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Campus mirrors panel's plans

- Statewide task force made safety recommendations in the aftermath of the deadly April 2007 shooting at Virginia Tech.

By Jimmy Ryals
The Daily Reflector

Ongoing campus security efforts at East Carolina University largely address recommendations made by a statewide task force.

The task force, formed by Attorney General Roy Cooper after the April 2007 shooting rampage at Virginia Tech, released its findings last week. The panel's prescriptions mirror things ECU's already done, interim Provost Marilyn Sheerer said.

"I don't think it's any different than what we've been using," she said.

Spurred by the April 2007 shootings at Virginia Tech and a subsequent University of North Carolina system safety review, ECU has:

- Formed a threat assessment team headed by Dean of Students Lynn Roeder. The team will get training from Secret Service officials at an on-campus symposium later this month, according to a campus-safety report given to ECU trustees in November.
- Adopted an emergency response plan that uses the National Incident Management System.
- Signed cooperation agreements with the Greenville fire and police departments. Similar pacts with the county health and emergency management departments are in the works, according to the trustees report.
ECU is probing second noose

By Jimmy Ryals
The Daily Reflector

For the second time in four months, East Carolina University officials are investigating a report of a noose found on campus.

And for the second time in four months, the university will follow up with diversity discussions in a forum setting, beginning today.

ECU spokesman John Durham confirmed Monday that ECU police and the campus equity office are probing the possible appearance of a noose.

At 3:12 p.m. Friday, someone reported finding a small nylon ribbon hanging from a mirror inside a car, according to an ECU police report.

The report does not say who reported the incident, nor does it identify who owned the car.

The car was parked outside ECU Building 172, 514 E. 14th St. Police seized the length of rope.

Because the investigation is ongoing, Durham declined to offer further details.

"We hope to have that investigation wrapped up within a few days," Durham said.

ECU Chancellor Steve Ballard will host a series of open forums to "examine and discuss our unconditional commitment to diversity as a core value," Durham said.

The first forum will be at 6 p.m. today in the Great Rooms at Mendenhall Student Center.

The local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People will make a statement at the event, chapter President Calvin Henderson said.
Acting out

State must fight domestic violence deaths

In the past six years, more than 400 women, men and children in North Carolina have been murdered in an act of domestic violence. On Wednesday, Pitt County added two more names to that tragic roll.

The murder-suicide in Winterville sent ripples of sadness across this community, sorrow not soon to fade away. And the deaths of Kristina Bryan Hobbs and Michael Hobbs refocuses attention on the insidious plague of domestic violence and the need to vigilantly address it.

Police were called to the Hobbs' home in Winterville on Wednesday morning at the behest of a relative, who found the couple each with a single gunshot wound. Investigators have determined that Michael Hobbs purchased a .38-caliber revolver two days before the crime, and they believe he killed his wife before turning the weapon on himself.

Any explanation of motive or behavior cannot erase the pain this event has caused.

The couple's 6-year-old daughter will grow up without her parents. Family members have lost loved ones and co-workers have lost friends. The entire community mourns these deaths.

Yet, despite good intentions, too many episodes of domestic violence — and certainly cases of homicide — bring an earnest pledge to be more attentive, but fail to lead to a greater commitment to prevention. North Carolina accepts domestic violence with its inaction, and should embrace the following steps to confront it.

There are support networks in place for those who need help, but they are not extensive enough. North Carolina lacks a sufficient number of shelters for those threatened with violence. Many women, particularly those in rural communities, have little way of escaping abusive relationships because they have no place safe to turn. We must do better.

As a state, North Carolina should commit additional resources to mental health and other medical treatment to address violent tendencies. Michael Hobbs, for one, needed psychiatric care. Funding mental health services should be a public priority.

Warning signs are missed because the general public does not know to recognize them, or, worse, is too timid to inquire when circumstances warrant. Victims of domestic violence may be crying for help, but they need others' courage to bolster their own. We must take an active role by being aware and broaching the subject even when it is awkward to do so.

Finally, more than half of all domestic violence deaths in North Carolina are caused by handguns. While the Second Amendment protects a cherished right of Americans to purchase and own guns, it need not be a national curse as well. North Carolina should look to common sense options to limit the proliferation of guns, especially handguns, where reasonable.

These strategies will not ensure the state ends the scourge of domestic violence that has claimed hundreds of lives. But they would show North Carolina will not accept idleness, or the endless addition of names to the roll call of the dead.
Cash, apology settle UNC-CH soccer suit

Other colleges ‘are looking at this case’

BY JAME STANCILL  
STAFF WRITER

The sexual harassment lawsuit against UNC women’s soccer coach Anson Dorrance never made it to a jury, but it gained national attention and helped draw boundaries between coaches and players.

After nearly a decade, the case was settled Monday, with the university agreeing to pay former player Melissa Jennings $385,000 and Dorrance issuing an apology to all his players. The deal also requires the university to conduct a comprehensive review of its sexual harassment policies and procedures.

