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DALLAS — Members of Conference USA and current and future members of the Mountain West are on their way to forming a new league that will begin in 2013.

The 16 schools announced the plans Monday, taking a bigger-is-better approach that will create a conference with schools in five time zones.

“We are very encouraged by the teamwork and energy exhibited among all the presidents and chancellors involved in our recent discussions,” East Carolina chancellor Steve Ballard said of the merger. “I’m in strong support of the commitment of the new conference to the academic success of the student-athlete.”

According to ECU director of athletics Terry Holland, the progress of the merger is “good news for all involved and we are looking forward to the continuing discussions.”

The sentiments were similar across the nation from member institutions.

“This is an exciting development that will stabilize the current conferences and create the first truly national conference with members in five time zones and television viewership from coast to coast,” UNLV President Neal Smatresk said in statement. “We are moving our plans forward rapidly and expect to complete our conversations in the near future. Look for further announcements soon as we work together on this exciting new venture.”

The new conference likely will have 18-24 schools, split into divisions, and not only have a football championship game but also semifinals. It also will hold a conference basketball tournament, the statement said.

School leaders said they plan to complete work on the new league in six months.

In October, Conference USA Commissioner Britton Banowsky and Mountain West Commissioner Craig Thompson announced the two leagues were working to merge their football operations starting in 2013.

Since then four C-USA members — SMU, Houston, Memphis and Central Florida — have announced they will join the Big East in 2013. Boise State and San Diego State from the Mountain West also announced they would be
joining the Big East for football and switching their other sports to new conferences. The Mountain West also lost TCU to the Big 12.

The new plan is to join forces and start over, possibly with new television deals.

Both conferences currently are in the middle of contracts with CBS that run through 2016. CBS has an option to extend the deal with the Mountain West for four years.

The schools include: Air Force, Colorado State, UNLV, New Mexico and Wyoming from the Mountain West; Alabama-Birmingham, East Carolina, Marshall, Rice, Southern Mississippi, Texas-El Paso, Tulane and Tulsa out of C-USA; Fresno State, Nevada and Hawaii, which all currently compete in the Western Athletic Conference, but are set to join the Mountain West in 2012.

All the schools except Hawaii will compete in all sports in the new conference. Hawaii will be a football-only member, though the Warriors could rack up some serious mileage when they face East Carolina in Greenville, N.C., (4,864 miles away) or UAB (4,358).

“Today’s announcement is both a culmination of several months of discussion between the presidents and chancellors of these 16 universities and an historic starting point to forge a ground-breaking, new conference,” Thompson said in a statement. “There are a myriad of details and moving parts that will be finalized in the weeks and months ahead, but there is positive momentum toward long-term stability and a tremendous opportunity for all involved.”
Joe Hofmann, 85, is one of the first in the Carolinas to have the recently approved transcatheter aortic valve replacement. His procedure was done on Jan. 30 at the East Carolina Heart Institute.

Procedure helps high-risk heart patients
By KJ Williams
The Daily Reflector
Tuesday, February 14, 2012

Joe Hofmann has a healthier heart just in time to celebrate Valentine’s Day with his sweetheart and wife of 63 years, Doris.

Open-heart surgery was considered too risky for Hofmann, 85. But a new, less-invasive procedure that received FDA approval in December made it possible for the Washington, N.C., resident to have his heart valve replaced.

His procedure was one of three similar surgeries at the East Carolina Heart Institute. These operations were among the earliest performed in the Carolinas.

Hofmann’s heart valve replacement took place on Jan. 30 at the Heart Institute’s inpatient facility at Vidant Medical Center, formerly Pitt County Memorial Hospital. He went home four days later.

The procedure known as transcatheter aortic valve replacement involves inserting the valve with a catheter through an artery in the leg or shoulder, or making a tiny chest incision and inserting the valve through the heart, said Dr. Walter Tan, an interventional cardiologist and associate professor of cardiovascular sciences at East Carolina University.

