ECU Notes: McCarthy to speak at coaching clinic

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East Carolina men’s basketball coach Mack McCarthy and Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame coach Bob Knight will be the featured speakers at the 24th Annual Fort Walton Beach Basketball Coaching Clinic April 24-26 in Fort Walton Beach, Fla.

McCarthy, in his second year as head coach at ECU, has won 13 conference titles in 17 years as a head coach. As the head coach at Chattanooga from 1985-97, McCarthy enjoyed one of the most prosperous runs of any coach during that era, leading the Mocs to five NCAA Tournaments, including a Sweet 16 appearance in 1997, and two NIT births.

Knight won 902 games during his career, the most in Division I history. During his 29 years as head coach at Indiana, Knight led the Hoosiers to three NCAA championships, one NIT title and 11 Big Ten conference championships before ending his career at Texas Tech.

He received Big Ten coach of the year honors six times and was named national coach of the year four times. He is one of only three coaches to win an NCAA title, an NIT championship and an Olympic gold medal.

The FWB Clinic begins April 24 with a round of golf followed by the clinic’s first session the following morning at 9 a.m. The clinic ends April 26 at 11:20 a.m.

Among the other scheduled speakers are: LSU coach Trent Johnson, UAB assistant coach Richard Williams, Kennesaw State coach Tony Ingle, Mercer coach Bob Hoffman and Savannah State coach Horace Broadnax.

The cost to attend the clinic is $95 per person with no hotel stay. If coaches register on the day of the clinic, the fee is $105.

Coaches clinic rates are available at the Ramada Plaza through April 1.

For more information, contact Joe Dean, Jr., at (205) 226-4938 or jdean@bsc.edu.

ECU baseball ranked 27th

The East Carolina baseball team picked up its third preseason top-35 ranking as it was ranked No. 27 in the National Collegiate Baseball Writers Association (NCBWA) poll.

Earlier this month, the Pirates garnered No. 31 pre-season rankings by Collegiate Baseball and Ping!Baseball.

North Carolina received the top spot in the preseason poll after coach Mike Fox’s team closed out last season with a 54-14 record.

Meet the Pirates

The East Carolina baseball team will hold its annual Meet the Pirates event on Feb. 14.

The luncheon is scheduled to start at 11 a.m. at the Murphy Center’s Harvey Banquet Hall.

Fans will get the chance to get autographs and photos of the ECU baseball team and fourth-year head coach Billy Godwin, as well as eat a catered lunch.
After lunch, fans are encouraged to head over to Clark-LeClair Stadium to watch an intra-squad scrimmage.

A limited number of tickets are available at $8 for adults, $5 for children (12 and under) and $5 for ECU students (with valid One Card) and advance reservations are required.

Tickets will go on sale today and reservations will be accepted through 5 p.m. on Feb. 9.

Fans can reserve their seats by ordering online at www.ECUPirates.com or by calling the Athletic Ticket Office at 1-800-DIAL-ECU.

— ECU Media Relations

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Atlanta campus to cost NCCU

University to pay U.S. $1.1 million

ERIC FERRERI, Staff Writer
Comment on this story

DURHAM - An unauthorized satellite campus that N.C. Central University ran for four years at a suburban Atlanta megachurch will cost the university more than $1.1 million.

The university has reached an agreement with the U.S. Department of Education to pay back $1,138,228, just a chunk of the more than $3 million in federal financial aid the university doled out to students in the program.

The series of criminal justice, hospitality and tourism and business courses offered at the New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Lithonia, Ga., from 2004 to 2008 were never approved by any university sanctioning body, and NCCU's accrediting agency didn't know about them either. Programs not acknowledged by an accrediting agency are not eligible for financial aid, which is why the university is now repaying part of the money.

It could be worse. The $1.1 million number came from a U.S. Department of Education formula that considers grants and direct loans dispensed to students as well as an institution's loan default rate, Chancellor Charlie Nelms said Tuesday in announcing the settlement.

