

BOARD EDITORIALS

UNDESERVED RIGHT

UNC students should have better access to various levels of town government, but they have not yet earned a right to representation.

The fact of the matter is, representation in town affairs is not the God-given right of the UNC student body.

Students, being such a large part of the Chapel Hill population, should without a doubt have a voice in local politics.

But while Chapel Hill Town Council members should make local government more accessible, the student body must earn the right to bring its voice to the table.

Town Council members responded to pressure from students by deciding Monday to study ways in which student involvement could be increased in the affairs of town government.

Frances Ferris, UNC's student body secretary, delivered in November a petition that suggested ways in which Chapel Hill officials can open government involvement to students.

The petition called for town board term lengths to be reduced from three to two years.

Such a reduction is a worthy goal.

But any proposal that calls for the reservation of town board seats specifically for students is misguided. And, frankly, such concessions haven't been earned by Chapel Hill's vast student population.

Senior Mike McSwain, a failed candidate for the Town Council in the past local election, advocated the creation of reserved seats for students on town boards.

If seats were reserved, however, there is no guarantee students even would show up.

Showing up turned out to be a difficult task for students in the last election, as only 329 voters between the ages of 18 and 22 made it to the polls.

Even with the opportunity to vote early at Morehead Planetarium — and the massive voter registration drive sponsored by student government that signed up 2,300 new Orange County voters — less than 400 student-age voters turned out.

If students don't even show up for elections, the town hardly is obligated to provide guaranteed seats on town boards.

But Town Council members are right to look into ways to make Chapel Hill government more accessible to students.

It is no easy feat for a student to jump through the hoops required to become involved in town affairs.

Particularly intimidating is the three-year commitment that comes with serving a full term on one of the town's myriad boards.

As the petition states, a three-year term necessitates that any interested students apply by the end of their freshman year. And the obligation of a three-year term is a daunting requirement to any freshman.

Those terms must be reduced to one or two years in length in order to increase the accessibility of town government.

Some critics have said reducing term lengths would lead to a dramatic turnover on town boards, in effect hampering the efficiency of important groups — such as the town's Planning Board.

But UNC students should not have to settle for membership on the Chapel Hill Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board.

If board members were allowed to serve several consecutive terms, such inefficiency could be avoided. Longtime Chapel Hill residents would be able to reapply for board membership, while students could complete one or two terms.

In this manner, important government institutions, such as the town Planning Board, could maintain a standard of efficiency, and interested students would have a chance to contribute at every level of Chapel Hill government.

While it is hypocritical for students to expect guaranteed seats, given a complete lack of electoral presence, Town Council members should continue to search for ways to increase accessibility to students.

ON THE DAY'S NEWS

"(W)e need to put the idea of proportionality at the center of our conception of representation."

LANI GUINIER, LAW PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

EDITORIAL CARTOON



COMMENTARY

Socio-economic status is a better admissions standard

Being that Monday is Martin Luther King Jr. Day, I am reminded of Dr. King's famous "I have a dream" speech in which he proclaimed his desire that his children one day would "live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

I wholeheartedly agree with Dr. King.

I long for the day when people will be judged solely by their individual merit, with no preferences associated with race. I long for a day when people no longer will use hyphens but instead will be united simply as Americans.

Unfortunately, continued racial preference in university admissions goes against the dream of Dr. King and instead has created a negative association within some minority groups in higher education.

Before I continue, let me make it clear that there is a difference between the need for affirmative action involving employment and with college admissions.

Some argue that affirmative action is necessary to ensure equity in both hiring practices and advancement, since nepotism remains abundant in various jobs. However, my purpose herein remains solely devoted to racial preferences in higher education.

The problem with using racial preferences in college admissions is that they offer incentives to particular groups that have an immutable quality that, in reality, makes them no different intellectually from any other student.

Believing that race is a determining factor in academic aptitude is racism at its worst.

Moreover, some minorities who benefit from the preferences



BRENTLEY TANNER
MADE WITH PRIDE IN THE U.S.A.

often feel as if they are under-achievers or beneath other students who might not have received preferential treatment.

Minorities occasionally think they are perceived this way despite the fact that they would have gained admittance without preferential treatment. Although such minorities possess a dislike for such preferences, they remain secretive for fear of being labeled "traitors" to their respective minority groups.

Advocates of racial preferences claim that they are necessary to keep diversity intact in colleges. I say it is important, but diversity is more than just skin color.

