

Campus callers ask alumni, parents to give to school

Ashley Felts

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One UNC Asheville group helps raise one-third of the university's income through donations.

"In times like this, where finances are tight, donations from alumni and parents really make the difference in maintaining the same level of support for the university and the students that go here," **Rebecca Lamb, head of the Annual Giving Program at UNC Asheville,** said.

The Telephone Outreach Program, also known as the student call center, was created to raise money for the university. Students call UNCA alumni and parents of students to ask for donations to support the school.

"The call center opened in the fall. We did a test about a year-and-a-half prior to that, so we did some calling from campus. But, the telephone outreach program as it exists today, started in the fall as a program that runs during the school year," Lamb said.

The call center serves a purpose larger than calling for donations, according to Lamb.

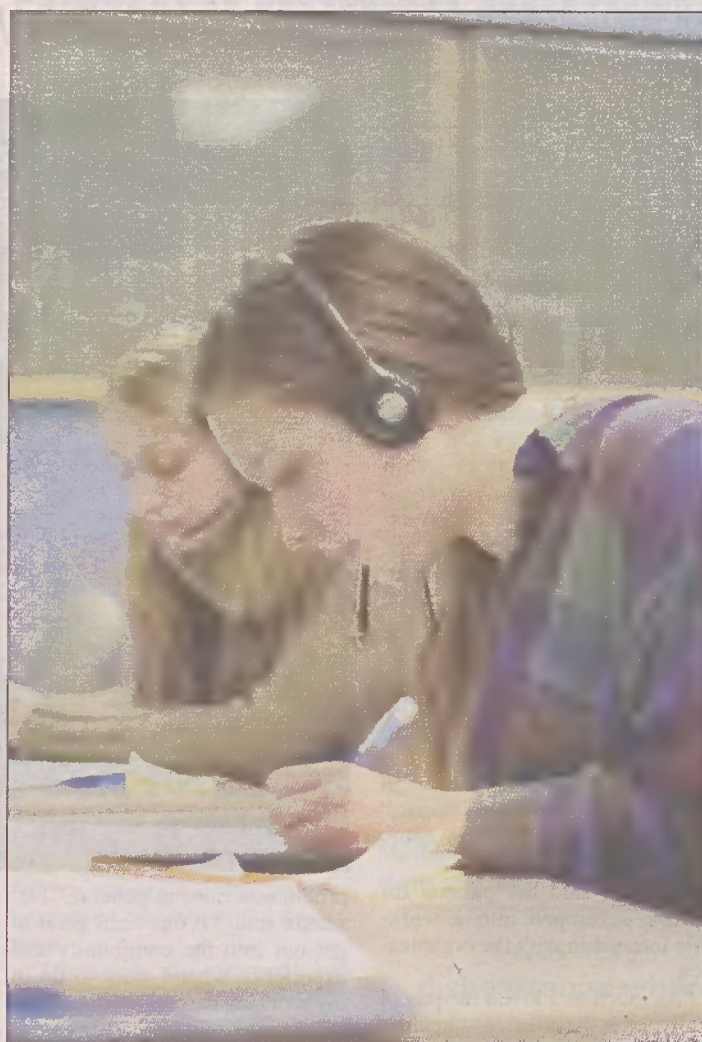
"One (purpose) is to reach out and talk to our alumni and check in with them to see what they are doing. But, primarily, the purpose of the call center is to raise financial support for the university to support the programs and the greatest needs of the university," Lamb said.

According to Lamb, students call instead of telemarketers so alumni and parents feel more connected to the university and will be more willing to donate.

"Our hope would be that talking to a student from our campus, a real student who can talk about what they have seen on campus recently, or maybe has the same major as the person they are calling, that it would be a more effective way than having just a random telemarketer calling," she said.

Alumni are asked to donate to the Chancellor's Excellence Fund and parents are asked to donate to the Parents' Fund.

These two funds are comprised of unrestricted funds Lamb said are very important



Adam Gross - Staff Photographer

Mel Holmes, right, and Angela Diganberadino place calls to alumni for the Chancellor's fund. There are 21 student callers.

to the university. It allows for the money to be used wherever there is the greatest need, according to Lamb.

"This year and last year, there was a significant increase for the need of financial aid because of changes in the economy, and the university wanted to be able to respond to those needs to make sure students had the resources they needed to stay in school," Lamb said. "The Chancellor's Excellence Fund helped provide scholarships and financial aid in that instance, so it really was important."

Follow the money

Lamb said the unrestricted dollars go to many different programs and change from year to year because the university's needs change.

"Last school year, we were able to come up with 87 percent

of the need for financial aid. This year, the number we have been given is 80 percent. When you add that money up, it really is something for people giving \$25 or \$50. Those gifts add up to be able to cover things like financial aid," Lamb said.

Money from the Parents' Fund has supported the Career Center, a beneficial resource for students and alumni, according to Lamb.

"There is software that has been purchased by the Career Center that students and alumni can access away from campus as a way to help search jobs and search careers," Lamb said.

Another center funded by donations was the Intercultural Center, according to Lamb.

The donations also benefit research and provide better technology to the school.

"Undergraduate research, equipment supplies and travel

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expenses are some examples the donations affect. It frequently directly impacts students, but it's also used for broad, general initiatives," Lamb said.

The donations received from the call center also help better the campus by making UNCA more environmentally friendly.

"At one point, it was green initiatives, being able to do the geothermal heating for buildings. This was an added resource to help do some of these projects whether it be replacement windows or more solar heating," Lamb said.

Student callers talk money

The call center is a student-run program, employing 21 students, including a call center manager. On average, about 10 students work a night. The call center is open Sunday through Thursday, according to Lamb.

Rebecca Gordon, a freshman at UNCA, has been working at the call center since November and said she enjoys her job.

"It's a great community. There are lots of very nice people," Gordon said.

Gordon said her favorite part of working at the call center is calling people who are willing to talk.

"The occasional calls we make to people who really want to talk to us and carry on really good conversation," Gordon said. "Sometimes they won't give money, but it's nice to have somebody who really wants to talk to you."

Stephanie Sine, a transfer atmospheric sciences student at UNCA, said she agreed the best part of the call center is

conversations with people excited to talk to the callers.

"It can get a little monotonous, but it's nice to talk to alumni and see how they are doing, see if they are succeeding. And, if they aren't, then what they are doing to fix that," Sine said.

However, Sine said calling parents and alumni is not always an enjoyable experience.

"There is a lot of negative energy from the people we call. Just because of the economy the way it is right now, people are losing jobs or haven't had a job in a long time, or they are unhappy because their major just isn't getting them anywhere, or they are just unhappy about something else. So, they bring that on to you," Sine said.

Gordon said angry people are not a huge problem, but she still gets nervous sometimes.

"It's a little nerve-wracking because it depends on who picks up," Gordon said. "Normally, when people are angry, they hang up on me, so I really don't have to handle it."

Gordon said working at the call center helped her develop social skills, whereas Sine said it helped her confidence the most.

"It has definitely built my confidence a bit because people are turning you down constantly, so that has definitely helped me because I can deal with negative energy. It's not always my fault. It can be the other person and that is helpful to know," Sine said.

According to Sine, calling is not too hard as long as you can keep a smile on your face and cherish the positive feedback you receive.