

## N.C. Action Not in Line With Nation

North Carolina has stood out from the pack, albeit good or bad, in recent weeks as various organizations released studies on topics ranging from SAT scores to the most "family friendly" cities in the nation.

But now the state is making headlines in a different arena.

The Washington Post reported Thursday that the number of executions across the country is down dramatically for the second year in a row. Virginia and Texas, once noted for having the most executions, have shown sharp declines. Some have even speculated that this year, the United States could execute the fewest number of inmates since 1996.

But in North Carolina, statistics tell a different tale.

Last year, the state executed only one inmate, Michael Sexton, according to the N.C. Department of Correction's Web site. The number has already tripled this year with the executions of Willie Fisher, Clifton White and Ronald Frye.

On the other hand, Texas has executed 12 people this year, with six more scheduled – a marked decrease from the record-setting 40 executions performed in the state a year earlier.

The Post attributed the national decline in executions to lower crime rates and public opposition to the death penalty. Several states have passed laws this year making it easier for inmates to receive post-conviction DNA testing, and in Georgia, legislators have halted all executions as they consider whether electrocution is "cruel and unusual punishment."

Further adding to the fury, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor said in July that she believes there are "serious questions" about the current application of the death penalty. O'Connor could have a tremendous impact on the court as it decides this fall whether it is unconstitutional to execute the mentally retarded.

But alas, North Carolina has strayed from the pack again. Last week, Gov. Mike Easley denied clemency for Frye despite objections from the N.C. Academy of Trial Lawyers. The lawyer's group urged Easley to grant Frye clemency – the first time the group has done so in its 35-year history – claiming Frye received inadequate counsel because one of his lawyers, Thomas Portwood, allegedly drank heavily every night of the trial.

According to an article in The News & Observer, Frye's co-counsel, Theodore Cummings, signed an affidavit stating that he ignored Portwood's drinking during the trial. The affidavit also reportedly states that the lawyers failed to thoroughly examine public documents that might have warranted a different sentence in the trial.

But in a press release sent last Thursday, Easley denied the lawyers' claims and said, "the premeditated and vicious nature of this murder leads me to conclude that there is no reason to overturn a death sentence."

One year ago, many had hoped that the state would not even be performing executions.

A legislative committee, co-chaired by Sen. Frank Ballance, formed last fall to study inadequacies in the death penalty. In December, the committee recommended a two-year halt on executions and proposed a bill banning the executions of the mentally retarded.

When the N.C. General Assembly session opened for its 2001 session, legislators wasted no time bringing the committee's recommendations to the House and Senate floors. It seemed almost certain that the bills might be considered this year.

Today, things look a little different. While legislators did pass a bill outlawing the executions of the mentally retarded last month, the moratorium bill appears dead.

Frank Ballance, D-Bertie, told The Daily Tar Heel last month that he doubts further action will be taken on the moratorium bill this year or during the next session. In the meantime, the state is preparing the execute its fourth inmate of this year. Robert Bacon Jr. is scheduled to die by lethal injection on Sept. 21.

Easley could grant Bacon a stay of execution. But given his clemency record and strong pro-death penalty stance, that appears unlikely.

And so the trend continues. North Carolina is again straying from the pack, albeit good or bad.

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# Campus Groups Concerned About Low Funds

By KAREY WUTKOWSKI  
Assistant University Editor

Some student groups are scrambling to put together their fund requests in hopes of getting a piece of the especially small \$11,500 pie Student Congress has to dole out this semester.

While Congress usually has between \$35,000 and \$40,000 to allocate to campus groups in the fall, it has about a quarter of that amount for this semester.

Some student groups are concerned the first come, first serve policy Congress is using to allocate funds will leave their organizations shortchanged.

Congress members say the shortage of funds is a result of last year's Congress not paying the Student Activity Fund Office \$40,000 in operating costs – an shortfall discovered before Tuesday's Congress meeting. Speaker Mark Townsend said half of the \$40,000 will come out of the fall subsequent appropriations budget and half out of the budget for spring subsequent appropriations. These funds comprise leftovers from the annual budget process in February and reversions – unused money student groups must return.

Townsend said the financial crunch is hard to swallow because of the scrimping Congress had to do last year. Congress

entered last year's session with a \$5,100 debt because of previous overspending and a small amount of reversions. "We told groups in the fall and spring (of last year), we'll have lots of money this year – well, we don't," Townsend announced at Tuesday's Congress meeting.

Townsend advised Congress members to approve student groups' requests on a first come, first serve basis. But this attitude has alarmed some group leaders, especially because Congress already gave out \$2,692.86 of its \$11,500 on Tuesday.

