

Trading Purple for Blue Among ECU's Top-Paid Employees

By Kellen Holtzman

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College campuses have long been thought of as liberal leaning rather than balanced when it comes to political ideology.

Despite the region's conservative reputation, schools in the Tar Heel State aren't exempt from this historic label.

At East Carolina University, 36 percent of the 500 top-paid employees are registered as Democrats compared to 23 percent registered as Republicans. Fewer than 20 percent are unaffiliated and about 21 percent were not found in records available online from the North Carolina Board of Elections. Over half of the highest paid employees as of fall 2007 are involved in the medical field—specifically, in the Health Sciences Department.

Economic undertones may be closely related to these political trends.

Dr. Bonnie Mani, a professor in ECU's Department of Political Science, points out what the national norms are outside of college campuses.

“Those who earn less than \$35,000 per annum are more likely to be Democrats,” said Mani. “Those who make over \$50,000 are more likely to be Republicans.”

This is certainly not the case on a campus like ECU's, where the highest paid employees are predominantly Democrats.

North Carolina has not voted Democrat in a presidential election since 1976. In the most recent election in 2004, President George Bush defeated Democratic Sen. John Kerry of Massachusetts 56 percent to 44 percent in North Carolina. In Pitt County, Bush edged out Kerry 53 percent to 46 percent.

Even in county and state that were “red” until 2008, ECU's campus is likely to stay blue.

“Those with higher levels of education are likely to be further to the left on the ideological scale,” said Mani. “Remember that ideology and party affiliation are two different concepts—although Republicans are more likely to be conservative and Democrats are likely to be further to the left.”

Despite ECU's strong democratic presence, the Republican Party does target students with groups such as College Republicans and Students for McCain. Kim Hendrix, the chair of the Pitt County Republican Party Executive Board, echoed Mani's sentiments.

“ECU is considered a liberal arts college,” said Hendrix. “So that’s why most of them [professors] are Democrats. Most educators are Democrats, but there does seem to be a Republican presence on campus.”

That presence is not overwhelming, however. While the student body may be more balanced, there is a decidedly “blue” theme among those in the teaching ranks.

Nicole Keech, a multicultural and transnational literature Master of Arts student, has instructed courses as a graduate assistant and worked closely with other professors.

“I’ve noticed that just driving through the faculty parking areas during the day that most cars are sporting Obama bumper stickers.” Keech said of the political vibe at ECU. “There are very few in support of McCain - maybe that just means that McCain supporters are more conservative in publicly expressing their political stances.”

Although ECU would normally be in what is considered Republican territory, the majority of voters in both Pitt County and North Carolina voted for Democrat Barack Obama in the 2008 election, making liberal campus trends a little less out of place than in previous elections.