody gets arrested for doing really stupid stuff," Banikazemi said. "We decided to do something really stupid and ended up getting arrested like Woody Allen."

The reason he chose to start a fire near the building was so the wind would not put the fire out, according to Banikazemi.

"We went out to the parking lot with some napkins to set it on fire," Banikazemi said. "I admit it was a very terrible idea. We decided that the best place was where the wind wouldn't bother it, next to the four-story brick wall of Highsmith."

One student said there was no way Banikazemi would intentionally try to burn down a building. "Eli may have a knack for getting himself into stupid situations sometimes, but anyone who knows him also knows there was no malice on his part in the incident," said Laura Eshelman,



Banikazemi

undeclared junior student. "Plenty of perfectly normal, bored guys in college get into mischief, and he just happened to be one with bad luck."

A campus safety patrol car driving down Founders Drive caught the two freshmen in the act of burning the napkins.

"My friend got scared and started running, so I followed him into Mills and the cop lost us," Banikazemi said. "A day later the cop came to my room and I went down to the station."

At first, it did not seem that he was going to get in very much trouble for starting the fire, according to Banikazemi.

"I gave a confession, and my friend gave one as well," Banikazemi said. "They told me that they weren't going to arrest me, but it was pretty serious and I would have a citation on campus."

Two days later, Officer Douglas Green arrested Banikazemi. He said his time in jail was the worst two days of his life.

"I got there around 2 a.m., and I had to sleep next to a homeless person who had peed himself and had drank about five 40 ounces," Banikazemi said. "So it was the worst smell ever, and I had to sleep on the ground right next to him because it was the only space available."

New UNC president named

By Rebecca Taylor
STAFF WRITER

Students at UNCA affirmed their confidence in Erskine Bowles and his ability to make a valuable contribution as the president of the 16-campus UNC system.

The UNC board voted unanimously to recommend Bowles, 60, as the next president of the UNC system.

Bowles succeeds Molly Broad, who led the system since 1997. Bowles served in the Clinton administration as director of the small business administration and White House chief of staff. Earlier this year, Bowles assisted former President Bill Clinton as U.N. Deputy Special Envoy for tsunami-affected countries in South Asia.

"I think anyone who has held a political position is a great person to be the leader of the UNC university system," said Emily Pomeranz, undeclared sophomore student.

The North Carolina University system currently enrolls almost 196,000 students from its 16 campuses. Bowles was enthusiastic upon his acceptance to take his post as president. At a press conference Oct. 3 he said the past UNC presidents all came from different backgrounds, but each served the state with honesty, dignity and a sense of purpose.

"I can't imagine having another opportunity to have such a positive impact on the lives and livelihood of the people of North Carolina," Bowles said. "You will never see someone who is more excited to be here than I am."

The multimillionaire will earn an annual salary of \$425,000 a year.

He plans to allocate \$125,000 of his salary throughout the UNC system to scholarships and financial aid for students.

"By giving people from his own salary, giving me a glimpse of the type of things that he might want to do while he serves as president," said Holly Ohayon, undeclared junior student. "This also says a lot about his character and that he really wants to make a difference."

In the next three months before his term begins Jan. 1, Bowles plans to visit each of the 16 campuses, talking to chancellors, faculty and students. He also will meet with state legislative members and leaders.

"I definitely think it's going to be beneficial for him to visit all of the campuses because it will give him the opportunity to see what each one has to offer individually," Ohayon said. "He will be able to gauge what needs to be done at each school."

Bowles ran unsuccessfully for the U.S. Senate in 2002 and 2004.

During his campaign for Senate, a portion of his platform was devoted to aiding in the advancement of minorities through education.

This will be beneficial to improving the diversification of the UNC system, according to Pomeranz.

"I think since he worked on minority issues a lot, he will look for the distribution of minorities on the campuses and try to improve that aspect of the system," Pomeranz said.

One of the issues the UNC system is currently dealing with is the desire for some of the universities to branch out on their own as an independent institution. Bowles might be able to take on this dilemma effectively, according to

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