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Silent Hatchet Job, II

Tazewell Thompson recently got UNC's "Tom Meyer Special" — fired with never a peep why. Officials need to come clean.

Secrecy, feuding, layoffs and lies seem to be swirling behind the walls of the Center for Dramatic Art. And it isn't the latest production of an Arthur Miller work.

The dismissal of former drama faculty member Tazewell Thompson just goes to reinforce a lesson the University hasn't seemed to grasp yet — a little bit of openness goes a long way in resolving personnel conflicts. More importantly, a dose of disclosure would acknowledge the fact that the firing of a University employee anywhere affects everyone — and faculty, staff and students deserve to have a voice in the decision.

In a letter to the editor in today's Daily Tar Heel, Tazewell Thompson, a former faculty member in the Department of Dramatic Art, claims that he was terminated and has no idea why. Thompson goes on to allege that acting Artistic Director David Hammond and Playmakers Repertory Company Managing Director Mary Lee Porterfield didn't have the professionalism to hand him his pink slip in person and that they spread false rumors about him. He then claims that acting department Chairman Ray Dooley could not explain to him why he had been fired.

Problem is, none could comment because the matter is a personnel issue. Hammond could say, though, that he had never made false statements about Thompson.

But personnel issue or not, Thompson deserves a full disclosure of the reasons for his firing. And not only does he deserve the 411, other faculty and students at UNC deserve to know the reasons as well.

All have a stake in administrative deci-

sions at UNC. Faculty form professional relationships with colleagues, and firing a co-worker without rhyme or reason does little to promote job security. Students form mentor relationships with the faculty, giving them an interest in the hiring and firing of professors.

Administrative politics surrounding a dismissal is not a new issue. Tom Meyer, formerly a vice provost of graduate studies, was a much-admired chemistry professor let go without any explanation to the public or to those who benefited from his work.

Faculty issues in the drama department seem to be particularly rampant. In addition to Thompson, former Chairwoman Milly Barranger got her walking papers in 1999.

In 1998, popular Professor Susanna Rinehart told one of her classes she was fired due to unspecified departmental politics, not for lack of teaching skill.

And it's interesting that Hammond didn't get fired when allegations arose in 1998 that he had sexually harassed some students. While cleared by UNC and federal officials, the stigma remains, and he's still teaching.

For the sake of professionalism, the University and the drama department should take the lead in a longstanding problem of administrative secrecy at UNC and remedy Thompson's concerns by fully and publicly disclosing the motive for his dismissal.

If the upheaval in the drama department is merely the unavoidable consequence of restructuring and improving the department, administrators should say so. Here's hoping they give him — and us — an explanation before the curtain drops and the fat lady sings.

Got Ads?

State and federal judges should throw out an anti-abortion group's challenge to election laws that make for informed voters.

When people pay to put a TV commercial on the air, they usually want their audiences to know who they are and what they are selling. But if N.C. Right to Life has its way, a different kind of commercial might be appearing on TV screens in the near future.

The anti-abortion group recently filed two lawsuits contesting a number of federal and state rules governing political campaigns. One specific state regulation the group wants to eliminate requires sponsors of political ads to identify themselves and their positions.

Right to Life contends that revealing sponsors' identities prevents voters from focusing on the ads' messages and that the public has no right to know their identities anyway.

"(Politicians) don't like free, robust debate," said Paul Stam, N.C. Right to Life's lawyer. "It upsets the apple cart."

But political advertisements are not, nor have they ever been, about an open and honest exchange of ideas. Like all television ads, they want to sell the audience a product — in this case, a political candidate.