The case centered around what were called inappropriate discussions about sex between Dorrance and his players. In the agreement, Jennings, who was recruited to the university to play goalie, stipulates that neither Dorrance nor his staff made a pass at her or pursued a sexual relationship with her. But they made overt sexual comments that were uninvited and offensive, she wrote. “As a result, I personally felt extremely uncomfortable,” she said in a letter included in the settlement.

Dorrance’s apology letter, contained in the settlement, said that

SEE SETTLEMENT, PAGE 12A
between August 1996 and June 1998, he participated with his players in group discussions of players' sexual activities and relationships with men.

"I understand that my participation in those discussions was inappropriate and unacceptable," his letter said. "I apologize to Ms. Jennings and her family, as well as all other members of the soccer team.

Dorrance and the university had long argued that the discussions were harmless locker room banter. But last year, Judge M. Blane Michael wrote in a majority opinion for the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals that Dorrance's conduct "went far beyond simple teasing and qualified as sexual harassment."

The court's opinion was important, said Nancy Hogshced-Makar, a former Olympic swimmer who is now a Florida Coastal School of Law professor specializing in women's equity in sports. The opinion made the line defining sexual harassment much brighter, she said.

"It already did very good work in establishing that for female athletes — and male athletes — that's not part of being on an athletic team," she said. "I do think schools around the country are looking at this case."

$12 million was sought

The lawsuit has had many twists and turns since it was filed in 1998 by Jennings and another player who together originally sought $12 million in damages. The university and the state fought the suit all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, which last year declined to hear it.

A trial had been set for April in federal court.

In a statement Monday, Dorrance said, "Since August 1998, I have looked forward to clearing my name in court. That is still true today. I understand, though, that after nine years of litigation, it is best for the University of North Carolina to let the court and the public make that decision."

Not about the money

Jennings' father, Craig Jennings, said the suit was never about money. He said UNC now can create a model sexual harassment policy. "It's really what we worked hard for," he said in a telephone interview.

Debbie Keller Hill of Raleigh said she was happy that her former teammate can now move forward.

"That's good for her that it's done," she said.

The two originally filed suit, she said, because "we both just wanted to the university to be accountable for his actions."

Former teammate Robin Confer, who played at UNC from 1994 to 1997, said she was surprised when the lawsuit was filed because she never saw or heard Dorrance do anything inappropriate. She, like many former players, rushed to Dorrance's defense.

"But in the end, she said, the UNC program has not been hurt.

"It's been dragging on for too long," she said of the case.

Confer, who is an assistant women's soccer coach at the University of Georgia, said coaches are always careful to have two staff members in meetings with players.

"You take precautions," she said. "You hear this happens to male coaches, and a lot of times it's not true. ... Something can be blown out of proportion and can be used against you."

UNC Athletic Director Dick Baddour said in a statement that a trial would have benefited no one.

"We have heard from a countless number of players who stand firm in their belief in support of and thanks to Anson and the women's soccer program," Baddour said. "Many of our former student-athletes expressed their desire to testify on Anson's behalf and about the positive experiences they had while playing for him. But we just didn't want to subject them to a court proceeding."

Dorrance, 56, created a dynasty with his women's soccer program at UNC, presiding over 19 national titles in 26 years. He is a master strategist who is known for motivating his players and inspiring fierce loyalty. It wasn't unusual for him to hug his players or present graduating seniors with long-stemmed roses after their final games.

In his 1996 book "Training Soccer Champions," Dorrance wrote that women "have to feel like they have a personal connection with the coach, and it has to be unique. ... Women want to experience a coach's humanity."

On Monday, UNC-Chapel Hill Chancellor James Moeser called Dorrance a great teacher and leader in advancing women's opportunities in sports.

"We have never believed that the case had any merit," Moeser said in a statement. "We've stood by Coach Dorrance since this case started, and we stand by him now."

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New Answers for E-Learning
Wikis and avatars are improving the educational experience

By Kim Clark
Posted January 10, 2008

With dorm bills and gasoline prices skyrocketing, it's no wonder 3.5 million students are now opting to stay home and take online college courses. Unfortunately, as many of those students have discovered, E-learning courses have disadvantages, too. Online courses often can be more boring and less educational than traditional classes. They also tend to have higher dropout rates and—on average—yield lower grades than regular students get.

That may finally be changing for the better, however, as E-learning is getting an upgrade. Some professors and schools are redesigning their courses to take advantage of the Web's interactive and visual possibilities, adopting some bleeding-edge technologies such as gamelike simulations and digital avatars to make online courses more exciting and more effective than traditional classrooms. Many students even say that a good E-learning course inspires them to work harder.

