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Public Forum

ECU supports city on bar-separation effort

We respectfully disagree with the recent editorial that argued against a mandatory separation of 500 feet between clubs and bars in downtown Greenville.

Thousands of East Carolina University students and their parents, the ECU senior administration, our Student Safety Task Force and the leadership of our Board of Trustees join me in urging the City Council to approve this separation requirement. It is well past the time when we must come to grips with safety issues downtown and vigorously protect our students, university employees and our community. Mayor Pat Dunn and other city leaders have our complete support in their efforts to reduce the adverse effects resulting from the high concentration of bar and club patrons in downtown Greenville.

In many other communities, universities have joined with community partners to build a positive culture in areas close to campuses. Greenville deserves no less.

STEVE BALLARD  
ECU Chancellor

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Board of Trustees
January 30, 2010

As Big Ten Studies Expansion, Others Brace for Ripple Effects

BY JERÉ LONGMAN

When the Big Ten Conference announced last month that it was considering expansion, the college sports world began a high-stakes game of musical chairs that will be influenced by athletic performance, academic standing, geography and money. Several universities have begun to circle hopefully, lobbying, eyeing a potential seat in new conference alignments, wanting desperately to avoid being left out of the big-money alliances once the music stops.

“The Big Ten study puts everyone on notice that opportunities may be available for change,” Terry Holland, the athletic director at East Carolina, which is in Conference USA, said in an e-mail message. “Positioning will intensify.”

However any Big Ten expansion would shake out — possibly adding one member, or even three or five, to the current 11, said Bill Martin, the outgoing athletic director at Michigan — it could have a domino effect on other conferences. The goal for any university would be to realign allegiances within, or to join, one of the six Bowl Championship Series conferences that control hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue. As costs rise at a rate that the National Collegiate Athletic Association says is unsustainable, only 25 of 119 major-college athletic departments operated in the black in 2007-8, with the others averaging deficits of $9.87 million.

“The only schools that have a shot of getting out of deep red ink are the ones in major conferences,” said Jay Coakley, a sports sociologist at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs and the author of “Sports in Society.” “It’s just basically a survival tactic. For the most part, schools aren’t looking to make money; they’re just trying to cut losses.”

Ritualized lobbying will be done mostly behind the scenes so that current conference affiliations are not damaged. E. Gordon Gee, the president of Ohio State, called this praising of stadium expansions, television markets and research facilities a “quiet kabuki dance.”

An important consideration to admitting any new member, Gee said, would be academic credentials. All Big Ten members belong to the Association of American Universities, a consortium of the nation’s 62 leading research institutions. So are four universities being mentioned for potential Big Ten inclusion — Missouri of the Big 12, and Pittsburgh, Rutgers and Syracuse of the Big East.

“It’s significant that we have institutions that meet the academic standing and reputation of institutions now in the Big Ten,” Gee said. “I don’t want to coin a phrase here, but we are sort of the public equivalent of the
Ivy League in our quality."

When Missouri's name surfaced for possible inclusion in the Big Ten, Gov. Jay Nixon focused primarily on academics in saying the option should be explored. He told The Associated Press, "I'm not going to say anything bad about the Big 12, but when you compare Oklahoma State to Northwestern, when you compare Texas Tech to Wisconsin, you begin looking at educational possibilities that are worth looking at."

Pittsburgh, Rutgers and Syracuse would probably give serious consideration to joining the Big Ten to enhance their academic reputations, said Kyle V. Sweitzer, a data resource analyst at Michigan State who wrote about university ambitions and conference affiliations in the most recent issue of New Directions for Higher Education.

Rutgers, for example, could bring the New York television market to the Big Ten. It has a football stadium expansion under way and announced plans this month to renovate its basketball arena. Tim Pernetti, the Rutgers athletic director, said in an e-mail message that he would not speculate on Big Ten expansion, adding, "We are a proud member of the Big East."

