

Board Editorials

Walking a Fine Line

Faced with budget challenges, University administrators should continue providing departments with flexibility to make cuts and preserving freshman seminars.

As the school year begins, there are certain rites and rituals UNC-system students and officials participate in.

Unfortunately, dealing with budget cuts handed down by the N.C. General Assembly is fast becoming that one tradition everyone wishes would just fade away.

But now that UNC-Chapel Hill has gained quite a bit of experience in dealing with budget cuts and the often-trying demands of the General Assembly, the University is in a position to minimize the damage done to core programs and services even as legislators continue debating the state budget.

One aspect of this year's round of budget cuts is that the heads of individual departments will have control over how to trim the budgets from their own programs. After scrutinizing their budgets, the administrators will determine what can be cut and make recommendations to the provost's office. The provost and other senior University administrators will then review the suggested cuts and try to minimize their campuswide impact.

This flexibility will be a great help in reducing the negative effects on students as the deans are better able to determine what is a non-essential class or position than someone higher up the chain of command.

The most visible aspect of this year's cuts will most likely be a greater number of students per class because of a reduced number of sections. Some classes, like freshmen seminars, have thankfully been spared in this round of cuts. These seminars are a great marketing tool for the University, serve as a vital boost to the intellectual life on campus and help freshmen adapt to University life by providing them with a more open classroom environment.

Another aspect of this year's cuts that will have a serious effect on classes in years to come is the hiring freeze placed on the faculty and staff.

This freeze comes at an especially bad time because the University is about to go through a time when more faculty than usual will be retiring.

Because this is one of the more serious drawbacks of the budget shortfall, University administrators must continue lobbying the General Assembly to fund as many positions as possible.

This further constraint on the UNC system is only a small symptom of a larger problem.

The General Assembly needs to stop sending mixed messages on its attitude toward higher education. On one hand, the state legislature says it wants to make the UNC system the best in the country.

But it remains difficult to see how the legislature will reach this goal — especially when each year brings more budget cuts.

There are some programs and departments at this University that still have not recovered from the budget cuts of previous years.

Though this year's budget cuts will not take a toll as large as initially feared, the General Assembly needs to take a hard look at how it has allocated money over the past three years. The state legislature's primary task is to allocate the revenue collected by the state in an efficient and balanced manner.

Judging by two consecutive years of budget cuts, though, the N.C. legislature has partially failed in its responsibility to support higher education to the fullest. The General Assembly needs to do all it can to ensure that budget cuts do not become a tradition students and administrators have to face each school year.

Crusade for Understanding

University officials, in an effort to expand students' academic horizons, made the right decision to select "Approaching the Qur'an" as this summer's reading book.

Not many people appreciate being asked to do something against their will, especially if it appears to conflict with their own beliefs.

This gut instinct has significantly colored the reaction surrounding the University's decision to select "Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations" as the summer reading book.

The decision ignited a nationwide debate questioning the reading's appropriateness, the separation of church and state and allegations that UNC administrators are trying to convert students to Islam.

In the face of those questions, a court challenge funded largely by the Virginia-based Family Policy Network, political pressure from the N.C. House and acidic criticism from numerous talking heads on television news programs, campus administrators have stood by their original decision.

Good for them. The decision to use "Approaching the Qur'an" rests on one of the fundamental goals of higher education — expanding students' minds by exposing them to a broad range of new ideas.

In the wake of Sept. 11, national polls revealed that most Americans knew next to nothing about the Quran and Islam even though roughly a fifth of the world's population is Muslim. At the time, there was an outcry for more information to determine the reasoning behind attacks that claimed nearly 3,000 lives.

"Approaching the Qur'an" critically analyzes 35 of the oldest and most-often-quoted suras, which are short passages in the holiest book of Islam. The suras are placed side-by-side with context explaining their literary and poetic significance and their role in Islamic culture and history.