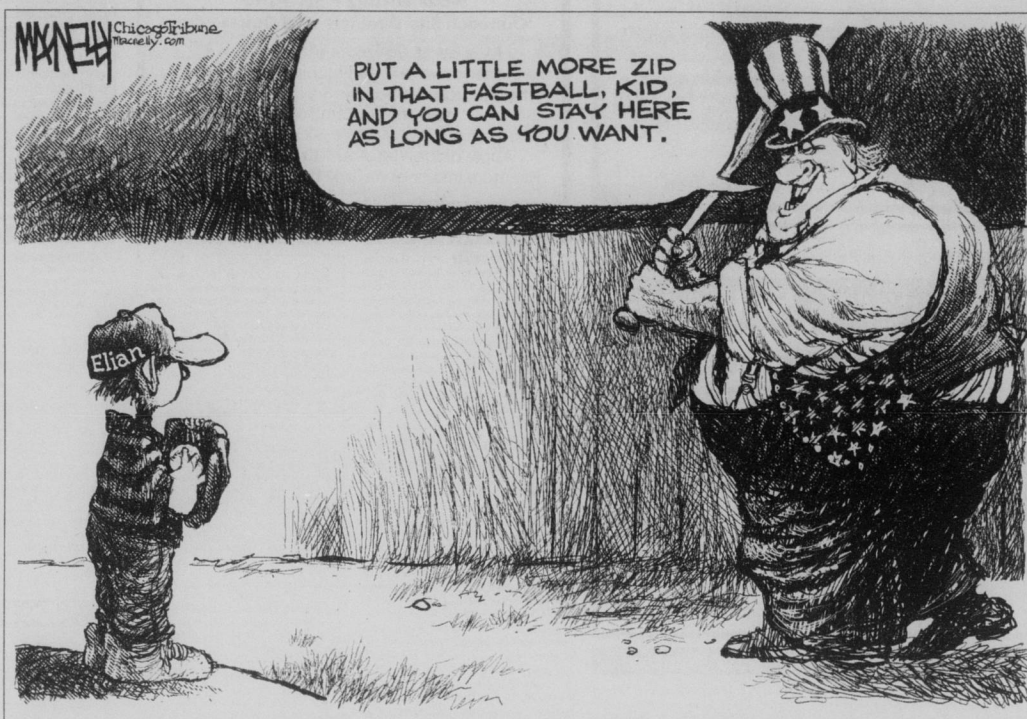
Every other TV advertisement is required to reveal who paid for it. Popular campaigns

such as "Got Milk?" and "Pork: The Other White Meat" are identified as being paid for by those industries' national boards. If viewers deserve to know who pays for milk and pork ads, they also deserve to know who pays for political ads. When any group, whether it be Planned Parenthood or Right to Life, chooses to participate in the political process, it should do so openly and honestly.

Federal campaign finance reform efforts designed to prevent a few rich individuals and groups from exerting too much influence in elections have largely failed. This makes state regulations, such as the one Right to Life wants to get rid of, all the more crucial.

By knowing who supports (or opposes) candidates, voters become more informed. It also becomes more difficult for rich, powerful groups to hijack the electoral process.

Political campaigns have never been level playing fields and to think that will ever change is naive in the extreme. But by insuring that voters are aware of whose money is benefiting which candidate and for what reason, some of the most egregious disparities can be prevented.



Textbook Racket Needs to Stop

I guess now that it's the second week of school, maybe I should go buy some books. It all seems worthless, because every semester ends up falling into the same ridiculous routine.

If you're anything like me, you go into the first day of class with about six registered hours, causing you to sit in on just about any class you can. This process is made even more difficult by the strategy that I personally employ, which automatically eliminates any class before 11 a.m.

After actually getting in a class, I check out the rest of the people in there with me to see if I need to stay in it. If there are lots of people with North Face gear and Croakies on one side of the room and others who are in a lot better shape than me on the other, I know the course isn't exactly going to be Economics 10 with Turchi, if you know what I mean.

So obviously I keep the class and tell myself that I won't show up on Fridays having to suck down a tub of water so I don't Steve Wojowall over the howski.

After this time-tested method of selecting only the most rigorous course load is completed, the most heinous act of attending college is thrust upon me: buying books.

The whole process of buying books is like dealing with a loan shark named Guido — you know that you are getting robbed blind, but there really isn't much you can do about it.