Still, Rutgers and others would be "foolish not to explore" a move to the Big Ten, Sweitzer said. "No question the Big Ten has the academic reputation to go along with athletics," he said. "I'm not sure the Big East does as a whole."

Yet, there is often tension between academic and athletic interests. Big Ten members also belong to the Committee on Institutional Cooperation, a pooling of resources and research opportunities that includes the University of Chicago. A majority of the Notre Dame faculty would surely like to join such a consortium, said Murray Sperber, a visiting professor of graduate education at the University of California, Berkeley, who has written two books about Notre Dame football.

But Notre Dame has repeatedly said it is not interested in joining the Big Ten, relishing its football independence, traditional rivalries and revenue from a television deal with NBC that does not have to be shared. Some students have also expressed concern that the undergraduate experience may become compromised if Notre Dame became primarily a research institution, Sperber said.

Over the next 12 to 18 months, the Big Ten will study possible expansion. Apart from academics, growth would be based primarily on athletic factors: adding a conference championship football game that could bring in an estimated $15 million; increasing the reach of the conference's television network; and countering the perception that Big Ten football has become inferior to, say, the Southeastern Conference or the Big 12.

Jim Delany, commissioner of the Big Ten, declined to comment. Conference officials and university presidents, who will make the final decision, are not believed to support expansion unanimously.

Some speculate that a Big Ten expansion could have a broad, rippling effect, as in 2003 when the Big East lost Boston College, Miami and Virginia Tech to the Atlantic Coast Conference and later added five members from Conference USA: Cincinnati, DePaul, Louisville, Marquette and South Florida. Notre Dame also competes in the Big East in sports other than football.
A Big Ten expansion, some coaches and administrators said, might spur the Pacific-10 to do likewise, or set in motion a restructuring that could lead to a handful of so-called superconferences or even the withdrawal of a cartel of powerful universities from the N.C.A.A.

“I do think the Big Ten holds a key, maybe the key, in terms of what is going to be the next phase of college athletics,” Ohio State’s Gee said. “We need to explore this carefully. The law of unintended consequences applies most specifically to college athletics.”

Geno Auriemma, who has coached the Connecticut women’s basketball team to six national titles, forecast “a huge chain reaction.”

“Whatever we thought, don’t think it anymore,” Auriemma said. “How many car companies were there? How many accounting firms? Airlines? You look at the rest of the world. The landscape keeps changing. The big get bigger. The ones who are struggling try to figure out a way not to get left behind. It’s not fair, but it’s the way of the world. Unfortunately, universities fall right into that same category.”

Others say the effect will be much less seismic. But whatever happens, the Big East will be paying close attention. The loss of Pittsburgh, Rutgers or Syracuse would be a blow to the conference’s prestige. And it could leave the remaining Big East football schools to consider a separate alliance.

To fortify its attractiveness, the Big East has contracted for a bowl game beginning next season at Yankee Stadium. It has partnered with the regional cable network SportsNet New York to bring a minimum of 16 conference football games and more than 100 basketball games per season into the nation’s largest television market. And it has extended its long-term arrangement with Madison Square Garden.

“We don’t know what’s going to happen, but we’re working hard to ensure that if something does happen, we can be in the best possible position,” John Marinatto, the Big East commissioner, said.

And down the line the game of musical chairs could continue. If a Big East team joins the Big Ten, Conference USA members like Memphis, Central Florida and East Carolina will become candidates to fill the vacancy. East Carolina has a football stadium expansion scheduled to be completed for next season, which could enhance its chances if the Big East came calling.

“The money involved is so much greater now than the last time this happened” in 2003, said Richard Lapchick, chairman of the DeVos Sport Business Management program at Central Florida. “Almost everybody will be in play to make sure they don’t get left short.”

An earlier version of this article erroneously referred to the Association of American Universities as the "American Association of Universities."
Professors hope research helps communities

"There are lots of stereotypes of who food pantry clients are, and by in large, our research has shown that those stereotypes are not accurate."