Michael Sells, who translated the passages from the

Quran and explained their meaning, wrote in the foreword that the book's purpose is "to allow those who do not have access to the Qur'an in its recited, Arabic form to encounter one of the most influential texts in human history in a manner that is accessible."

University administrators, by finding a reading related to the most significant issue of the day and trying to satisfy some of the public questions raised about the Quran and Islam, are only meeting the public service requirement so vital to UNC's mission as the flagship university for the state.

Granted, it's not a popular decision. Polls reveal that a majority of N.C. residents oppose the reading selection.

But it is not the University's place to kowtow to fleeting public opinion and neglect the weighty responsibility of academic freedom. Some of the proudest moments in University history are when administrators and students stood together firmly, in the face of widespread public opposition, to protest the Speaker Ban in the 1960s and attempts to stop teaching evolution in the 1920s.

University administrators, though, have not ignored criticism. They have responded to public concerns by offering students unwilling to read "Approaching the Qur'an" the option of writing a one-page essay explaining their reasoning.

Most importantly, UNC officials have continued the past practice of not taking attendance and not issuing grades at the discussion sections. This policy, which effectively makes the discussion sections completely optional, served as the basis for a U.S. District Court judge affirming the University's right to hold student discussions.

After all, sometimes it's a good idea to go against one's instincts and experience something new.

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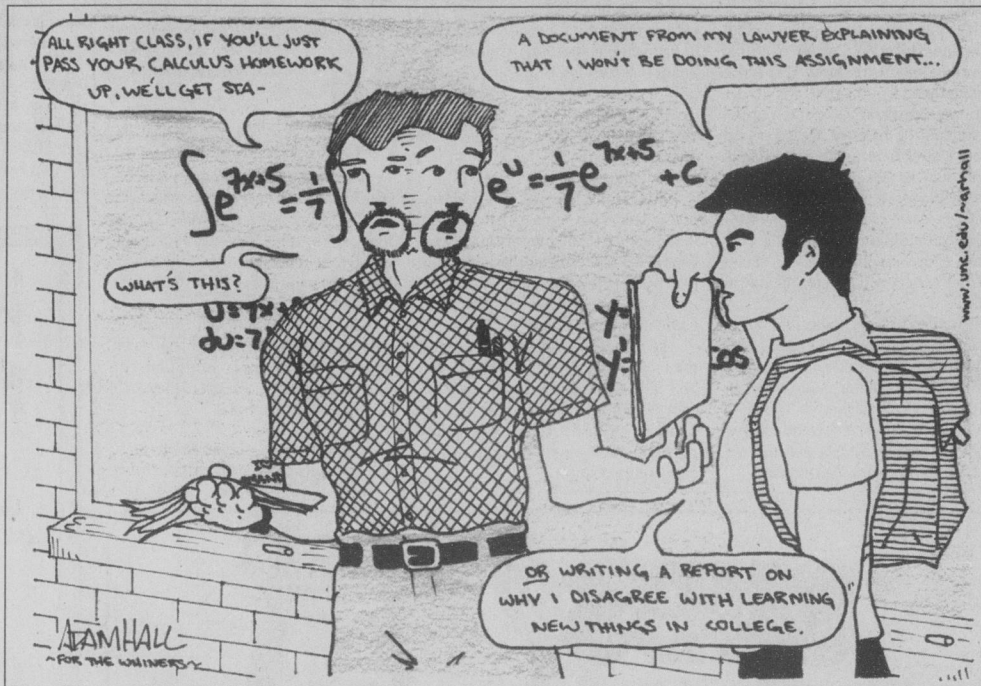
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Summer Reading Represents Chapel Hill's Zoo-Like Nature

Cruising back into town Sunday morning and flipping through the radio dial, I was immediately taken back by the familiar Guns N' Roses anthem "Welcome to the Jungle." As the song blared on the radio, I could not help thinking Axl Rose was singing about UNC.