Hofmann’s surgery used a valve approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.
Two other recent surgeries at the Heart Institute were clinical studies for a smaller valve made by the same manufacturer.

Tan is co-principal investigator for the clinical trial. Its two patients — an 85-year-old retired Navy veteran and a 90-year-old woman who’s a retired licensed practical nurse — underwent the procedures on Jan. 23 and Jan. 30, respectively.

The team was led by Dr. W. Randolph Chitwood Jr., an ECU professor of cardiovascular surgery and director of the Heart Institute. In addition to Tan, the team of doctors included Curtis Anderson and Alan Kypson, cardiothoracic surgeons and associate professors of cardiovascular sciences, along with cardiologist Ramesh Daggubati, a clinical associate professor. Anderson shared principal investigator duties with Tan.

The results of follow-up care received by the two clinical trial patients will complete the local portion of the study.

Tan said the procedure could lead to fewer open-heart surgeries in certain heart valve cases. It also could offer an option for high-risk patients not considered good candidates for open-heart surgery.

While Hofmann wasn’t part of the valve trial, the TAVR procedure was his only option due to risk factors including his age and other medical conditions.

It is hoped that the valve in the clinical trial will offer further improvement to the procedure.

Tan said the clinical trial placed ECU and the heart institute in the same company as Ivy League schools, where some of the other trials took place.

“We were selected among the elite institutions,” he said.

The valve under review for safety and performance is smaller than the one with FDA approval. It also is more flexible, meaning it could cause less trauma to the arteries and vessels around the brain.

Tan cautioned that while the FDA-approved valve can be used for high-risk patients, it’s unknown whether that valve or the one used in the clinical trial will have the longevity of the valves currently used in open-heart surgery.

The TAVR procedure does result in a faster recovery time, Tan said. It is less painful and easier on the patient.

“They’re doing wonderfully,” Tan said of Hofmann and the two clinical study patients.
The patients’ breathing improved immediately, he said.
“All of them got their breath back within 24 hours, which is remarkable,” Tan said, comparing the procedure to clearing a plugged up shower head and tripling its flow.
“Here without the pain of bone incision, they reap the benefits the same day,” he said. “They’re also up and about the same day.”

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Editorial: Tuition increases threaten harm
Tuesday, February 14, 2012

Despite the certain knowledge that higher education serves as a gateway to higher salaries and upward economic mobility, North Carolina’s university system intends to put access to a degree slightly further from the reach of the state’s less fortunate. Its tuition increase plan, approved by the UNC Board of Governors on Friday, averages 8.8 percent across the system’s 16 campuses.

East Carolina University, the second largest public institution in North Carolina by student population, will raise the cost of attending by 9.3 percent, compounding the burden imposed by other recent hikes. That promises to harm qualified, but less fortunate students with aspirations of earning a degree and will negatively affect a region already wallowing in high rates of unemployment and poverty.

In-state students attending East Carolina for the 2012-13 school year will be asked to pay $5,813 a year in tuition and fees, an increase of 9.3 percent over the current year. That is not the largest hike imposed by the UNC system with this plan — a distinction held by UNC Chapel Hill and two other schools — but does represent a significantly larger bill for those pursuing a degree here.

UNC System President Tom Ross held firm to his demand that no tuition increase exceed 10 percent, and the greater revenue generated will help offset deep spending cuts imposed by the N.C. General Assembly last year. However, this plan represents another step away from the mandate in the state Constitution calling for education to be as free from expense as possible. East Carolina remains a great value, of course, but steadily rising tuition harms that reputation.

That trend is particularly worrisome in eastern North Carolina, a region that traditionally lags behind other areas of the state. Many students from this area enrolled in East Carolina are the first in their families to attend college and the dream of a diploma fuels their aspiration to escape a cycle of poverty that persists here. Increasing the cost of attendance threatens to put that dream out of reach for a growing number of students, or force them to accept
a crushing amount of debt only to face potentially grim employment options after graduation.