Sharon Paynter
The North Carolina Hunger Project

Professors Sharon Paynter and Maureen Berner wanted to do something useful with their research.

One day while having lunch together, Paynter, now an assistant professor at ECU's Department of Political Science, and Berner, from the University of North Carolina's School of Government, shared a common desire to use their skills and knowledge in a way that would benefit their communities.

From that conversation, the pair began The North Carolina Hunger Project, in which the women collect data about food banks and pantries, and the people associated with them.

"We got involved in the project because we were interested in working together on an issue in which we both had background," said Paynter, a former executive director of the nonprofit Area Christians Working Together in Service (A.C.T.S.). Located in Henderson, A.C.T.S. runs a food pantry, a soup kitchen and two shelters. Berner has a work history involving food pantries in Iowa, her native state.

"We want our research to be useful," Paynter continued. "... This project has been an evolution for three or four years."

Paynter is a North Carolina native who was initially employed as a social worker after receiving a bachelor's degree in biology from University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

"I did child abuse and neglect investigations, which are incredibly difficult," Paynter said. "I wanted to still help people but in a less traumatic environment. So when the job at the food pantry (A.C.T.S.) opened, I applied for that."

She was executive director of the nonprofit for four years until 2001, when she returned to UNC to receive her first master's degree in public administration. She afterward got her second master's in Denver, in legal administration, and then earned her doctorate in public administration in 2008 from N.C. State University, where she also taught classes. She spent a year as a Public Policy Fellow at Brown University before returning to her home state to teach at East Carolina University.

The N.C. Hunger Project was well under way by then. She and Berner, who is also Paynter's former professor, and photojournalist Donn Young set out in 2008 to research and record everything about nonprofit food banks and pantries in the eastern part of the state, including information on the volunteers, the clients and the funding.

The story of this pilot...
As their research continues and expands, they've partnered with the Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina, which has a Greenville branch and supports 34 counties. After all of the information is compiled, food banks, like the one in Greenville, and pantries, like the Ayden Christian Care Center and the Ministries of the Bread of Life in Farmville — both of which were featured in the pilot study — can use the research results to aid in writing grant proposals, newsletters, presentations to stakeholder groups or soliciting help from city councils.

"I think when I went into this, I thought the whole issue was about the client," Paynter said. "But the process of simply handing out the food and making sure people get the resources they need is sometimes overwhelming. It surprises me that we are able to support that now with statistical research."

Through their findings, the professors and the photographer are able to tell the stories of the people who regularly visit food pantries, and how these organizations manage to operate with little funds. And what they found were similar stories from pantry to pantry.

"There are a lot of stereotypes of who food pantry clients are," Paynter said, "and by large, our research has shown that those stereotypes are not accurate."

Many people think that food pantry regulars are unemployed, Paynter said. But working individuals and families are actually more likely to experience what's called "long-term food insecurity."

"It means that people who have jobs are making decisions to buy food or pay for rent, or pay for transportation to get to work, or buy school clothes or medications," she said.

I would like to use my research in the classroom to teach students about hunger and policy, and how to conduct research; to teach them how to use research conducted by other people."

Sharon Paynter
The North Carolina Hunger Project

said. "... The other part is about the organization that serves the clients. Do they have the resources they need? Are they funded and have a professional staff or are they run by volunteers? And do they have the training they need? Or even, on the more basic level, can they refrigerate donations? If they get a lot of meat or vegetables, are they going to be able to use it?"

Since the pilot study was completed, Paynter has spoken at conferences to share these stories and hopefully begin a push for policy change. But eventually, Paynter said, she, Berner and Young hope that their work can be a starting point for community conversations — to find better ways to support local food banks.

"One, I hope we have a better understanding of what the issues relative to hunger poverty and food assistance are," she said. "Two, that we've been able to give communities and nonprofits and universities a better opportunity to use information to affect policy change. And (three), to learn in my own work. I would like to use my research in the classroom to teach students about hunger and policy, and how to conduct research; to teach them how to use research conducted by other people."

