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The Daily Tar Heel

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Planting blame

Community frustration with Chapel Hill's largest citizen — the University — peaked last week when \$43,000 in fines were levied against the University-run power plant.

The battery of fines included multiple administrative and technical violations during the last three months of 1991 — shortly after UNC personnel began managing daily plant functions.

To a large extent, the violations are a simple result of the University growing accustomed to the unfamiliar complexity of power plant operations. Yet its status as a novice in the boiler business does not exonerate the University from its responsibility.

Many of the violations pertained to simple bureaucratic oversights, such as failure to notify the proper authorities before construction. One can only hope that a year later, the University Physical Plant has become more accustomed to the ritualistic paper chase in Raleigh and future administrative violations can be avoided.

Of greater concern are the violations indicating a failure to meet certain emissions standards. State environmental codes mandate that the plant remove at least 90 percent of the sulfur dioxide initially contained in the coal. According to Gene Swecker, associate vice chancellor for facilities management, the plant averaged approximately 88 percent or 89 percent sulfur-dioxide removal.

Although this discrepancy might seem minor, the University has a duty to uphold minimal state standards and protect the environment of the University

community. The plant engineers have taken steps to close the gap still further so as to be in accordance with state levels. Only the next round of official readings will tell if their work has translated into success.

Members of the Power Plant Neighbors, a group of residents living near the Cameron Avenue plant, have suggested that the University explore natural gas as an alternative energy option. The boilers currently are equipped to make this transition. Only the high cost and limited resources of natural gas remain as economic barriers.

Swecker has said the University will conduct a cost assessment of the use of natural gas instead of coal. Ideally, this dollar-sign decision-making will include important intangibles like the relative environmental impact and the acceptance of the Chapel Hill community.

Assuming no unforeseen catastrophes occur during the next few months, the recent fines should not alter the plant's operations or force a price increase next year. After a probable appeal, the final fines will be paid for out of the utilities trust fund that covers operating costs for the facility. Every year a financial safety cushion is built into the plant budget for such unanticipated emergencies.

But clearly, a \$43,000 financial loss does not make good business sense. When the University entered the power plant business a year ago, it willingly took on the great responsibilities inherent in the project. Now, it's being called upon to live up to them.

Library life support

It's old news that statewide budget cuts over the last few years have hit the University system where it hurts — right in the purse.

The libraries, especially, have suffered. As UNC's libraries have fallen off the pace in several categories of acquisitions, so have UNC's reputation and ability to attract top-notch students and professors.

Some leaders in Student Congress have taken steps to bolster our libraries' financial position. A proposal now before the congress would place a referendum on the spring ballot requesting a fee increase of \$2.50 per semester and 75 cents per summer session. This fee increase would create and finance a new Student Endowed Library Fund. The annual interest from this ever-growing fund would be allocated to the Academic Affairs Libraries.

It's unfortunate that action by the student body has become necessary, but it has, and this proposal is both timely and constructive. The issue must be put before the students, and the endowment must be approved.

The benefits of excellent libraries at the state's universities reach far beyond the boundaries of a campus. The University and its library system are public goods that should not have their budgets slashed. The state should not put its students in the

position of having to salvage the libraries.

However, it has been demonstrated that funding libraries does not buy votes.

Students can't be as shortsighted as our political leaders. They and the faculty are the primary users of the library system, and when an institution so vital to our education is neglected, they must act where everyone else has failed. Students cannot stand idly by while their library system's standing and competitive ability plummet. They can't afford to.

Having paid tuition, fees, room, board and other costs of living in Chapel Hill, which can add up to \$10,000 a year, it would be foolish not to spend another \$5 a year to support the library and be sure a UNC diploma keeps its value.

UNC might get name recognition because of the exploits of athletes who wear the blue and white, but UNC graduates get jobs because of the school's reputation for generating quality graduates. If this reputation falls behind, as it will continue to do unless students take action, then the marketability of a UNC diploma will diminish for lack of \$20 for the library.

We can't allow the kingdom to be lost for lack of a horseshoe nail. Student Congress must approve the referendum on the Student Endowed Library Fund.

Criminal statistics

Sometimes the numbers lie.

UNC officials last month issued their annual security report listing on-campus crime statistics. But considering that the majority of crimes against UNC students occurs in the surrounding community, these figures do not tell the whole story.

