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Katherine Bray-Strickland

FARMVILLE — Dr. Katherine Bray-Strickland, 27, died Wednesday, Feb. 10, 2010. A graduate of J.H. Rose High School and East Carolina University’s Brody School of Medicine, she was a family medicine resident at ECU.

Erskine Bowles will retire as UNC president

CHAPEL HILL -- After four high-intensity years guiding North Carolina's public universities, Erskine Bowles announced today that he was stepping down as UNC system president.

Bowles told the UNC Board of Governors today that he will remain at his post through the end of 2010 or as long as it takes to find a successor.

Bowles has held the post since Jan. 1, 2006. Prior to that, the multi-millionaire scion of a prominent North Carolina family, had been a banker and, famously, White House Chief of Staff under President Bill Clinton from 1996 through 1998. He then ran unsuccessful campaigns as a Democratic candidate for the U.S. Senate in 2002 and 2004.

His father, Greensboro businessman Hargrove "Skipper" Bowles, served in the legislature and in the Cabinet of Gov. Terry Sanford before running unsuccessfully as the Democratic nominee for governor in 1972.

When Bowles was tapped to head the UNC system, he vowed to make it more accountable, efficient and transparent.

He became known among his staff for putting in brutally long work days as he led the system to redefine its planning process and install a series of checks and balances to slow a long proliferation of academic programs that, at times, overlapped unnecessarily with similar ones at other campuses. The mechanism behind all this was the UNC Tomorrow initiative, a series of meetings Bowles and board members conducted with North Carolinians across the state in an effort to find out precisely what people want from their university.

Now, all university initiatives must fit the criteria spelled out in the UNC Tomorrow commission's findings.

Bowles' tenure also has included a number of tribulations. He replaced chancellors at Fayetteville State and N.C. A & T following the discovery of financial abuses on both campuses. Then last year, he had to do the same at the state's largest university, N.C. State, in the midst of a scandal over the hiring there of former State First Lady Mary Easley. Chancellor James Oblinger resigned, along with the university's provost and the chairman of its Board of Trustees.

In a move that has been widely praised at NCSU and on the Board of Governors, Bowles calmed the crisis by persuading the respected former chancellor of UNC-Charlotte, Jim Woodward, to come out of retirement and serve as interim chancellor.
UNC system ponders smaller rise in tuition

CHAPEL HILL -- UNC system leaders want to charge students less than the General Assembly has them scheduled to pay next year.

Last year, state lawmakers mandated that tuition and fees would rise $200 or 8 percent, whichever is lower, in 2010-11. The revenue from that rate increase would go to the state's general fund, a sticking point for university leaders who want it to stay on campus.

Now, university system leaders are readying an alternative that would bring in less money but let campuses keep it. Under that plan, half of all revenue raised through tuition increases would be used for need-based financial aid, and the rest of the money would be spent on critical campus needs such as programs to improve graduation and retention rates.

University leaders fear losing money for financial aid if all the increase goes into the state's general fund.

"Not only do we lose that money, but half of it was going to need-based aid," UNC President Erskine Bowles said Thursday during a meeting of the UNC system's Board of Governors. "Some would say we should raise tuition and plow the money into the university. But this is a tough time for families."

In considering tuition increases each year, campus leaders weigh the price of quality against the state's constitutional mandate to keep college costs low. This year, the task is complicated by the recession and the legislature's funneling the revenue into the general fund.

Under the current law, the average tuition-and-fee increase for in-state students next year would be $180. Under the plan being pushed by the UNC system, those same in-state students would see a $131 increase, or 5.2 percent, on average, said Rob Nelson, the UNC system's vice president for finance.

"Part of our approach is to lessen the burden for residents," he said.

Students like the plan

Greg Doucette, the sole student on the UNC system's governing board, said Thursday that student leaders support the alternate tuition plan. He pointed to the more than 20,000 petition signatures the UNC system's student government association has collected from students across the state endorsing the plan.

"That's like having four UNC Asheville signing the same document," he said.

Under the UNC system plan, undergraduates from North Carolina attending UNC-Chapel Hill would see their tuition and fees rise $265.98 to $5,535.64. N.C. State University's rate would rise $164.30, to
$5,323.30. N.C. Central University's rate would rise $183.21 to $3,924.42.