In the meantime, she and Berner are writing grant proposals to conduct a statewide study. After that, the two professors may embark on a multi-state study.

"I don't know exactly how that will all come into play," Paynter said. "... This sort of thing is happening quickly, so I'm not sure that we've fully captured all the ways we can use (the research) yet."

To read the story in "Endeavors" online, visit http://research.unc.edu/endeavors/win2010/index.php.

Contact Kristin Day at kday@reflector.com or (252) 329-9579.
Marine's family reflects on his life
Originally published January 30, 2010

By Megan Eckstein

Sgt. David Smith's family spent the past few days sharing favorite memories of the 25-year-old who gave his life doing what he loved most: serving his country as a Marine.

"I'll never forget the time we got in trouble the most," said Smith's sister, Kristen Forse, 27. "We were building an addition onto the back of my mom's house, and David and I went in there to have a war with sawdust. We picked up the sawdust and just threw it everywhere." Forse was 6 or 7 years old, and Smith was 4 or 5.

Even as he got older, Smith stayed fun and goofy. Smith's girlfriend, Kimberly Mott, 21, said one of her favorite memories was him dancing at Forse's wedding last summer.

"He was always the center of attention, he just liked twirling any girl around," she said.

"When David danced, the whole dance floor would clear out for him," Forse said. "He always wore a hat, and he would always incorporate the brim of the hat with dancing."

"Even if he didn't have a hat, he would pretend it was there," Mott said.

For all his playfulness, he loved his family deeply. Forse said she's heard many stories this week about how much her brother was changed by her two children, 8-year-old Logan and 1-year-old Vienna.

"Somebody had written me and said that when I was pregnant with Logan, David had told them that he couldn't wait for his nephew to be born because, although he knew he wasn't the father, he couldn't wait to play a father figure in his life. And I never knew that until yesterday," Forse said.

Smith was also serious about being a Marine. Family and friends said he loved serving his country, and it was clear years ago that he'd choose a military life.

"He always wanted to be an Army guy or a fighter" when they played, said Smith's brother, Daniel Brown, 20. "We would always tear up my mom's basement, make forts out of cushions and everything, and fight each other and shoot each other. And he'd get wounded and I'd fix him up."

After one year at Salisbury University, Smith decided the time was right. He called his sister to tell her the news.

"He called and said, 'Look, I really want to do this but I'm too scared to tell Mom. So I'm just gonna go do it and not tell anyone,'" Forse said.

She tried to talk him out of it, but Smith still left in the middle of a beach trip to enlist.

"I heard about it a week or two later from my mom. 'Did you know what your brother did?' 'Yeah, sorry I didn't tell you.'"

Mott said Smith wanted to be an officer. He had another year and a half before graduating from East Carolina University, but he looked forward to becoming an active-duty Marine instead of a reservist.
Smith made the most of his time as a reservist in Frederick's 4th Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion Company B. He met his future brother-in-law, Brian Forse, during training in 2005.

"Dave always thought he was a little big for his britches," Brian Forse said. "We would butt heads, but we were the same type of personality, I guess, the type A."

The two deployed to Iraq in 2006, Forse as a sergeant and Smith as his gunner. Smith saved Forse's life once while trying to retrieve a boat that was stuck in the Euphrates River.

"A couple guys asked if they could come with me and I said no," Forse said. "But right before, Dave said, 'Can I come?' and I said, 'Yeah, get the rope, let's go.'"

The two started across the river. As it got deeper, an undercurrent knocked Forse off his feet and dragged him under water.

"Dave was like, 'Here, catch this,' and throws the rope, but he lets go of it at the same time, so it hits the water and just sinks to the ground," Forse said. "So he starts running towards me and gets me — he's trying to pull me up, and about that time David's feet gave through and we both almost went under."

They made it out of the water safely.

"We were talking about it, it accomplished nothing," Forse said, laughing. "It's a great story, and we got one hell of a picture out of it, but it did absolutely nothing."

