

Book Details ‘Heck of a Job’ by UGA’s Adams

Victor Kulkosky, News Editor, *The Leader-Tribune*, “Out of My Mind” column, May 13, 2009

Let’s get one thing perfectly clear: UGA President Michael Adams’s dismissal of Vince Dooley is not what lead the UGA Foundation to commission an audit that the Board of Regents rejected, and which ultimately led to the Foundation losing its status as the school’s official fundraising arm.

A new book by former *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reporter Rich Whitt thoroughly demolishes that story line, if anybody cares to listen. *Behind the Hedges: Big Money and Power Politics at the University of Georgia* (NewSouth Books, www.newsouthbooks.com), casts a harsh light on Adams, who has led the state’s flagship public university since 1997, but ultimately casts the harshest light on the Board of Regents, the governing body of all 35 public colleges and universities in the state, including Fort Valley State University.

Whitt (who died of a heart attack right after finishing the book’s final edit) worked for many years at the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. According to his publisher, the AJC mischaracterized this story as “Sports vs. Academics,” and the paper’s lack of interest in looking deeper sparked Whitt’s own interest. What I’ll do here is heartily recommend that you read *Behind the Hedges* yourself for a detailed account of the sordid details. I want to emphasize the aspects of the story in *Behind the Hedges* that extend beyond Michael Adams, which might take a couple of columns.

To summarize the story as the press told it: In 2003, Adams refused Dooley’s request to extend his contract. Adams, not always the most diplomatic guy, could have handled it better. Outraged Dooley supporters attempted a coup, culminating in an audit of Adams’s expenses and other dealings, commissioned by the UGA Foundation. The Board of Regents rejected the resulting report and chastised the Foundation, ultimately taking the unprecedented step of severing the foundation’s official relationship with UGA and creating a new foundation.

Hogwash, Whitt reports in *Behind the Hedges*, but expertly spun, politically astute hogwash, dished out by Adams and his supporters on the Board of Regents, and swallowed whole by the press. The UGA Foundation had long-running problems with Adams. Thus it was that in July 2003, the Foundation, through the law firm King and Spalding, commissioned the fraud and forensic investigations unit of Deloitte & Touche, a top accounting firm. The audit explored several issues: Adams’s expenses paid by the Foundation, his compensation as supplemented by the Foundation, a stipend paid to Adams’s wife Mary and passed through the Foundation, a \$250,000 side agreement with former football coach Jim Donnan, an unauthorized property purchase in Costa Rica, and anything else that came up.

In short, “Taken as a whole, the Deloitte & Touche investigation casts Adams as a self-dealer who took advantage of his position and of weak oversight by Foundation trustees,” Whitt wrote in *Behind the Hedges*. In a letter sent to the publishers of *Behind the Hedges*, law professor and UGA alumnus Jim Ponsoldt wrote the following: “if the facts described in the audit report are correct, the report identifies several fiduciary violations which would warrant civil litigation and discharge (in most organizations).”

There has been neither litigation nor discharge. Attorney General Thurbert Baker’s office has so far done nothing, although Whitt reports a cursory investigation.

Why, or why not?

Whitt points to the cozy, all-too-cozy relationships that have developed between Adams, the Board of Regents and Gov. Sonny Perdue. He reports that Adams and senior staff were with the Board of Regents as they studied the Deloitte & Touche report, and he speculates that Adams’s visible “what me worry” attitude during his battles with the Foundation stemmed from his knowledge that the Regents were behind him all the way and his job was secure. Whitt even discovered that some Regents never read the Deloitte & Touche report.

We know what happened. The Board of Regents, in an unprecedented move, revoked the The UGA Foundation’s official relationship with the university and set up a new organization, the Arch Foundation, as the official fundraising arm of UGA. However, the UGA Foundation still controls roughly \$500 million, while the “official” Arch Foundation controls a mere \$80 million. There are more than a few UGA alumni withholding their checks until the day Michael Adams steps down.

As of Dec. 31, 2007, the University of North Carolina had raked in \$2.38 billion in its latest fundraising campaign, compared to \$458 million for UGA by the same date. Adams was hired for his fundraising abilities. UGA is also slipping in academic standings. These issues deserve further exploration. Keep reading.