

# Alumni teach America's youth

## Campus tries to attract diversity

Tepper, others work to change lives

BY JULIA FURLONG  
STAFF WRITER

Matt Tepper traded the brick-lined paths of Chapel Hill for the streets of the South Bronx after he graduated in May.

Now, the former student body president, one of 51 UNC alumni currently involved with Teach for America, teaches literacy to sixth graders in a New York City middle school.

"It's an extremely tough experience," Tepper said of his first two months in the classroom. "And I thought I had a busy year last year. ... I'm always exhausted."

Teach for America, a member of the national service organization AmeriCorps, is a nationwide network of college graduates who commit two years to teach in low-income urban and rural communities.

The elementary and secondary schools involved in the program characteristically under-perform and have poor resources.

When searching for college graduates to participate in the program, recruiters try to draw from as diverse an applicant pool as possible, said Melissa Casey, regional recruitment director for Teach for America.

"We need students who have demonstrated a track record of achievement, leadership potential and the ability to set ambitious

goals," Casey said.

About 2,000 graduates from a variety of backgrounds are selected each year for the corps. They attend a summer institute that provides classes on effective teaching strategies before moving on to regional orientations, which prepare them for experience in real classrooms.

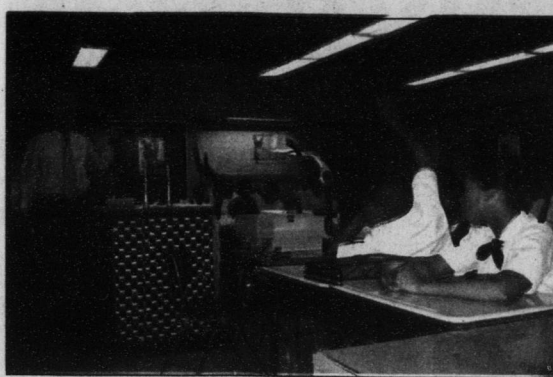
These training sessions provide some of the first lessons in teaching that corps members receive — many members hail from fields including government, language and other social sciences. Only 2 percent of last year's Teach for America group majored in education.

Lisa Guckian, who graduated from UNC in 1996, first encountered the program when she was a high school student in Warren County. Both her history and Spanish teachers possessed an unusual energy and perspective — and both were members of Teach for America.

The young corps members related to high schools students well and were creative in making the curriculum relevant, Guckian said.

"They allowed me to look past my current world," she said.

After graduating from the University, Guckian joined the corps and began teaching math and science to seventh- and eighth-grade students in the Bronx.



UNC history professor Richard Talbert speaks to students in former Student Body President Matt Tepper's sixth grade class at a Bronx middle school.

*"It's an extremely tough experience. And I thought I had a busy year last year. ... I'm always exhausted."*

MATT TEPPER, 2003-04 UNC STUDENT BODY PRESIDENT, TEACH FOR AMERICA PARTICIPANT

She quickly realized the realities of an overcrowded urban school system. "I had 35 to 40 students in one class, with some students not even on grade level."

Despite the daily challenges, Guckian noticed an overall trend of growth and learning and felt supported by other teachers in the school and the families in the community, she said.

The drive she puts into her current work in education policy at North Carolina's Hunt Institute is a result of the people she was surrounded by during her work with Teach for America, she said. "Knowing my impact can be greater, that is my drive. I want to help schools like the one I worked in."

Within North Carolina, Teach for America sends teachers to Charlotte and eight eastern counties.

And the program offers applicants much more than a salary and additional educational awards of up to \$9,450, Casey said.

"There's the idea of joining a movement, a unique opportunity to have both immediate and direct impact," she said. "Corps members are taking on a tremendous responsibility of providing students with the education they are entitled to."

The program has two application deadlines for each new corps class. This year's Oct. 24 deadline yielded 5,797 applicants nationwide, 37 of whom were UNC seniors.

The remaining due date for 2005 is Feb. 18.

Senior Kasey Johnson, a middle school education major from Asheville, plans to participate in the second round of applications.

She wants to help out in schools that are in need of teachers and would like to experience "somewhere big" like New York City or Chicago, she said.

For Tepper, days in the Big Apple are unpredictable, and he never knows when he'll go home excited or frustrated.

He still isn't sure what he'll pursue after his two-year commitment ends, though law school or journalism school seem probable, he said.

But Tepper said he knows he's in the right place when he sees the looks on his students' faces when they grasp a concept.

"You get that feeling, you know you're supposed to be there, and you know you're doing what you're supposed to be doing."

Contact the Features Editor at features@unc.edu.

BY KELLI BORDET  
STAFF WRITER

Native Americans make up the smallest portion of the University population, representing only 0.8 percent of the entire student body.

To help increase the small percentage, students and faculty at the UNC Graduate School are hosting events such as the Native American graduate student recruitment weekend in attempts to attract diversity.

Officials have held several other events this year catering to the group as part of their diversity initiative.

"By encouraging Native undergraduates to get to know our University campus and to meet current Native American graduate students, we think it will help them to understand what Carolina offers and hopefully choose to attend Chapel Hill for graduate study," said Sandra Hoefflich, associate dean for interdisciplinary education, fellowships and communication.

