

The Daily Tar Heel

Established 1898,
115 years
of editorial freedom

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Snapshot of life as a teaching assistant

For most undergraduate students, getting high grades is a top priority. Like most of my friends, I know that I need to perform well in the academic arena in order to gain entry into a favorable institution for my post-grad studies. Therefore it should come as no surprise that many students try to gain points whenever possible, even blaming the varying grading standards among teaching assistants.

While it's true that TAs grade differently, many of us forget that TAs are students, too, and working with undergraduates is a relatively peripheral activity for them.

Whitney Heavner, a TA for genetics and molecular biology, started out her college life wanting to go medical school and was accepted before turning to a different path.

When asked about how she likes her job teaching at UNC, the Ph.D. candidate says "most graduate students are pretty nerdy and don't really mind teaching because we love our subject."

If you think your life as an undergraduate is tough, take a look at what your TA endures. Most of them work between 40 and 50 hours a week on their own studies. For some that might include working at a lab bench, attending a seminar, doing research, meeting with an adviser or applying for grants. Specific activities vary based upon area of study but the time commitment remains constant.

In addition to working on their own projects, TAs also commit a large portion of their time to helping undergraduates. This can mean between 15 and 20 hours a week preparing, teaching and grading. During recitation or lab they have to make sure they are on top of all of the material so that they can answer questions.

Some must teach as part of their graduation requirement, while others choose to become TAs for their own reasons. Most agree it's a great way to get introduced to teaching as a potential career. They also agree that UNC has some of the most impressive students they've seen and for the most part really enjoy their jobs, except when they start to feel the time crunch.

In a letter to the editor this semester, an undergraduate student complained about the different standards each TA applies when grading leading to unfairly dissimilar grades for the same work. Obviously each TA has a different area of expertise but when it comes to grading, collaborating on grading tests and papers is standard practice to ensure a fair evaluation.

There is just no way a professor can be looking over the shoulder of every TA. As we all know, some TAs just seem to grade tougher than others. While they do their best to make the grades consistent, there will always be some judgment calls that go differently for different people.

For some classes the TA will regrade students' papers only if they submit a written request detailing why it's merited. But this is no guarantee that the final grade will change.

"Sometimes your heart just bleeds," Neal Rasmussen, a BIOL 101 lab TA, said of making tough decisions on grades. So next time you think about complaining about the job your TA does, remember that they might not be perfect but that they are among the best in their field. In the long run, your own personality and initiative will take you further than a few points on a test.

EDITORIAL CARTOON By Nate Beeler, The Washington Examiner



Decentralized cuts are best

The University is responding prudently to the state-mandated budget cuts of 2 percent that were announced earlier this year. While other UNC-system schools have frozen hiring of faculty, UNC-CH has given jurisdiction of spending cuts to individual departments.

This distribution of responsibility is both more effective and more efficient than decisions made from the top. Individual departments certainly know best which programs can endure reduced budgets and which programs cannot.

"I do believe this is a wise course of action," said Steven Matson, dean of the UNC-CH

Graduate School, in an e-mail. "UNC-CH has a long history of decentralized administration, which has served us well in the past. This includes allowing departments to manage their budgets with some direction from the Provost and the Chancellor."

But a system that distributes fiscal power is not sufficient, in itself, to make sure budget cuts are carried out sensibly.

The risk of such a system is that it demands multiple departments to coordinate effectively. As a result, all departments must act wisely under this distributive system. "Each dean and vice chancellor needs to weigh their priorities, and make the budget

reduction decisions in a way that minimizes the impact on programs and services," said Roger Patterson, associate vice chancellor for finance at UNC-CH, in an e-mail.

Though state funding is decreasing, UNC-CH is fortunate to receive the strong support of private donations. But continued private support of this extent depends on a sustained rationale to invest in our University.

During this economic downturn, the University is the taking the right approach in dealing with the budget cuts. Now the responsibility lies with the individual departments to ensure academic quality is not compromised.

Thinking about drinking

Student input essential for new alcohol policy

The University's revised alcohol policy needs to have broad student input and focus on comprehensive solutions, rather than on a purely punitive crack down on drinking.

From every indication so far, University officials understand the importance of incorporating nuance into a new alcohol policy, while making sure the punitive aspects of the policy are clear and consistent.