As a matter of fact, I think the color of someone's skin is the least important determining factor regarding diversity when one considers that the only difference among people of different color is the level of melanin in their skin.

While it remains important that minorities are given an equal opportunity to achieve higher education, there is a more equitable standard that could be used when administering preferences — socio-economic status.

It goes without saying that children who are raised in wealthier settings perform better, whether it is due to private tutoring, prep courses or simple attention from parents who aren't forced to work multiple jobs.

Sizable portions of U.S. minori-

ty groups are indigent. With that being true, the use of socio-economic status would ensure that at least the same number of minorities would be admitted.

Moreover, it would alleviate the problem associated with children whose families lack a history of attaining higher education, thus giving a greater opportunity to people who are first in their families to attend college.

Although it might seem to be a rare circumstance, it wouldn't be fair for a destitute Caucasian to be denied admission in place of an upper-class minority. Some will argue that this circumstance rarely happens, but even one instance of this is one too many if your true intention is equity.

By using socio-economic status as a standard, you keep opponents of racial preferences from maintaining permanence on the issue. Also, the use of socio-economic status would unite the factions firmly entrenched on each side of the affirmative action debate.

I am sure that after reading this, some individuals might label me with the typical stereotypes given to individuals who denounce the current implementation of racial preferences. But it is important to remember that a considerable number of minorities also detest the use of racial preferences.

Moreover, the disdain I possess for the policy is simply due to my belief that socio-economic status is the primary factor concerning a student's chance for success.

Minorities who abhor the use of racial preferences in college admissions should speak out so the aforementioned change in equity can result.

Contact Brentley Tanner
at gtanner@email.unc.edu.

NEARING EQUALITY

A recent New Jersey law does well to give same-sex couples legal benefits while not challenging the concept of traditional marriage.

This week, gay rights activists won yet another battle in the war for legal and economic legitimacy for same-sex couples.

New Jersey Gov. James McGreevy on Monday signed into law the Domestic Partnership Act, making the state one of five in the nation — along with California, Hawaii, Massachusetts and Vermont — to take some action to validate homosexual couples.

The act is a perfectly reasonable law that helps legitimize the notion that, yes, homosexuals are people too, and they should be able to enjoy the same rights as everyone else.

The legislation provides same-sex couples with the same basic union rights inherent to heterosexual marriages — hospital visitation, qualification for state income tax deductions for dependents and state inheritance tax exemptions.

It also makes domestic partners of state workers eligible for certain health-care and retirement benefits.

The terms of the act go a long way to legitimize, in the eyes of New Jersey law, relationships that are marked by the same emotions, conflicts and commitments as those of heterosexual couples.

The Domestic Partnership Act is similar to a decision by the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court in November declaring bans on same-sex marriage unconstitutional.

But because New Jersey's recent act is based on actual state legislation, it carries more weight than Massachusetts' ruling.

The Garden State's elected representatives, who have much more to lose in terms of credibility with their constituents, have put more on the line than the Massachusetts judges, who are appointed by the governor and don't have to worry about keeping their positions.

Gay rights opponents can take some solace in the

fact that New Jersey lawmakers have not set a precedent in terms of granting benefits to same-sex couples.

So far, states only have gone as far as to treat same-sex unions *like* and not as marriage. Referring to a relationship as a "civil union" has proven not to be as incendiary as calling it "marriage."

According to a recent USA Today/CNN/Gallup Poll, 58 percent of respondents opposed the idea of legislation that would allow same-sex couples to "legally get married." But only 41 percent of those polled stated their opposition to "civil unions."

In terms of practice, Vermont has done the most to legitimize such unions by rewriting its laws to afford same-sex couples the exact same benefits as married heterosexual couples.

In terms of potential, Massachusetts might take an even greater step. By ruling a gay marriage ban unconstitutional, the justices are opening the door for the possibility of such unions becoming legitimate in the future.

Unlike the Massachusetts court, New Jersey lawmakers aren't taking the gay rights debate to a new level. They are following the lead of other states in making the distribution of rights and benefits more equal among the citizens they represent.

The Domestic Partnership Act isn't a promotion of alternative lifestyles, but rather a recognition of legal benefits between same-sex couples.

New Jersey officials haven't implicated any religious impact. They haven't addressed the often-asked question of whether or not homosexuality is permitted by any of the major organized creeds. They are not issuing an open challenge to opponents' traditional views of "marriage."

