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ECU audit eyes financial aid

No student has lost money due to weaknesses, ECU official says.

By Corey G. Johnson
The Daily Reflector

Deficiencies in ECU's supervision of student financial aid that could have lead to errors and abuses, were reported by the state auditor on Wednesday.

ECU officials say they corrected one of the deficiencies more than a year ago and are trying to resolve the other problem by the spring.

Employees in East Carolina University's Office of Financial Aid could enter the computer system, override any protection and award students discretionary aid, which is a short-term grant or loan, without approval or review by supervisors, according to the report released by state Auditor Leslie W. Merritt Jr.

About 20 people work in East Carolina University's financial aid section, John Durham, university spokesman, said.

State auditors found unauthorized staff also could change the academic status or family income information of unqualified students to enable them to receive federal funds, according to the report.


Since November 2004, the State Bureau of Investigation and ECU's internal auditors have conducted probes of the financial aid office after investigators received a tip that improper use of state resources may be taking place there, Durham said.

The university has made substantial changes to protect student money and is working diligently with internal auditors to continue the reforms, he said.

Durham said there is no evidence of any student losing funding because of any problems identified by the audit.

"Since November 2004, only the financial aid director and associate financial aid director can do the discretionary aid overrides," Durham said. "And we are hoping that, by the end of the semester, all the necessary changes mentioned by the audit will be implemented."

This is not the first time an audit has uncovered problems with ECU finances.

Former Chancellor William Muse resigned in September of 2003 after audits surfaced detailing the misappropriation of funds by an associate vice chancellor and fraudulent practices by university employees responsible for administering a nearly $5 million dollar grant by National Library of Medicine, according to previous published reports.

The financial aid office, located in the Flanagan Building, distributes nearly $129 million in aid annually to students attending classes, Durham said in an 2005 interview. The office is part of the Academic Affairs Division led by Provost Jim Smith.

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Pauline H. Spain

Mrs. Pauline Hooker Spain, 89, died Monday, Jan. 16, 2006. The funeral service will be conducted Friday at 10:30 a.m. in the Wilkerson Funeral Chapel. Burial will follow in Pinewood Memorial Park.

Mrs. Spain, daughter of the late Eugene T. and Argie Chapin Hooker, was born in Aurora on August 8, 1916. She was a graduate of Aurora High School and received an A.B. degree from East Carolina Teachers College in 1937 and her Master's degree from East Carolina College in 1962. For 35 years she taught primary education in Beaufort and Pitt Counties and retired from the Greenville City Schools in 1973.

A charter member of Hooker Memorial Christian Church, Mrs. Spain served as deaconess and was active in the Christian Women's Fellowship. She had been a volunteer with the Ronald McDonald House since 1967 and in 1989 was recipient of the Volunteer of the Year Award. She was also a member of the Alpha Delta Kappa International Sorority for Women Educators, the NC Retired School Personnel, the American Association of Retired Persons, the Pitt County Shrinettes, the Town and Country Senior Citizens Club and the Clio Book Club.

Mrs. Spain was married to Jatie J. Spain who preceded her in death in 1986.

She is survived by her niece, Margaret Elks Trione; and great-niece, Margaret Frances Trione, both of Daphne, Ala.; and her godchildren, Don Lee Bennett of New Bern, Todd Bennett of Winterville and Dawn Broome of Greenville.

Visitation will be held tonight from 6 to 8 at Wilkerson Funeral Home.

Memorials may be made to the Ronald McDonald House of Eastern NC, 549 Mose Blvd., Greenville, NC 27834.
Eugene E. Ryan

Dr. Eugene Edward Ryan, Professor Emeritus, 79, died Wednesday, Jan. 18, 2006. A memorial service will be held Friday at 4 p.m. in the Wilkinson Funeral Chapel.

A native of Chicago, Dr. Ryan received his Ph.D. from Gregorian University in Rome, Italy. In 1968 he began his career at East Carolina University in the Philosophy Department, where he served as Department Chair and later served as the Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences. Prior to his retirement in 2002, he established an academic collaboration between East Carolina University and the University of Ferrara in Ferrara, Italy.

Dr. Ryan is survived by his wife, Margaret Ann Oberhausen Ryan; two daughters, Emma Ryan of Stockholm, Sweden, and Eileen Ryan of New York, N.Y.; a brother, Robert E. Ryan of Charlotte; and a sister, Mary Jane Ridgeway of Chicago.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to St. Gabriel’s Catholic Church, 3250 Dickinson Avenue, Greenville, NC 27834.

Arrangements are by Wilkinson Funeral Home & Crematory.
New MBAs finding education pays off big time

MBAs are hot, again.
Salaries and signing bonuses of fresh graduates took a double-digit jump in 2005 to a record average $105,000 and signaled an end to the “perfect storm” of sour news this decade that included the dot-com bust, the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks and a subsequent recession, said Dave Wilson, president of the Graduate Management Admissions Council (GMAC) that oversees the test for aspiring graduate students in business.