North Carolina cannot expect to remain competitive if it deliberately undermines one of its most important public resources. Those arguments were made — loudly — only to be dismissed by the Board of Governors, to the detriment of North Carolina’s next generation.
East Carolina gets new league
From wires and staff reports

DALLAS—East Carolina will be among the Conference USA schools joining the Mountain West in forming a conference that will begin in 2013.

The 16 schools announced their plans Monday.

"The statement from the Chancellors'/Presidents' (CEO's) meeting is encouraging and indicative that the merger is moving forward as expected," East Carolina athletics director Terry Holland said in a statement. "That is good news for all involved and we are looking forward to the continuing discussions."

The new conference likely will include 18-24 schools, be split into divisions and not only have a football championship game but also semifinals, and will hold a conference basketball tournament.

School leaders said they plan to complete work on the league in six months.

Four C-USA members - Southern Methodist, Houston, Memphis and Central Florida - have announced they will join the Big East in 2013. Boise State and San Diego State from the Mountain West also announced they would be joining the Big East for football and switching their other sports to new conferences. The Mountain West also lost Texas Christian to the Big 12.

Nowhere in the release are the names of the conferences mentioned, just the schools involved. They are:

Air Force, Colorado State, Nevada-Las Vegas, New Mexico and Wyoming, all of whom currently compete in the Mountain West.

Alabama-Birmingham, East Carolina, Marshall, Rice, Southern Mississippi, Texas-El Paso, Tulane and Tulsa, all of whom currently compete in Conference USA

Fresno State, Nevada and Hawaii, all of whom currently compete in the Western Athletic Conference but are set to join the Mountain West in 2012.

All the schools except Hawaii will compete in all sports in the new conference. Hawaii will be a football-only member.
Tudor: Planned merger won't change ECU's challenge

BY CAULTON TUDOR - Staff Writer

RALEIGH—It's difficult to believe the merger of Conference USA and the Mountain West Conference - in the 2013-14 school year - will significantly change East Carolina's football and basketball programs.

The planned merger, announced Monday, could lead to the creation of an 18-team - perhaps 24 - jumbo union that might include Hawaii at one geographical extreme and East Carolina at the other.

There will be a league football championship game for sure. And if the conference winds up including 24 teams, there could be football semifinals, too.

Details of how the league might operate are incomplete. A statement released by school presidents Scott Cowen (Tulane, in Conference USA) and Neal Smatresk (Nevada-Las Vegas, in the Mountain West) said planning meetings among school officials will be conducted during the next six months.

While 18-to-24 football programs should be reasonably attractive to television networks for contract bargaining purposes, many of the current football and basketball series will remain basically the same.

In a 24-team league, there would four six-team divisions. If the membership is limited to 18, there probably would be two nine-team divisions.

ECU almost certainly would continue its football games against Marshall, Southern Miss, Alabama-Birmingham and Tulane.

When C-USA members Southern Methodist, Houston, Memphis and Central Florida move to the Big East in 2012-13 or perhaps later, the Pirates could lose regularly scheduled games against all four.

But the bigger issue hasn't changed much for the Pirates, who despite boasting more fans and generally more football success than any of their conference peers, can't make an upgrade in conference status.

The ACC and Big East don't think ECU has enough of a television market base to justify a bid.
If traditional athletic logic carried any weight, the Pirates long ago would have been in the ACC or Big East.

But since conference leaders in the ACC and Big East care more about annexing television markets than programs and fan bases with true regional athletic substance, the Pirates can't catch a break. The planned mega-conference will not change that problem.
Bus driver cited, off duty
Monday, February 13, 2012

An ECU Transit driver has been cited in a Friday wreck that injured five and has been removed from service during an investigation, the bus service announced Monday.

ECU Transit will continue to look into the causes of the accident involving a student transit bus and two other vehicles, ECU Transit Director Wood Davidson said.

“The driver of the bus is a student employee,” Davidson said. “An investigation by our operations and safety units is under way and the employee will be subject to our personnel polices as appropriate based on the findings of the investigation.”