The goal of any alcohol policy should be helping students make smart choices, rather than aiming for complete prohibition.

University officials have opened up an initial discussion among students in the process of formalizing an official alcohol policy for UNC.

The focus so far is in the right place.

The "public health model" that administrators have been discussing would focus on intervention and prevention, as well as providing resources for education and alternative alcohol-free activities on campus.

But it is also essential that students take part in this discussion in the coming months and make sure that campus officials have a wide range of opinions — not just from the people that usually participate in changes in campus policy.

Officials have indicated that they're in no rush to put in place a new policy and they want to gather as much input as possible, as well as vet the new policy thoroughly.

Two major areas that need more input are medical amnesty and parental notification.

On these issues, there's no agreement among colleges across the country. As a result, a persuasive voice from UNC students can help shape these aspects of the policy.

Officials rightly recognize that there is no silver bullet to reducing alcohol-related problems and cutting down on dangerous binge drinking on campus and that it's also important to have consistency and clarity in any new policy so that students are aware of consequences for violating the drinking policy.

But students still need to get involved to help administrators come up with sensible policies.

Hate speech troubling

Racial slurs on free expression tunnel not acceptable

Racial slurs written on N.C. State University's free expression tunnel last week provided an unfortunate reminder of our dark past and have no place in our society as we look forward to the future.

Despite Tuesday night's celebratory atmosphere and the message of unity by the nation's first black president-elect, students awoke to the painful reminder that hate that still exists in our country.

That morning, racial slurs and death threats directed toward President-elect Obama were discovered on the walls of NCSU's free expression tunnel.

This incident comes after advertisements for a Ku Klux

Klan rally were found in the tunnel earlier in the semester.

These messages contradicted the efforts of all who came together — black and white, Republican and Democrat — to make history last Tuesday.

America took a giant leap forward as we left behind old stereotypes and prejudices and elected the nation's first African-American president.

Obama's election represented great progress for the civil rights movement and for many marked the start of healing, not only from the past eight years of the Bush administration, but from the racial divisions that have long tainted our history.

N.C. State's free expression

tunnel offers a place for people to express their opinions and feelings and promote dialogue on a wide variety of topics.

But freedom of speech comes with great responsibility, a responsibility that was breached last week.

Students and administrators at NCSU responded to calmly and productively, with a protest that included speakers who voiced opposition to these inflammatory remarks and a discussion among students.

This incident reminds us that racist expressions and threats do nothing to promote dialogue, but simply reopen wounds of the past and do not belong in today's America.

QUOTE OF THE DAY:

"We just ran out of time tonight."

KAREN SHELTON, FIELD HOCKEY COACH

FEATURED ONLINE READER COMMENT:

"Why is it that one language is not good enough but two languages are? If two, then why not three, four or a hundred?"

— ON "LETTER TO THE EDITOR WAS RACIST AND INCONSIDERATE"

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Raynor's nonattendance policy counterproductive

TO THE EDITOR:

Student Body President J.J. Raynor has made a decision not to attend meetings of the UNC Association of Student Governments. Her reasons, while not entirely lacking merit, are not a substantive argument for failing to represent the students of UNC at the highest level of student government in the state.

Representing your university in-person is important. Instead, Logan Liles, Ms. Raynor's hand-selected proxy, represents our great university.

Were I a member of ASG, I would consider it rude that Ms. Raynor feels unable to attend when others make time to do so regardless of their busy schedules. For the simple sake of maintaining UNC's high reputation and the respect we deserve among our peer institutions, it seems only prudent that Ms. Raynor re-evaluate her nonattendance policy at ASG monthly meetings.

It may be true to a certain degree that the student body president at UNC has greater demands on her time than other student presidents, but this is no excuse.

UNC should choose the high road, the path of parity and humility. While I believe that UNC is first among equals, it is counterproductive and disrespectful for other universities to suffer Ms. Raynor's perpetual absence.

William McLeon Harris
Sophomore
History, Political Science

Ending affirmative action would enhance academics

TO THE EDITOR:

In response to last week's editorial ("Future ranking uncertain," Nov. 7), here is a sure way to enhance our academic prestige: Let's stop practicing affirmative action.

Not only is this solution free to the students, taxpayers, and donors, but it's also sure to work.

