

"We're Gonna Make It." -- The Recruitment, Retention

By Debbie Baker
Staff

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is considered one of the best public institutions of higher learning in the United States. As the first state university to open its doors, UNC has a long tradition of academic excellence. Chapel Hill is the ultimate college town as students from across the country receive their academic training in hundreds of areas. Among the thousands of students who apply to the University each year, only a select few are chosen to enroll in the freshman class. A certain amount of prestige accompanies every student who is a "Tar Heel." UNC has such a renown reputation that it has earned the nickname the "Southern Part of Heaven." UNC is a "paradise" where one can think, study, be happy—just enjoy the good things in life. A place where people from diverse backgrounds can just be free.

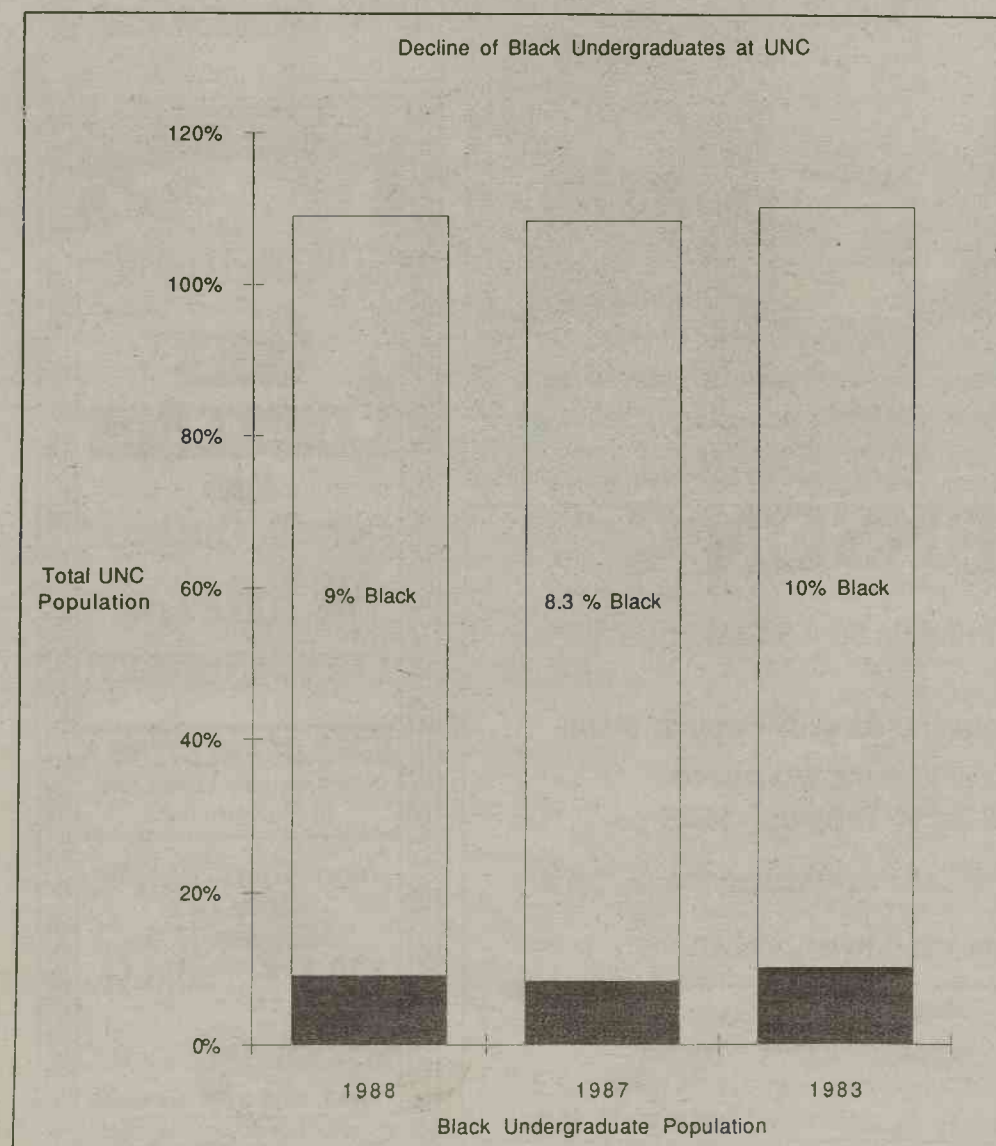
But at UNC, black students are not free.

