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Grant will extend Pitt broadband access area
The Daily Reflector
Wednesday, January 20, 2010

Pitt County is one of 37 counties in North Carolina scheduled to benefit from a $28 million federal grant intended to expand broadband access in rural communities.


MCNC operates the North Carolina Research and Education Network, one of the nation’s first statewide education and research networks, according to a MCNC news release.

The network provides broadband communications technology services and support to K-12 school districts, higher education campuses, academic research institutions and public health facilities across the state, the release said.

The nonprofit organization has to rent bandwidth to serve its clients, which include East Carolina University and the Brody School of Medicine, Pitt County Memorial Hospital and Pitt County Schools, said Joe Freddoso, MCNC president and chief operating officer.

Renting bandwidth limits the number of organizations MCNC can serve. Also, existing clients, which have to pay a fee to use the service, can experience rate increases, he said.

MCNC will use the $28 million grant, plus $11.7 million it raised from private sources, to build its own fiber optic network that should provide the organization with unlimited bandwidth.

The project will result in a 494-mile network that will connect to 685 miles of existing infrastructure in urban regions, according to the MCNC news release.

MCNC’s bandwidth reaches 3 million students ranging from kindergartners to graduates student.

With the unlimited bandwidth MCNC should be able to add Pitt Community College and 29 other community colleges to the system, Freddoso said.
It also will allow public sector clients such as libraries, public health clinics and museums access to broadband, he said.

“All North Carolinians will benefit from the public/private partnership that created this application,” Mike Murphy, chairman of the MCNC board of directors, said.

While MCNC doesn’t directly serve private clients it does have a partnership with FRC/PalmettoNet, a fiber-based network provider and management company, to use the network to provide service to consumers and commercial businesses.

The network has the potential to serve more than 1,500 anchor institutions, 180,000 businesses and more than 300,000 under served families, according to an MCNC news release.

The other central and eastern N.C. counties benefiting from this grant include Beaufort, Bladen, Carteret, Columbus, Craven, Cumberland, Edgecombe, Greene, Harnett, Johnston, Nash, New Hanover, Onslow, Pender, Robeson, Wake and Wilson.

The western counties include Alexander, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Cleveland, Davidson, Davie, Gaston, Haywood, Henderson, Iredell, Jackson, Lincoln, McDowell, Mecklenburg, Polk, Rutherford and Transylvania.
Current East Carolina offensive coordinator Steve Shankweiler is a finalist for the head coach job.

More in ECU
- With Stockstill out, Pirates' search continues
- Pirate DT skipping senior year
- Sources link Stockstill to ECU position
- Stockstill: Timing not right for position at East Carolina
- Owls hand ECU first C-USA loss

Four frontrunners emerge for Pirate coaching gig
By Nathan Summers
The Daily Reflector
Thursday, January 21, 2010

An East Carolina official said Wednesday there were three or four prime targets to become the next ECU head football coach.
Two days after Middle Tennessee head coach Rick Stockstill removed his name from consideration to become the replacement for Skip Holtz, ECU athletic director Terry Holland was back at the drawing board, and was reportedly involved in the interviewing process.
A source close to the coaching search told The Reflector Wednesday evening that Mike Shula, quarterbacks coach for the NFL’s Jacksonville Jaguars and former Alabama coach, was a lead candidate.
Liberty coach Danny Rocco was also at the front of the pack, but the coach on Wednesday finalized a contract extension that will keep him with the Flames through the 2014 season, a Lynchburg, Va., source confirmed to The Reflector, eliminating Rocco from contention.
The Liberty coach was contacted but not interviewed by Holland.
Other leading candidates who were reportedly poised to interview with Holland as of Wednesday night are Oklahoma offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson, former Texas Tech defensive coordinator and ECU alum Ruffin McNeill and ECU co-offensive coordinator/offensive line coach Steve Shankweiler.
Two sources in Oklahoma indicated Wilson would be very interested in the ECU job if offered.
Holland will reportedly conduct at least three interviews before a hire is made to replace Holtz, who left ECU last week to become the new head coach at the University of South Florida.
Bowling Green head coach Dave Clawson was thought to be a candidate, but sources close to the BGSU football program stated Clawson was not contacted and was in attendance at the Falcons men’s basketball game Tuesday night.
Also, the publicist for North Alabama and former Auburn coach Terry Bowden said Wednesday he had not been contacted regarding the Pirates’ job.
On Tuesday morning, Stockstill announced he was removing his name from consideration for the ECU opening and staying at MTSU.
Until then, he was the only candidate believed to be interviewed for the job since Holtz announced last Thursday afternoon he was taking the USF position.
Other possible candidates include Grambling head coach Rob Broadway, Temple head coach Al Golden, Virginia Tech defensive coordinator Bud Foster, former Clemson head coach Tommy Bowden, former Boston College head coach and ECU staffer Jeff Jagodzinski and Navy defensive coordinator and Charlotte native Buddy Green.