Perhaps, as a first step, the University could stop inquiring applicants about their sex, race and religion. And if any of these things should be disclosed inadvertently, there could be a rule explicitly forbidding admissions officers from using such criteria in making their decisions.

Now, I realize that this is a bit controversial, but if applicants are admitted solely on a basis of their academic, intellectual, scholarly and extracurricular merits, then we will be sure to have the best possible student body.

Riley Matheson
Senior
Classics

DTH should be critical of Obama administration

TO THE EDITOR:

I hope that even though the election is over, the DTH will continue to be critical of the policies and actions that President-elect Barack Obama takes in office. The election has brought attention to many important issues that I hope do not fall out of the spotlight simply because

the votes have been counted.

It is imperative that we hold the President accountable for the promises made during his campaign.

As one of the news sources read most by the students of Chapel Hill, it is your responsibility to be critical of the President's actions, specifically in a nonpartisan way, so that we can all continue to voice our opinions — just as we have during the election.

Partisanship, of course, is inevitable when evaluating and reporting on the different aspects of politics. However, I hope you can continue nonbiased reports on the successes and failures associated with Obama's policies.

Claire Jordan
First-year
Undecided

Gay disenfranchisement parallels segregated past

TO THE EDITOR:

Calling California's passage of Proposition 8 a success for conservative ideals is insulting. We live in a country that is supposedly ruled by the idea that all people are created equal, and that each person has the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

It is appalling that the name given to the denial of equal rights to all people is "preserving the sanctity of marriage," or "conservatism," and not "prejudice."

In the '50s and '60s, there were opponents of desegregation and of extending full rights to African Americans. These opponents said that they were preserving America and protecting their children. Many conservative Southerners even looked to the Bible to back up their viewpoints.

The systematic disenfranchisement of African Americans that took place in the United States in the past is eerily reminiscent of what is happening today to the GLBTQ community.

By not extending full rights to gay couples, we are proliferating "separate but equal" ideals.

Anna Tarleton Potter
Senior
Anthropology

Washington must monitor corporate bailout money

TO THE EDITOR:

Why are taxpayers paying thousands of dollars for executive retreats?

Less than a week after getting \$85 billion from the government, the insurance corporation AIG spent \$440,000 on an executive retreat. A few weeks later, as the government gave them another \$38.7 billion, a handful of the top AIG executives spent thousands on an English hunting trip. Now we find out that only 22 days after being taken over by the government, Fannie Mae spent close to \$7,000 on an executive golf trip for 20 people.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but aren't taxpayer dollars supposed to go toward helping the liquidity problem, not lavish getaways for rich executives?

Swathi Putcha
Junior
Business

SPEAK OUT

WRITING GUIDELINES:

- ▶ Please type: Handwritten letters will not be accepted.
- ▶ Sign and date: No more than two people should sign letters.
- ▶ Students: Include your year, major and phone number.
- ▶ Faculty/staff: Include your

department and phone number.
▶ Edit: The DTH edits for space, clarity, accuracy and vulgarity. Limit letters to 250 words.

SUBMISSION:

- ▶ Drop-off: at our office at Suite 2409 in the Student Union.
- ▶ E-mail: to dthedit@gmail.com
- ▶ Send: to P.O. Box 3257, Chapel Hill, N.C. 27515.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Columns, cartoons and letters do not necessarily represent the opinions of The Daily Tar Heel or its staff. Editorials reflect the opinions of The Daily Tar Heel editorial board. The board consists of seven board members, the associate opinion editor, the opinion editor and the editor.

JOIN US: The Daily Tar Heel is hiring for the spring semester.

We're looking for about eight columnists who will produce hard-hitting, insightful, well written and well researched columns with local relevance centered around a theme of their own choosing on a biweekly basis.

We're looking for about eight to 10 board members who will write unsigned editorials on behalf of the DTH. Members must attend a one-hour meeting on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday each week to brainstorm and pitch ideas. Each board member can expect to write at least three editorials a week.

We're looking for at least two cartoonists who will produce creative, original editorial cartoons weekly.

Please visit Union 2409 or www.DailyTarHeel.com under "About us" for an application.

Applications are due at 5 p.m. Nov. 24. Contact Editor Allison Nichols at allisonnichols@gmail.com with questions.