THE DAILY CLIPS

February 16, 2009

News, commentary, and opinion
compiled by the East Carolina University News Bureau from:

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Monday, February 16, 2009

On Jan. 29, the students at the Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity suffered a devastating loss in losing one of their houses to fire.

These students as well as parents know how fortunate we all are to have not lost a child in this fire.

As a parent of one of these students, I could not have asked for anything more than the support the Greenville Fire and Rescue, the American Red Cross, countless volunteers, university officials and many others who came to the aid of these students. All of these people who came and worked together that morning deserve much credit in taking an unfortunate situation and making it easier to deal with. The university has gone to great lengths to support these young men in getting their lives back together as well as the rest of the East Carolina community.

As I was standing that morning on Fifth Street and observing all of the efforts, it certainly makes me prouder to call East Carolina University my alma mater.

Again, thank you to all who came together during this time.

SHADE “CHIP”

WOOTEN JR.

Cary
Misuse of electrical equipment led to frat fire, officials suspect

By Michael Abramowitz
The Daily Reflector

Saturday, February 14, 2009

Unsafe conditions and misuse of electrical equipment likely led to an electrical fire that destroyed a Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity annex Jan. 30, Greenville Fire-Rescue officials said.

Within the 3-foot area of the fire's origin, investigators found bundled and coiled extension cords lying among piles of books, notebooks and other papers.

Three reading lights, a computer and a space heater were plugged into the cords, said Gary Coggins, a Greenville fire marshal and Doug Branch, a battalion chief and information officer.

An open kennel where a puppy slept also sat nearby.

One student told Coggins that the circuit breakers at the house were continually being tripped, on one occasion seven times.

"All these items I saw in this area registered in my mind. I said to the student, 'OK, you told me you cut the breaker back on seven times. Didn't that send a red flag up and tell you that you were overloading stuff?' He told me, 'I just told the boys in the other room to cut the other breakers off so I could leave mine on and do my work,'" Coggins said.

Ignoring circuit breakers is hazardous, the marshal said.

"If you aren't pulling current, the line heats up, the wire melts ... and blows out over a period of time. It was just a matter of time," Coggins said.

Fire broke out at the Summit Street home about 6:20 a.m. Thirteen students inside the house, nine who lived there and four overnight guests, scrambled from the house as fire alarms rang. Some students climbed from second-story windows and dropped to the ground from porch roofs. One person was slightly injured.

Coggins and Branch discussed the results of an investigation into the fire on Thursday during an interview with The Daily Reflector. They said several possible sources of ignition were found, but none could be positively identified as the exact cause and point of origin due to the extensive damage.

"My professional guess is that it came from the misuse of extension cords, light and appliances; too much plugged into an outlet, carrying too much current," Coggins said. "It started down at ... beside the baseboards, with cords that heated up."

"We can't say the space heater did or did not start the fire. It is electrical, and we have said the fire was electrical in nature," Branch said. "We can't say whether the heater was turned on or was off, because there wasn't enough of it left after the fire to make that determination. We can't say that the extension cord found in the area was overloaded and shorted out due to being coiled up in a ball and being pinched and rubbed over time or due to being chewed by the puppy. But the fire was electrical in nature and an overloaded cord is electrical."

"That could be no fault at all of the house wiring, just overload," Branch said.

The house was equipped with working smoke detectors wired to the campus system. Greenville Fire-Rescue was alerted to the fire by that system.
Branch said the students in the house might not have been alerted by smoke detectors in time to leave safely if they had been sleeping deeply.

"I feel like if that fire would have started at 3:30 or 4 a.m. instead of 6:20 a.m., there would have been loss of life," Branch said. As it was, they got out of the house just in time, Branch said.

The fire officials are counting on the 2009 state fire code amendments to help get fraternity organizations more involved in fire and safety issues.

"The 2009 edition gives us a little more authority to make life safety a priority," Branch said. "We can now conduct four fire drills per year." In the past, it was just once a year.