Greenville Police investigated the wreck, which occurred shortly before noon near the intersection of Tenth and Maple streets.

According to police, a vehicle had stopped on Tenth Street to make a right-hand turn. Two other vehicles traveling behind it also came to a stop.

The ECU bus rear-ended one of those vehicles, police said, sending it into the rear of another.

Five passengers riding in the Acura sedan hit by the bus were transported to Vidant Medical Center in Greenville. None of the eight passengers on the bus were injured.

Police said the bus driver reported he was looking in the rearview mirror, then noticed the stopped vehicles and was not able to stop in time. He has been charged with failing to decrease speed as necessary to avoid a collision.

Davidson said the driver has been removed from service pending the university’s ongoing investigation into the cause of the accident.
Saunders: Booing Perdue? Not classy, Tar Heel fans

BY BARRY SAUNDERS - Staff Writer

Born: Circa 2000 BC.

The latter is the date good manners in North Carolina officially perished, killed when some UNC Tar Heel fans and alumni thought it would be a hoot to rain boos down upon Gov. Bev Perdue as she stood at center court of the Dean Dome.

They cared not a whit that she was there for the most innocuous reason imaginable - to bestow the Order of the Long Leaf Pine upon longtime play-by-play announcer Woody Durham, who next to Dean Smith, may be the most beloved Heel.

Perdue, the former school teacher, should've taken that long leaf pine and switched their impolite fannies.

It's debatable whether the egregious etiquette breach by some uncouth fans led Perdue to shock the state later by announcing she wasn't going to seek
re-election. But there's no doubt the incident has hastened the decline of decorum.

UNC alumni have the reputation of being classy fans - if you doubt it, just ask them - who know how to behave while strutting around the Dean Dome in their Carolina blue V-neck cardigans, pressed tan khakis and pre-scuffed Bass Weejuns.

It took them years, remember, to live down the appellation of "a cheese and wine crowd," with which they were tarred by a visiting player who must've been shocked that no one in the stands questioned his parentage each time he shot a free throw.

Being known as too polite, though, beats being known as crass and classless.

Oh sure, anyone with a hint of good breeding recoiled at news clips of First Lady Michelle Obama being booed at a NASCAR race at which she'd been invited to serve as a grand marshal last year. But, c'mon, that's NASCAR. At an event where the unofficial motto seems to be "if you ain't rowdy, you ain't drunkin' enough," what can you expect?

For goodness' sake, though: Even the mafia declares women and civilians off limits to attack. When Rush Limbaugh tried to defend the NASCAR fans, he said Mrs. Obama deserved it because she and her husband are "uppity." I swear, he said uppity.

A case could be made that many of the people who booed the governor did so for the same reason: How dare she, a - egads! - woman, think she can run a state?

**A cynical public**

UNC Chancellor Holden Thorp - he was booed at the same event - never returned any of my calls or written questions asking about the boobish behavior, but I asked Andy Taylor, a professor at N.C. State University, if booing a pol at a non-political event was a new low or the new norm.

"We do live in a time when politicians need a thick skin. The public is extremely cynical and upset with the way things are going," he said. "We've seen eras like this before, when there were fights on the House floor and newspapers printed the most awful things" about politicians who were not in their favor.

"But the country is very polarized right now, with people thinking in very tribal terms, Us vs. Them," Taylor said.
There was a period, he added, right after World War II, when it seemed "gentlemanly discourse" prevailed and certain rules of political propriety were observed. "Of course, that was an era when there weren't that many women and minorities in politics."

Taylor, though, thinks the bad behavior "is not necessarily a bad thing. It is indicative of an activist populace that is very concerned with what is going on," he said.

Cool, but what about women pols? Shouldn't they be treated a bit differently, less harshly, especially when appearing at an ostensibly non-political event, I asked?

"It does grate on our sensibilities, not least because she is a woman," Taylor said of Bev's boo birds. "Many people believe there should also be some reverence for the office."

