THE DAILY CLIPS

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The new sign built by East Carolina University is seen in operation on the corner of Charles Boulevard and Greenville Boulevard Tuesday, Jan. 4, 2011. Recent complaints by motorists prompted the university to turn down the brightness of the sign at nighttime to cut down on the glare experienced by drivers. (Justin Falls/The Daily Reflector)

ECU sign toned down
By Jackie Drake
The Daily Reflector
Thursday, January 6, 2011

The brightness of the new digital sign at East Carolina University has been toned down this week, according to officials.

Installed in December, the large lit screen at the corner of Greenville and Charles boulevards prompted several residents to complain about the brightness interfering with visibility while driving, especially at night.

“We had a malfunction,” William Bagnell, associate vice chancellor for ECU campus operations, said. “The new board had a defective photocell, which regulates brightness. When that's not working, the sign stays on its brightest setting.”

The sign's manufacturer came out Monday and replaced the defective part, according to Bagnell.

“It has been adjusted so it is no longer as bright,” Bagnell said.

Sgt. Robert Brewington, traffic safety officer with the Greenville Police Department, said at the beginning of this week that it was “a bright, bright light, but there are no indications that it has caused any crashes as of yet.”

While he did not want to speculate whether the sign's brightness could cause a wreck, Brewington said before the sign was turned down that he intended to follow up with ECU officials this week to work with them on safety concerns.
The sign is part of the athletics fields project. While the sign's individual cost was not immediately available, it costs roughly $120 per month to run on average, according to Bagnell. Costs are covered by athletics revenues and student fees.

The sign is exempt from Greenville city codes, which prohibit signs that change displays more than once an hour, because it sits on state property.
Contact Jackie Drake at jdrake@reflector.com or (252) 329-9567.
Dr. Mark M. Brinson, 67, passed away on Monday, Jan. 3, 2011. The family will receive friends Friday from 6 to 9 p.m. in the upper room at Winslows Tavern.

Professor Mark Brinson came to ECU in 1973 after completing his doctoral degree from the University of Florida. He taught numerous courses in ecology and biology.

Throughout his career, Professor Brinson authored or co-authored many publications pertaining to his research. Applying his research, he served as a technical consultant providing feedback and advice to the US Environmental Protection Agency, US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Smithsonian Institute. He also served as president of the Society of Wetland Scientists.

In addition, Professor Brinson received many honors and awards, including the Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences Distinguished Professorship, ECU’s Board of Trustees Lifetime Achievement Award, a National Wetlands Award for Science Research cosponsored by the Environmental Law Institute and the Environmental Protection Agency, and a Fellowship of the Society of Wetland Scientists.

He is survived by his wife of 40 years, Leslie Brinson, of Greenville; son, Peter Brinson and wife, Suzanne; granddaughter, Sylvie, all of Pasadena, Calif.; sisters, Sara Gregor, of Saginaw, Mich., and Judy Reed, of Shelby, Ohio; and a brother, Bob Brinson, of Shelby, Ohio.

In lieu of flowers, please send a contribution towards scholarships for ECU Biology students, checks should be made out to "ECU Foundation, Inc., Biology Scholarship Fund" and include "In memory of Mark Brinson" on memo line. Please send to Tammy Garris, ECU Director of Gift Records, Greenville Centre, 2200 S. Charles Blvd., 27858. Arrangements by Wilkerson Funeral Home and Crematory. Online condolences at www.wilkersonfuneralhome.com.

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Letter: Pepsi more to ECU than a contract
Thursday, January 6, 2011

Regarding the Dec. 22 story “ECU awards exclusive beverage contract to Coke,” I was shocked and then flooded with memories. I remember my mother hiding her carton of Cokes in the paint shed and substituting Pepsis for her cocktail parties. She always served rum and Pepsi never rum and Coke. I made fun of her for doing that, but she said it was just the courteous thing to do.

When I returned to Greenville in 1972, I vividly remember Dr. Ray Minges and Booger Scales walking into my dad's office to raise money for the football stadium. My dad knew what was coming, but I didn't. They were only a little cordial and had come for the sole purpose of raising money for the stadium. Dr. Ray wasn't in great health and didn't need to spend the countless hours he did raising money for ECU. And other generations of Minges have generously followed his example.

In those days, a la Leo Jenkins, you were either for ECU or against it. Dr. Ray and Booger Scales epitomized that. But it was not done solely for the football team or ECU. I think early on they knew what a healthy and thriving university would ultimately do for Greenville.

When I read that ECU had sold Pepsi out to Coke for $10.5 million over 10 years (big deal) and university officials (nameless, of course) had let that happen, I was angry. I don't know what the difference between the two bids was and don't really care. Pepsi and the Minges are part of the history of ECU and eastern North Carolina.

