

The Daily Tar Heel

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Communication Is Key

Now that students are back in town, members of the committee that will select the next provost need to hear them out.

Another year, another search. Another search, more tight-lipped committee members.

If there was a lesson to be learned from last year's chancellor search, it is that openness is essential. But apparently no one was taking notes.

The latest search on the University's agenda, the hunt for a replacement for retired Provost Dick Richardson, remained closed to the public during the summer.

But now that students are back in Chapel Hill, that must change. As the members of the University committee most impacted by the provost's decisions, students should be given the opportunity to take an active role in the process, even as the committee narrows its list of candidates, as sources have indicated to The Daily Tar Heel.

Although two students sit on the 16-member committee, their voices are not enough. Because the provost acts as chief academic officer and sets priorities for the University's academic programs, his decisions have a very direct impact on students' academic lives.

All students must be given the opportunity to speak out, regardless of the point to which the search has progressed. If the committee has indeed narrowed its list down to five finalists, there is still time for students to influence the final decision.

At the very least, committee members must let the students know that they seek and value their opinions. A forum similar to the one held early last fall during the chancellor search should be held so that students can tell committee members what qualities they would like in their next provost.

Once the finalists' names have been released, students should be an active part of the screening process, whether it be by questioning the candidates directly at a forum or by submitting questions for the candidates to answer in the DTH.

Whatever the means, communication between the committee and the students must happen soon.

The academic futures of 24,000 people will be affected by this important decision. The least the committee could do is let those people have their say.

JONATHAN CHANEY — EDITORIAL NOTEBOOK

Due Punishment

North Carolina's decision to crack down on violent inmates was a logical step in its efforts to make prisons tougher.

Serving hard time in North Carolina's prison system just got even harder for problematic inmates.

That's because the state wisely has begun cracking down on misbehaving convicts by removing special privileges.

Under the new rules instituted by the N.C. Department of Correction on Aug. 1, inmates who act out in our 76 prisons will lose television time, canteen trips, visitation, tobacco breaks during recreation, shower time and exercise privileges.

The rules only apply to the worst inmates, such as those who are identified as gang leaders, break prison rules or assault other inmates or prison staff. Up until now, prisoners who acted out were only segregated from the general prison population, and few privileges were restricted.

Since 1994, North Carolina has been less lenient with cutting prison time for good behavior, thus keeping violent inmates where they belong: behind bars. But the stricter laws have had a secondary effect.

Prisoner misconduct has risen since the new laws went into effect. For instance, inmate assault on prison staff jumped 52 percent between 1995 and 1998.

Inmates can no longer look toward shorter prison sentences and quicker parole because of "good behavior." Before 1994, a prisoner sentenced to 15 years could get out in a little more than four years for good

behavior.

Now, inmates are forced to actually serve the sentences handed down to them. And their true violent colors come out when they can no longer anticipate an early release.

But the new rules will go a long way toward making our prisons safer for the men and women risking their lives to work there.

And the stiffer penalties will make life less pleasant for inmates who continue to act out violently, even while behind bars.

The entire point of prison is to punish those who harm society, and coddling inmates is counterproductive to the state's reason for building correction facilities.

If the state makes prisons as austere a living arrangement as they possibly can, perhaps it will entice released convicts to keep out of trouble, so they will not have to return.

It's such an elementary concept, but there is so much resistance to toughening our prison system. The American Civil Liberties Union and prisoners' advocates promise to watch how the new rules affect inmates' lives and say they will not hesitate to challenge the rules if they feel they go too far.

But the bottom line is that the state has been moving in the right direction in the last six years by making sentences stricter and life in prisons tougher. And the new rules are a nice addition.

Remember, we're building prisons, not Holiday Inns.



For Truth, Look Past Propaganda

If there is anything I have learned during my years at UNC, it's that there are several unflinching certainties upon which every Chapel Hill student can depend.

Because of a recent personal awakening, there is one certainty at Chapel Hill that I find particularly disconcerting: The Department of English will forever overlook the writings of the late British author and philosopher C.S. Lewis. Most likely this is because Lewis' ideas and writings are not always politically correct and have an ideological slant different from the "powers-that-be" at the department (so much for intellectual diversity).

The oversight is a loss for students because of Lewis' amazingly light touch with a pen and because of his unique perspective, but more importantly because he writes entertaining fantasy that somehow manages to inspire the reader to serious thought - and does so more effectively than most books that are expressly written to inspire introspection.

It was one of Lewis' harmless-looking novels that forced me to look twice at some of my most basic assumptions. In the first chapter of "The Screwtape Letters," an elderly devil begins the arduous task of teaching his nephew how to poison human souls. The teacher's first advice is to avoid any attempt to use argument or rational debate to divert men (and women) into the embrace of evil.

Screwtape (the elder devil) reasons that engaging a man in true debate can only put his mind in the habit of thinking beyond his immediate experience - which might well lead him to an honest search for truth.

Instead of debate, Screwtape advises his charge to lead men astray with propaganda and diversion. A devil's job, he insists, is not to convince a man that evil is "true," but sim-



CRAIG WARNER HARSH LIGHT

ply to inhibit his search for truth by keeping his mind occupied with what is "modern," "popular" or "pleasurable" instead of what is true. Any effort by man to form a coherent philosophy based on principles (even bad ones) is to be discouraged, because the effort (even if unsuccessful) will make him think.