Junior Justin Baltzghier, treasurer of the show choir group Lighter Shade of Blue, said his group is responding by quickly

putting together its funding request.

He said the group needs about \$5,000 from Congress to rent sound equipment for its fall show. Without that money, it will have to resort to extreme measures, as they did last year when Congress could not grant them their full request.

"We had to ask the parents of the show (participants) to pay so we didn't have a debt," said senior Michael Troutman, who went before Congress last fall to request funds for the group.

Aidil Polanco, secretary of the Carolina Hispanic Association, said she was satisfied with how much Congress gave her group last fall.

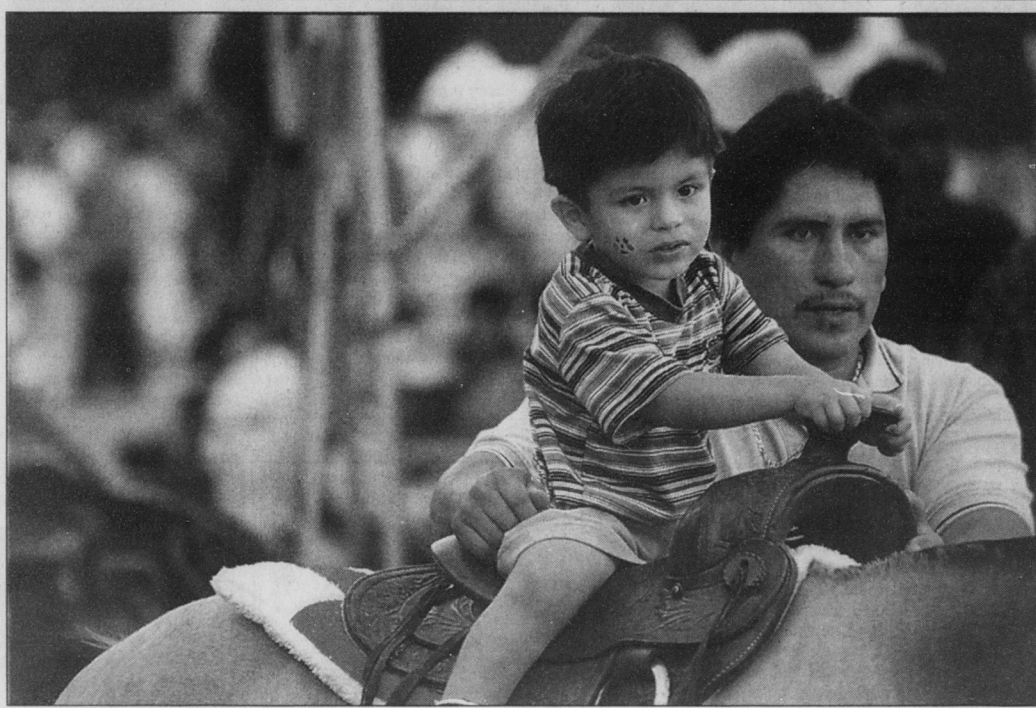
But Polanco said she is concerned with Congress' abiding by a first-come, first-serve basis this year, especially because her group has not yet put together a calendar of events for the year. "It's not fair if one of the groups that comes before you has a less worthy cause," she said.

Polanco also said she is displeased that Congress has not immediately notified student groups of the dwindling funds. "I wish there was some way student government could be bring it to the groups' attention so they can take action on this."

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APRIL BETHEA  
STATE & NATIONAL COLUMNIST



Three-year-old Robert Monroy rides a pony with the help of his father, Laurentino, at last year's Fiesta Del Pueblo on Sept. 9, 2000. Officials are expecting a record-breaking crowd of 45,000, a significant increase from last year's 41,000 attendees.

## CHHS to Host Fiesta This Weekend

Melanie Chernoff, a program coordinator for El Pueblo, said special features have been added to cater to local Hispanics' needs.

By BEN GULLETT  
Assistant City Editor

¡Olé!  
Area residents are gearing up for this weekend's Fiesta Del Pueblo, an annual event promoting Hispanic culture.

The fiesta will be held from noon to 8 p.m. Saturday and noon to 6 p.m. Sunday at Chapel Hill High School.

El Pueblo, the group that puts on the festival, expects this year's event to be larger than ever. The festival will feature prominent politicians along with numerous aspects of Hispanic heritage, including food, art, music, dancing and

other culturally tailored events. Melanie Chernoff, a program coordinator for El Pueblo and a 1996 UNC graduate, said this year's "Festival of the Town" will include a speech by the ambassador to the United States from El Salvador and various political figures.