North Carolina has the largest Native American population east of the Mississippi River, but the group traditionally has been underrepresented at UNC, Hoefflich said.

Officials said the recruitment efforts are aimed at creating a more diverse campus population.

"We have a very welcoming community here," said Graduate School Dean Linda Dykstra. "We are hoping to attract and convince others that Carolina is a good place for Native Americans."

The Graduate School recently held a recruitment weekend for Native American students. Organizers said they aimed to give students from around the country the chance to learn what graduate studies at UNC can offer to Native Americans.

Although nine different tribes are represented at UNC, Derek Oxendine, a senior psychology major and a member of the Lumbee tribe, said it is sometimes hard to maintain his sense of culture.

"It is hard maintain a balance between the contemporary and traditional worlds that we live in," Oxendine said. "We are proportionately the smallest minority group

on campus, and that makes us a minority within a minority."

Cookie Newsom, director of diversity education and research for the Office of Minority Affairs, emphasized the recruitment as a way for UNC to serve all citizens of the state.

But officials also said recruitment efforts should not be restricted to in-state students. Students from as far away as Washington and New Mexico attended the weekend.

Hoefflich reiterated the point that the addition of more Native Americans would create a more diverse community and University. "We all can benefit from a diverse culture and a diverse student body."

Jennifer Taylor, a Cherokee and a doctoral student in biology, said she left California for UNC not only for academics but also to share her culture with other students.

"We bring our culture with us when we come to Carolina, whether it is Lumbee, Cherokee, Chickasaw or any other tribe, and we share that culture with others," Taylor said.

Josh Barton, a Lumbee undergraduate student, also said Native Americans can benefit attending by UNC and strengthen the culture of its students by creating a more diverse atmosphere.

"Carolina allows us to be exposed to other cultures," he said. "It makes us as Native Americans appreciate who we are and where we come from."

Contact the University Editor at udesk@unc.edu.

### CLARIFICATION

■ The Nov. 16 story "Pope funds prompt uproar" states that during a protest, some people held signs asking the University not to take money from a "controversial conservative think tank."

Many signs at the protest did, in fact, urge UNC not to take money from a "hateful" group, and sources are quoted as saying that the group in question — the Pope Foundation — is against UNC's ideals.

But the foundation officially is a charitable organization — not a think tank. It provided some of the original funding for the Pope Center for Higher Education Policy, a think tank that has been critical of UNC's policies.

To report corrections, contact Managing Editor Chris Coletta at coletta@email.unc.edu.

### The Daily Tar Heel

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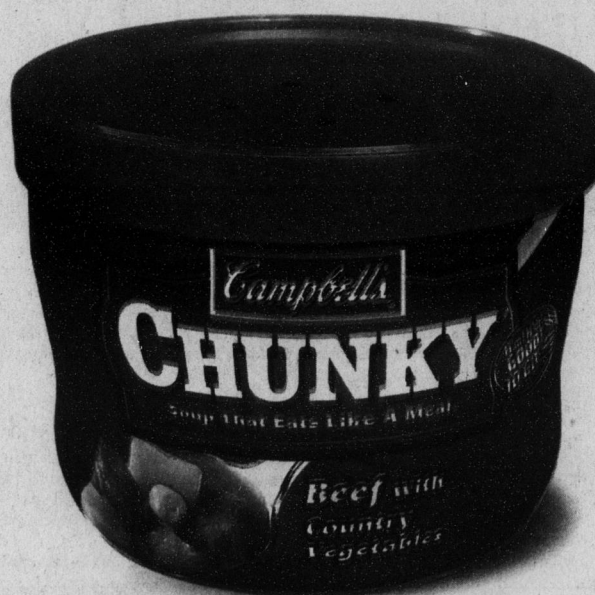
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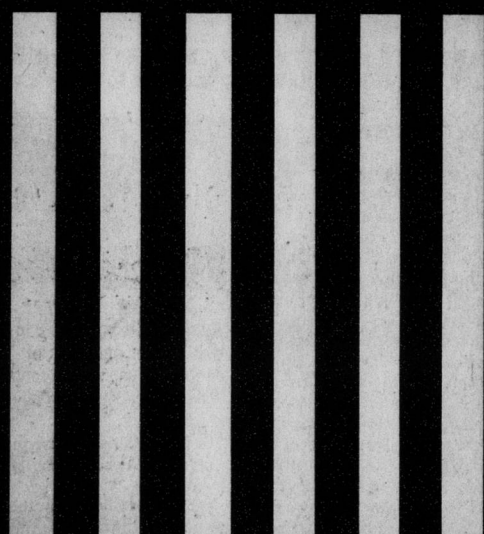
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Coordinated by the Latino/a Studies Initiative at Duke and co-sponsored by the Carolina and Duke Consortium in Latin American and Caribbean Studies, Duke's Latino Graduate Student Association, and Duke's Mi Gente: La Asociacion de Estudiantes Latinoe, and the Duke Human Rights Initiative. This event is free and open to the public. For more info contact las@duke.edu.