Those costs don't include room, board, books and other college expenses.

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State H1N1 immunization campaign targets college students

staff reports • February 11, 2010

RALEIGH — The N.C. Division of Public Health is sponsoring a college immunization campaign during February in response to continued cases of H1N1 on college campuses statewide, according to a press release.

While flu cases are not at the level they were back in the fall, health officials said there is clear evidence that H1N1 is still striking young people.

From late January through early February, student health centers outpaced other providers in cases of influenza-like illness. A similar trend was evident during the fall wave of H1N1 flu.

However, statistics from the state’s immunization branch show college-age individuals are the least immunized overall in the state. As of Jan. 30, only 5 percent of 19- to 24-year-olds had received vaccine distributed to colleges through the N.C. Division of Public Health.

The campaign seeks to re-energize efforts to remind students that it is not too late to be vaccinated.

Mascots from eight colleges and universities will be sporting bandages with the message “The Flu Stops With Me” at selected basketball games during February.

In addition to their campus efforts, student health services personnel will offer immunization clinics at games to reach students and others who have not yet been vaccinated.

Colleges involved in the campaign include N.C. State University, Fayetteville State University, UNC-Chapel Hill, UNC-Charlotte, North Carolina A&T, UNC-Wilmington, East Carolina University and Winston-Salem State University.
Mount Olive program earns ‘very serious’ students a degree in three years

Laura Oleniacz
2010-02-11 18:03:45

Mount Olive College's three-year degree program

♦ The program will be offered to students with a minimum GPA of 3.5.

♦ Students will be required to enter the program at the onset of their freshman year and to declare a major at that time.

♦ Students can take as many as 24 credit hours per semester in the program, while the average college student takes 12 to 15 credit hours.

♦ For more information or to apply, contact the Mount Olive College admissions office at 1-800-653-0854.

Source: Mount Olive College

Students burning to get out of college and go on to get a job or enter graduate school will have a chance to complete their bachelor's degrees in three years at Mount Olive College starting this fall.

Officials at the small private college estimate that the new three-year degree program targeted for “very serious” traditional students will save those students more than $22,000 per year.

The new program is evidence of the college’s willingness to be innovative, said President Philip Kerstetter, and is a response to a growing pressure across the nation for higher education leaders to create ways for students to complete their degrees as quickly as possible.

But an official from another higher education institution in the state said the school offered a three-year degree, and is now phasing that option out for new students because there wasn’t a large volume of students who were interested in leaving college early.

Robert Lange, senior associate director of admissions for East Carolina University, said the school is now in the process of phasing out a “Degree In Three Program” that was started at the school in summer 2003. The last class of new students to enter the program was in the fall of 2009.

The program was marketed to attract the “best and brightest students” to ECU, Lange said, and it ended up bringing in only about 25 students per year.

Those students started their coursework the summer prior to the fall of their freshmen year, and they worked closely with advisors to tailor their coursework for their remaining years in school.

Their course loads varied depending on the number college-level credits they came to college with through Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, or dual-enrollment high school programs that allow...
students to gain college credit while in high school.

The university also offered a program that would allow a student to get a bachelor’s and a law degree in six years rather than in seven, and a “MD7” program that allowed a student to get a bachelor’s and a medical degree in seven years instead of eight.

The programs were part of a “Succeed Sooner” initiative that is being phased out because students weren’t interested in leaving college early in large numbers.

“There was very little interest in doing this,” Lange said.

Instead, he said those top-level students were more interested in getting a second major or minor, studying abroad, or taking part in internships or clubs on campus.

“We’re finding that students who are that high achieving, while yes they see grad school and or medical school in their futures, they also understand the importance of other types of experiences while in college,” Lange said.

Kerstetter is estimating that 5 percent of the college’s traditional student body will be looking to get their bachelor’s degrees in three years, as most students in their first few years of college are still exploring career options.

That will mean about 40 of the 745 traditional students at the college’s Mount Olive campus should enroll in the three-year program.

The three-year program will only be open to traditional students at the Mount Olive location. The college has 3,363 students in total at all of its locations at Mount Olive as well as at New Bern, Jacksonville, Goldsboro, Wilmington, the Research Triangle Park and Washington, N.C.

