

# The Daily Tar Heel

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THURSDAY, JANUARY 25, 2007

## Taheri-Azar pleads not guilty

BY JESSICA SCHONBERG  
SENIOR WRITER

HILLSBOROUGH — The UNC alumnus charged with driving a rented SUV through the Pit in March striking nine people pleaded not guilty to 18 felony charges in Superior Court in Hillsborough on Wednesday.

Mohammad Taheri-Azar, 23, entered the pleas on nine counts of attempted first-degree murder and nine counts of felonious assault.

He is being held in Central Prison in Raleigh in lieu of \$5.5 million bail.

Public defender James Williams spoke on behalf of Taheri-Azar, who wore a dark gray suit and seemed well-collected during the three-minute proceeding. Williams declined to make a statement after the hearing.

Taheri-Azar walked calmly in and out of the courthouse — a shift from his first appearances when he seemed to revel in the media attention often waving and smiling.

Taheri-Azar turned himself in to police minutes after the March 3 incident. He since has said he committed the crimes to avenge the deaths of Muslims around the world.

The short arraignment came after months of speculation about how Taheri-Azar would plead.

In June Taheri-Azar told a judge he would plead guilty. But in earlier letters to The Daily Tar Heel, he stated he would plead not guilty.

In the letters he used the Quran to justify his actions.

District Attorney Jim Woodall said he expected the not guilty plea.

"That's what I've said he would do," he said. "It just took him four months longer than I thought."

Woodall estimated that 95 percent of defendants plead not guilty within the first two to three months.

If the case goes to trial and Taheri-Azar is convicted on all counts, he could face about 150 years in prison.

Woodall said that he can't be certain the case will go to trial but that Williams did mention a possible trial date to him.

In a letter to The Daily Tar Heel dated Sunday, Taheri-Azar said he had been offered a plea bargain. Woodall said

SEE TAHERI-AZAR, PAGE 4

### Aftermath of the Pit attack

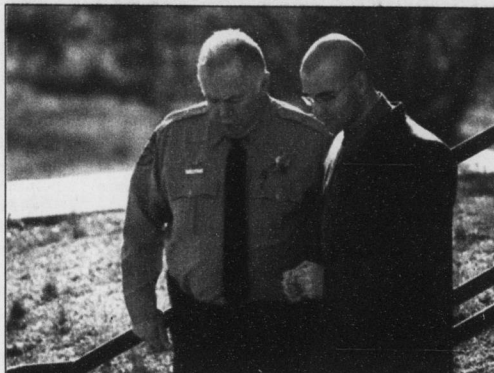
March 3 A man in a silver Jeep Grand Cherokee drives through the Pit, striking nine people. No one suffers life threatening injuries. Minutes later Mohammad Taheri-Azar calls police to turn himself in.

March 6 Taheri-Azar makes his first appearance in court, asking to represent himself.

March 10 Taheri-Azar makes his second appearance in court with public defender James Williams representing him.

March 24 A judge finds probable cause to pursue nine charges of attempted first-degree murder and nine charges of felonious assault.

Wednesday Taheri-Azar pleads not guilty to all charges.



DTH/BETH ELY

Mohammad Taheri-Azar is led into the Orange County Courthouse in Hillsborough on Wednesday. He appeared stoic and kept silent.

## N.C. LEADERS ASSEMBLE

BY ERIN FRANCE  
STATE & NATIONAL EDITOR

RALEIGH — The normally austere N.C. General Assembly was packed for the first day of session Wednesday.

Families, friends, lobbyists and politicians looked on as Rep. Joe Hackney, D-Orange, assumed his post as the newly elected House Speaker.

Instead of using the usual electronic tabulation, the members of the House were called to name their candidate for speaker, with Hackney garnering 68 votes and Rep. Paul Stam, R-Wake, earning 52 votes. The tallies reflect the party lines in the chamber.

After his election and escort to the podium, UNC graduate Hackney, who was first elected to the House in 1980, expressed his optimism for the upcoming session.

"There is a great collection of wisdom in this body," he said. "We must pledge ourselves to civility."