MICHAEL MCKNIGHT
RIGHT OF WAY

There are definitely plenty of "fun and games" to be found here on the Hill, and while there are only a few wild animals around these parts, wild ideas abound. Over the years, the University has received a great deal of attention for its left-of-center stances on, well, just about anything. The campus is awash daily with student activists who want to free everything from Tibet to convicted cop-killer Mumia Abu-Jamal.

That reputation stretches as far back as the 1960s. During that time, state leaders were debating where to build a new zoo, and popular legend holds that U.S. Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., suggested that the best option might be to simply put a fence around Chapel Hill.

While Helms says he never made the now-infamous "zoo" comment, Chapel Hill's reputation as a haven for hippies and "far-out" ideas has stuck. And the most recent controversy here at the University lends even more credibility to that analogy.

For those of you who have been living under a rock this summer or just in the

dark abyss that is Carrboro, I am of course referring to UNC's controversial summer reading program. This year, incoming freshman and transfer students were asked to read a book entitled "Approaching the Qur'an" by Michael Sells.

The program fell into the national spotlight when a Christian organization filed a lawsuit against the University on behalf of three UNC freshmen who objected to the assignment.

After that, television political pundits from Bill O'Reilly to Robert Novak latched onto the story, routinely bashing University officials for the reading. Members of the N.C. House of Representatives even weighed in on the matter and passed a budget last week that cuts funding for the program unless the University gives equal time to other religions. The move was largely symbolic, but it nonetheless illustrates that state legislators are willing to tug on the leashes of the "animals" here at the UNC zoo when they get out of control.

University officials, along with other self-proclaimed defenders of American freedom rallied to defend the book, claiming they were merely trying to "enlighten" students about Islam and were not in the business of saving souls. University Chancellor James Moeser later dismissed critics as just "blowing smoke."

While I don't think anyone truly believes University administrators are trying to convert students to Islam, I do think UNC officials are missing something by simply writing off criticism.

The nationwide backlash that the assignment prompted is not a sign of widespread ethnocentrism in America as some in the academic left might claim. Rather, it is symbolic of a growing — but largely unspoken — discontent among Americans over the fact that Islamic world leaders have shown little remorse and made few condemnations of Islamic fundamentalists responsible for the events of Sept. 11.

N.C. native and evangelist Billy Graham landed in hot water this week for being one of the first American religious leaders to publicly express this less-than-PC view.

While leaders of Islamic countries have made the obligatory apologies for the terrorist attacks, they have done virtually nothing to curb the tide of anti-American sentiment that has swept these nations since September. Call me Miss Cleo, but I honestly don't see them doing anything of the sort in the near future either.

Until real change happens in the Middle East, I think we can all expect controversy anytime the Quran comes up on the public radar screen.

Michael McKnight really is a closet Guns N' Roses fan, but that's the only closet you'll catch him coming out of. Reach him at mmcknight@email.unc.edu.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The above editorials are the opinions of solely The Daily Tar Heel Editorial Board, which were reached after open debate. The board consists of eight board members, the assistant editorial page editor, the editorial page editor and the DTH editor. The 2002-03 DTH editor decided not to vote on the board and not to write board editorials.

DTH Makes New Goals for Year

Welcome to the pages of the 2002-03 Daily Tar Heel. We're excited to be up and running again, providing you with one of the best college dailies in the country for another year.

Earlier this month our editors met for a three-day retreat to discuss the DTH's goals. We crammed 35 editors into a small room for as many as 12 hours a day to hash out last year's strengths and weaknesses, as well as improved approaches to coverage.

Among other things, we worked out a mission statement to guide our coverage — to be an independent, comprehensive news source that vigorously gathers and accurately presents information that affects the University and its surrounding community while responsibly training future journalists. There are a few other things I should tell you as you get to know this year's DTH. First, and probably most importantly, we're independent from the University, meaning that we get no funding and that we have no adviser.

Because of this, we play a different role on campus than you might think.