Rather, they are taking a progressive legal stand and granting basic rights to one of their state's marginalized populations.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The above editorials are the opinions of solely The Daily Tar Heel Editorial Board, and were reached after open debate. The board consists of seven board members, the editorial page associate editor, the editorial page editor and the DTH editor. The 2003-04 DTH editor decided not to vote on the board and not to write board editorials.

READERS' FORUM

BOT is being shortsighted about options for tuition

TO THE EDITOR:

I'm confused. This is a university that takes enormous pride in being the first public university in the country.

It doesn't hide its goal of becoming the premier national public university and prides itself on its academics so much that its students attend classes amid a hurricane.

So it follows, then, with impeccable logic, that Paul Fulton and the Board of Trustees should seek to place the entire burden of the current fiscal situation on the least influential group on campus: the out-of-state students.

I understand the reasons for our higher tuitions, but I do not understand the need to further maim us financially because North Carolina is in a budget squeeze.

If the University is in need of money such that it will go to students for funds to continue operation, it should go to the students. All of them.

The Board of Trustees never would authorize higher costs for only African-American students or homosexual students or Muslim students. Why now, when it considers nonresidents, does it throw these fair-minded ideas out the door?

Therefore, the only way to legitimize the out-of-state tuition hike is to increase income tax rates for

state residents so that they'll pay more of their fair share. And that would blow over really well.

Students might have to give in to a higher cost for their education here at UNC. But the fiscal situation is no excuse for the BOT to single out and blacklist the one group with no representatives in the state legislature under the misguided notion that "they could have gone somewhere else."

If this notion continues, they will — and UNC will be reduced to a mere regional school with little renown beyond the state borders, boundaries about which the BOT is being simply myopic.

Doug Orloff
Freshman
Chemistry

Other people affected by protest are being ignored

TO THE EDITOR:

I'm having a hard time with all these people that are willing to let the war protesters from the UNC-Virginia game get away with what they've done.

I'm as much for free speech as the next person, but there is a time and place for protest, and the middle of a basketball game is neither.

People keep pointing out the protesters' rights. Well, what about our rights? Maybe some people were watching the game to keep their minds off the war or any

other stress they might have felt.

What about the players who play on scholarship and might be working up to a professional career?

What about all the people who had to put their lives on hold because some selfish, self-righteous college students decided that what they had to say was more important and that everyone should have put their lives on hold so they could run out on a court with a homemade sign and get themselves arrested?

I am thankful that most UNC students are more mature and have more respect for their peers than these people did.

Jessica Stafford
Senior
English

UNC damages reputation by prosecuting protester

TO THE EDITOR:

I am saddened to hear about the recent events surrounding the prosecution of one of your alumni, Andrew Pearson, for having expressed his views during a short protest at one of your sports events Feb. 12, 2003.

While I personally have a very similar political perspective and support the course of action Andrew took, I concede that others might not feel that this was a proper forum to express his message.

But no matter what your feelings are about the war and protest in general, you must admit that UNC's harsh response to his short disruption is far out of proportion to the little inconvenience he caused.

This is especially true since the students involved were generous enough to notify Chancellor James Moeser beforehand to make their peaceful intentions clear.

I think the University's response is detrimental not only to Andrew but also to your institution.

I'm sure many UNC alumni are shocked by your attitude toward a member of your own extended community, and they might respond less favorably in the future to any requests seeking continued support for the University. They essentially have been sent the message that their voices are no longer welcome on the campus where they invested so many years.

I also would like to point out the fact that Andrew has made a very favorable impression on many members of the activist community, all of whom now are working to spread word of his plight to as many people as possible.

Many students all across the country are hearing about the University — perhaps for the first time — through news of this issue.

Not only is the University being cast in ill light among your peer institutions, but many high school students might now be hesitant to

attend a school that would so strongly suppress their free speech. UNC has long had a reputation for being a home of progressive activism.

I felt very welcome when I visited your campus for the first time several months ago for a Student Environmental Action Coalition reunion, an event which Andrew worked hard to support and which brought dozens of attendees to your campus from across the country.

I urge the University to drop the charges against Andrew and resolve this issue in a more peaceful manner so that we can return to praising UNC for its many past accomplishments.

Michael McCaffrey
Alumnus
Student Environmental Action Coalition

The length rule was waived.

TO SUBMIT A LETTER: 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 them to editdesk@unc.edu.

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