I honestly can't think of any other form of just blatantly taking advantage of somebody being so socially accepted. Student Stores on campus literally sells us a book for \$24 only to buy it back at the end of the semester for about \$4.

They then turn around and sell the exact same book to some other chump for 24 bucks.

Sometimes it gets so maddening that the book stores don't even hide the fact they're robbing you. If you look on the inside cover, many times you'll see the price they bought the book back for, leaving you on the verge of insanity when you compare it to the loot you are about to drop on it.

This leads to the question of how they even got that buyback price anyway.



AMOL NAIK
FROM THE DANK CAVE

What kind of math is that machine which scans the books using? Is it connected to the Pentagon where a team of scientists is fiendishly plotting how to raise money for all these scholarships that Student Stores is supposedly doling out?

Maybe if all the books didn't cost so damn much, so many people wouldn't need scholarships.

But the helplessness doesn't stop there. Sometimes the powers that be don't even give you the option of meagerly taking \$1.25 for a paperback.

These times they decide their gargantuan profits aren't good enough any more, so they publish a sixth edition to replace the \$45 hardback fifth addition you bought just three months earlier.

Don't get me wrong — obviously, updates are needed in classes like chemistry or biology, but in some subjects the reason for the new publication is purely for the bank.

Seriously, do we really know that much more about Genghis Khan than we did five years ago?

The result of this ploy by the publishers is a ragtag collection of works that you couldn't dump, ranging from a health book to an in-depth study on a clan in Macedonia that you never read in the first place.

I don't even know why I hold on to these reject books, I guess I don't want to be stranded the next time I need to know something as relevant as what some sociologist thought the role of the housewife was in 18th-century France.

Maybe the worst thing about the whole sit-

uation is that there really is no way out of the trap. Sure, there are lots of people claiming to save you money, but it seems like they're really just a bunch of hype.

It might just be me, but I have a problem giving out my credit card number over the Internet to a group of people who are running around campus in jumpsuits passing out little rubber balls. Plus, the money you save isn't worth the hassle and inconvenience of waiting for your books in the mail. (Although those rubber balls do bounce pretty high — I think I saw somebody skip one over the Bell Tower the other day.)

So what do we do about this book situation? The options aren't very appetizing, so I say that we don't do any of them. I think that at the end of this semester nobody should sell back any of their books. Think about it: if nobody sold any books back, they wouldn't have the profits from redistributing texts to other students.

I say just sit on your books until next semester, when you can either sell them back to the man — who will be so desperate for books that maybe he'll pay reasonable loot — or switch them off with somebody who needs them and has books for your new classes. While this plan doesn't seem very feasible at first because of its general lack of practicality, reason or planning, I for one am willing to give it a chance.

I guess that's because last semester I only got \$4.50 back for my books — sadly, I'm not joking — which to me is a small price to pay to stick it to the man.

Or I guess if all else fails, we could always rent books. Hmmm ... rent books that you only need for a while anyway, thus saving everybody time and money.

Nah, it just makes too much sense. I think it's better to lose 200 bucks every semester either being robbed on campus or over the Internet.

Don't you?

Amol Naik is a junior history major from Lumberton. Send all inquiries of romance to unc2001@hotmail.com.

READERS' FORUM

Ex-Playmakers Director: Department's Handling Of Firing Lacked Civility

TO THE EDITOR:

I was shocked and saddened by the Nov. 30 notification of my termination as the director of "The Glass Menagerie" at Playmakers Repertory Company. No legitimate specific reasons for my dismissal have been supplied, either to me or my agent, Barbara Hogenson. We remain to this day uninformed of the reasons that apparently warranted my termination.

Indeed, the behavior displayed by some members of the University's theater department and Playmakers are not only baffling but suspect.

It is one thing that David Hammond, the acting artistic director, and Mary Lee Porterfield, the managing director, did not have the decency or civility, not to mention the professionalism, to personally notify me of the decision. But it is a much more than problematic issue that they proceeded to tell certain members of their staff and, even worse, members of the national theater community that I had "withdrawn from the project," thereby putting the production in jeopardy.