And for just plain old good breeding. If you don't like what a politician stands for, there'll be ample appropriate opportunities to make known your displeasure - like political rallies. Or the voting booth. Or in line at the Piggly Wiggly. But not at a basketball game. Oy.

**Perdue Voodoo?**

Don't cry for Perdue though, Argentina. You don't have to be superstitious to think that she took a measure of satisfaction last week when the kid from Duke drained that 3-pointer at the buzzer to sink the Heels on the same court where she was so poorly treated.

I'm not saying the court has been affixed with a mojo, the Perdue Voodoo, that will kick in each time the Blue Devils come to town. But do Heels fans want to take that chance?

If not, they'd be well-advised to do what the wife of a not-too-distant Tar Heel football coach did at Kenan Stadium: burn incense and sprinkle goober dust on the court to remove any hoop hex.

Better yet, they could apologize to the governor. Now, that'd be classy.

That won't revive Perdue's political career, but it might bring good manners back to life.

The Dean Smith Center should be a de-politicized, demilitarized zone where Heel fans' boos are reserved for nearsighted referees and Coach K.

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In China, private colleges, universities multiply to meet higher-education demand

By Sarah Butrymowicz

Langfang, China --- Hundreds of private colleges and universities have opened in China in the past decade in response to soaring demand for higher education in the world’s most populous nation.

The growing private sector fills a niche in a market long dominated by public universities. The private schools offer millions of students a no-frills education and a better shot at a paycheck after graduation as China continues its quest to gain influence in the world economy.

The new schools have flooded China’s big cities, spilling over into places such as Oriental University City, a complex here in the Hebei province, an hour south of Beijing. It has 14 private universities, one shared library and a handful of fast-food restaurants to feed tens of thousands of students.

“Everyone wants to have an education, but the ability of the country is limited. Public universities cannot meet the need,” said Rao Dujun, director of the international office at the private Xi’an International University in the Shaanxi province of central China. “This is why private universities can emerge.”
The number of private universities in China has soared to more than 630, up from 20 in 1997, according to a 2010 analysis from the Center for International Higher Education at Boston College. In all, the private institutions enrolled about a fifth of Chinese college students in 2008.

Private university administrators and critics of the schools have warned that as China’s population growth slows, the boom in private universities may subside and only the best ones will survive. Some have amassed enormous debt from purchasing land and building facilities. But these schools have been integral to the expansion of Chinese higher education.

In the late 1990s, fewer than 10 percent of Chinese age 18 to 22 were enrolled in higher education, according to government data. Now the figure is about 27 percent — or 30 million students — and the government hopes to reach 40 percent by 2020. If China is successful, it will have more than 40 million students in college. That would be roughly double the projected total for the United States. The U.S. population, however, is significantly lower than China’s.

In China, a college degree is often crucial for upward mobility. Competition is intense for available spots. By contrast, the United States is focused on persuading students to enroll in college and to stay and complete degrees once they do.

Higher education in China was gutted during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s, but has been built up again. In 1999, the authoritarian Communist government decided to remove restrictions on the private sector of higher education in an effort to propel economic growth.

In 2003, the government permitted private schools to partner with public universities. Although still self-funded and self-governed, these new “independent schools” gained some prestige through the associations while also helping public universities deal with overflow.

Unlike their public counterparts, private universities across China emphasize practical skills over theory. The Civil Aviation Management Institute, for instance, teaches security guards-to-be to operate metal detectors. Students in Xi’an International’s automobile college learn how to fix cars, whereas at a public university they might learn how to design them.

“That’s just not our job,” Rao said.

Some of the more established private institutions across the country, such as Xi’an International — a constant presence on the government’s top-10 list of private universities — are able to fill seats with little or no recruiting.
Still, private schools are often the second choice of students who score poorly on the national entrance exam. Private institutions typically charge double what public ones do — about $1,500 a year, compared with $750 — and are generally viewed as having lower-quality programs.