The largest statistical discrepancy was in reported rapes. University numbers showed the six rapes that were reported on campus last year, a relatively small figure. What they did not show were the 24 rapes that were reported as occurring off campus during the same time period.

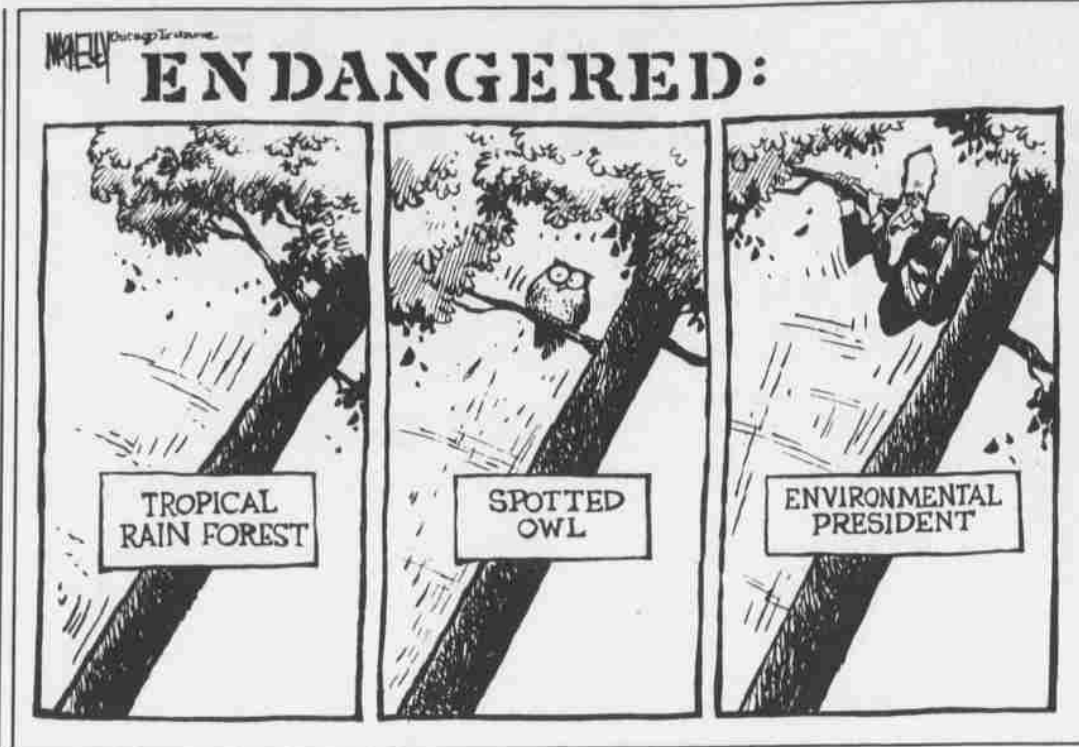
While University officials only are required to list on-campus crime statistics, these numbers alone do not give an altogether accurate account of UNC students' safety problems. In order for students to be fully informed of the dangers that lurk on campus grounds and just beyond, it is vital that the University collaborate with local law enforcement and health

officials to show the real statistical picture.

It's important to remember that a lack of information can in itself be a very real danger. Rape, for example, is a notoriously underreported crime. A victim who notes that only six other women came forward to press charges in a year's time might decide to keep her story to herself. And by seeing only half (or in the case of rape, one-fifth) of the picture, some students might be lulled into a false sense of security when they wander off campus.

N.C. State University already has decided to expand its crime reports to include the surrounding community. Even if UNC feels it is necessary to release only statistics that are specific to on-campus crimes, they should at least include a second set of statistics on crimes that involve students reported in the surrounding community.

Low crime statistics look good for the University, but students deserve a closer look.



Invisibility threatens gay civil rights movement

Bruce Gay settled into his seat on the US-Air flight to Washington, D.C. He had delayed getting a ticket until the last minute, and his name had been placed on a waiting list. Luckily for him, some poor schmuck was probably stuck in traffic someplace at this very moment, cursing at the now useless piece of paper in his hand that had once been a valid ticket to D.C. Bruce was on his way to D.C. ... or so he thought.

Just as the gateway's door was about to close, the passenger who had been assigned Bruce's seat dashed inside. A flight attendant, none too eager to tell the seated passenger to leave, approached Bruce Gay's seat cautiously, glanced at her seating chart (which had only the last name of the passengers) and said something a little too quietly for Bruce to hear.