Accountability of sororities and fraternities has increased under the new code, Branch said.

"Fraternities and sororities will have to have a fire life safety plan in writing. Greenville Fire-Rescue will have the opportunity to know the inner layout of every frat house and sorority, which will help firefighters understand what they are up against if a fire erupts," he said. "We’ve given a grace period to sororities and fraternities to answer any questions they might have and offer advice, when asked, about any changes they need to make."

Benjie Minton, a local board member for the Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity association and a chapter adviser for cultural and academic issues for the fraternity students, said an upgrade of safety standards and closer scrutiny of student safety habits is appropriate.

"We were doing everything that was required by the code. We had quality wiring, outlets and a breaker system. I absolutely believe we have to reinforce safety to the students and expand that to include all student housing facilities, including dorms and all the fraternity and sorority houses. This circumstance is not unique to our fraternity, but applies to every college kid in the country," Minton said.

Fire safety will be the first concern considered when the fraternity house is rebuilt, Minton said.

ECU has required all new buildings to have a smoke detector, fire alarm and sprinkler system built in, Coggins said.

The university has told all Greek organizations to install sprinkler systems in existing buildings by 2012 or they will not be recognized. The organizations will still be able to operate off campus.

The university has no jurisdiction over the sororities' and fraternities' off-campus activities, the officials said. It can only determine whether it will officially recognize an organization.

Contact Michael Abramowitz at mabramowitz@coxnc.com or (252) 329-9571.

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Financial aid applications up 30 percent in NC

The Associated Press

Monday, February 16, 2009

RALEIGH, N.C. — Applications for financial aid have spiked 30 percent since last year in North Carolina as more students seek help amid the economic recession.

The News&Observer of Raleigh reported Monday that this year's March deadline could be more important than ever. North Carolina is expected to offer about $300 million in need-based aid this year.

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSAs, are the forms students and their parents must fill out to apply for aid. The forms can be bewildering, so experts are fanning out across the state this weekend to help.

College Foundation Inc. spokesman Ben Kittner said experienced financial aid professionals will volunteer Saturday. Kittner said the "earlier you do it, the better off you are because there's a finite amount of money."


Feb 16, 2009 - 09:55 a.m. EDT

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Educational programs focus on diversity, success

By Josh Humphries
The Daily Reflector

Sunday, February 15, 2009

Areas school officials say programs are in place to ensure that black students can be successful.

The three public entities in Pitt County, East Carolina University, Pitt Community College and Pitt County Schools, address the black population with programs aimed at making that population successful.

Few programs exist at those institutions that are aimed directly at black students, but many of the programs are designed to incorporate diversity into the education experience.

Pitt County Schools address diversity by incorporating culturally responsive teaching, an approach that helps deliver material to students from various backgrounds.

The method, developed by education expert Geneva Gay, uses cultural knowledge, prior experiences and performance styles of students to make learning more effective.

Gay has visited the district several times to introduce and teach the method to Pitt County Schools employees.

The district now trains representatives from each school in the method, and the teachers return to their schools and present the training to all the teachers in the county.

"Diversity ought to be an integral part of teaching every day," Superintendent Beverly Reep said.

"We want to look at who is in the classroom and think about how to bring their backgrounds into teaching."

The Pitt County Schools Board of Education also recently created a diversity task force, made up of community members representing different ethnic groups, that will meet four times a year to discuss diversity issues in the district, Reep said. The group will determine if there are gaps in teaching different cultures and discuss strategies about how to fix any issues.

"We are really working hard — 100 percent of us — on differential instruction to challenge all of our kids," Reep said.

"If we are doing that well, then we are addressing all the needs of a diverse population. No matter where you come from, you need to know how to read and write."

Teachers are making more efforts to be in touch with the backgrounds of their students and to make learning relevant for everyone, Reep said.

At Pitt Community College, the Next Level program is designed to help minority males make it through the first few years of higher education.