Matt Kerr signed up for an online art history course last year just to satisfy a general education requirement at Sierra College, a community college outside Sacramento, Calif. He was so inspired by teacher Michelle Pacansky-Brock's audio lectures, "VoiceThread" demonstrations, and assignments that opened his eyes to the art around him that he ended up creating an extensive art blog and did "a lot more work than if I was just sitting in a classroom, listening to her," he says. "I really liked it."

Researchers say that students who stick to courses that offer several of the E-learning field's best practices can cut their chances of dropping out by as much as 50 percent. Here's their advice on what to look for in an E-learning program.

Accreditation, transferability, and reputation. The federal government won't give
financial aid to students attending schools that aren't accredited by an approved organization. It lists all schools' accreditation here: ope.ed.gov/accreditation/. But as one student (who asked not to be named) learned this year, accreditation is just the beginning. Colleges are often picky about which courses they'll accept as transfer credits. He spent $12,000 and a year of his time grinding out papers for one school's online communications courses, then discovered that some of his classes might not be accepted if he wanted to transfer. "I wish I'd researched better," says the 27-year-old Simi Valley, Calif., resident.

**Schedule.** Some online courses are "synchronous," which means all students must be online at the same time for live discussions or exams. Others allow students to work independently throughout the week but have deadlines for assignments and tests. Still others allow students to work at their own pace and finish the course as quickly, or as slowly, as they like. Researchers say one of the biggest reasons students fail at online courses is that they aren't honest with themselves about how much time they can actually devote each week to an online course and whether they have the discipline to work without traditional course structures.

**Technology.** A growing number of online courses are requiring students to participate in blogs, wikis, or gamelike simulations. Those activities require students to have good computer skills and access to well-equipped computers with high-speed Internet connections. Students nervous about technology should look for online schools with readily accessible help desks and other technological guidance.

**Course design.** E-learning students are generally happier with courses that start out with a well-organized and detailed syllabus and clear, logical grading criteria. Karen Swan, who researches online learning at Kent State, says most online students are happier with courses that offer lots of smaller, weekly or biweekly assignments instead of big midterm and final exams.

**More—and better—ways of delivering lectures and information.** "My pet peeve is professors who just paste PowerPoint slides, a textbook assignment, and a quiz into a course shell in Blackboard" and think they've created a good online course, says Darcy Hardy, who heads the University of Texas's TeleCampus. The best online teachers provide information in many different ways. Sierra College's Pacansky-Brock, who was named 2007's best online professor by the Sloan Consortium, posts her lecture notes, provides
audio podcasts, and uses VoiceThread—a new program that allows students to hear her talk and see her draw on and annotate slides of artwork—to get her lessons across.

The best online teachers also exploit the Web's opportunities for interactivity and eye-catching graphics. Barbara Christe, who teaches biomedical engineering technology at Indiana University-Purdue University-Indianapolis, uses simulations that allow students to scroll over circuit diagrams to see how changes in current affect resistance, for example. Michigan State University has developed a Jeopardy!-like website, packed with quiz questions that science and math students can answer to see how well they've mastered key concepts. The University of Maryland-University College has developed a gamelike simulation of a crime scene for students in its criminalistics class. And a growing number of teachers are experimenting with presenting lectures and information as avatars in Second Life.

**Student community.** Isolation is one of the most common reasons given by online students who drop out or fail, so "community-building is part of the art of teaching," says Julie Little, interim director of Educause, a nonprofit devoted to technology in education. Some schools, for example, are trying to match students with peers who take at least some of the same online classes each semester, so they get to know each other and can cheer each other on. Other colleges turn each course into an instant community by requiring students to post information about themselves on a class blog, Web page, or Facebook. Most typically require students to share their reactions to readings, assignments, and other students' work at least once a week. Many also require students to join together to work on team projects. Professors at Old Dominion University have E-learning students collaborate on a wiki textbook, for example. The University of Maryland is even creating virtual clubs and honor societies.

**Quick and thorough responses by professors.** "The evidence shows the more access, more interaction, and more opportunities for feedback learners have from instructors, the better they do," says Christine Geith, the executive director of Michigan State's Global Online Connection. Geith, who earned her doctorate online, says she learned to seek out classes with professors who were available during more than just standard office hours. That means the best online teachers are easily accessible, if not by phone, then by E-mail, instant message, or some other method. Overseas students taking online courses stateside might prefer professors who use Skype or some other free long-distance service, for example, she notes.
While some of his online courses took as little as one hour a week and were easy A's, Sierra College student Kerr says he'll seek out more online courses like his art history class. He says he finds the best classes by checking with classmates and researching professors on sites like ratemyprofessors.com. The six or so hours a week he figures he spent on the art history class was less than he typically gives to a traditional class, but much of that time is spent commuting or sitting bored in a classroom, he says. During his online class hours, he was immersed in research, thinking, writing—and learning. Says Kerr: "I'm saving gas, I'm saving time, and I'm saving money."

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