Chapel Hill Mayor Rosemary Waldorf, U.S. Reps. Bob Etheridge, D-N.C., and David Price, D-N.C., N.C. Rep. Jennifer Weiss, D-Durham, N.C. Sen. Ellie Kinnaird, D-Orange, and Mary Easley, the wife of Gov. Mike Easley, will all attend.

El Pueblo officials said they were expecting 45,000 attendees at this year's fiesta. Last year, 41,000 people attended.

Chernoff said this year's fiesta will feature several new events, including a mobile consulate, or "Matricula Consular."

The consulate, an official Mexican agency that serves the Mexican population in North Carolina, will be providing Mexican citizens with identification cards. "The ID is something

that agencies will accept in lieu of a N.C. drivers' license," Chernoff said.

Chernoff said this feature fits with one of the fiesta's goals: to aid Hispanics living in the Triangle. Census data released last May indicate that Orange County's Hispanic population has more than quadrupled in the past 10 years.

Hispanic interaction with government agencies has increased along with their growth in population, and Chernoff said providing Latino residents with identification would ease relations between Latino residents and government officials.

"This is, in our opinion, a great way to reach the Latino community," she said.

For the first time the Fiesta Del Pueblo will include a public safety fair aimed at raising awareness within the Hispanic community.

"Twenty-five percent of Latino deaths in North Carolina between 1997 and 1999 were

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## Atypical Republican Candidate Joins U.S. Senate Race

Retired physician Ada Fisher said her experiences give her a unique view, primarily concerning health issues.

By MICHAEL MCKNIGHT  
Staff Writer

Ada Fisher is not the typical Republican senatorial candidate – she is a black, Jewish woman who supports stem cell research.

Fisher, a Salisbury resident, announced

this week that she will seek the Republican nomination for the U.S. Senate seat that will be vacated when Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., retires in Jan. 2003.

In her announcement, Fisher, a retired physician, outlined a 13-step program that she said would improve the lives of all North Carolinians.

Although she admits that her beliefs don't always fall within normal Republican boundaries, Fisher says being atypical is exactly what she hopes will land her a job in Congress.

"The founding fathers did not intend for Congress to be the Land of Gentry,"

she said, adding that many members of Congress are millionaires and lawyers. "It would be nice to have some doctors and school teachers and even a ditch-digger or plumber up there."

Fisher, who joined the Republican Party in 1968, said she hopes to gain support from black voters who traditionally support Democrats. "Many blacks are conservative," she said. "Middle class black voters are very conservative."

While Fisher said her views are rooted in Republican ideology, several of her positions differ from the traditional Republican viewpoint. For example,

Fisher said she favors stem cell research. President Bush announced last month that he favors only limited use of stem cells in scientific research.

"I think there are some things the Republican Party needs to do differently if it wants to be successful," Fisher said. "I guarantee you if we came up with a cure for a disease through stem cell research, the Republicans would be the first in line to get it."

Fisher said her experience as a physician serving on the Rowan-Salisbury Board of Education gives her a unique perspective on issues like public educa-

tion, a patient's bill of rights and stem cell research.

But she said raising the money necessary to compete could be a problem. "The costs of campaigns are going to change the system of checks and balances if we don't change the way we look at candidates," Fisher said. "We've degraded (elections) to a 30-second soundbyte. ... That is why only rich folks can win."

Fisher said she hopes to eventually raise enough funds to run campaign ads. "If I raise enough money to do ads, then

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## Filming, Writing, Farming: Professor's Field of Dreams

By DIANA CUNNINGHAM  
Staff Writer

A large poster of a picturesque forest on UNC English Professor Gena Diamant's wall reads, "In every walk with Nature one receives far more than he seeks."

It is an appropriate motto for Diamant, who has high expectations for herself and the resourcefulness to fulfill them.

Even the oddly shaped, chalky rock on the shelf in her office has to serve three purposes – it's a bookend, pen holder and reminder of the beach she found it on.

The 37-year-old American Literature Ph.D. takes advantage of all the area has to offer. She teaches Film Criticism here at UNC, but she lives

on a small farm in Chatham County with her husband and three stepdaughters.

Besides teaching classes and taking care of her chickens, geese and goat at her house in the country, Diamant is now working on a film with the Empowerment Project, which is a nonprofit organization that offers inexpensive film production.

Diamant is collaborating with David Kasper and Carlyle Poteat on a documentary about N.C. painter Maud Gatewood. The film will record not only the paintings of the artist but also the story of a strong woman now in her 60s.

"Documentary is a way to record a way of life

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English Professor Gena Diamant holds a strong interest in film documentaries. Diamant is beginning work on an Empowerment Project documentary.

DTH/KIMBERLY CRAVEN