

Covenant fulfills its promise

225 benefit from program's 1st year

BY NATALIE HAMMEL
STAFF WRITER

Freshman Renatta Craven's favorite memory from her first year at college might even make older students jealous.

Through her participation in Carolina Fever, Craven nabbed a ticket to witness UNC's dramatic 75-73 victory over Duke in men's basketball.

"The last 10 seconds were just awesome," she said.

But without the Carolina Covenant, Craven's favorite memory might never have materialized.

Craven said that as she was growing up, she never struggled for basic necessities. But she knew attending college without financial assistance would be difficult.

As a Carolina Covenant scholar, she was able to put her worries aside. She is one of 225 students who will graduate debt-free from the University because of the program.

"I was just relieved, completely relieved," she said about the moment when she found out she was a recipient of the scholarship.

The Carolina Covenant is a need-based financial aid program that promises low-income students a debt-free education. Eligible students' needs are met through a combination of federal, state, and university funds and private donations.

For a student to be eligible, he or she first must be admitted to the University. Financial aid officers then assess the student's needs.

In the inaugural year of the program, the student's parents' combined income could not exceed 150 percent of the federal poverty level. But next year's Covenant will

reach out to applicants who fall at or below 200 percent of that level.

But instead of just offering students financial assistance, the Covenant also aims to help them adjust to college life.

The scholarship includes a mentorship program that has given faculty members the chance to work intimately with small groups of scholars this year.

The groups often went off campus to eat dinner together, and mentors offered students advice, such as how to study for exams.

Fred Clark, study coordinator of the mentorship program, said the initiative is important because many of the scholars are first-generation college students. He said mentors help students form links within the University community.

"The place gets smaller every time you meet someone else," he said.

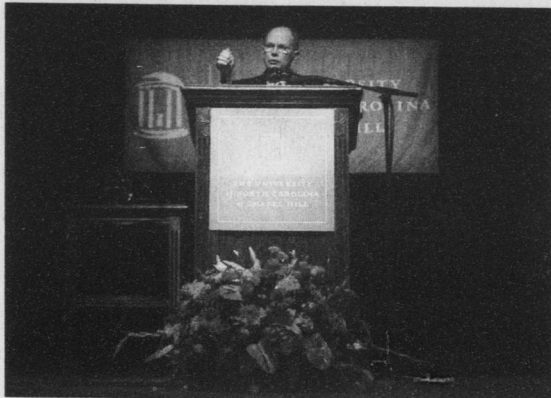
"So we hope those get-togethers also make the transition smoother for them."

Carolina Covenant scholar Tasrif Ahmed said the mentorship program helped him adjust to college.

"We can go anytime to the mentor and go with questions about everything — everything and anything about college life," he said. "It's fun to know different people and get together with them."

Clark said one added benefit for next year's Covenant scholars might be a peer-mentoring program. Interested second-year scholars would serve as college-savvy advisers for the new freshman beneficiaries.

As part of the Covenant, this year's students also balanced class



DTH FILE PHOTO

Chancellor James Moeser created the Carolina Covenant, giving a debt-free education to low-income students. 225 students participated this year.

with work-study jobs, normally for about 10 to 12 hours per week. In many cases, the jobs teach useful skills.

Ahmed works as a lab assistant in the Division of Nephrology and Hypertension in the School of Medicine.

His job includes performing regular lab maintenance and running different protocols.

He said he enjoys his work because, as a biochemistry major hoping to go to medical school, the experience is good for him. And so far, balancing class and work hasn't been a problem.

"Everything I need to do in work, I do during the time I work there," he said.

Erin Callender, a freshman journalism major, balanced class, a work-study job, waiting tables at Outback Steakhouse and joining a sorority during her first year at college.

She said she probably would have been more stressed if not for

her scholarship.

But instead of anxieties about paying for college, her first year will be filled with memories of new friendships.

"We're all really close," she says about her Ehringhaus South Residence Hall suite mates.

"It's been nice being able to have a couple of girls that I'm close with."

But the success of the program is within the students themselves. Clark said the class of scholars contains responsive and high-achieving students.

"All of them are quite motivated and all of them are very pleased to have the scholarship," he said. "It made, in many cases, their coming to UNC possible."

"The (scholars) that I have met, they're enthusiastic, bright young people that are already quite devoted to UNC."

Contact the Features Editor at features@unc.edu.

BY JIM WALSH
ASSISTANT ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

This year has been a period of growth for the University's arts community, which in recent years has struggled to define itself as a cohesive entity.

Communication gaps among performing arts groups, campus publications and University officials have led to what some have called a fractured arts network.

The January installment of an executive director for the arts, Emil Kang, was a step toward healing the wounds that have been a long time developing, but there is still work to be done.

Representatives from student government said bridging the gaps in the arts community will be a priority for campus leaders next year.

"The mechanisms on this campus are not ideal at the moment for communication about performances," said Adrian Johnston, student body vice president.

He said it will be important for student government to help facilitate communication among the various arts groups on campus.

"We're really trying to bring them all to the table and make headway in that area," he said.

Student Body President Seth Dearmin said he was pleased with the work of student government's Arts Advocacy Committee this year.

The committee, under the leadership of chairman Casey Molino Dunn, worked closely with Kang in the early months of his tenure and organized two arts forums as a way for students to voice concerns about the arts community.

Next year, the executive branch outreach group will continue under

the auspices of new chairwoman Molly Stapleton.

"We really want to celebrate the huge amount of talent here," Stapleton said.

Molino Dunn said he was pleased with the progress that has been made this year and is anxious to see what will develop.

"The entire arts community on campus has been uplifted," he said. "This is a really exciting time."

What remains to be seen for students involved with the arts on campus is the extent to which that development will go forward.

Memorial Hall, the largest performance space on campus, is set to reopen — after nearly three years of renovation — at the beginning of September.

Plans for the Arts Common, a redesigned portion of North Campus to be set aside for arts buildings, still loom in the distance.

Those are not scheduled to be completed for at least 50 years, though they dominated headlines in the early part of the school year when a group of local residents — led by Democratic Sen. Ellie Kinnaird of Orange County — protested what they said was the unfair demolition of the historic West House to make room for the project.

Kang continues to say that he wants to make UNC a destination for the arts.

Next year, the challenge for campus leaders will be to come together and get involved with the changes that are taking place.

Johnston said there is a lot of energy surrounding the issue.

"The arts is a big priority for us next year."

Contact the A&E Editor at artsdesk@unc.edu.

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