Pepsi being served at football games is as much a part of the ECU tradition as Petey the Pirate. The shoe leather, goodwill and loyalty the Minges clan give ECU is an intangible benefit that will always be worth far more than the yearly difference between the two marketing bids.

VAN C. FLEMING III
Greenville
The site has not been finalized yet for the new Greenville Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinic, but a local developer said he has a contract with the VA for 12 acres at Moye Boulevard and West Fifth Street.

Pete Tillman, spokesman for the Durham VA Medical Center, which provides services for the 26-county area including Pitt, said Wednesday that the government plans to begin the bidding process for the construction of a more than 100,000-square-foot, two-story clinic within a month.

The first step in the process involves identifying a preferred site, followed by selecting a developer to buy the land and build the facility, he said. The VA would lease the facility.

Tillman said due diligence is under way to evaluate an undisclosed site, but there's nothing final at this point.

Greenville developer and attorney Tom Taft said Wednesday that the suitability of his land is under review. “It is under contract for the VA to buy, and they paid a substantial down-payment,” he said.

Taft said he was notified in September that his site had been chosen. The entity that submits the successful proposal “will actually purchase the land from me,” he said, referring to his VA contract.

The land is located near East Carolina University’s Brody School of Medicine, and about a block from Pitt County Memorial Hospital. A Microtel Inn and Suites and a Jimmy John's restaurant sit on the opposite side of the Moye extension.

Taft said he posted two signs at the site several days ago.
The signs illustrate the VA facility and advertise four adjacent lots “for sale or build to suit.”

Tillman said that the new clinic will expand upon the services offered at the existing clinic on Moye Boulevard. The facility is expected to open by late 2013. Its estimated cost is not available.

Several veterans outside the existing clinic said Wednesday that they are anticipating the opening of the facility with its added services, an event they expect will lead to fewer trips to the Durham hospital for medical care.

“In my case, for so many things I need, I can't come to Greenville. I have to go to Durham,” said Air Force veteran Thomas Blanchard, 53, of Wilson County. “I prefer coming to Greenville because it's only 30 miles from Wilson. This will be a lot more convenient.”

Tillman said veterans need more facilities, including those in eastern North Carolina. “This new clinic will help meet that need,” he said. “And it shows our commitment to help provide that care closer to where the veterans live.”

The existing outpatient clinic on Moye Boulevard provides primary care, and mental health, prosthetics and physical therapy services. Tillman said the new facility will offer more.

“Once it's complete, the new clinic is going to provide a full range of specialty care,” he said. Those services will include audiology, cardiology, chemotherapy, dermatology, gastroenterology, hematology, oncology, optometry and otolaryngologist (ear, nose and throat).

The clinic also will house a laboratory. It will offer MRIs, CT scans and ultrasound. In addition, a home-based primary care satellite program will offer services within a 35-mile radius of the clinic.

Some veterans arrive at the Greenville clinic and other facilities via the Disabled American Veterans vans.

Volunteer van driver and Navy veteran Jim Frederick, 75, of New Bern, said a van from that area goes to Durham nearly every day. “It will lessen the load up at Durham,” he said of the future clinic.

Army veteran Al Matinale, 71, of Winterville, said the new clinic means “one-hundred and ten miles that you don't have to travel” to Durham.

Matinale said the 18,473-square-foot clinic has become overcrowded due to the number of veterans seeking service. “Hopefully, they'll provide better care,” at the new clinic, he said. “They're overloaded here.”
Army veteran Bob Lesko, 71, of Greenville, said the new facility is needed. “It will be great even for those outside the area,” he said. “The facility they have right now is really not adequate anymore for the number of veterans who are getting care there.”

Tillman said about 7,900 veterans sought care at the clinic during the 2009-10 fiscal year.

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Johnson takes new job at ECU
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Jamie Johnson, a compliance official at Rutgers University, has been named associate athletic director for compliance at East Carolina University.

Johnson, who has been assistant athletic director of compliance at Rutgers since 2007, will join ECU on Feb. 1 and will report directly to Chancellor Steve Ballard.

Ballard said Johnson is the first person to hold this new position at ECU and that the position will strengthen the university's commitment to NCAA compliance as well as to risk management on campus.

“I view this position to be an essential component of risk management at ECU,” Ballard said. “I am very pleased that we are bringing a person with Jamie's experience and expertise to our university.”

Johnson holds bachelor's and master's degrees from Florida A&M University and has worked in compliance positions at Georgia Tech, Arizona State and Auburn.

“I am very excited, and I am looking forward to starting a new chapter in my professional career at East Carolina University,” Johnson said.