Knowing what the war zone was like, Smith still volunteered to go to Afghanistan. He deployed in the fall, and Mott said he was always ready and never scared. "He was so strong, I always knew he was going to come back," she said.

"(Mott) supported him where sometimes none of us could understand him," Kristen Forse said. "A lot of girlfriends and wives and friends just want to keep you back for their own personal reasons, but she just knew that was what he loved to do, and she supported him."

Smith, who died Tuesday afternoon of injuries from an attack in Afghanistan, leaves behind his brother and sister; girlfriend; mother, Mary Jane McWilliams; father, Leonard Smith; and many extended relatives. The family has not yet made funeral arrangements and is waiting for Smith's body to be flown from Germany to Dover, Del.
ECU lecture to focus on African-American folklore

ECU News Services

A scholar in African-American literature and folklore, whose primary research focuses on the complexities of the Southern African-American identity and experience, will deliver the Sallie Southall Cotton Lecture at East Carolina University in February.

Trudier Harris, professor emeritus at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, will present "Little Old Ladies and the Last Word: An Exploration of Sassiness and Risqué Behavior in African-American Folklore" at 7 p.m. on Feb. 17 in Wright Auditorium.

Harris is a recipient of the UNC system board of governors' award for excellence in teaching, the William C. Friday Award for Excellence in Teaching and the John Hurt Fisher Award of the South Atlantic Association of Departments of English for outstanding contributions in English scholarship. Her primary research focuses on the complexities of the Southern African-American identity and experience.

During her 36 years of full-time teaching, Harris also served on the faculties of the College of William and Mary and Emory University, in addition to lecturing throughout the United States, Canada, Europe and South Africa.

She is the author of many books, including her most recent, "The Scary Mason-Dixon Line: African American Writers and the South," published in May.

Harris is also the author of "From Mammies to Militants: Domestics in Black American Literature" (1982); "Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals" (1984); "Black Women in the Fiction of James Baldwin" (1985, for which she won the 1987 College Language Association Creative Scholarship Award); “Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison” (1991); "The Power of the Porch: The Storyteller's Craft in Zora Neale Hurston, Gloria Naylor, and Randall Kenan" (1996); and “Saints, Sinners, Saviors: Strong Black Women in African American Literature” (2001). In 2003, she published her memoirs, "Summer Snow: Reflections from a Black Daughter of the South."

The Sallie Southall Cotton Lecture is presented through the Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences Voyages of Discovery Lecture Series. The series brings prominent scholars representing a variety of disciplines to speak at the university.

Free tickets are available to ECU students, faculty and staff and are $10 for the general public. Tickets are available through the ECU Central Ticket Office at 328-4788 or (800) ECU-ARTS. Individuals requesting accommodations under the Americans with...
Disabilities Act should call 737-1016 (voice/TTY) at least 48 hours prior to the event.

For more information, contact John Tucker, director of the Voyages of Discovery Lecture Series, at tuckerjo@ecu.edu or visit www.ecu.edu/voys.

Joyner co-hosts county anniversary event

J.Y. Joyner Library at ECU and the board of directors of the Pitt County Historical Society are co-hosting a public reception to mark the 250th anniversary of Pitt County.

The celebration is scheduled for Tuesday at Joyner Library and will mark the opening of three exhibits documenting the history of Pitt County. “The Seeds of Change: The Daily Reflector Image Collection” exhibit features 40 images from the all-new digital collection of launched earlier this year. The online collection contains more than 7,500 images digitized from the photographic negatives of The Daily Reflector, which documents changes across eastern North Carolina between 1949 and 1967. Seeds of Change will be on display at Joyner through March 29.

The Special Collections department will display an exhibit of manuscripts, photographs, maps, printed materials and other items from its extensive collection to celebrate the anniversary.

“Pitt County’s 250th Anniversary Exhibit: From the Vaults of Special Collections” will be available on the fourth floor of the library through July 31.