Corporate recruiters had disappeared from campuses. But, Wilson reports, “The MBA is back as the currency of intellectual capital.”
The $106,000 salary and signing bonus was up 13.5% from 2004, according to a GMAC survey of 5,829 2005 grads. Salary alone increased to $88,600, surpassing the previous high of $85,400 set in 2001. The 2005 salary still trails 2001 by about $4,000 when adjusted for inflation, but the inflation-adjusted record will likely be broken this year.

Consulting firms and investment banks, the best-paying employers of freshly minted MBAs, had been slashing jobs. “They’re back and hiring aggressively,” says Nunzio Quacquarelli, the London-based director of the QS World MBA Tour that recruits students to 350 business schools in 56 cities worldwide.
The average bonus paid to a 2005 MBA graduate by investment banks was $40,000, Quacquarelli says.

Other forces are behind the rising compensation. The health care industry craves MBAs to help manage spiraling costs, and schools such as Boston University offer an MBA for those looking for careers ranging from hospital administration to biotech.

Technology hiring showed signs of life last year and is building steam in 2006, Quacquarelli says. Even the outsourcing of jobs to places such as India is driving demand for MBAs. The Labor Department estimates the outsourcing industry will need 2,000 senior executives this year, up from 100 in 2000. By 2012, it will need 9,500.

Wilson says there is also heavy demand for MBAs by the U.S. government and not-for-profit organizations. Salaries are not as high, but added demand is likely driving them up elsewhere.

The trend is global, according to a survey out Tuesday by QS World MBA Tour. Average salary and bonus for new MBAs was up 10% in 2005 to $114,000, also breaking the record set in 2001.

More than 100,000 MBA degrees are awarded each year in the USA alone. That’s likely to rise. Prospective students who took the Graduate Management Admission Test rose to 228,000 in 2005 from 213,000 in 2004. And this year has started strong, Wilson says.

There are 1,500 schools worldwide offering MBAs, a number poised to explode, Quacquarelli says, as programs in China, India and Russia take off.
Saltwater therapy helps ease cystic fibrosis

Lung function improves

By Liz Szabo
USA TODAY

Australian surfers have helped inspire a new way to treat a deadly genetic disease. Patients with cystic fibrosis, a rare disorder that damages the lungs, have reported feeling better after surfing, says Mark Elkins, a researcher at Sydney's Royal Prince Alfred Hospital. Surfers said their chests and sinuses felt clear, and they coughed up much of the thick mucus that clogs their lungs.

Doctors wondered why, Elkins says. Was it the exercise? Or was it the saltwater?

Scientists have known for years that salt plays a key role in cystic fibrosis, Elkins says. Cystic fibrosis, which affects about 30,000 Americans, is caused by a defect in a gene that controls the amount of salt and water that line the airways of the lungs. Without sufficient lubrication, mucus builds up and blocks the airways, providing a fertile home for bacteria.

Doctors in Australia and the USA decided to test whether saltwater might replace that missing lubrication. They hoped the extra salt would draw water out of lung tissue onto the airway, providing a thin layer of liquid to ease mucus out of the lung, says Richard Boucher, who directs the cystic fibrosis center at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and led the American study.

Researchers found that inhaling an intensely salty solution — almost twice as salty as the Atlantic Ocean — improved patients' lung function and slowed the progression of the disease, according to articles published in today's New England Journal of Medicine. Australian doctors found that 41% of those who received the treatment avoided serious complications — such as weight loss, coughing up blood or a dangerous infection — compared with 16% of the other patients. The solutions helped remove mucus from the lung for at least eight hours, according to the UNC study of 24 patients, also published in the journal.

Doctors probably will begin using the treatments right away, says Peter Mogayzel, director of the Johns Hopkins Cystic Fibrosis Center, who was not involved in the study. His center began offering the treatment last year after seeing preliminary results at a conference.

The treatments don't cure cystic fibrosis and won't replace current therapies, Elkins says. Some patients already spend hours a day treating their disease, so adding another 30-minute therapy could be a burden. To make the treatments easier to use, researchers are testing a device that works four times more quickly than current systems.

Felix Ratjen of the University of Toronto, who wrote an editorial accompanying the studies, notes that the saltwater treatment may have a limited benefit, because it may not reach the most clogged airways. But Boucher hopes the treatments could prevent damage, especially in babies whose lungs are still unscarred. He plans to begin tests soon in infants as young as 2 months.

The new therapy is also relatively cheap. The Cystic Fibrosis Foundation estimates the cost to be about $110 a month, less than one-tenth the cost of other drugs. Scott Donaldson, an assistant professor at UNC and co-author of that study, says, "Something simple has turned out to be very good."