Contact Nathan Summers at nsummers@reflector.com or (252)329-9595.
Oblinger, Nielsen back as professors

Former Chancellor Jim Oblinger and former Provost Larry Nielsen are professors now for N.C. State University, though Oblinger has left the Raleigh campus and moved west.

The pair resigned last year over their roles in the university's hiring of former state first lady Mary Easley.

Each received a six-month leave to prepare for rejoining the faculty after being away from their areas of scientific expertise for years.

The spring semester that just began marks their first back in their roles as professors.

Oblinger began work a little more than two weeks ago at NCSU's building on the new North Carolina Research Campus in Kannapolis, north of Charlotte.

There, he's expected to help with NCSU's strategic planning, as well as performing his own research and developing distance-learning classes, among other duties.

Before he became a university administrator, Oblinger was a professor in food science. He said he thinks he'll be a good fit in Kannapolis, where the university studies, among other things, how to make fruits and vegetables more nutritious and healthy.

Oblinger has long been involved in efforts to interest more children in pursuing science and engineering careers. He said that's something he'll be doing in Kannapolis, and he is already serving on a planning committee for the school system there.

The 350-acre campus, which officially opened in 2008, is home to researchers from more than half a dozen universities, including UNC-CH and Duke. There are three buildings there now and dozens more are planned.

Dole Food owner David Murdock came up with the idea to turn it into a $1.5 billion public-private campus for research into nutrition, health and biotechnology.

Interim NCSU Chancellor Jim Woodward, a former longtime chancellor at UNC-Charlotte, was involved in the initial planning for the Kannapolis campus. He said that even though it has been held back by the poor economy and state budget problems, it has huge potential to be a boost to the state's economy.

Woodward said he expects results from Oblinger's work in planning for the research campus and that Oblinger must file a written progress report at the end of six months. After a year, university leaders will evaluate his assignment and decide whether to continue it.

Part of Oblinger's job plan includes teaching. He hasn't begun that yet, but he is preparing a distance learning course tentatively called Food Safety and Consumer Protection.
Last fall, Oblinger was a finalist to become president of New Mexico State University, but now says that he's fully focused on his new role at NCSU.

Nielsen creates course

Nielsen, meanwhile, has carved out a more traditional role in the Department of Forestry and Natural Resources. He has created a new course, Conservation of Natural Resources, that offers a broad look at conservation. He began teaching it this semester, and it is full, with 96 students.

It's a requirement for fisheries and wildlife majors, but the course can also be used by non-majors to fulfill a science requirement.

Nielsen also is immersing himself in planning for the university's study abroad programs, and he plans to write several books.

"My colleagues have been wonderful in welcoming me back, and I'm really enjoying being back in the classroom, and I hope the students are enjoying it, too," Nielsen said.

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UNC warned after leak

CHAPEL HILL -- State officials served UNC-Chapel Hill with a notice of violation after treated wastewater at its animal holding facility in western Orange County leaked into a creek feeding Jordan Lake.

It was the second of three wastewater spills at the Bingham Facility, commonly called The Farm because it houses animals used in research on the university's main campus.

The first, 630-gallon leak did not trigger a notice because the wastewater did not reach Collins Creek, a tributary of the Haw River, which in turn flows into Jordan Lake. That spill, Nov. 18, came from pipes that separated and was contained to the soil.

The December spill came from a leak in the liner of a storage pond where treated wastewater is stored before being sprayed on the site. UNC has constructed a sump to collect the discharge and pump it back to the pond. Eventually the pond will be emptied and the water in it hauled to the Orange Water and Sewer Authority while the liner is fixed, said Mary Beth Koza, director of UNC-CH's Department of Environment, Health & Safety.

State officials could not estimate how much treated wastewater leaked into the creek. UNC-CH does not know when the liner started leaking, according to a letter from Larry Daw, a geologist in the Department of Environment, Health & Safety.

An underground drainage system is discharging about 1 gallon per minute, but that discharge likely includes groundwater, the letter said.

A third leak, of "maybe 100 gallons," occurred last week when piping in the spray irrigation system did not work properly and treated wastewater seeped into the soil, Koza said.

The university has planned a $27 million expansion of the Bingham Facility, located off Orange Chapel Clover Garden Road in Bingham Township.

The 57-acre site has about 60 research dogs, UNC-CH officials said in December. A building under construction will add 100 dogs that are currently housed near Hillsborough. The new building has been designed to add 100 dogs when funding is secured.

At the same time, the university has applied for federal stimulus money to move dogs and pigs at the Frances Owen Blood Research Laboratory near University Lake in Carrboro to Bingham.

If the money comes through, new buildings could house up to 150 additional dogs - for a total between 400 and 450 - and up to 150 hogs.

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More college freshmen call being well-off 'very important'


By Mary Beth Marklein, USA TODAY

Money appears to be high on the minds of this year's college freshmen, reflecting the influence last year of the struggling economy on enrollment, financial aid and life goals, a survey released today says.

