

## The Daily Tar Heel

Established 1893,  
115 years  
of editorial freedom

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## Center researches decision- making

When facing decisions, independent of how complex they are, we often assume we will be able to make a rational choice. If we have the right information and incentive, we will bet good money that we would take a

### GUEST COLUMNIST

We will be able to close options that no longer make sense to us; we will not provide overly optimistic forecasts about timelines for the completion of our activities and projects; we will start exercising without waiting once again for tomorrow; we will negotiate our first job offer without fear of being judged negatively for doing so.

Research in psychology and related fields helps to explain why we never seem to enter this "promised land" of optimal judgments and rational decisions.

This research has yielded enormous insights into how the mind works and how we, as humans, can systematically deviate from prescribed norms of rational thinking without even being aware of it.

But where does this research happen?

Bringing together researchers and students from various departments on UNC campus, and with the help of key colleagues, I founded a new center dedicated to cutting edge research on human behavior and decision making: the Center for Decision Research.

The Center for Decision Research was created in September of 2008 and is jointly sponsored by the Kenan-Flagler Business School, the psychology department, and the philosophy department here at UNC.

The steering committee of the Center for Decision Research is composed of me (director), Keith Payne (Department of Psychology, UNC), and Joshua Knobe (Department of Philosophy, UNC).

The center provides a home for researchers from a variety of disciplines such as organizational behavior, marketing, communication, public health and policy, philosophy, psychology and sociology.

Starting in fall 2009, the group will meet regularly to engage in a vigorous exchange of ideas with speakers from around the globe in weekly seminars, and already performs cutting-edge research on human judgment, behavior and decision making.

Affiliates of the Center for Decision Research investigate topics both on the forefront of their respective fields of research and of current interest to the public.

Topics include (but are not limited to): Fairness, justice and ethical decision making, emotions, social influence, moral judgment, social cognition, motivation, power, leadership and managerial decision making, creativity, innovation and team decision processes.

The results of this research can help decision makers in both the public and private sectors better understand how they can improve their decision making processes and make higher quality decisions.

There is still a great deal to learn about human judgment and behavior.

Affiliates at the center will keep making progress in this direction.

**EDITORIAL CARTOON** By Alex Herrington, achctts1@email.unc.edu



PREPARATION FOR THE WAR ON CHRISTMAS 2008

## Bridge to nowhere

Building a pedestrian bridge over South Road isn't a good use of University funds right now

No one can deny that pedestrian traffic on South Road is a serious problem, but a massive bridge from Student Stores to Stadium Drive is not the most practical solution.

Of course, something should be done to revamp current traffic conditions and improve safety for students walking to and from campus.

Pedestrian safety has become a significant concern this year as two people have been struck and killed by Chapel Hill Transit buses on campus.

While the urge to take immediate action is understandable, there are a number of important factors to consider.

The project won't come cheap. A \$400,000 budget has been allocated for design alone, with much more to be spent on

construction.

UNC officials should reconsider how urgent a priority a South Road bridge should be.

Given the struggling economy, not to mention the University's construction backlog of nearly \$1.7 billion, which includes some long overdue repairs and safety upgrades on campus, this massive structure hardly seems like the most pressing project.

And aesthetically speaking, a massive bridge towering over South Road — which must be high enough so buses can pass underneath — right next to one of our most historic campus landmarks (the Bell Tower) just wouldn't fit in with the quaint character of our University.

One simple, and less visually obstructive, alternative would be to install upright traffic

lights at the busiest crosswalks in front of the Bell Tower. This would also eliminate the need for the crossing guards hired by the UNC Department of Public Safety to work during peak traffic hours.

Or, if the University has the stomach for it, how about our very own free expression tunnel under South Road? At least the tunnel would be hidden from view and serve the same purpose as an unsightly bridge.

UNC will have to make some difficult financial decisions in the months and years to come.

A pedestrian bridge would be a substantial — if unsightly — improvement to South Road traffic conditions. But given the state of the economy, it is not the most sensible use of University funds.

## Driver policy too lenient

Chapel Hill Transit should have stricter incident and discipline policies for town bus drivers

The accident record of the bus driver responsible for the death of a UNC Health Care employee on Oct. 27 raises serious concerns about the town's vetting process of bus drivers for safety.

Chapel Hill Transit driver James Willie Orr was involved in 10 accidents between 2001 and 2008 — eight of which took place while driving a Chapel Hill Transit bus. Two accidents occurred in a personal automobile.

Chapel Hill Transit policy states that a driver can be recommended for termination after recording three "preventable" accidents in a rolling calendar year.

While Orr didn't meet this criteria, he did have a long history of incidents.

Chapel Hill Transit — or

the town, which can supersede Chapel Hill Transit policy — should have more closely reviewed Orr's record.

