

# Teachers propel American dream

BY ALI GRAY  
STAFF WRITER

When the mail arrived at the Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority house in December, two seniors eagerly dug through the pile to find the letters that would determine their futures.

Ashley Castevens said she and Jessica Cline received their Teach for America acceptance letters in small, thin envelopes, which they interpreted as a bad sign.

"I thought we had both been rejected," said Castevens, a public policy major. "I was devastated."

As they simultaneously read the congratulatory first sentences, their moods were lifted. "I was so relieved," said Cline, a Spanish and international studies double major. "This is what I really wanted to do."

TFA is a program that assigns qualified graduates from various backgrounds to teach for two years in low-income school systems across the country.

"We're looking for students who have demonstrated a track record of achievement and have a sense of personal responsibility," said Melissa Casey, the regional recruitment director for TFA.

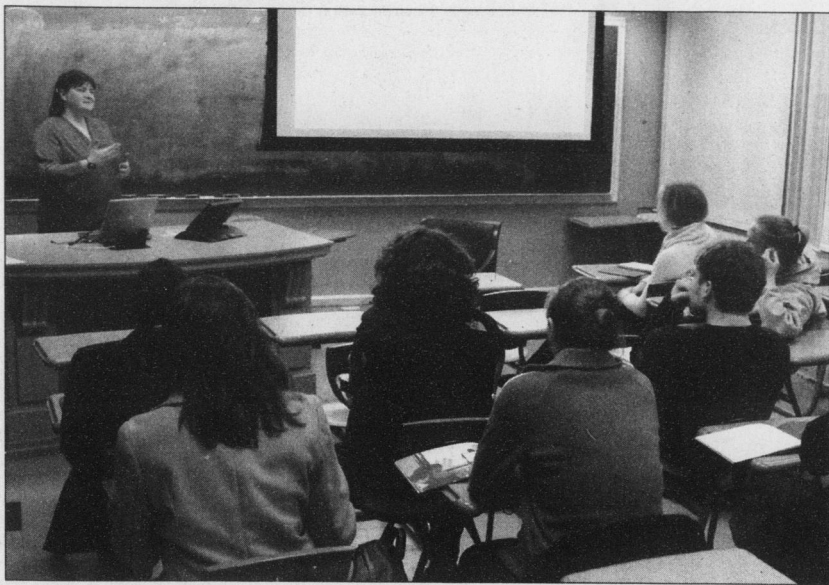
Last year, the organization sent 30 of 116 UNC applicants to teach in several different cities. So far this year, 19 applicants have been accepted, and another group will be evaluated after the final Feb. 18 deadline, Casey said.

Castevens said she became interested in TFA because of her concern with the education system. "I have personally seen the need for programs like TFA," she said.

She had heard positive evaluations of TFA from her friends who are involved and decided to apply.

The first step of the application process involved sending in essays and references. Castevens and Cline were then chosen to come in for interviews.

The interview session required the applicants to teach a five-minute lesson to the other applicants



Melissa Casey, a UNC graduate and recruitment director for Teach for America, speaks during an information session for the program Thursday night in Caldwell Hall. Last year, 30 UNC students were accepted into TFA.

and the interviewees. "That was the most nerve-racking part," Cline said. "I was really nervous about it because I know it's really competitive, but I felt really good about it after it was over."

Castevens received her first-choice location and will be teaching elementary school in the Mississippi Delta region.

"I wanted to teach in a school where I'd have a really good chance of making an impact on the students," she said. "I am really happy that I'm going there. The only catch is that I've never seen Mississippi."

She said she is excited but considers the move a big step because she has never lived outside North Carolina.

The territory where Cline will be teaching will be more familiar for her because her boyfriend cur-

rently lives in her assigned city, and she has visited there several times. She will be teaching Spanish in Baltimore.

Cline was pleased to receive her assignment over Winter Break. "I was so excited," she said. "It was exactly what I wanted. I could not be more happy."

The accepted students will leave for their assignments less than a month after graduation. Cline said she is eager to get started because of her belief in the program.