Official statistics are not available, but private colleges claim employment rates for their graduates that are higher than those of their public counterparts. While public schools have to work with the curriculum set by the government, private universities can create or change majors on a regular basis, in response to the job market.

Hou Yifei, an electrical-engineering major at the 10-year-old private Oxbridge University in Kunming, a city in southern China, called some aspects of public universities “old fashioned.”

“I think I can get a better lesson, a better job after graduation” than at some public institutions, Hou said recently.

Here in Langfang, the Oriental Institute of Technology offers 25 majors — including hotel management, historical artifact restoration and dance — up from five when it opened in 2009. Its main office is filled with glossy brochures detailing courses and potential jobs. One brochure, replete with pictures of lush green grass, describes how students can turn a physical-education major into a career in golf-course management.

Whether a degree from a private college is the path to a lucrative career remains unclear.

Yan Fenqiao, a professor at the public Beijing University who has studied private higher education in China, believes that private-university graduates are less picky than their public-school peers. “It’s not a problem to find a job,” he said. “It’s a problem to find a good job in a big city.” For the jobs that private-university graduates are taking, Yan said, a high school diploma would usually suffice.

Government jobs are among the most coveted. But private-university graduates have difficulty competing for them, said Yong Zhao, associate dean for global education at the University of Oregon’s College of Education. Zhao, who gives his surname second following U.S. custom, said private Chinese universities invest less in education and hiring high-quality faculty members because the institutions are seeking to make money. Some private schools, such as Xi’an International, say they are not run for profit; other schools say that they are.
“They may tell you [they’re] not-for-profit, but there’s a profit motive,” Zhao said. “When there’s a profit behind it, of course you would try to cut cost.”

This story was produced by the Hechinger Report, a nonprofit, nonpartisan education news outlet based at Teachers College at Columbia University. Other Hechinger stories in The Washington Post in recent months have explored higher-education trends in Japan, India, Great Britain and Canada.

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Money Urged for Colleges to Perform Job Training

By TAMAR LEWIN

As part of his budget, President Obama on Monday proposed an $8 billion Community College to Career Fund, with the goal of training two million workers for well-paying jobs in high-demand industries.

The fund, which would need Congressional approval, would be administered jointly by the Departments of Labor and of Education. The money would be used to bolster partnerships between community colleges and businesses to train workers in areas like health care, transportation and advanced manufacturing.

In his State of the Union address, Mr. Obama called for a national commitment to help create an economy built to last by training two million workers with skills that will lead directly to a job.

Mr. Obama has for years sought to expand resources for community colleges, the main source of education and job training for most low-income Americans. In the American Graduation Initiative he announced in 2009, Mr. Obama proposed to bolster the work force by producing millions more community college graduates over the next decade. But instead of the $10 billion for community college that the administration’s original plan called for, community colleges got just $2 billion for job training.

The new fund, announced at an event at Northern Virginia Community College in Annandale, Va., would support community college-based training programs that would expand training to meet the needs of employers in high-growth sectors, provide workers with the latest certified training and skills, and invest in registered apprenticeships and other on-the-job training opportunities.

The fund would also support paid internships for low-income community college students that would allow them to simultaneously earn credit for work-based learning and gain relevant employment experience.

Republicans were critical of the new spending proposals in the president’s budget. While promising that the House Committee on Education and the Workforce would consider the administration’s plan for expanded job-
training programs, its chairman, John Kline, Republican of Minnesota, said he was skeptical.

“During his State of the Union address, the president acknowledged the need to streamline the bureaucracy in our work force investment system,” he said in a statement. “It now appears he is retreating from the proposal he announced less than a month ago.”

Under the proposal, states would also be able to seek money to support employer efforts to improve the skills of their work force. The fund would provide support for regional or national industry sectors to identify pressing workforce needs and develop solutions like the standardization of industry certifications, development of new training technologies and collaborations with industry employers to define and describe how skills can translate to career pathways.