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UNC administrator implicated in newspaper theft

Mike S. Adams ([archive](#))August 16, 2004 |  Print |  Send

UNC administrators had better stock up on Maalox because it's going to be a long week in Chapel Hill. Just last week the university was exposed for de-recognizing a Christian group without due process for an unthinkable transgression; they wanted to limit membership in the Christian group to people who are actually Christians.

Now, information has surfaced, which implicates the administrator who de-recognized the Christian group in the theft of a student newspaper in 1996. And wouldn't you know it; the stolen newspaper was the *Carolina Review*, the only conservative newspaper on campus.

The theft of the student newspapers took place in February of 1996 when a liberal student named Aaron Nelson was running for student body president at UNC-CH. The conservative Carolina Review printed a scathing critique of Nelson's politics that was slated to appear in an issue to be released on Election Day. That was when the real trouble started.

Supporters of Nelson's campaign stole 1500 copies of the *Carolina Review* in an effort to preserve victory for their liberal candidate. The copies were deposited in the office of Student Attorney General George Oliver some time between the closing of the office the day before and 9:00 a.m. on February 13 (Election Day).

Enter Jonathan Curtis (jon@email.unc.edu), the administrator in charge of the recognition of student groups at UNC-CH.

In an interview with the *Daily Tar Heel (DTH)*, another student newspaper, Curtis admitted that only three

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administrators had master keys to the building where the 1500 stolen newspapers were found. Jonathan Curtis told the *DTH* that he was one of those three administrators.

One year after the theft of the paper, Tadd Wilson, a member of the Nelson campaign dropped a bombshell by disclosing the following in a guest column for the Carolina Review:

What (Jonathan) Curtis knew but could not say was that students were not the only ones involved (in the theft). He could not say so because he was the one whose key unlocked the door.

The serious accusations against Jonathan Curtis continued with the following:

(W)hen asked to open (Oliver's office), Curtis said "I can't do that," turned over his keys and turned his back. Another individual independently confirmed knowledge of Curtis' action. Curtis' involvement (in the theft) fills a major blank in the events leading up to Oliver's discovery of the (stolen) issues, in addition to explaining why Curtis had to testify for the defense at the Honor Court trial.

To make matters worse, Curtis has actually admitted to letting the newspaper thieves into the Attorney General's office. But Curtis denies that he saw the stolen newspapers in their possession. Unfortunately for Curtis, I have seen photographs of the stolen newspapers showing that they were stuffed by the hundreds into giant plastic bags. The words "Carolina Review" were easily distinguishable on the hundreds of stolen copies because the bags were all transparent.

But Jonathan Curtis says that he didn't see any of the 1500 stolen newspapers while he was letting the thieves into a locked university office in the middle of the night.

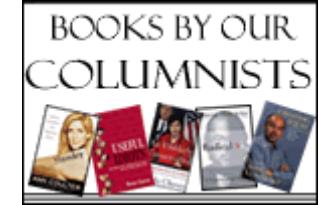
Accusations of a) stealing newspapers to alter the outcome of a student election and, b) manipulating honor court hearings are serious when levied against students. They can result in expulsion or in criminal charges. When levied against university officials who are charged with the responsibility of administering justice, they are even more serious. Clearly, the responsibility of upholding the honor of a great university cannot be entrusted to the dishonorable.

But it may be too late for Chancellor James Moeser (chancellor@unc.edu) to give weight to these important considerations. Last week he decided to dig in his heels

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(no pun intended) and stand by his man Jonathan Curtis. His recent memo to the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) www.thefire.org indicates that this showdown may soon be headed for federal court.

In the process of standing up for Curtis and against his Christian accusers, Chancellor Moeser will likely compound the embarrassment he brought on the university in 2003. That was when he originally tried to cover up the university's treatment of religious organizations by making demonstrably false statements to the public. This time things will be even worse when evidence of Curtis' behavior is admitted in a court of law in a suit against the university.

But Moeser's recent response to the FIRE indicates that he has little understanding of the university's obligation to remain viewpoint neutral in the administration of student funds and in the recognition of student groups.

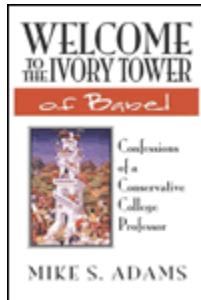
One can only hope that Moeser did not know everything that is now surfacing about Jonathan Curtis' complicity in the theft of the Carolina Review. And there may be more bad news on the way.

To be continued...

Author's Note: The FIRE will respond to James Moeser on August 16th. That response will be posted on www.thefire.org.

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