— ECU Media Relations
RALEIGH—Peace College will expand its night-degree programs for working adults, admitting more male students and dropping its music major.

The women's college announced the moves Wednesday, immediately setting off anger and confusion among tight-knit alumnae.

The new co-ed school within the college will be called the William Peace School of Professional Studies. It will offer bachelor's degrees in both business administration and liberal studies. Male and female students can take courses online or in the classroom at the downtown Raleigh college.

The new classes will begin later this month, and six new full-time faculty will be hired later this year, said Peace President Debra Townsley, who arrived at the college last summer.

"We're realigning faculty slots into areas that are in high demand by students," she said in an interview Wednesday.

Peace has undergone a series of significant changes in the past six months, including staff layoffs and the reorganization of academic programs. Last month, 13 professors accepted buyout packages - amounting to a loss of a quarter of the faculty. Most of them will leave by the end of the current academic year.

In the latest move, the college dropped its music major and dismissed six professors. Instead, the college will offer majors in theater and musical theater.

Alumnae were stunned by the changes.

"We're just upset that an entire program has been wiped out," said Jamie Averette Mitchell of Zebulon, a 2000 graduate of Peace who majored in communications but was active in the college's chamber singers group.
Townsley, who had been president of Nichols College in Massachusetts, said Peace, like many other colleges and businesses, had encountered financial difficulties during the recession.

The night school expansion should help the college grow and thrive, she said. The college has about 600 students in its traditional day programs.

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NFL turns to UNC for concussion research

By J.P. Giglio, staff writer

Kevin Guskiewicz has proof, $200,000 worth of it, that the NFL and NFL Players Association can agree to something.

Guskiewicz, the research director of the Center for the Study of Retired Athletes at the University of North Carolina, has received matching $100,000 grants from the NFL and NFLPA for concussion research.

"Both sides agree, our research is important," said Guskiewicz, a Kenan Distinguished Professor at UNC.

The NFL and NFLPA have been at odds over a new collective bargaining agreement, which threatens to wipe out the 2011 NFL season.

UNC issued a release announcing Guskiewicz's grant from NFL Charities on Tuesday. He said his research team also received a $100,000 grant from the NFLPA.

Guskiewicz has been working with retired NFL players since 2001, studying the life consequences of concussions. Guskiewicz's research includes neuro-imaging scans to study brain activity and also atrophy of the brain and the link between the head injuries and the development of dementia and depression.

The center has already studied 41 retired NFL players, Guskiewicz said. The new grants will enable the center to study another 45 former college players - who didn't play in the NFL - and compare the data.

"That will help us answer the magic question: What is the effect of the additional exposure?" Guskiewicz said.

Guskiewicz has emerged as a leading figure in the NFL's concussion research. In June, he was named head of the NFL's "Head, Neck and Spine" committee, and he's also involved in the league's subcommittee on safety, equipment and rules changes.

He met with NFL commissioner Roger Goodell in early December in New York.

"Roger Goodell has taken this very seriously," Guskiewicz said. "We've gotten more response on the issues in the last year than the previous 15 years combined."
The NFL cracked down on flagrant hits in early October. The league handed out fines and threatened suspensions for illegal hits to the head that previously had only been punished with a penalty or fine.

According to the UNC release, NFL Charities awarded research grants to support sports-related medical research at 16 organizations. In addition to UNC's research, the grants support studies such as concussion surveillance among a large national sample of middle school football players, the role of the cervical spine in football-related concussions, and examining how genetics may influence the outcome after repeated concussions.

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By PETE THAMEL

PARADISE VALLEY, Ariz. — In the aftermath of a football academic scandal at Auburn in 2006 that caused two department heads to step down and the N.C.A.A. to investigate, university officials are no longer bragging — or even talking — about the team’s once-stellar scholastic record.

Auburn’s top-ranked football team, which is preparing to play Oregon in Glendale, Ariz., for the national title on Monday, has tumbled in the N.C.A.A.’s most important academic measurement to No. 85 from No. 4 among the 120 major college football programs.

The decline came after the university closed several academic loopholes following a New York Times article in 2006 that showed numerous football players padded their grade-point averages and remained eligible through independent-study-style courses that required little or no work. Auburn has earned a certain sort of praise from those who were its toughest critics in 2006.

“Auburn was in a rogue position and they corrected it,” said Gordon Gee, who in 2006, when he was Vanderbilt’s chancellor, was stunned that Auburn was ranked higher than his university. Gee is now president of Ohio State. “When those loopholes are closed and the issue is dramatically different, it shows that the loophole was being used. I applaud
Auburn. They really did make a concerted effort to curb those abuses. We should applaud them even if they dropped 80 points.”