“Pitt County’s 250th Anniversary: Special Resources from North Carolina Collections” exhibit in the Verona Joyner Langford North Carolina Collection highlights printed resources available in the collection for the study of Pitt County history. Materials include broadsides, maps, newspapers, memoirs, histories and works of fiction. The exhibit runs through April 30 and is located on the third floor of the library.

Local historian Roger Kammeyer will speak at 7 p.m. Tuesday on the second floor of the library. The Pitt County Historical Society will provide light refreshments. The event is free and open to the public.

ECU parking is available in the Joyner Library/Mendenhall Center lots, behind the FedEx Kinko’s lot, with overflow parking in the lot at the corner of Charles Boulevard and 10th Street, across from McDonald’s. For more information, contact Dawn Wainwright at 328-4090.

Ballard to deliver first State of the University

Chancellor Steve Ballard will deliver his first State of the University address at 11 a.m. Wednesday at Hendrix Theatre in Mendenhall Student Center.

Ballard, who joined ECU in the spring of 2004, plans to offer a summation of the university, discussing strengths, achievements, challenges and opportunities.

All members of the university community are welcome to attend, as are residents of Greenville. A reception will follow Ballard’s remarks in the Cynthia Lounge in Mendenhall.

Laupus Library hosting national exhibit

Laupus Library is hosting a national traveling exhibit through March 6 featuring Charlotte Perkins Gilman, women’s rights advocate and famed author of “The Yellow Wall-Paper.”


The six-banner exhibit provides a glimpse into the late 19th century, when women were challenging traditional ideas about gender that excluded them from political and intellectual life. At the time, medical and scientific experts drew on notions of female weakness to justify inequality between the sexes.

Gilman, who was discouraged from pursuing a career to preserve her health, rejected these ideas in a terrifying short story titled “The Yellow Wall-Paper.” The famous tale served as an indictment of the medical profession and the social conventions restricting women’s professional and creative opportunities.

Gilman wrote numerous treatises critiquing the limited role of women in society, including her most famous book, “Women and Economics,” in which she advocated financial independence and meaningful work for women.

The exhibit was developed and produced by the National Library of Medicine. For more information, visit http://www.ecu.edu/cs-dhs/laupuslibrary/events/LitPresct.cfm or http://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibits/literatureofprescription/b1Literature.html.

Visitors can view the exhibit during normal operating hours posted at www.ecu.edu/cs-dhs/laupuslibrary/events.cfm or call 744-2219. Metered parking is available in front of the library. For more information, call Kelly Rogers at 744-2232 or e-mail rogerske@ecu.edu.
Department of Physical Therapy reaccredited

The Department of Physical Therapy in the College of Allied Health Sciences recently was reaccredited for the maximum period of 10 years by the Commission on Accreditation of Physical Therapy Education.

The reaccreditation followed a site visit in June and review in October.

Students earning a doctorate of physical therapy at ECU complete a three-year, 106-semester-hour program that includes 32 weeks of clinical education.

ECU physical therapy faculty also operates an outpatient clinic at 2325 Stantonsburg Road in the ECU Neurosurgery and Spine Center on the corner of Arlington Boulevard and Stantonsburg Road.

Upcoming events:

- **Friday:** Sixth annual Jean Mills Health Symposium: Race, Stress and Health, 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Hilton Greenville. Contact: Eastern AHEC at 744-2587.
- **Saturday:** Great Decisions Program: Global Financial Crisis, 10 a.m. to noon, Rivers West Building auditorium, Randall Parker, ECU Department of Economics. Contact: Sylvie Debevec Hennig at 328-5520.

See www.ecu.edu/cs-ecu/calendar.cfm for times, places and more information on upcoming activities at ECU.
City, GUC, ECU to host fifth annual Mix-n-Meet

The City of Greenville, Greenville Utilities Commission and East Carolina University will host the fifth annual M/WBE Business Opportunity Fair and Educational Symposium, better known as the "Mix-n-Meet-n-Learn," on Feb. 13.