Andre Gregory, minority male mentoring coordinator at PCC, said the program is about real issues that young black men face.

Once the students, who come from area high schools, apply and are accepted into the program they meet with Gregory as a group at least once a week.

"We have real talk — I mean any issues the guys are dealing with," Gregory said.

"We might talk about the view that people have of black men or the view we have of ourselves."
There are 27 PCC students in the program who are encouraged to keep their grades up and finish their degrees. They come from area high schools where they were identified by counselors as high school seniors on track to graduate but with no college plans.

Gregory shows the students how to get into PCC and how to succeed once they make it to campus.

"I think that for a lot of students, there is a sense of detachment at the community college level. When you have questions, you don't know who to turn to," Gregory said.

"A lot of times they get discouraged and just quit coming. This creates a level attachment to the school and other students."

East Carolina University, much like PCC and Pitt County Schools, addresses diversity with any number of programs including presentations on campus sponsored by the Office of Institutional Diversity and events at the Ledonia Wright Cultural Center on campus.

At the College of Nursing, training nurses from different backgrounds is part of the mission.

"We strive to embody or mirror what we find in the population as a whole," said Walter Houston, academic support counselor at the ECU College of Nursing.

About 20 percent of nursing students at ECU are black. Houston also serves as the advisor to the very active Black Student Nurse Association, that has a mission to increase the number of black students who get into nursing school and graduate.

"We have a mission to be a diverse population for our students, faculty and staff and we are also trying to teach cultural competence so they can be competent with minority patients and minority peers," said Laurie Evans, marketing director for the ECU College of Nursing.

The college works in the urban areas of North Carolina to recruit black students to become nurses and even recruits on the middle school level in places like Raleigh and Charlotte.

"The earlier we can reach them — we even go into middle schools — the more ready they will be to go into nursing schools," Evans said.

Contact Josh Humphries at jhumphries@coxnc.com or (252) 329-9565.

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10 faculty members join ECU's Scholars Academy

By ECU News Services

Sunday, February 15, 2009

Ten East Carolina University faculty members from a variety of disciplines became the first class of scholars in the new Engagement and Outreach Scholars Academy at an induction ceremony Feb. 2.

The class was selected competitively from a pool recommended by the deans. Scholars are Jeannie Golden (Psychology), Jane Painter (Occupational Therapy), Michael Harris (Management), Kylie Dotson-Blake (Counselor and Adult Education), Rebecca Dumiao (Communication), Sharon Rogers (Health Education and Promotion), Kim Larson (Nursing), Paige Averett (Social Work), Gene Dixon (Engineering), and David Collier (Pediatrics).

Scholars will attend five, three-hour workshops to learn about community-based research and the resources available to them on campus. Academy coaches will support the scholars as they develop research plans involving community outreach.

ECU's new Engagement and Outreach Scholars Academy is a constituent unit of the Office of Engagement, Innovation and Economic Development and part of the Division of Research and Graduate Studies.

Students learn to make homes energy-efficient

Several ECU students have taken a step to become more energy efficient and environmentally friendly.

The students recently completed Rebuilding Together’s Online Energy Efficiency Workshop, a volunteer certification program that provides easy and cost-effective strategies to make a home more energy efficient.

The workshop was completed through Sustainable Design, an undergraduate course administered by ECU’s Department of Technology Systems.

"Sustainable design and energy efficiency are examples of the necessary training graduates must have when they enter the workforce," said Robert Chin, a professor in ECU’s Department of Technology Systems. "As we grow green and as we become more energy conscious on a global scale, our students are able to remain ahead of the curve so that they are not only prepared to succeed, but make immediate impacts."

Students who completed the program were Moria Little, Anthony Pleasant, Meredith Harris, Travis Roundtree, Daniel Stiles, Jordan Jones, Ahmed Kar, Timothy Strickland, Tyler Priest, Dani Berrone, Chris Bray, Phillip Lewis, Stephanie Askey, Edward Tramble, Rochelle Williams, Lindsey Austin, Tanya Froeba, Edgar Santos and Clay Sugg.