"What was that?" Bruce asked. "I said, 'Are you Gay?'" the flight attendant repeated (a little too loudly). "That's right," Bruce replied. "Why?" "I'm afraid you'll have to leave the plane," she said, trying her best to be polite.

At this point, a man sitting across the aisle put down a paper he had been reading and stood up angrily.

"Wait a second," he demanded. "I'm gay, too. Does that mean I have to leave the plane?"

"Huh?" the confused flight attendant gasped, taking a short step back. Every one of the more than 100 passengers stared at the developing conflict with mounting interest. This sure as hell beat that emergency exit and seat belt routine the flight attendants usually did. Another passenger stood.

"That makes three of us," she declared, defiantly. "You gonna kick me off, too?"

"They can't kick all of us off," a fourth passenger yelled. Bruce and the poor, misunderstood flight attendant (who would later enter intensive therapy) shook their heads in amazement after, one by one, more and more voices joined in the show of unity ...

I can't attest to the validity of this story, but I've heard it repeated in several different circles. It's good for a laugh, but it also serves another purpose.



Doug Ferguson
To A Different Beat

It illustrates the veil of invisibility that cloaks the gay and lesbian population in the United States. This "invisibility factor" could be the most damaging enemy of the gay civil rights movement. Before those brave — albeit misled — passengers stood up in defense of their perceived "brother," they were just average, ordinary people on another routine flight to our nation's capitol. Dressed in business suits and sweats, jeans and khakis, their dress certainly didn't set them apart from their straight peers. Black and white, Asian and Indian, their skin color was certainly no give away either. In fact, some gay activists have admitted wishing that all gay people would wake up purple one day so that everyone else would realize who we are and just how many of us are around. Well, I don't know about purple ... the color does nothing for me. Perhaps a nice teal or magenta would be better. The idea, however, is a sound one.

You see, the fact that we can't — in the vast majority of cases — be identified by sight not only keeps straight people from recognizing our numbers, but it also keeps us from being able to organize in an effective way. Sure, some lesbians have short hair and nose rings, but so do some straight women. Yeah, some gay men are wispy and dye their hair black, but in an age when androgyny is in, that's no sure sign. Shoot, I'd be taking my life into my own hands if I approached every man on campus I thought was gay and asked them to "join the movement." Half the fraternities would have me on their most wanted lists.

Instead, the few of us who are "out" have to wait for others to realize the need to take a stand. We have to wait for the executives, the politicians, the soldiers, the housewives to take that often painful step of coming out to their colleagues, constituents, commanding of-

ficers and families. Meanwhile, we struggle to prove to critics that we are performing all of these roles and many more on the same level and sometimes better than our straight peers.

It is no small wonder that "outings," such as in the case of Pete Wilson, Defense Department spokesman, occur. Can you imagine how frustrating it is when one of us — someone we know is one of us — has a leading role in an organization that bars gays and lesbians from employment and yet does nothing to stop it? Is it any small wonder that conservative, anti-gay politicians are outed when they are seen frequenting gay bars?

Of course, a person's sexual orientation is a private matter, and it should be his or her choice whether to reveal it ... as long as they avoid hypocrisy. I don't believe in outing people just because they would make good role models for our nation's gay youth. I don't believe people have a duty to reveal their homosexuality just so straight people will realize how many of us there are.

Of course, if every one of the 10 percent of us who are gay was willing to open those sealed closet doors, it would make things a whole lot easier for the overworked few who are activists. After all, taking on the rest of the world to create a just society is no small task.

I know. Everyone can't be an activist. Everyone isn't in a position to be open about his or her sexuality. That is a sad fact most gay activists have come to accept. But this invisibility doesn't prevent people from working for change in their own quiet ways.

Those of us who can will take the big strides — introducing anti-discrimination legislation on the floor of the U.S. House, working to end the military's ban on gays and lesbians. But the little strides, such as bringing up a new generation of open-minded children and breaking down established stereotypes, add up, too.

With the big and small battles being fought to end discrimination and hate, invisibility is a foe that will be overcome. And when it is, we will all stand up and be counted.

Doug Ferguson is a senior journalism major from Charlotte.

READERS' FORUM

Look at the big picture before offering help

To the editor:
I would like to respond to a letter in your reader's column of Aug. 31. It was titled, "Helping hand should not offend those in need." It was written by Joan Celmer after she offered to hold a door on Franklin Street for a person using a wheelchair who had already opened the door for himself. Ms. Celmer was "confused, and a bit hurt" when he answered her offer with a curt reply of "NO, thank you."