The networking event, which begins at 8:30 a.m. with registration and breakfast, will be held at the Health Sciences Building, 2100 W. Fifth St. The theme of "Diversity Works!" recognizes the competitive advantage businesses gain when leveraging the knowledge, skills and expertise of diverse firms. State Sen. Don Davis will discuss how diversity works for North Carolina.

Business owners will have the opportunity to learn how to do business with government, institutions of higher education, prime contracting firms, and other large companies, including University Health Systems, owner of Pitt County Memorial Hospital.

Educational workshops will focus on addressing the needs of the small, minority and women business community. Representatives from the N.C. Institute of Minority Economic Development will be presenting on financing and bonding for small business along with information on its menu of programs. The N.C. Office for Historically Underutilized Businesses will present a question-and-answer session on the new State-wide Uniform Certification program. Michael Washington of Action Coach Business Coaching, who kicked off the 2009 Mix-n-Meet, will present a business growth seminar.

The event is free and open to the public. For more information, contact Denisha Harris at 329.4862 or dharris@greenvillenc.gov or Donna Mayo at 328.6858 or lewisd@ecu.edu.
Stalking the 'bird flu' of trees

In 1995, oak trees began dying en masse in some coastal California forests.

The disease, which causes oozing cankers and cuts off water and nutrition to oaks, was unknown to science but was soon dubbed Sudden Oak Death.

It took scientists five years to pinpoint a pathogenic fungus-like brown algae as the cause. In 2001, it received a scientific name, Phytophthora ramorum.

Sudden Oak Death spread north along the West Coast, and today it is established in forests from California to Washington. Nobody knows how much of North America's forests are at risk of infection, but in the decade and a half since it emerged, a scientist at UNC Charlotte has been one of the leaders in seeking to understand it - and find out if it might infect Eastern forests.

Ross Meentemeyer uses high-tech mapping technologies to examine how P. ramorum survives, reproduces and spreads.

"You might think of Sudden Oak Death as the bird flu of the plant world," Meentemeyer said. He began studying it a decade ago at ground zero of its emergence in California's Big Sur eco-region, as a geography professor at Sonoma State University.

Today, Meentemeyer directs the Center for Applied Geographic Information Science at UNCC, a lab in the department of geography and earth sciences. CAGIS's approach to studying Sudden Oak Death cuts across academic boundaries and draws from epidemiology, plant pathology, molecular biology, land use planning and information sciences. Research at CAGIS is helping policymakers to better allocate resources to contain the disease's spread in the West, and to prepare for its possible occurrence in the East.

Their maps are not static, like the ones you may see on your car's GPS screen. Instead, they provide visual and spatial awareness for where the disease may occur. The data used to build them can also be manipulated to predict disease spread or test management policies.

Meentemeyer and his lab of 20 scientists and students can even predict how a host plant's genotype variability across a landscape might influence its susceptibility to the disease. This predictive power gives policy-makers visual information to figure out how best to fight it.

But the lab has struggled to quantify the total number of trees that have died, or are infected, because the data needed are so massive.

"Everyone is afraid to put a number on it," Meentemeyer said. "So we say 'potentially millions' of trees are infected, or have all ready died. It could be a very high number. And then the potential
number of at-risk trees is going to be even larger."

Seemingly unrelated things such as fire suppression policies, hiking trails and urban sprawl have all found their way into Meentemeyer's data, offering surprising mechanisms for how Sudden Oak Death creeps and lurches across landscapes.

In one study, his team found that fire suppression policies in California's Big Sur led to an expansion of woodlands at the loss of shrubland and grassland habitat, which both depend upon fire. The newer woodlands were different than the old and were more likely to harbor P. ramorum because they contained comparatively more California bay laurel, which is a key host for transmitting the disease to oak trees, Meentemeyer said.

In another study, Meentemeyer and his colleague, J. Hall Cushman of Sonoma State University, found that human activities were strongly associated with P. ramorum's presence. They found significant amounts of the organism in soil along hiking trails - but not off trail - and they found that it was more likely to be present near where wildlands and urban areas meet.