Conference focuses on teaching English

The English Department of ECU will host its sixth annual Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)/ Applied Linguistic Graduate Students Conference on Saturday.

The event will be held in the Bate Building from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. On-site registration will begin at 8 a.m.

The TALGS conference allows graduate students and professionals working in teaching English as a second language (TESL), teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) and a variety of applied linguistic fields to present their work and receive feedback. It offers graduate students and working professionals a forum to showcase their research and experiences.

This year's conference theme is "Research Meets Practice." The keynote speaker will be Jodi Crandall, director of the interdisciplinary Ph.D. program in Language, Literacy and Culture at the University of
Maryland-Baltimore County, whose lecture is titled, "Sharing Our Expertise: Working with Mainstream Teachers." Another discussion "Global or Local? A Framework for Analyzing New Varieties of English within the ELF Context" will be led by Chandrika Rogers and Chris Blake of Western Carolina University.

Among the sessions will be papers, discussions and workshops on such issues as linguistic assimilation of Hmong refugees in Appalachia, redefining linguistic diversity, new varieties of English with the EFL context, ESL Standards and teaching thematic units, gender and privacy in online spaces and fun, interactive activities for the ESL classroom.

Linguistics and TESOL graduate students and faculty in the English Department organize the conference. The event is co-sponsored by Carolina Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and is a continuing education opportunity for N.C. teachers.

Refreshments and lunch will be served. For more information, visit http://core.ecu.edu/engl/talgs/conference/conference.htm.

ECU sponsors art show inspired by Darwin

Charles Darwin and his evolutionary theory have inspired an art exhibit co-sponsored by East Carolina University's Department of Biology and the Emerge Gallery and Art Center in Greenville.

The Darwin Day Art Celebration features paintings, photography, sculptures, mixed media and other works by faculty members, students and area artists. It is part of the ECU Biology Department's commemoration of Darwin's 200th birthday.

The display at Emerge Gallery, 404 S. Evans Street, continues through Saturday.

"There has long been a connection between art and science," said John Stiller, professor of biology and exhibit coordinator. "Art is often an expression of the natural world, an expression of the beauty and the wonder that people have towards nature."

Gallery hours are Tuesday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Saturday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and Sunday 1 to 4 p.m.

Joyner Library hosts art student exhibit

As part of ECU's African-American Heritage Month activities, an exhibit by art student Maurice Moore is on display in Joyner Library until the end of February. His paintings are mounted in the hall leading to the Digital Learning Center on the first floor.

In his artist statement Moore writes, "My work examines the idea of the human flaw, the imperfections we are born with and those that we continue to acquire throughout our lives. My own defects, shortcomings, or weaknesses are just some of the qualities that make me unique. As a result of this exploration these attributes have become the catalyst of my work. This leads me to believe that my flaws are also the source of my greatest strengths. I explore and express this idea through my artwork."

Upcoming events:

ECU Blood Challenge, sponsored by the College of Health and Human Performance, Wednesday from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m., at the Student Recreation Center. ECU students, employees and community members are welcome to donate blood.

Annual AIDS Benefit Fashion Show hosted by the Black Student Union, Saturday from 7 to 9 p.m. at the Mendenhall Student Center Great Rooms. Cost is $5. All proceeds from the show are donated to PICASSO, an AIDS and HIV prevention center.

Dr. Lee West, professor of pathology at the Brody School of Medicine, will present "Who was the first physician?" at 4:30 p.m. Feb. 23 in the Evelyn Fike Laupus Gallery, fourth floor Laupus Library, Health Sciences Building.

See www.ecu.edu/cs-ecu/calendar.cfm for more information about these and other ECU events.