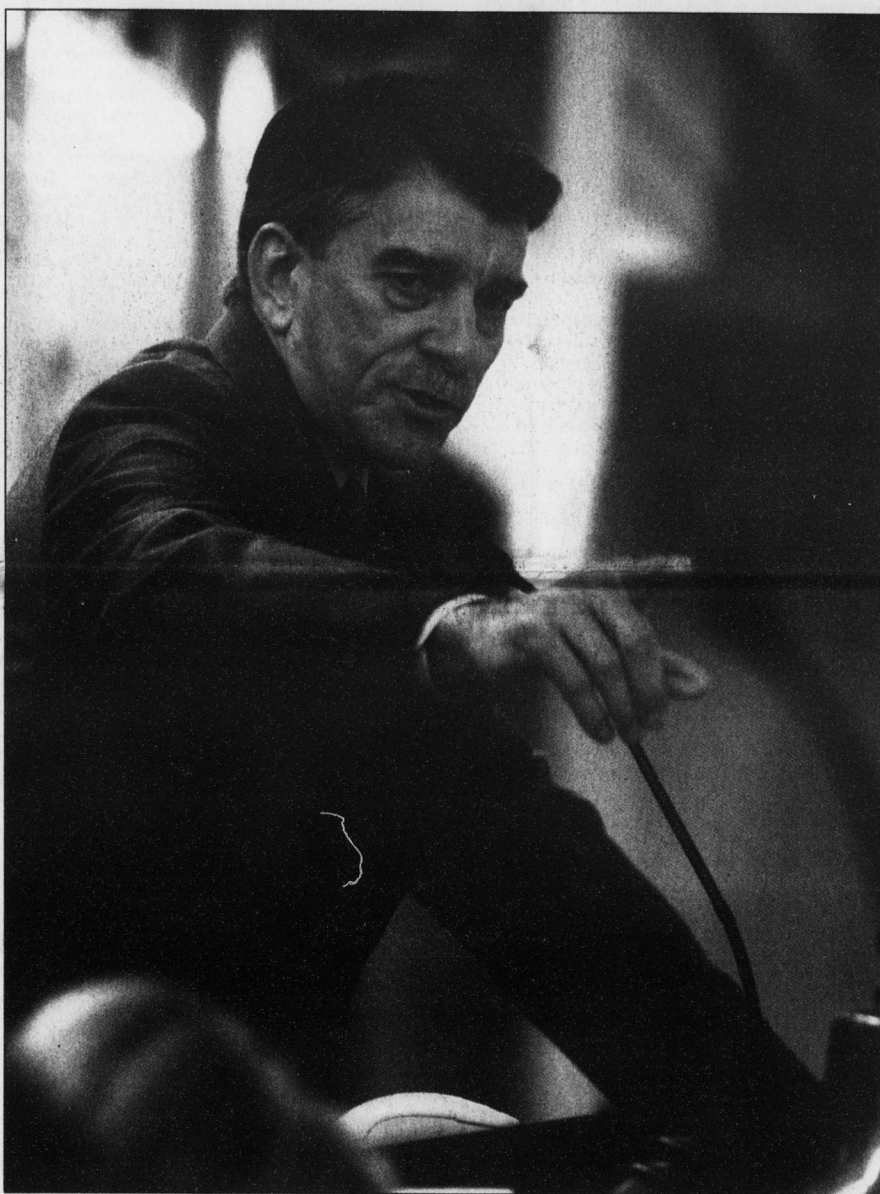
Rep. William Wainwright, D-Lenoir, was voted speaker pro tem and temporary operating rules were voted on for both chambers of the General Assembly.

Legislators use these rules until a committee submits its suggestions for how they can be improved. After a vote on the amendments, the

SEE ASSEMBLY, PAGE 4



William Russler, 2, grandson of Rep. William Current, R-Gaston, was one of the many children who came to the opening of the legislature.



DTH PHOTOS/COURTNEY POTTER

Rep. Joe Hackney, D-Orange, introduces legislators as the new speaker of the House on Wednesday. Hackney said he hopes both parties can work together. Both the House and Senate also used the first day to pass operating rules.

## Assault strains relations

Guilford officials called on to label incident hate crime

BY BRENDAN BROWN  
ASSISTANT STATE & NATIONAL EDITOR

GREENSBORO — The alleged assault of three Palestinian students at Guilford College on Saturday has left painful rifts between students and the administration in the school's Quaker community.

The alleged victims — two were hospitalized for concussions — filed criminal charges Sunday that led to the arrest of three Guilford football players in connection with the event.

Osama Sabbah, Faris Khader and Omar Awartani reportedly were attacked first by racial slurs, then by at least three brass-knuckled, brick-wielding students, though as many as 20 were present.

The school administration's caution against naming the action a "hate crime," has many students, alumni and parents troubled.

"Hate crime. Those are very strong words that have a precise legal definition," Guilford President Kent Chabotar said at a packed community meeting Wednesday.

The arrested players, Christopher Barnette, Michael Six and Michael Bates, have been charged with misdemeanor assault and ethnic intimidation. They were released Monday on \$2,000 bail.