The money will be paid back over five years, and the university will only use private dollars from its endowment.

Students not penalized

None of the students who received the funds will be asked to give any of it back, Nelms added.

"This is North Carolina Central University's approach to writing the last chapter of this situation," Nelms said at a meeting of the executive committee of the university's board of trustees.

The pastor at New Birth Missionary Baptist Church is Eddie Long, a university trustee and wealthy donor. He did not attend Monday's trustee meeting, which was held by teleconference.

Twenty-nine students who were enrolled in courses when NCCU officials discovered the program’s improper origins and abruptly shut it down last year are now in approved online courses through NCCU and East Carolina University, Nelms said. The students are expected to graduate in either May or December, he said.

The New Birth saga has embarrassed and frustrated source NCCU and UNC system officials, many of whom were not on the job when the satellite campus was created in 2004.

The origins are still largely unknown. The chancellor at the time, James Ammons, has said he
shoulders the blame for the misstep but has not publicly offered a thorough explanation for what happened.

In October, the UNC system released a critical report on the matter, finding that through the New Birth program, NCCU gave students an improper tuition break, ignored several policies and kept poor and incomplete records.

In all, 126 students took courses at the New Birth campus in the four years that it existed, and 25 earned bachelor's degrees.

The university's accrediting agency, the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, subsequently declared those degrees to be of the same academic quality as those earned by traditional students at NCCU's main campus in Durham.

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Arguments today in lacrosse coach's suit

BY ANNE BLYTHE, Staff Writer  
Comment on this story

The N.C. Court of Appeals will hear arguments this afternoon in the slander case brought against Duke University by former lacrosse coach Mike Pressler.

Duke lawyers have appealed a decision made last year by Superior Court Judge Howard Manning that opened the door for Pressler to pursue his slander case.

In court documents, the lawyers argue that Manning erred when he nullified a settlement reached by Pressler and Duke in 2007.

Pressler was at the helm of the Duke lacrosse team in 2006 when the infamous spring break party occurred. An escort service dancer hired to perform at that party alleged that she was raped by three players, allegations that were later dismissed by the state attorney general.

Duke canceled lacrosse play midseason and fired Pressler from a job he had held for more than a decade and a half. Duke and Pressler reached a settlement agreement in 2007.

But Pressler filed suit against the university more than a year ago alleging that John Burness, a former spokesman, made slanderous comments to the media.

Duke lawyers have argued that under employment agreements the school had with Pressler, the case should go to arbitration first. Pressler now coaches in New Jersey.

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January 13, 2009

At M.I.T., Large Lectures Are Going the Way of the Blackboard

By SARA RIMER

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — For as long as anyone can remember, introductory physics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology was taught in a vast windowless amphitheater known by its number, 26-100.

Squeezed into the rows of hard, folding wooden seats, as many as 300 freshmen anxiously took notes while the professor covered multiple blackboards with mathematical formulas and explained the principles of Newtonian mechanics and electromagnetism.

But now, with physicists across the country pushing for universities to do a better job of teaching science, M.I.T. has made a striking change.

The physics department has replaced the traditional large introductory lecture with smaller classes that emphasize hands-on, interactive, collaborative learning. Last fall, after years of experimentation and debate and resistance from students, who initially petitioned against it, the department made the change permanent. Already, attendance is up and the failure rate has dropped by more than 50 percent.

M.I.T. is not alone. Other universities are changing their ways, among them Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, North Carolina State University, the University of Maryland, the University of Colorado at Boulder and Harvard. In these institutions, physicists have been pioneering teaching methods drawn from research showing that most students learn fundamental concepts more successfully, and are better able to apply them, through interactive, collaborative, student-centered learning.

The traditional 50-minute lecture was geared more toward physics majors, said Eric Mazur, a physicist at Harvard who is a pioneer of the new approach, and whose work has influenced the change at M.I.T.

"The people who wanted to understand," Professor Mazur said, "had the discipline, the urge, to sit down afterwards and say, 'Let me figure this out.' " But for the majority, he said, a different approach is needed.