The program is geared for serious students with clear goals in mind. So to be admitted, students must have a 3.5 minimum grade point average, and be willing to declare a major in their freshman year of college.

Those students will get special advising and preferential scheduling to get the courses they need. The college is also planning to waive fees normally charged to students taking a course overload.

Students are normally charged $350 per credit hour for a course load above 19 credit hours, Kerstetter said. In the new degree program, students can take up to 24 hours without those extra fees.

The average course load per student is 12 to 15 credit hours per semester.

“This is really designed for say, that student who knows what he or she wants to do, and it’s pretty much career-focused and sees what he or she needs to be,” Kerstetter said.

College officials from other schools in the state said there are other alternatives available at their schools to get a degree more quickly, or that smooth transitions into after-college options.

Lange said students at ECU can still get their bachelor’s degrees in three years depending on what they’re studying and the number of college credits they come to college with, although the program marketed for students to do that is coming to a close.

"For the right student, it's still possible," he said.

There are programs at ECU that allow for an easier transition into graduate school, such as the Early Assurance Program that guarantees admission into medical school for four freshmen students who have received Merit Scholarships.

That program does not allow a student to finish early, said Karen Pearce, associate director of ECU’s Pre Professional Advising Center.
And at UNC Chapel Hill, there is not a three-year degree program, said Ashley Memory, UNC’s senior assistant director of admissions.

The university is planning dual bachelor’s and master’s programs that will allow students to complete both degrees in less time.

“Although we don’t think many of these students want to graduate in three years, we believe that many would be interested in accelerating and leaving with an advanced degree in hand,” Memory wrote in an e-mail. “So these programs would certainly increase value for students, but we also believe that offering top admitted students these options would be a strong enrollment incentive.”

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Audit claims corruption at NCCU

Three N.C. Central University employees involved with an education agency based at the campus improperly took tens of thousands of dollars, an internal university audit alleges.

The chancellor of the school called the draft report sloppy and said some of its harshest accusations might not be true.

Once of the agency's leaders, Nan Coleman, was fired last fall for poor performance, Chancellor Charlie Nelms said Thursday. After that, he ordered the internal audit of her Historically Minority Colleges and University Consortium.

Once the audit was completed, Nelms also fired the unnamed auditor who produced it. Now Nelms has ordered his staff to gather more information before he releases a final version to the public. He said the draft audit was so poor that he doesn't trust it, and he does not want to damage the reputations of people who might not have done anything wrong.

"I want to see the source documents, and I want to see the field notes from the audit, because I want it to be accurate," Nelms said. "I don't want it to be hearsay, because some of the allegations are just mind-boggling."

The consortium represents a dozen public and private institutions across the state that have traditionally had heavy minority enrollment. Based at NCCU in Durham, the consortium received millions of dollars in state, federal and private grants to help minority children close the achievement gap with white kids. More than a dozen programs operate under its umbrella.

Nelms said that he feared the draft audit might hurt the efforts of programs that are doing good work to help a population of children who badly need it.

Coleman didn't return phone calls to her home Thursday, nor did one of the other women who the audit alleges had received improper payments, Vermal White. She is listed in the NCCU directory as an administrative assistant in the Division of Extended Studies. She wasn't at work Thursday, according to a woman who answered the phone there.

The other woman named in the audit, Barbara Fields, is listed as a clerical assistant in the Division of Extended Studies. Reached there by telephone, she declined to discuss the audit or her connection with one of the programs cited in the audit, Learn and Serve. Fields said she had not done anything wrong.

"I don't understand why you're asking these questions," she said. "I refuse to answer these questions."

Fictitious payments?
According to the draft audit obtained by The News & Observer, Coleman received $186,000 from federal Learn and Serve grants the consortium had received to support faith-based groups teaching youth about community service. That program's coordinator told the auditor that some of that money - the auditor couldn't determine how much - was paid to a company that Coleman registered with the N.C Secretary of State.

"On the last day of audit fieldwork, Internal Audit questioned the Program Coordinator about the nature of these payments and she admitted that they were fictitious payments to increase the compensation of Ms. Coleman," the audit says.