Ms. Celmer, I was the person you met on Franklin Street in front of the bank, and I never meant to be discourteous or use "a very rough tone." Ms. Celmer, I am sorry that you perceive me to be a person who "seemed to be having a hard time," and that you wanted to hold a door open for me "simply because it might make a tough job a little easier" since "his hands were obviously busy." I think, Ms. Celmer, our perceptions of the event differ to a large degree. My hands were only busy with the wheelchair, but that is not busy for me. It is how I get around and how I always open doors for myself. I might have had things in my lap, but they do not busy my hands. I am interested in what you perceive to be the "tough job" whose trials you sought to alleviate. Was it opening the door? (I had already done that) Was it getting around Franklin Street? I don't know. I was only trying to go about some business I had. I don't do such things counting on the aid of the general public to get me through those "tough jobs." If situations arise in which I need help, I arrange for it in advance.

And Ms. Celmer, I use a hand on an open door to pull myself through it. Your well-intended desire to help me was really a hindrance to my progress. I am sorry to dampen your spirit of good intentions. I am sorry that "(sic) he grabbed the door so tightly I could not move it." I think this is the greatest point of contrast between our perspectives. How hard a time was I having if I had such a dominant control of the door?

Look at the big picture before offering help

It is hard to be picked out of the crowd by strangers as someone "who needs help," Ms. Celmer, especially when by your own account, I didn't seem to need any. I have to assume you were just having a reaction to something else. I hope you might gain a little more control over it in the future (and not bring it out in the school paper).

If I may make a suggestion, Ms. Celmer, the next time you see a handicapped person, take a step back and look at the bigger picture. That person will probably get through the door in question (especially if it is already open), so adopt a broader view. Help them with a door they can't even attempt. Take, for example, the entrance to Ben and Jerry's, right down the street from where we met. Two stairs and NO ramp. I've worked out a way to pull myself up those stairs, but I've almost pulled myself out of the chair a few times doing it, letting me know it's not safe. I've written several letters to the company, getting wonderful, pleasant and positive replies of "we are right now looking into it." Why don't you try (write Ben and Jerry's Homemade P.O. Box 240 Waterbury, VT 05676; get your friends to write, too).

And, Ms. Celmer, if you would really like to help a person using a wheelchair, don't become upset when they don't want you to be their servant. Leave the open doors that way. Work on the ones that are closed.

CARWILE LEROY
Medicine

Apathy rules: Protesting is a waste of our youth

To the editor:
This is a response to "Don't believe the hype" by Jeff Savino, who really doesn't deserve one. Yet we feel we have an obligation to speak for the silent majority who were too apathetic to bother replying.

In general, apathy arises when one realizes that there is little one can do to change the world. Reasons:
1. Campus politics. They are mostly

composed of symbolic acts, measures and demands by special interest groups. They dominate campus politics (via DTH coverage, etc.) with a greed-based rationality that would make any self-respecting egoist blush. The "what's in it for me" attitude that the current politically correct movements are motivated by, i.e. POWER, is the same movement that the "freshman undecided" railed against society at large. Unfortunately, as one cow goes, so goes the herd. Thus, apathy is politically incorrect when it should be simply apolitical.

2. National politics. Unless you are a member of a powerful special interest group, how could you expect to make a difference?

3. Students like Jeff and assorted activists. We hate incessant whining over trivial matters. Do symbolic measures such as moving the Student Body statues approximately 100 yards accomplish anything? And do you think all the time that was spent on this debate was worth it? Do you feel better now? Personally, I'd feel better spending my time on something more productive, such as listening to the Replacements and drinking a Schaefer Light. Why don't you give us a call, and we'll indoctrinate you with our apathetic lifestyle.

Can you not see the point? You are wasting your youth. Loosen up, so when your grandchildren ask what you did in the 90s, you will not have to mumble that you protested, i.e. essentially did nothing.

CRAIG HENDRIX
Junior
History

GREG KONIG
Junior
Philosophy

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The Daily Tar Heel welcomes reader comments and criticisms. We attempt to print as many letters to the editor as space permits.

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Campus mail address: CB# 5210 box 48, Carolina Union
Office: Suite 104 Carolina Union
U.S. Mail address: P.O. Box 3257, Chapel Hill, NC 27515-3257