

Activism sweeps up students

'04-'05 demonstrations run gamut

BY DON CAMPBELL
STAFF WRITER

"The Pit Preacher," Gary Birdsong, is a landmark in the corner of the Pit, shouting his beliefs at passers-by and waving his hands to attract attention.

But student activists recently have drowned out his words with cries of their own.

Students rallied around numerous causes this year, starting with the frenzy of presidential elections and ending with the current debate about workers' rights at UNC.

"I think we have a reputation of an active student body," said Dave Gilbert, assistant dean of students. "This year is reflective of that. We've seen students stand up for all kinds of issues."

Voter mobilization efforts kicked off the activist season in October, with students campaigning for candidates and rallying to turn out the youth vote.

After the election flurry, the tuition controversy became the dominant topic of campus debate, leaving many students up in arms with talks of another wave of increases.

In response to students' and administrators' demands, former Student Body President Matt

Calabria helped persuade officials to trim tuition increases.

The UNC-system Board of Governors passed a \$700 increase for nonresidents — down from a potential \$1,200 increase — and voted down an in-state tuition increase.

As the tuition debate died down, the assault of a UNC junior — termed a hate crime by local police — reignited campus fervor.

A group of men physically assaulted the student, who is openly gay, while shouting derogatory remarks about his sexual orientation. Several hundred members of the community banded together the next week to unite against hate crimes.

Organizers circulated petitions to change the N.C. law on hate crimes and to establish nondiscrimination policies at all UNC-system schools.

Following this solidarity, divisive demonstrations emerged.

Carolina Students for Life brought a display to campus that linked abortion to genocide with graphic pictures.

"You couldn't go anywhere on campus without getting into conversations or discussion, whether it was in classrooms, restaurants or at work," said Stephanie Evans,



DTH FILE PHOTO/RACHAEL HYDE

Protesters stormed South Building in support of workers' rights after Lenoir Dining Hall worker Vel Dowdy was charged with embezzlement.

then-president of the group.

The anti-abortion group met counter protest in subsequent days.

Soon after, Students United for Darfur Awareness Now hosted North Carolina's largest demonstration to raise awareness of the crisis.

And most recently, the workers' rights debate has taken center stage after the arrest of Lenoir Dining Hall worker Vel Dowdy.

Some have criticized the student

protests, calling them futile, but others have held that such demonstrations effectively promote change.

"Lots of times, people become lost in 'What can I do to help?' mode," said sophomore Matt Craig, who organized Stand for Sudan. "(Student demonstrations) are the best way to channel people's emotional response into something more action-oriented."

Calabria praised student activism but said protests are not enough.

"I think demonstrations can be convincing that there is a need for a change," he said. "I've always felt that even if someone is bringing a problem to the fore, it's important that that group also make educated proposals for change."

Student Body President Seth Dearmin said he is confident that the activist spirit will stay alive next year when students return to campus.

"It's great to see students passionate about issues," he said. "Especially when they're causes like ... unionization that don't even directly affect them."

Contact the University Editor at udesk@unc.edu.

Funding crunch impedes quest to reach the top

BY JOSEPH R. SCHWARTZ
ASSISTANT UNIVERSITY EDITOR

As officials aspire to propel the University to the leading public institution in the world, they say decreased funding puts significant obstacles in their path.

A proposed \$16.3 million budget cut from the state and an approved tuition increase proposal that cut \$2 million in requested funds has officials worrying about future budgetary and educational implications.

Chancellor James Moeser said that if cuts occur, the immediate impact will be devastating.

"Our ability to deal with that in the short term will be very difficult," he said.

Cuts would yield 200 fewer class sections and would wipe out funding for 90 filled faculty positions and 80 unfilled positions — slashes that administrators said would erode the quality of a UNC education.

"My concern is that we are really, really starting to cut into bone," said Richard "Stick" Williams, chairman of the Board of Trustees.

UNC has seen its budget cut from the state for the last five years.

Provost Robert Shelton said the University relies on state funding for about 24 percent of its overall budget, and cuts have forced accountants to allocate all state funds to pay faculty salaries.

"With all the cuts over the last five years in the state budget, we've tried to protect people," he said. "People have given up the state dollars that they use to buy a light bulb."

Last fall, the Tuition Task Force completed a comprehensive review of campus needs and suggested that tuition increases be used to address faculty retention and attraction, teaching assistant stipends and need-based student aid.

Williams said he's worried that a lack of funding could leave some of these priorities in jeopardy — something he said could have a widespread, grave impact.

"The worst thing that can happen for an institution like Carolina is to lose the very, very attractive faculty and graduate students that

"We really have scrimped and saved in every kind of way. ... You can't keep at it."

JUDITH WEGNER, FACULTY LEADER
we've got that make university education so rich."

Even so, officials said the annual cuts mean they can't subsidize funding anymore.

"We really have scrimped and saved in every kind of way," said Judith Wegner, chairwoman of the faculty. "This has been going on for many years at this point, and you can't keep at it."

But despite need, legislators say their hands are tied because of a \$1.3 billion state deficit.

"I believe we obviously have to protect our universities," said Sen. A.B. Swindell, D-Nash, co-chairman of the Senate's higher education appropriations subcommittee.

"At the same time, this is a difficult budget year, and it requires revenues to meet our future needs of our state."

Moeser said the proposed cuts could be a scare tactic to inspire public outcry and garner support for revenue from a tobacco tax or lottery, which could increase state funding by \$1 billion to the state.

With the budget situation looming, UNC officials are examining ways to cut costs.

More autonomy from the state could allow UNC to cope with funding problems, according to a presentation at a March BOT meeting. For example, increased purchasing power might allow the school to receive products for less money.

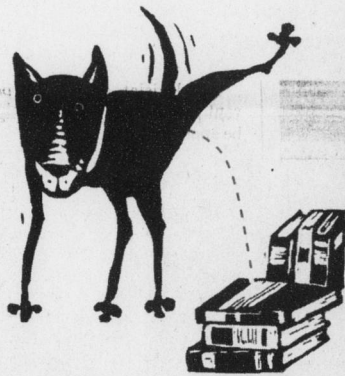
And although Shelton said the picture is grim, he said he remains optimistic that cuts will be reduced.

"What I believe in is the 200-year history of the state of North Carolina in supporting higher education."

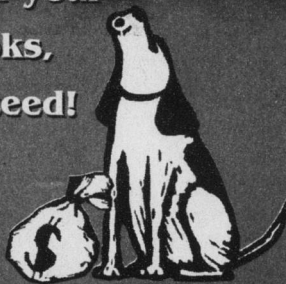
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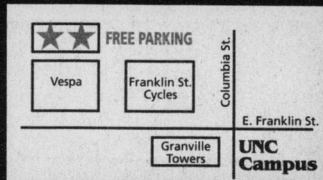


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