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Campuses compete over who can save most water

UNC-CH, NCSU cut consumption

ANNE BLYTHE, Staff Writer

No one on either side of the latest grudge match between the Tar Heels and the Wolfpack wants to turn it into a full-fledged mudslinging contest.

That might defeat the purpose.

The students are midway through a competition to see who can conserve the most water during the record-breaking drought, and N.C. State University has a slight edge.

Daily water use in residence halls has dropped by four gallons per student per day on average at both schools. But because NCSU students used less water to begin with, their overall consumption has dropped by 14 percent, compared to 12 percent at UNC.

UNC-CH Chancellor James Moeser told his trustees Thursday that there are different theories why his school trails.

"One reason we're behind is that we have more female students -- that was N.C. State's take on it," Moeser said with a laugh.

But as the head of a university that is nearly 60 percent women, Moeser, wisely, distanced himself from that hypothesis.

Brian Sugg, UNC-CH president of the Residence Hall Association, said he would not get into a debate about whether women spend more time in the shower than men.

"Some of my best friends are women," Sugg said before playfully throwing a little mud at the students down the road. "Even if we didn't take as many showers as State students we'd still smell better than their campus."

The gritty contest began in November, on the day the Wolfpack beat Carolina on the Carter-Finley Stadium football field. It ends when the Tar Heels return to Wolfpack territory on Feb. 20, this time in the basketball arena.

Bobby Mills, NCSU student body president, hopes for a two-fer that day, with victories on and off the court.

NCSU, where just 44 percent of the students are women, started the water challenge using fewer gallons than its counterparts to the west. NCSU residence hall students used 31 gallons per day to Chapel Hill's 34 gallons.

As of mid-December, NCSU students were using an average of 27 gallons each per day, compared to 30 gallons per day per UNC-CH student.

Mills said he didn't mind getting a little dirty to save the Earth. Like others at his school, he said he has shortened his showers and made far fewer trips to the laundry room this year.

"Sometimes I take showers in the gym," Mills said. "But that's not something I'm encouraging others to do."

(Staff writer Jane Stancill contributed to this report.)