"I think it's really important to have advocates for education in all different fields," she said. "It makes the whole community, not just teachers, concerned with the gap in the schools."

After their two years of required teaching are over, the teachers will decide what their next career moves will be.

For Castevens, the two-year time period might not be the end of her career in education. "There's a very good chance I may stay (in Mississippi) longer than that."

Cline had previously considered studying law and will decide when the time comes.

"I think this will give me a good perspective on whether or not law school is what I want to do," she said.

If she does go on to become a lawyer, Cline said she thinks her experience with TFA will be an asset.

"It's just such a great opportunity to make a difference, and at the same time it's a great career opportunity," she said. "That's why it was so attractive to me."

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## HONOR

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dents with hearings in a timely fashion," he said.

As the honor system prepares to solidify its role in UNC's future, officials are focusing on publicizing the importance of the honor system.

"There are a lot of misconceptions in the general student body about what it is we do," Chavez said. "In reality, the system is here to promote a climate of honor and integrity so we can learn in a safe environment."

Stacy Bennett, honor system outreach coordinator, said her

committee has planned various programs throughout the year to increase student awareness. Events include Honor and Integrity Week and Hazing Awareness Week.

"The toughest obstacle is always going to be to get the students interested," Bennett said.

Gilbert said many students pay attention to the Honor Code and graduate with no violations.

"Most students on campus do abide by the honor system," Gilbert said. "The subset of students we see may not represent the typical UNC student."

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## WAIVER

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increase from the previous average of 68 percent.

Enrollment in the school has risen, and Rowe attributed that fact to the tuition waiver as well.

"Because of the tuition grants we did see a spike in the number of applications," he said.

"The entering class of 2006 had the highest average SAT score in the history of the school."

Both Rowe and Hagan said the Pope Center's report was not put together well.

"I think that it does a disservice to the exceptional work being done," Hagan said.

"I don't think it was a well-thought-out, well-studied paper. ... This (program) is the first step. We need to replicate this benefit to other high schools around the state."

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## VISAS

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improve the immigration process for more than just students.

"We are working on the registered-traveler program, where if you have been vetted appropriately we can exempt you from customs and immigration processing," he said.

Although some people might be greenlighted through customs, students will not fall off the radar of homeland security once they enter the country.

The Student Exchange Visitor Information System is a program that allows schools to provide information to the government, ensuring that foreign students are operating within student visa guidelines.

"We can tell, 'Has this person been admitted? Are they currently enrolled?'" Verdery said.

But Verdery said there were errors and technical malfunctions in the program that caused problems for foreign students.

"SEVIS, I think everyone would admit, when it was first developed, was not a good system," he said.

Since the initial setbacks, SEVIS has improved its record, seeing a 90 percent reduction in problems, Verdery said.

He said that the feedback he is receiving from school officials reflects this improvement, but that there remains more work to do.

"We are working on getting out better information to the University community ... that can be useful to students when they are considering UNC-Chapel Hill or William and Mary or Podunk U."

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## REACTION

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to set the tuition rate so they could address several chronic problems."

Several officials said the most troubling part of the decision was that the board locked in a \$100 fee increase for two years down the road.

"One of the most alarming points about the whole thing was the inclusion of the caveat that they've already (approved the \$100

fee)," said Jen Bushman, president of the Graduate and Professional and Student Federation. "I think that crosses a line that has not been crossed historically."

Natalie Russell, student body treasurer and member of both committees, said she thought trustees didn't consider student input sufficiently.

"I think that's a real shame," she said. "With the exception of the student body president serving on the Board of Trustees, the work of

those two committees is really the only message the students have put towards the chancellor and the Board of Trustees."

The Board of Trustees' decision still has to be approved by the UNC Board of Governors, which is set to begin reviewing recommendations in February. Anderson said he hopes the board will examine several factors clouding the decision.

"I would certainly hope that the Board of Governors takes a long hard look at ... the lack of consideration with respect to the effect on out-of-state students and the lack of consideration for student governance and student opinion on the athletic fee."

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