Both the alleged victims and charged students were forced off campus and security was increased, Chabotar said, adding that further action will not be taken until an investigation brings out the truth.

A cohort of concerned students, who have organized a class walkout for today, spoke against what they said was the school's refusal to address the incident as a hate crime.

"It is obvious that it is a hate crime, and you cannot deny that it is a hate crime," student Raji Ward said.

The school's press release, issued Tuesday, makes no mention of racial slurs and states that the students involved were acquaintances.

The alleged victims had no acquaintance with their attackers before the incident, said Ghada Jakbeer, Sabbah's cousin who spoke on his behalf.

Sabbah, who was in attendance, was advised against commenting to the press.

SEE ASSAULT, PAGE 4

## Committee supports hikes

BY ERIN ZUREICK  
UNIVERSITY EDITOR

The Board of Trustees inched closer to approving across-the-board tuition hikes Wednesday.

At the meeting of the board's audit and finance committee, members unanimously recommended increases of \$1,250 for nonresident undergraduate students, \$250 for residents and \$500 for graduate students.

The full 13-member board will convene at 8 a.m. today at the Carolina Inn's Chancellor's Ballroom East and West to vote on the proposal, which would generate \$5.9 million.

Student Body President James Allred,



an ex-officio trustee who is not a member of audit and finance, said he plans to advocate a lower figure today for out-of-state students, though he did not commit to any certain level.

"Students are reasonable," Allred said earlier this week. "We want to grow, but in a reasonable and fair way."

Provost Bernadette Gray-Little presented the recommendation, which was put forward by Chancellor James Moeser, to the committee. The proposal was similar to the one Moeser initially brought to

### ATTEND THE BOT MEETING

Time: 8 a.m. today  
Location: Carolina Inn, Chancellor's Ballroom East and West  
Info: www.unc.edu/depts/trustees

the board's November meeting — with the exception that his out-of-state tuition recommendation then was \$500.

The jump in nonresident tuition is necessary to close the gap between UNC and its peers when it comes to tuition levels and faculty salaries, some trustees said.

The board's tuition policy mandates

SEE TUITION, PAGE 4

## Tuition to support needs

Revenue targeted for salaries, student aid

BY WHITNEY KISLING  
ASSISTANT UNIVERSITY EDITOR

Every semester students and parents shell out thousands of dollars to UNC. But after checking accounts have been emptied and credit card bills racked up, some find themselves wondering where all that money went.

This year tuition dollars will be divided into three main groups — faculty salaries, student aid and teaching assistant stipends — priorities recommended by the tuition and fee advisory task force.

Task force members spent the past semester researching recommendations for tuition increases and campus needs. The Board of Trustees will meet today to vote on the hikes.

Provost Bernadette Gray-Little, who led the task force with Student Body President James Allred, presented its findings Wednesday to the board's audit and finance committee.

If the proposal goes through, 64 percent will be set aside for faculty salaries, 35 percent for student aid and the remainder to increase the minimum TA stipend by \$400.

The amount dedicated to salaries is an increase from the 43 percent for the 2006-07 academic year, reflecting a priority to put UNC

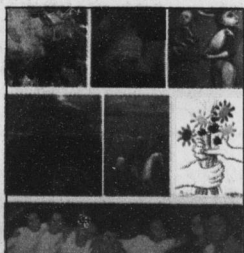
SEE REVENUE, PAGE 4

### inside

**A WAY WITH WORDS** Renowned poet graces Memorial Hall stage, PAGE 5

**HOT DOG! VENDORS** Downtown leaders discuss street vendors, PAGE 6

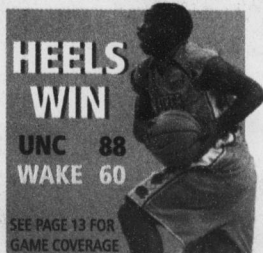
**TAR HEEL ACES** Women's tennis team dominates Tennessee at home, PAGE 13



### dive | page 7

#### GO TO A GALLERY

A comprehensive look at the numerous art galleries the area has to offer, as well as a variety of reviews of the latest music and movies released.



SEE PAGE 13 FOR GAME COVERAGE

### this day in history

#### JAN. 25, 1996 ...

Calling himself the "original beer patriot," a UNC graduate student goes to court to protest Chapel Hill's ban on open containers of alcohol on public property.

### weather

Partly cloudy  
H 47, L 23

### index

police log ..... 2  
calendar ..... 2  
games ..... 11  
sports ..... 13  
opinion ..... 14