Coleman was at the center of another education controversy 11 years ago. In 1999 the Durham school system declined to renew her contract as its director of vocational education just weeks after she was named by her peers across the state as the best in North Carolina. She petitioned a judge to force the system to restore her contract, which she said had been improperly terminated. The school system later paid her $12,500 to end the legal fight.

According to the audit, White said that she had been paid $70,000 to be Learn and Serve coordinator. She also was to use some of the money to get insurance, but she said she did not buy any. Also, some of the $70,000 went to two companies White had registered with the state, the audit said.

White also "had received a fictitious vendor payment in order to increase her compensation," the audit alleges.

Hard to reach

The audit said White told the auditor that Fields received $88,000 for providing administrative services and some type of insurance related to the program. But Fields didn't even work on Learn and Serve, and did not buy the insurance, the audit quotes the coordinator as saying.

The auditor got a list of groups or people that received sub-grants from the program from 2004 through 2009 and tried to contact them to determine whether they actually existed. The auditor could not reach any of them, according to the audit. The auditor then asked the program coordinator whether these recipients were legitimate.

"The Program Coordinator stated that the sub-recipients were legitimate, but that she hoped that the Learn and Serve Grant did not get audited by the [federal agency paying for the program] because of what they might find," the audit said.

The audit also alleges that another of the consortium's programs misspent $6,560 on iPods, and that another apparently spent money mostly on social events rather than the intended mix of social and educational events.

Final audit coming soon

Nelms said he thinks there's a strong chance that some of the harshest allegations aren't true. He pointed out problems that led him to question the audit.
An early version, he said, scrutinized programs that weren't connected to the consortium, which he had clearly requested as the sole target. A cover sheet on the version of the audit that The News & Observer obtained, which was addressed to Nelms, appears to confirm that: "To accommodate your request from last week, I have deleted items that were part of our review but were determined to be unrelated to HMCUC," it says.

Nelms, who didn't name the fired auditor, said he will have a final version of the audit in a week to 10 days and will release it. He said no one implicated in the draft audit had been fired except Coleman, who lost her job before the audit was commissioned.

Nelms said that he hadn't informed UNC system President Erskine Bowles about the problems yet, but that he had told the system's top financial and auditing officials.

"We have a team of people working to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the document, including staff from our internal audit office, finance and administration, my chief of staff and university legal counsel," he wrote in an e-mail message to The News & Observer late Thursday. "I am confident that we will succeed in producing an accurate and complete report, and that the actions we have taken and will take, will ensure transparency, accountability and responsiveness."

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UNCC students head to football vote

By Meghan Cooke
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Posted: Friday, Feb. 12, 2010

A group of about 15 students sporting their 49er regalia gathered on campus before sunrise this morning, ready to tackle what could be an important day in their fight to establish football at UNC Charlotte.

The group carpooled to Chapel Hill, where the UNC Board of Governors is expected to vote today on a student fee increase that would fund the creation of a football program at the university. That team would take the field by the 2013-2014 school year.

UNC Charlotte officials asked the board to support the increase, which would require students to pay an additional $120 in student fees starting next fall. The fee would rise to $320 by the fall of 2014, making it the highest athletic fee among the 16 UNC campuses by today's figures.

"If we make this hurdle, we're almost there," said UNC Charlotte's student body vice president, Jacob Pierce, as the group prepared to depart around 6 a.m.

The students planned to greet board members as they entered today's meeting, cheering on the 49ers and encouraging them to vote in favor of the fee increase.

Of the $6.2 million operating costs for the football program's inaugural year, student fees will cover $3.2 million. The fees also will cover $2.4 million a year in debt service starting that year.

At the board's January meeting, members agreed with 49er fans that a football program would enhance the university, but some questioned whether students should be forced to pick up the tab.

Several students also traveled to the January meeting, holding banners that read, "See you on the 49 yard line."

Students' hopes were high this morning.

"We're going to show them that this is something we want," said Joey Lemons, UNC
Charlotte’s student body president. “We are the students.”

Junior Megan Smith admitted she’s not exactly a football fan as she waited for the group to assemble in the chilly morning weather.

"I really don’t care about football on a sports level," Smith said, smiling as fellow students gasped and playfully chided her blasphemous statement. "I’m just excited about what it’ll do for campus culture."