It's unclear if Orr was ever disciplined by Chapel Hill Transit, but the incident reports obtained by The Daily Tar Heel indicate grounds for such action.

The town's concern for pedestrian safety has been illustrated through its efforts to test innovative approaches at the crosswalk at the intersection of South Columbia Street and Cameron Avenue.

While this is an appropriate action to alleviate safety concerns, it does not address the main cause of Valerie Hughes' death — driver error.

Hughes was crossing at the intersection of Mason Farm Road and South Columbia

Street while a "walk" signal was shown, and the bus driven by Orr failed to yield.

Because this accident can be chiefly attributed to that failure to yield, it is important for town officials to be vigilant in the future when determining which drivers could be at risk for future traffic accidents.

Of the 10 accidents reported involving Orr, several included rear-ending stopped traffic and hitting parked vehicles, as well as sideswiping a utility pole.

Eight automobile accidents in seven years certainly should raise some eyebrows.

This issue should be revisited not in order to further incriminate Orr, but to rethink the town's response to drivers who have a history of traffic incidents.

## Dollars and sense

Making financial auditing higher priority right move

UNC-system Board of Governors has recently made financial accountability more of a priority.

Financial accountability has moved from tenth place to fourth place in the BOG's stated priorities.

Financial accountability now falls only behind faculty retention, financial aid and campus safety.

The BOG has made the right decision to place a greater emphasis on financial accountability, especially in these times of economic instability.

This move illustrates the BOG's willingness to crack

down on wasteful spending by standardizing accounting systems and increasing financial training for university staff.

These additional measures will require more funding initially, but Frank Daniels, chairman of the board's auditing committee, said he expects the system to recoup these initial costs within the next two years.

Audits in the past two years have turned up too much wasteful spending by UNC-system universities.

Most notably among the audits are reports that universities sometimes waived competition for service contracts,

therefore not ensuring that services were rendered at the lowest possible price.

Increased, standardized and preventative auditing will help the state save money by holding the universities more accountable in how they allocate funds.

The BOG's reordering of its priorities sends a strong signal to UNC-system schools and the state legislature that it is serious about cutting costs.

The BOG needs to make sure its priority shift is put into practice and continue to look for ways to cut costs during times of financial strain.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY:

*"I had this feeling, this cold feeling on my eyes, that just kept them open. Around my face it was just like my nerves were awake."*

UNC SOPHOMORE, ON USING ADDERALL TO STUDY

### FEATURED ONLINE READER COMMENT:

*"I know it can be annoying to have an ideology shoved down your throat. ... Try being an unaffiliated voter in Chapel Hill!"*

— ON "SAY WHAT YOU MEAN, NOT 'HAPPY HOLIDAYS'"

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### By law, funds need to be handed out based on merit

TO THE EDITOR:

The article "Young Dems aim for power," (Dec. 1) claims that "a greater liberal presence could mean rejection of events sponsored by conservative groups." Charlie Sellew, co-president of the Young Democrats, is quoted saying that Student Congress should "not treat everything the same."

According to the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *The Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System v. Southworth*, it is unlawful to appropriate funds in the manner that Sellew suggests. Any student organizations cannot be denied funding based on in viewpoint.

Funds are appropriated to those who have a legitimate request. So, should anyone who is elected act in the manner that Sellew suggests, they will do so unlawfully.

Jason Sutton  
Student Congress and  
College Republicans

#### Student athletes' health privacy is protected at UNC

TO THE EDITOR:

The Department of Athletics, Campus Health Services and the medical professionals who treat Carolina's varsity sports programs take very seriously student athletes' rights to privacy and the Federal and state statutes that govern the release of patient information.

We are careful to only release information approved by UNC sports medicine and the student athletes themselves. Our student athletes sign a Consent for Release of Medical Information each year. Athletic department staff members review that consent form with the student athletes each year.

There are some situations when it's in a student's best interest to release basic and limited information, and we will do so with their consent. For example, in sports such as football and basketball, where gamblers are looking for any inside information that could help them, we feel it is prudent to provide basic information that would preempt people from contacting students for information. In addition, because some of our students become public figures, releasing basic information as to why a student athlete is not participating due to injury prevents others from inventing "reasons" and engaging in wild speculation as often occurs in a vacuum of valid information.

We would not release information in any of the sensational situations Dr. Lewis Margolis referred to at the beginning of his column ("Athletes deserve privacy rights," Dec. 1).

In some situations, like that earlier this semester of a swimmer who had a serious health condition, we work closely with the family to make certain that no unauthorized information was given out. If the family requests that no information be released, then that is what we do.

In Tyler Hansbrough's case, the last thing Tyler wanted was to constantly be asked why he was not playing when all we had to say was he had a shin injury.

Steve Kirschner  
Director of Athletic  
Communications

### 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 [editdesk@unc.edu](mailto:editdesk@unc.edu)
- 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.