We're not a publicity rag for the administration or student government. When it comes to the news, our role as professional journalists supercedes our role as students. We strive to give credit where credit is due and shed light in dark areas.

Many college papers don't cut financial ties with their university because it's a scary risk to take. The DTH is a nonprofit organization funded by advertising revenue — a tough situation in this poor economy. Our papers have been smaller than ever, and we have to make tough calls when deciding how to use our limited space. If you're interested in that process, let us know and we'll let you sit in on one of our budget meetings.

It's also important for you to know a thing or two about our editorial page and the Editorial Board. The news and editorial sides share no connection except that I am the final word as to what prints. I am a strong believer in the First Amendment, and whether I agree with anything being said by a columnist or the Editorial Board, I won't censor it unless it's obscene or

libelous. To maintain our objectivity in coverage, no editors other than Editorial Page Editor Lucas Fenske and his assistant, Jon Harris, have any say in what appears on this page.

The people who determine what goes on this page, in turn, have no effect on our news coverage. Fenske and Harris strictly oversee an eight-member Editorial Board that is the institutional voice of this paper. The DTH editor also sits on that board, although this year I have decided to strictly act as a resource for the board and will not vote when a consensus is being reached. It's just one way I feel I can help ensure that bias does not seep into our news coverage.

That's a very brief introduction to our paper. Our ultimate mission is to serve our readers, so if you have any questions about what we do or concerns about how we do it, please let us know. It is my pledge to you that our doors — and our ears — always will be open, even if we don't agree.

Minugh is a senior journalism and history major from Mission Viejo, Calif. She can be reached at kminugh@email.unc.edu.

READERS' FORUM



The Daily Tar Heel welcomes reader comments. 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.

Editor's Note: Viewpoints, which runs Monday, will be about the summer reading choice. Please submit any op-ed pieces on the topic by Thursday. The pieces can be e-mailed to editdesk@unc.edu or taken to The Daily Tar Heel office in Suite 104 of the Student Union.

UNC Students Should Read About American Life, Not "Approaching the Qur'an"

TO THE EDITOR: Dear Chancellor Moeser, the last time I heard my brother Christopher's voice will be one year from this Sept. 10. As you know, he was among those UNC alumni who perished the next day.

Some time has passed, and my outrage which came after reading that UNC had decided to require the reading of "Approaching the Qur'an; The Early Revelations" has tempered somewhat.

I fully support fair, open exploration and discussion on all issues which foster learning and enlightenment, so long as all views are presented and that leadership bias, in a University setting, is nonexistent. That's higher education's responsibility. This issue, as presented for freshman this year, is clearly lopsided.

Firstly, let me say that it is incomprehensible that UNC is supporting the "required" study and discussion of a single religious belief. Aside from the obvious religion and public institution conflict, this is tantamount to rewarding the radical

elements of that religion. I'm at a loss to understand how passages of Islamic belief and subsequent discussions will authentically enlighten freshmen, specifically with relevancy to 9/11.

I will suggest that perhaps there would be more relevancy in reading the Declaration of Independence, Bill of Rights and perhaps the New York Times' "Portraits, 9/11," which portrays the lives of those who were murdered by Islamic extremists last September. The profiles are of men and women from various religions, cultures and nations. They are people who worked as cooks, window washers, service personnel, leaders of industry, as well as religious leaders and also include UNC alumni. How much more appropriate to read of and then discuss the lives of those who were a part of us, who worked to make the "American Dream."

Secondly, the University's decision to put the onus on a freshman to decide to explain their objection to this institution's directive, I believe, is cowardly and the attempt by UNC to absolve itself of developing an all-inclusive opportunity for dialogue on this subject, is inexcusable. I know of one incoming freshman whose older brother died along with mine. I hope you take as much concern for his needs as with those of the faculty who support this inappropriate response.

Michael Quackenbush
Class of 1977

The length rule was waived.