And if the vote goes their way, Smith said there will be celebrations in Charlotte tonight.

"I’m going to be pumped," she said.

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Weight-Loss Surgery Gets a Lift

BY ANNA WILDE MATHEWS

Obese teens who underwent weight-loss surgery shed significantly more pounds than those who tried just dieting and exercise in a new study, a finding that may boost interest in bariatric surgery for adolescents.

The clinical trial, published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, found that the 24 surgery patients who finished the study lost an average 76.3 pounds, about 28% of their total body weight. The equivalent for the diet-and-exercise group of 18 who completed the study was 6.6 pounds, or 3% of body weight.

Seven surgery patients required follow-up procedures, including one person who got two. Participants in the study, which was done in Australia, were between 14 and 18 years old, and were followed for two years.

The U.S. and other countries are struggling with high rates of pediatric obesity, an issue highlighted by first lady Michelle Obama Tuesday as she launched a campaign focused on improving eating and physical activity.

"This is very important evidence that you can get good results in kids," from surgery, said Edward Livingston, a professor at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School, who wrote an editorial accompanying the study in JAMA. He noted that the study showed diet and exercise improvements, even with less weight loss, can help teens' health as well.

The new trial is the first to compare bariatric surgery to another treatment—in this case a reduced-calorie diet and exercise—in pediatric patients randomly assigned to receive one or the other. Evidence from such trials is generally considered stronger than other types. Still, the study was relatively small, and doctors said the Australian group that performed the surgeries has previously shown better results from them than are typical in the U.S.

It's a "legitimate concern" that similar average weight loss may not be achieved by American teens having bariatric surgery, said Thomas Inge, director of the Surgical Weight Loss Program for Teens at Cincinnati Children's Hospital. That is partly because of the fractured U.S. health system and payment policies that can limit follow-up care after surgery, said Dr. Inge, who is leading a study sponsored by the National Institutes of Health also looking at bariatric surgery in adolescents.

Bariatric surgery is relatively rare among pediatric obesity patients and isn't always covered by insurers. Based on federal databases, Dr. Livingston estimated there were fewer than 1,000 bariatric surgeries in obese patients younger than 18 each year in the U.S., less than 1% of the number done on adults.

In addition to weight loss, the surgery patients in the JAMA study also did better on other diabetes and heart-related measures, though the diet-and-exercise group showed some improvement. No surgical patients had the prediabetic condition known as "metabolic syndrome" at the end of the study, while four people in the other group did.

The bariatric surgery used in the trial was a gastric banding procedure that wraps a silicone band around the upper part of the stomach to restrict food intake. Another type of bariatric surgery, known as gastric bypass, wasn't used in the trial.

Surgeons said U.S. hospitals can charge $15,000 to $25,000 or more for the gastric banding surgery—not including follow-up care—though insurers might pay less under their contracts.

The maker of the bands used in the study, Allergan Inc., is currently seeking Food and Drug Administration approval to market its product for use in morbidly obese adolescents. Currently it is approved only for adults. The company donated the study devices, and provides general research support for the Australian obesity center.

In general, many patients who get bariatric surgery regain at least some of their lost weight several years after the procedure. Also, there can be complications of bariatric banding, though they are relatively rare. Patients' stomachs can be perforated during surgery, or the band can develop a hernia after the band is implanted.

These issues didn't occur in the new study. The eight follow-up procedures were done to replace either the band or the access port used to adjust its fit around the stomach. These happened after surgeons accidentally pricked devices' tubing with their needles or, in most cases, after patients ate too much too fast and overfilled the portion of their stomachs above the bands, causing symptoms such as reflux and vomiting.

In the future, "we will spend more time reinforcing the need for them to eat slowly," said Paul O'Brien, the study's lead author and director of the Centre for Obesity Research and Education at Monash University in Melbourne.

The researchers found that 21 of the surgery patients lost more than half their excess weight, compared with three in the diet-and-exercise group. Excess weight was defined as that above the 95th percentile for body-mass index.

Swelling Numbers
Percentage of U.S. children and adolescents who are obese

| Ages 6-11 |
| Ages 12-19 |
| Ages 2-5 |

Note: Obesity is defined as being at or above the 95th percentile for body mass index. Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Journal of the American Medical Association.