

Star reporter charges dropped

By Scott Williams

NIU President William Monat dropped the judicial charges against three Northern Star reporters Wednesday, apparently averting an NIU federal court showdown with the American Civil Liberties Union.

Monat also announced he is ordering an investigation into the University Health Service, the subject of the Northern Star investigation last month which resulted in charges being brought against the reporters.

"I am requesting a detailed inquiry by external experts to advise me on the quality of care exercised in prescribing medications (in the service)," Monat said.

Monat said he dropped the charges against the Northern Star reporters after being advised by University Legal Counsel John Templin that "justice will be served and equity served if their charges are withdrawn."

Templin declined further comment.

Now that the charges have been dropped, the ACLU will ask NIU officials to guarantee The Northern Star full freedom of the press in the future, Illinois ACLU Legal Director Harvey Grossman said.

"Once the university chose to establish a newspaper, it became incumbent upon university officials to accord full constitutional respect for the activities of the newspaper staff," Grossman said.

The ACLU adopted the case of the reporters Tuesday and asked NIU officials to drop the charges because the reporters' First Amendment right to freedom of the press was being violated.

NIU officials were not trying to censor The Northern Star, Monat said.

Grossman said Tuesday he sent letters by private courier to NIU officials, including Monat and Canon, telling them the ACLU would seek a federal injunction to stop judicial proceedings if the charges were not dropped by Friday.

"I have not received a letter, a telephone call, a telegram or any information either from the ACLU or anyone else," Monat said Wednesday.

Monat said he directed NIU Vice President for Student Affairs Harry Canon to



NIU President William Monat announces to a press conference in Lowden Hall that he has dropped charges against three Northern Star reporters for falsifying information to university appeals.

withdraw the charges against the reporters.

"I have carried out the president's decision," Canon said. But, "I am vehemently opposed to that decision."

Monat knew Canon opposed dropping the charges, Canon said.

The panel that will investigate the health service will consist of a faculty member from a medical school, the president of the American College Health Association or his designee, a pharmacy school educator and a faculty member from a research/teaching faculty, Monat said.

The panel may be established by next week and the investigation may be completed by mid-January, he said.

The Northern Star reporters charged with violating a judicial code, Patricia Neubauer, Susan Skowron and Carrie Allen, were involved in an investigation of the service's practice of prescribing drugs to students.

They were charged with violating an NIU judicial code which prohibits students from falsifying information on university records.

University Health Service Director James Erickson said he is "philosophically opposed" to dropping

the charges, but accepts Monat's decision.

All NIU students should be required to abide by the judicial code, and if there has been a defeat in this case, it is of the code itself, Erickson said.

The judicial code is unconstitutional because it prosecutes students for acts which are not illegal outside NIU, Northern Star Attorney Gary Benson said.

"I think that the fact that the ACLU was willing to take this case made it very clear to the university that they were wrong," Benson said.