Under his guidance, UNCC graduate student Sarah Haas is investigating links between plant biodiversity and disease risk. She said their initial data show that in areas with a great variety of plant species, the presence of disease appears to decline.

"This pathogen is a generalist; it can live on many different hosts," Haas said. "But only two seem to drive its infectiousness: California bay laurel and tanoak, which produce about 90 percent of its reproductive spores."

When a tree succumbs, it often dies within a single growing season. But oaks are dead-end, accidental hosts for the pathogen. P. ramorum cannot complete its life cycle on them. For that, it needs woody plants called "foliar hosts," which do not die when infected.

More than 75 of those plant hosts have been identified, and all develop non-lethal infections on their leaves. Spores are carried to new hosts by water droplets.

Interstate shipments of nursery plants are the most likely way P. ramorum might leap across the continent. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service has regulated host plants shipped out of quarantined counties since 2002. But some plants slip by.

In March 2004, three Florida nurseries were found positive for P. ramorum. By the end of 2004, 177 nurseries in 22 states received infected shipments, resulting in the destruction of more than 787,840 plants and heightened inspections. In March 2009, P. ramorum was found near a nursery in Gadsden County, Fla. In June 2009, it was found on a rhododendron in a residential landscape in Greenville County, S.C.

Laboratory trials conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture have shown that live oaks and red oaks are susceptible. Meentemeyer's work shows that though Eastern forests contain dozens of common woody plants that act as hosts - rhododendron and camellias are like magnets for the pathogen - different weather patterns from the west might prevent it from reproducing.
"It's still considered a threat," said Kier Klepzig, assistant director for research at the Forest Service's Southern Research Station in Asheville, "but less so since it seems to have had several chances to establish here. But it has not."

Despite the low likelihood of Pryamorum's establishing in Eastern forests, scientists don't like to say "never." If the pathogen were to mutate or adapt its reproductive cycle, Meentemeyer's work would come into play.

"We have the ability to develop models to predict the spread of the pathogen if it were to reach Eastern forests," Meentemeyer said. "And we'd be better prepared to contain it."
Cathy Smith Bowers named poet laureate

Gov. Bev Perdue has named a new state poet laureate: Cathy Smith Bowers, who teaches at both UNC Asheville and Queens University in Charlotte.

Bowers, who lives in Tryon, a small town south of Asheville, will be installed at a ceremony Feb. 10 at the State Capitol.

"Cathy's powerful poems open new avenues of thought and are a reflection of the love of words and learning," Perdue said in a statement. "She believes poetry inspires and instructs North Carolinians of all ages."

Reached by phone Friday, Bowers said, "North Carolina has an amazing number of stunning poets. I feel honored to be representing them and spending the next couple years inviting people into the dialogue of poetry."

Bowers will serve an unpaid two-year term as the state's ambassador for poetry and literature. Past poet laureates have written poems for special events or taught creative writing workshops online.

Bowers said she hopes to continue her predecessors' efforts but also wants to make poetry accessible to those who are not computer savvy. So far, that includes doing an hourlong show once a month on an Asheville radio station.

Bowers' poems have been published widely, from The Atlantic Monthly to The Kenyon Review. She has written three collections of poetry: "The Love That Ended Yesterday in Texas;" "Traveling in Time of Danger;" and "A Book of Minutes."

Mike Kobre, a professor at Queens University and co-director of the master of fine arts in creative writing program, said Bowers possesses a real mastery of form while remaining accessible.

Her book, "A Book of Minutes," refers to the minute poetic form that requires 12 lines, 60 syllables and strict iambic pentameter. Her topics include, travel, body organs and her husband's suicide.

Kobre also noted that Bowers is a much-lauded teacher. She received the J.B. Fuqua Distinguished Educator Award in 2002, and Kobre said of her students, "Universally, they all rave about how strong a teacher she is."

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