"Just as you can't become a marathon runner by watching marathons on TV," Professor Mazur said, "likewise for science, you have to go through the thought processes of doing science and not just watch your instructor do it."

Another proponent of the new approach is Carl Wieman, a Nobel Prize-winning physicist who directs a science education initiative at the University of British Columbia.

In an article in the education journal Change last year, Dr. Wieman noted that the human brain "can hold a maximum of about seven different items in its short-term working memory and can process no more than about four ideas at once."
"But the number of new items that students are expected to remember and process in the typical hourlong science lecture is vastly greater," he continued. "So we should not be surprised to find that students are able to take away only a small fraction of what is presented to them in that format."

At M.I.T., two introductory courses are still required — classical mechanics and electromagnetism — but today they meet in high-tech classrooms, where about 80 students sit at 13 round tables equipped with networked computers.

Instead of blackboards, the walls are covered with white boards and huge display screens. Circulating with a team of teaching assistants, the professor makes brief presentations of general principles and engages the students as they work out related concepts in small groups.

Teachers and students conduct experiments together. The room buzzes. Conferring with tablemates, calling out questions and jumping up to write formulas on the white boards are all encouraged.

"There was a long tradition that what it meant to teach was to give a really well-prepared lecture," said Peter Dourmashkin, a senior lecturer in physics at M.I.T. and a strong proponent of the new method. "It was the students' job to figure it out."

The problem, say Dr. Dourmashkin and others in the department, is that a lot of students had trouble doing that. The failure rate for those lecture courses, even those taught by the most mesmerizing teachers, was typically 10 percent to 12 percent. Now, it has dropped to 4 percent.

Another big concern was attendance.

John Belcher, a space physicist who arrived at M.I.T. 38 years ago and was instrumental in introducing the new teaching method nine years ago, was considered an outstanding lecturer. He won M.I.T.'s top teaching award and rave reviews from students. And yet, as each semester progressed, attendance in his introductory physics courses fell to 50 percent, as it did, he said, for nearly all of his colleagues.

"M.I.T. students are very busy," Professor Belcher said. "They see the lecture as dispensable, that is that they can get it out of a book more efficiently than getting up, getting dressed and going to lecture."

After three years, Professor Belcher had had enough. "I had poor attendance, and was failing 10 to 15 percent, and grading the tests and shaking my head in despair about how little was getting across," he said. "And this is a subject — electromagnetism — that I love."

The new approach at M.I.T. is known by its acronym, TEAL, for Technology Enhanced Active Learning.

A $10 million donation from the late Alex d'Arbeloff, an M.I.T. alumnus, co-founder of the high-tech company Teradyne, and former M.I.T. corporation chairman, made the switch to TEAL possible. The two state-of-the-art TEAL classrooms alone cost $2.5 million, Professor Belcher said.

Unlike in the lectures, attendance counts toward the final grade, and attendance is up to about 80 percent.

Classes meet three times a week, for a total of five hours. Homework is due three times a week.
Monique Squiers, a sophomore who intends to become a surgeon, liked her TEAL classes so much that she has signed on as a teaching assistant. “You can say, ‘Hey, professor, I didn’t really get what you went over at this point, could you explain it to me a little more?’” Ms. Squiers said. “If anything, they’re happy when someone doesn’t get it.”

Of the core science curriculum required of all freshmen, only introductory physics follows the new method, Professor Belcher said. Math, biology and chemistry are still taught through large lecture classes and small recitations.

In the physics department, debate over teaching methods continues. Younger professors tend to be more enthusiastic about TEAL than veterans who have been perfecting their lectures for decades.

One of the newer professors, Gabriella Sciolla, who arrived in 2003, was teaching a TEAL class on circuits recently. She gauged the level of understanding in the room by throwing out a series of multiple-choice questions. The students “voted” with their wireless “personal response clickers” — the clickers are essential to TEAL — which transmitted the answers to a computer monitored by the professor and her assistants.