Students were more likely to take out loans, more likely to have an unemployed parent and more likely to say an offer of financial aid was "very important" in choosing a college.

EMPLOYERS: Not satisfied with what students learn

IS COLLEGE WORTH IT? In recession, fear of debt changes plans

ECONOMY: Influencing college choices

And, a record 78.1% identified "being well-off financially" as a very important objective. That's higher than any other item on the list of choices, including "raising a family" (74.7%) or "helping others in difficulty" (69.1%).

Concern about money "just really permeated everything," says John Pryor, lead author of the report by UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute, which has surveyed freshmen since 1966. The
report advises colleges to prepare for students who are "increasingly anxious" about the economy. This year's survey was based on data from nearly 220,000 first-time, full-time freshmen at 297 four-year institutions and was statistically adjusted to reflect the national population of 1.4 million new freshmen.

Among signs that financial hardships are intensifying:
- 41.6% said the cost of attending a college was a very important factor in their choice of schools, up from 31% in 2004, when the question was first asked.
- More students reported having an unemployed father (4.5%) than at any other time in the history of the survey. Students reported that 7.9% of mothers were unemployed, the highest percentage since 1979.
- 53.3% reported taking out loans, the highest percentage in nine years. The percentage using aid that need not be repaid rose only slightly, to 70%, from 69.3% last year, but more students reported receiving grants for higher amounts.
- More freshmen than ever (56.5%) say a very important factor in selecting a college was finding a school where "graduates get good jobs."

One seeming contradiction: Fewer students are reporting business as a major.

Apparently, "they don't see a business major or career as the way to get ahead in the financial spectrum," Pryor says.

Other findings:
- 29% identified themselves as liberals, down from 31% last year and similar to 29.3% in 2007. Researchers say that dip repeats a pattern, dating to President Carter's 1976 election. Students also were less likely to discuss politics frequently (33.1% vs. 35.6% in 2008).
- More first-year students reported taking Advanced Placement classes and exams. But the percentage of freshmen reporting remedial work or special tutoring in high school — 21.2% reached its highest level ever.
Annual Poll of Freshmen Shows Effect of Recession

By KATE ZERNIKE

The recession hit this year’s college freshmen hard, affecting how they chose a school as well as their ability to pay for it, according to an annual nationwide survey released Thursday.

Over all, students were more likely than previous freshmen to have a parent who was unemployed and less likely to have found a job that might help pay for college.

About two-thirds of incoming students said they had “some” or “major” concern about their ability to pay for their education. The percentage of those with “some” concern — 55.4 — was at its highest level since 1971.

The number of students taking out loans was at its highest in nine years, at 53.3 percent.

“We expected that, given what we were seeing last year in the economy, we would see some significant changes in how finances were impacting people’s ability to pay,” said John H. Pryor, director of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program at the University of California, Los Angeles, which conducts the survey.

“What was more surprising,” he said, “was that it goes beyond just that into other areas. Everywhere we turned, whether it was how you chose your college or what do you think you are going to do in college, everywhere the finances piece popped out.”

The survey, which has been conducted for 44 years, asked about 220,000 incoming students at 297 campuses questions on everything from beer drinking habits and religious and political preferences to anticipated major and life goals. The answers were weighted to represent the 1.4 million full-time first-year students who entered 1,555 colleges and universities nationwide in the fall of 2009. (Each percentage point in the survey reflects the experience of roughly 14,000 students.)

When the survey was done in 2008, as the recession was deepening, researchers were somewhat surprised that the percentage of students taking out loans had not shifted appreciably. That changed this year, with the percentage climbing 3.9 points.

Students reported fewer resources to draw on. The number whose fathers were unemployed — 4.5 percent — was the highest in the history of the survey. The number of students whose mothers were unemployed was higher — 7.9 percent — and at its highest since 1979.

Fewer students reported working as high school seniors — 62.8 percent reported having a job, down from 66.4 percent in 2008 and 69.3 percent in 2007. “What all this points to is that they are going to be graduating with a larger debt burden than students in the past,” Mr. Pryor said.
Students were more likely than ever before to weigh financial factors in choosing a college: 41.6 percent of students reported that the cost of their school was a "very important" reason for choosing it, the highest number since the survey asked the question. And 44.7 percent said that an offer of financial aid from the school had been a very important reason for attending, up from 39.4 percent in 2007.

About 9 percent of students said they chose their college because their first choice did not offer them financial aid — the highest since that question was asked in 1984.

And students seemed acutely aware of value when choosing a college. The factor most often cited for choosing a school was that its graduates got good jobs — 56.5 percent said this was "very important," the highest rate since the question was asked in 1985.

However, their ideas on where the good jobs are may be changing: the number of students saying they expected a career in business had dropped to 12.1 percent, the lowest since 1976.