Black students can't be free, as long as they barely represent 10 percent of a student population.

They can't be free, when there are so few faculty and staff of African descent.

They can't be free because they don't graduate at the same rates as their white counterparts.

But despite the chains of racism that try to hold us back, despite the shackles of disadvantages around our feet, we as black students are going to make it at UNC-Chapel Hill.



The Trailblazers

During the earlier part of the 20th century, state statutes allowed almost all white universities in the U.S. to deny admission to students of color, but especially those of African descent. And UNC was no different from the rest. Class rank and grade point average were irrelevant as white universities enforced "Jim Crow" laws as a way to preserve the status quo.

However, historically, African-Americans who have challenged legal institutional segregation. Certain blacks have refused to participate in injustices and have fought their relegation to second class citizenship. African-American trailblazers helped pave the way for future generations of black students at UNC-Chapel Hill.

Pauli Murray, a native of Durham and a graduate of Hunter College in New York, became one of the first blacks to apply to UNC in 1938. She wanted to do graduate work in the sociology department at the University. She had hoped that the University would abide by the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Gaines vs. Canada*. In this case, the high court ruled that universities must admit blacks into their graduate programs at black universities. Two days after the Court's ruling, UNC sent Pauli Murray a letter saying she had been denied admission. After the rejection, she embarked upon a letter writing campaign designed to raise consciousness about the issue. Although she was denied admission, her protest stirred public controversy, which made it a little easier for future black students applying to UNC.

In 1951, UNC found itself once again in the middle of a segregation issue. For thirteen years, UNC had ignored the Supreme Court's ruling on admission policies. In fact, UNC only admitted students, when a U.S. Court of Appeals ordered them to abide by the Supreme Court's 1938 ruling. The first three black students to attend school at UNC-Chapel Hill were J. Kenneth Lee, Henry Beech and Floyd McKissick. All three had been students at North Carolina Central University's Law School in Durham, N.C., when the ruling came. For a while, highway patrolmen escorted them to class, but eventually publicity surrounding their admission died down. All three went on to become successful attorneys. McKissick became well-known as the executive director for the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) during the civil rights movement and was recently appointed to a judgeship.

When black students go into Lenoir Dining Hall today, they don't need armed guards. And there are certainly more than three black students on this campus. However, the plight of the trailblazers is important, as black students examine what happens to them when they come to school at UNC-Chapel Hill.

Separate but not Equal

The state of North Carolina operates 16 pub-

lic institutions of higher education. All of these public universities comprise the entire University of North Carolina system. The entire UNC system should not be confused with UNC-Chapel Hill, which is just one of the universities within the system.

In 1969, the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) accused North Carolina and nine other states of operating segregated universities in its system. HEW said the states were in violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits racial discrimination at any university receiving federal funding. Each state was ordered to develop affirmative action plans and submit them to HEW for approval.

In 1970, several civil rights organizations, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), sued HEW for failing to enforce Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The organizations did not feel that HEW was pressuring the UNC school system to desegregate. The law suits were consolidated into one case called *Adams vs. Richardson*.

"I testified in that case as an undergraduate at UNC-Chapel Hill," said Rosalind Fuse-Hall, associate dean in the College of Arts and Sciences. "HEW wanted a couple of students to tell about the racial climate at UNC-Chapel Hill, so I did. I told them that the campus was racially segregated and that there was a seemingly racist attitude on the campus."

In 1981, the UNC Board of Governors and HEW finally agreed upon a desegregation plan, which called for minority enrollment to increase at the system's universities. The universities would also have to submit annual reports to HEW, now the Department of Education, on the status of minority enrollment.

Since the Adams Case

The UNC-Chapel Hill Affirmative Action Office, has the task of collecting data on minority students and faculty. The office publishes annual reports analyzing trends in minority enrollment and minority hiring. The office is directed by Dr. Robert Cannon, UNC-CH's affirmative action officer.

Statistics show that from 1983 to 1987, the number of black undergraduates constantly declined. In the Fall of 1983, blacks comprised 10 percent of the student population, but that number had dropped to 8.3 percent by Fall 1987. The decline in black enrollment is ironic considering that the entire student population increased from 12,810 in 1983 to 13,562 by 1987. In the Fall of 1988, blacks made up about 9 percent of the 13,835 member student body, which is still below the 1983 figure.

Dr. Cannon said the number of black students at the University during the past 10 years has been affected by the low number of high