Auburn’s drop in the Academic Progress Rate, a four-year assessment of the movement toward graduation for a team’s players, is the third largest in college football since 2006, behind Mississippi’s (to 113 from 18) and Florida State’s (to 105 from 17). Since 2006, both Florida State and Michigan have endured academic scandals, with Michigan’s ranking falling to 84 from 27.

Among all the bowl teams this season, Auburn has the highest disparity in the graduation rates between white players (100 percent) and black players (49 percent), according to a study at the Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport at the University of Central Florida.

Jim Gundlach, the Auburn sociology professor who uncovered the academic abuse, saw the decline in the team’s ranking as progress. “A genuine consequence to this has been that the people who want to do things right have gotten a bit more grasp over what the university is trying to do,” he said.

Auburn’s athletic director, Jay Jacobs, declined to comment. The Tigers’ second-year football coach, Gene Chizik, said of his team’s academic performance and support, “We do a great job, so we’re not concerned with that.” When pressed on the issue of graduating black players, Chizik said, “Those are circumstances; there’s all kinds of different things.”

In 2006, Auburn football was No. 1 among public universities in the academic ranking, alongside private institutions like Duke and Boston College. But some irregularities had caught Gundlach’s attention two years earlier.

He saw on television that an academic football player of the week was an Auburn sociology major, yet Gundlach was surprised that he had never had him in class. He asked two other sociology professors, who also did not recall having him as their student. Gundlach dug through records and soon found that Auburn football players were graduating as sociology majors without taking sociology courses in the classroom.

He found that 18 players on Auburn’s undefeated 2004 team had taken 97 directed-reading course hours — independent study-style classes — from Thomas Petee, the sociology department’s highest-ranking member. Petee taught 252 independent studies in one academic year, 2004-5, astounding Auburn faculty members, who said that overseeing 10 independent studies would be considered ambitious.

In investigating the situation, the university found that another professor, James Witte, had taught an inordinate number of directed-reading classes. The investigation did not find fault in the athletic department because the courses were available to and taken by all students.
The N.C.A.A. investigation yielded secondary violations. Witte, the program coordinator for adult education, and Petee stepped down as department chairmen, and Petee was later forced to stop teaching after an audit revealed that he had changed grades without the approval of professors.

Petee did not respond to a request seeking comment, and a woman who answered the telephone at his house said that he was not available. Petee’s lawyer also declined to comment. Witte did not return a call or respond to an e-mail seeking comment.

Another factor in Auburn’s precipitous drop was the university’s decision to hire Chizik to replace Tommy Tuberville as the football coach two years ago. Kevin Lennon, the N.C.A.A. vice president for membership services, said that rankings can dip after coaching changes because of the number of players who transfer.

But Thomas S. Paskus, the N.C.A.A.’s principal research scientist, said that a drop as large as Auburn’s was irregular.

“It’s unlikely that a change of that nature would be part of normal fluctuation,” he said. “These numbers do fluctuate, and football is a very large sport. There’s a lot of factors that could be involved, and whether this was due to one of those factors is difficult to tell.”

Another factor in the Auburn case was the sudden death of Virgil Starks, the senior associate athletic director for student athlete support. He died of cardiac arrest while driving home from an Auburn football game in 2008.

“I don’t know if the falling in the ratings as precipitously as it did there has anything to do with Virgil’s passing from the scene; he certainly did an excellent job there,” said the former Auburn president William Muse, who recruited Starks. “I’m disappointed to hear that the rankings are as low as they are.”

The senior linebacker Josh Bynes said he did not know what impact Starks’s death had on the program. Bynes, who is black, appeared more bothered by the graduation-rate disparity between black and white players than in the plunging numbers in the Academic Progress Rate. When asked for reasons, Bynes began to answer.

“Maybe because it’s — never mind,” said Bynes, who graduated in December. “I don’t want to say nothing.”

The senior offensive lineman Mike Berry, who also graduated, cited sociological reasons for the disparity. “School systems coming out of high school and stuff like that,” he said.

He added: “It’s one of those things; we put an emphasis on not getting around things. You’re not going to be able to do that in the real world.”
As for Gundlach, his fate was not uncommon for a whistle-blower. He left the university two years ago because of what he called “an ongoing sense of discomfort” after his revelations. He received dozens of hate calls and letters from Auburn fans. Although the university was unable to dismiss the tenured Petee — he is now a consultant for Auburn University at Montgomery — Gundlach said he was proud of exposing the academic fraud.

“The things that I did in the process of going out was one of the best things I’ve ever done for Auburn,” he said. “In the long run, it will eventually do more.”

When asked about the decline in the Academic Progress Rate, he chuckled and said, “I consider that the Gundlach effect.”