“You know where they are,” Professor Sciolla said afterward. She can then adjust, slowing down or engaging students in guided discussions of their answers, as needed.

Lecturing in 26-100, she said, she could only look out at the sea of faces and hope the students were getting it.

“They might be looking intently at you, understanding everything,” Professor Sciolla said. “Or they might be thinking, ‘What am I going to do when I get out of this bloody class?’”
Who should apply for college aid? Every student

Bad times mean more families could qualify for financial help

Most people won't bother to pick up a penny on the sidewalk. If they’re in a hurry, they may not even stop for a dime. Most will, however, stop to pick up a $5 bill, even if they’re late for lunch.

Many parents of college-bound students take the same approach to financial aid.

Those who expect to receive a lot of money take the time to fill out the forms. Families who believe they’ll receive only a small amount of aid — or none at all — don’t bother. Last year, 25% didn’t complete the federal application for financial aid, according to student lender Sallie Mae.

But unless you’re reading this from the deck of your yacht, you should apply for financial aid. The recession has made it more difficult for many families to pay for college. At the same time, though, economic setbacks could increase your eligibility for federal and institutional assistance.

For the 2007-08 academic year, undergraduate students received an average of $4,656 in grants and $3,650 in federal student loans, according to the College Board.

The two primary documents you'll need:

- Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA. This document is used to determine your eligibility for federal aid, state aid and scholarships. The Department of Education uses your FAFSA to determine how much your family can afford to contribute to a child's college expenses.

You can apply online at www.fafsa.ed.gov. You can also obtain an estimate of how much federal aid you’ll receive at www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov.

Even families who are convinced they’re ineligible for need-based financial aid should fill out the FAFSA. Otherwise, you’ll be ineligible for federal student loans, which are available to all students.

- CSS/Financial Aid Profile. This document is used by many private colleges and universities to determine eligibility for institutional aid. Find this form at the College Board’s website, profileonline.collegeboard.com

How to increase your chance of receiving aid:

- Know your deadlines. Some colleges and universities require you to have your application in by the end of this month. Others give you until March. If a school has a limited pool of money, students who meet the deadline will get priority, says Stephen Joyce, student aid director for Bowdoin College, a private college in Brunswick, Maine.

- But take the time you need to get it right. While it’s important to meet the deadlines, “It’s more important that you file accurately and understand how to present your case to your best advantage,” says Kalman Chany, author of Paying for College Without Going Broke. “Most people have little clue as to how their responses influence how much aid they qualify for.”

To fill out the form, you’ll need your driver’s license, latest federal tax return, W-2 forms, bank statements and investment account information.

The process will be easier if you’ve already done your 2008 taxes. However, if you have an early deadline, you can use estimated income figures and revise the information after you file your taxes.

- Advise financial aid offices of recent setbacks. If you were laid off late last year, your 2008 tax return probably won’t reflect your current financial situation. When applying to state colleges and universities, include a letter explaining your job loss, Joyce says. If you’re applying to a private school, include the information in the comment section of the CSS Profile, he says.

- Be aware of recent changes in the financial aid formula. This year, the formula won’t include untaxed Social Security benefits when calculating how much a family can afford to pay, Chany says. That benefit could help older parents with college-age children, as well as widows or widowers who receive Social Security survivor's benefits.

- Understand how the bear market will affect your eligibility for aid. Most parents saw the value of their 401(k) plans and other retirement savings plans plummet last year.

Unfortunately, that won’t increase your eligibility because the financial aid formula doesn’t count retirement plans. However, non-retirement assets are included, so losses in taxable investments could boost your eligibility.

The federal financial aid formula doesn’t count equity in your primary residence, so a decline in the value of your home won’t affect eligibility for federal aid. However, some private schools include home equity in their aid formula. If you’re among the millions of homeowners who are “underwater” — you owe more on your home than it’s worth — you could be eligible for more institutional aid.

To suggest columns, e-mail: sblock@usatoday.com.