"Remember," Screwtape comments dryly, "that you are there to fuddle him. The way some of you young fiends talk, anyone would think it was our job to teach."

If the devils exist, they have been doing quite a job of late. I discovered soon after reading "The Screwtape Letters" that many of my own "beliefs" were not based on honest thought but on the effects of propaganda.

I had embraced a lifestyle - not because I thought it right, but because countless magazine ads and music videos had told me it was urbane and pleasurable. I had adopted political positions - not because I agreed with them on principle after examining the facts, but because I had never taken time to notice that they were using catchy slogans to compensate for weak ideas. And I had rejected religious beliefs - not because I thought them false, but because I knew they would be inconvenient if they were true.

My situation is not unique to Americans today. Our lives are increasingly governed not by thought but by propaganda. You very likely believe you have an informed opinion on controversial political issues like abortion and gun control. But is your political view really based on the facts and your principles, or have you allowed the propagandists to scream slogans in your ear until your mind submits?

As an example, a quick test: Do you know what the law actually says about abortion? Most people think they do, but a recent Gallup poll shows that only 11 percent of Americans accurately understand the law. Do you know when the unborn's heart begins to beat, or when her brain waves are measurable, or during which month of pregnancy she begins to feel pain? Do you know what percentage of abortions are due to rape or concern for the life of the mother? How can anyone form an honest opinion without knowing these facts? They can't. And neither can you.

The purpose of "Harsh Light" is to get past propaganda and to glare with unflinching eyes at the facts and conflicting principles that should inform our views about politics, religion and culture. In a democracy, where power and policy flow from our mandate, nothing is more essential than that. We the People learn to think honestly about issues.

I am not unbiased. But I have reached many of my biases through honest thought and conviction, and I'm honored to have this semester to converse (and argue) with you about my biases and yours. But let's steer the conversation clear from the propaganda, eh?

Craig Warner is a political science major from Latrobe, Pa. Reach him with questions and comments at cmwarner@email.unc.edu.

DTH '00-01: Big News, Bigger Goals

Another year, another DTH. But it's not just any year.

The academic term that will see the true start of the 21st century is shaping up to be an exciting nine months, both in your world and ours.

A new chancellor will be setting out to carve his niche on the Hill. Freshmen will serve as guinea pigs in the nation's most ambitious campus technological initiative.

A fresh-faced basketball coach will make his debut as the archbishop of our campus' official religion.

A pivotal election will shape our nation and herald a new era of politics in North Carolina, marking the end of the Jim Hunt era and setting the stage for a hard-pitched battle in Raleigh over the state's voting districts.

And The Daily Tar Heel will be at the heart of it all. Our mission is simple: to keep the University community informed of the issues and events that affect them, striving for accuracy, balance and depth above all.

Rest assured we'll approach all these issues with this mission in mind.

But 2000-01 provides more than great news for those of us toiling away in the newsroom. The year also will see dramatic changes in how we approach the news.

The most significant change is our completely revamped Web site. When daily-tarheel.com is unveiled in a week or so, we will be able to utilize the Web in ways we only could have dreamed just a year ago.

Readers will be able to establish free Internet-based e-mail accounts and planners,



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make their voices heard through polls and chats, instant message others in our virtual community and access a portal to the rest of the Internet. It is mere coincidence that this change is occurring in conjunction with the CCI, but a little luck never hurt anyone.

With a more connected campus, we will be able to run additional content online and provide up-to-the-minute news without fear that it will go unnoticed.

Implementing these changes will take a good deal of work and planning.

It also entails changing how we operate. Instead of getting a story ready to hit the stands the next morning, we will have to think in terms of getting the most pressing news out in a matter of hours. A daunting challenge for any newsroom, particularly a college one.

But just as this campus is striving to stay on the cutting edge of our dot-com society, so is this campus' newspaper. We hope you will find your way to this site once it's up and running and that you find it useful.

We also want to hear what y'all think.

Community relations programs that were begun in earnest last year will be expanded and hopefully improved. Please consider participating in such initiatives as the student and faculty feedback boards and the Association of Student Leaders. Stay tuned to this fine publication for more information.

Let's just think we're getting a bit big for our britches, I hope this year also will set a precedent for teaching sound fundamentals of journalism to our incoming writers and current staff. In the daily push to put out a paper, it's easy to forget the basics. Our staff will work with renewed zeal to establish a firm foundation of solid journalistic habits among our staff before pushing them into higher echelons of the craft. The effect, I hope, will be to avoid overwhelming writers and having our paper boast strong copy across the board.

Finally, don't let my mug fool you.

Beneath the happy-go-lucky visage lies a serious commitment to the ideals that makes this business both great and difficult. It also masks an undying devotion to this newspaper, this campus and this state. The job of editor is an honor I have difficulty expressing my gratitude for in words. It's one I think I can tackle, with the help of my unbelievably talented and dedicated staff. It should, at the very least, be interesting.

With that, dear readers, I welcome you to yet another year.

Matt Dees is a senior journalism and political science major from Fayetteville. Reach him at mdees@email.unc.edu.

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