This is an outright lie and a complete contradiction of their documented printed statements in their letters to my agent and my directors' union stating that I had been terminated. When I recently arrived at the Actors Theatre of Louisville to direct a play, I was frequently asked what project was so important that I would withdraw from directing "The Glass Menagerie" and break my contract with Playmakers. I am angered at this unconscionable attempt to besmirch my professional reputation which, I am proud to say, is impeccable.

I made initial calls to Ray Dooley, the acting head of the Department of Dramatic Art, and Darryl Gless, senior associate dean, for clarification of the reasons for this decision and the manner in which it was executed. No explanation was forthcoming and in the case of Gless, not even a return phone call. It is inexplicable, to say the least, that the University of North Carolina would countenance this kind of reckless irresponsibility by their theater department and Playmakers administrators.

The pre-production work on "The Glass Menagerie" was right on schedule. It is an understatement to say I was looking forward to directing Tennessee Williams' beautiful and delicate play, making it the fourth time in my career that I would have

done so.

Over the last four years I have enjoyed directing "Master Class," "Having Our Say," "Cymbeline," "The Tempest," "As You Like It," "From the Mississippi Delta" and, most recently, my own play, "Constant Star." All were enormous critical and commercial successes. In fact, two of them were strategically responsible for helping to keep the theater financially afloat. Was the level of this success a problem for someone in the Playmakers or the theater department's administrations?

Playmakers, the University and the Chapel Hill community have always seemed like a pleasant home-away-from-home for me. I looked forward to a long and fruitful relationship with the community. The collaboration had always been, I thought, an equally enriching experience for everyone involved. ... It is unfortunate that certain parties conspired to abruptly put an end to my productive partnership with Playmakers and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Tazewell Thompson
New York City

The length rule was waived. Though he is not directly involved in the drama depart-

ment's administration, Gless said he still tried to return Thompson's phone calls for days but got only busy signals.

No One in Right Mind Would Have Had Classes — But University Did

TO THE EDITOR:

I woke up early Tuesday morning to find the ground covered in the white precipitate we call snow. I quickly turned on my television in hopes of seeing that school was closed. I thought for sure that no one in their right mind would make 30,000 people trek through three inches of snow and at least an inch of ice.

Well, 8 a.m. rolled around, and I called to check the weather schedule and heard that class was still on schedule and everyone was to report on time.

So, I went out to clean off my truck, only to find out that I could not even pull out of my apartment complex due to the amount of ice on the road.

Because the bus runs in front of our apartment I was going to wait for the bus but then called Chapel Hill Transit, and they said that the buses were not going to run today. So I take it I am supposed to

walk 10 miles to school, is that right?

Forty years from now I would be telling my grandkids that I had to walk 10 miles in the snow in below freezing weather to get to school and it would not even be a lie.

I find it hard to believe that schools such as Duke University, Meredith College and even N.C. Central University were closed at least until noon if not all day, yet our "prestigious" University decided it would be better to risk the lives of many students as well as faculty due to the silly notion that the UNC prides itself on being the school that never closes.

Now I understand that Durham and Raleigh might have gotten more snow than us, yet even the one to two inches that we got gave me the chance to witness cars slipping and sliding in front of my apartment building, a situation that I did not want to put myself in.

Travis Dodson
Senior
Communications Studies

Mason Hotaling
Senior
Communications Studies

The length rule was waived.



The Daily Tar Heel welcomes reader comments and editorials. Letters to the editor should be no longer than 300 words and must be typed, double-spaced, dated and signed by no more than two people. Students should include their year, major and phone number. Faculty and staff should include their title, department and phone number. The DTH reserves the right to edit letters for space, clarity and vulgarity. Publication is not guaranteed. Bring letters to the DTH office at Suite 104, Carolina Union, mail them to P.O. Box 3257, Chapel Hill, NC 27515 or e-mail forum to: editdesk@unc.edu.