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Fans get chance to 'Meet the Pirates'

By
The Daily Reflector

Sunday, February 15, 2009

Senior first baseman Brandon Henderson will wear East Carolina's honorary No. 23 jersey during the 2009 season according to an announcement made by ECU Head Coach Billy Godwin during the program's annual "Meet the Pirates" fan session, held inside the Murphy Center on Saturday.

No. 23 jersey was the number worn by late East Carolina Head Coach Keith LeClair throughout his coaching and playing career, became an honorary number for the Pirate baseball program in 2003.

Henderson becomes the fifth senior to wear the No. 23 jersey and the seventh Pirate overall, following Ben Sanderson, Jamie Paige, Brian Cavanaugh, Adam Witter, Chris Powell and Drew Schieber.

The Pirates will open the 2009 season on Friday when they square off against Monmouth at Clark-LeClair Stadium. First pitch is 3 p.m.

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Education, health fields still growing

By Tom Marine
The Daily Reflector

Saturday, February 14, 2009

While lawmakers have been hammering out the details on the economic stimulus package, job losses and unemployment rates have spiked across the country.

Employment fell sharply last month, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as businesses shed nearly 600,000 jobs nationwide. In North Carolina, unemployment jumped to its highest level in about 25 years and ranks as the eighth worst jobless rate among other states.

Where are the jobs?

Health care and education are the two industries projected to have the largest growth in local employment during the next eight years, according to the Labor Market Information Division at the Employment Security Commission of North Carolina. The report, which calculates the annual job openings in Pitt, Beaufort, Hertford and Martin counties, predicts nearly 2,000 teaching positions and about 1,800 registered nursing jobs will open every year through 2016.

“(The report) clearly shows education and health are going to dominate in the coming years,” Larry Parker, spokesman for the ESC headquarters in Raleigh, said. “As our population increases, as our labor force grows, these services are needed on a greater basis.”

Parker also noted how an aging baby boomer generation will place even more demand on the health care system, resulting in the need for more medical personnel. This stable demand is what buffers health care, he said, whereas other industries are handcuffed to the cyclical nature of the economy, such as construction and manufacturing.

“There are some job sectors that don’t seem like they will ever turn around,” Parker said.

According to the ESC’s county unemployment rate release for December, the industries in the Greenville Metropolitan Statistical Area — a region encompassing Pitt and Greene counties — experiencing the largest employment growth were government, financial activities and health services.

Parker said the government industry includes public school employees, meaning teachers working for East Carolina University, Pitt Community College and Pitt County Schools fall into this category.

Danny Alston, manager of the Pitt County ESC office, agreed with the occupational projections because the health care industry is based on people getting sick and needing medical assistance. He said the local job market is extremely tight, but any hiring would be in health care, fast food or retail.

“You can say you aren’t going out to buy a shirt, but if you get sick, you need to go see a doctor,” Alston said. “You have to have it.”

As of Thursday, University Health Systems of Eastern North Carolina was actively recruiting for 630 open positions, said UHS Chief Executive Officer Dave McRae. The majority of job openings are considered clinical, he said, including more than 200 nursing positions.

McRae said it is still too early to tell how the economy will affect future hiring at UHS hospitals, although staffing is adjusted to the volume of patients.

“We are fortunate to be weathering this recession better than other industries,” he said. “There are impacts. People continue to get sick and continue to need emergency services.”
McRae said indigent care increases during times of economic hardship, which places a greater financial burden on the health care system. In response, he said UHS may slow down on capital projects but will continue to hire clinical staff.

"Even in a recession, health care fields are a good area to be in," he said. "There are growth opportunities here."

Deans at the Brody School of Medicine and College of Nursing at East Carolina University said there are doctor and nursing shortages in eastern North Carolina. As the population continues to grow, more medical staff will be needed to provide health care.

"The demand will be as strong as ever," Dr. Paul Cunningham, dean of the medical school, said. "I can almost guarantee (Brody students) will find jobs when they graduate."

Sylvia T. Brown, acting dean of the College of Nursing, said more students have been applying to the nursing programs, often doubling or tripling the 130 available spots each semester. She said the college will only get more popular.

"It's very competitive because people know they can get a job, even in this economy," Brown said.

For everyone interested in pursuing a career in health care, Cunningham advised them to volunteer for the local Red Cross chapter, Emergency Medical Service squad or other health associations. He said volunteering will give a flavor of providing health care services, plus experience and contacts.

"The health delivery system is huge," he said. "We have more and more people losing their jobs and losing their health care, showing up at our doorstep. They are very vulnerable."

Contact Tom Marine at tmarine@coxnc.com or (252) 329-9567.

Occupational Projections for 2006-16

The Labor Market Information Division at the Employment Security Commission of North Carolina projected the long-term employment growth for industries in Pitt, Beaufort, Bertie, Hertford and Martin Counties. Health care and Education offer the most annual job openings, according to the report, which is broken down by education level.

Vocational Training Annual Openings Projected Salary

Nursing Aides, Orderlies, Attendants 405 $19,818
Preschool Teachers 349 $18,400
Licensed Practical, Vocational Nurses 305 $36,454
Automotive Service Technicians, Mechanics 203 $29,754
Associates Degree Annual Openings Projected Salary
Registered Nurses 1,802 $50,484
Dental Hygienists 172 $66,750
Computer Support Specialists 172 $38,922
Radiological Technologists, Technicians 132 $42,101
Bachelor's Degree Annual Openings Projected Salary
Elementary School Teachers 613 $36,652
Secondary School Teachers 352 $39,576
Middle School Teachers 320 $38,266
Business Operations Specialists 250 $38,795

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More students never see campus

Distance learning redefines college

BONNIE ROCHMAN, Staff Writer
Comment on this story

RALEIGH - Last semester, Lindsay Lewchuk graduated tops in her class, one of 33 valedictorians in an N.C. State University class of 1,787 graduating seniors.

Lindsay who? Her fellow classmates could be forgiven for not knowing who she was. Lewchuk, 26, didn't sit through a single class on campus.

Battling an autoimmune disorder, Lewchuk took all her courses by distance learning. N.C. State officials say she's the only undergraduate and the only valedictorian to receive a diploma this way.

Lewchuk's achievement also illustrates the rise in distance education as more and more students find themselves unable to attend traditional classes. Some may hold full-time jobs. Others may not live near a college campus or be able to afford room and board. Older students may have families and other responsibilities that make it difficult to show up for class at the same time on the same days.

East Carolina University and N.C. State are two of North Carolina's leaders in education over the Internet. Though not every university has hopped on the distance learning bandwagon -- Duke University offers no such classes for undergraduates -- the trend is on the upswing throughout the state.

In the fall, more than 20 percent of ECU's enrollment of 28,000 were solely distance education students, said John Durham, the university's spokesman.

"It's a very big part of what we do, and it's growing on other campuses as well," Durham said.

Distance learning refers to a specific way of teaching, mostly through the Internet. Some classes incorporate video or meet off campus. Students log on for class materials and video recordings of lectures. Sometimes, students can participate live through video conferences, Internet chat or Internet voice protocols.

"It's a very rich experience, and the tools and technologies are getting better all the time," said Tom Miller, N.C. State's vice provost for distance education.

During the course of their years on campus, many undergraduates take an online course or two. Perhaps it meshes better with their schedule; sometimes, they enroll online during the summer when they're home with their families.

Many more graduate students use the Internet option to forge a workable schedule.

Down Under, Down East
Universities are not serving only students in North Carolina, either. In May 2001, Cheryl Zakaria of Australia arrived at ECU in Greenville to attend spring commencement. The university granted her a master of science degree in industrial technology with a concentration in digital communications. It was her first time on campus; she completed all her course work online.

Distance learning is perfect for the student who's a slow note-taker and those who aren't morning people. The lessons' accessibility on the Internet means students can learn when their minds are most attentive, rewinding parts they find confusing and fast-forwarding bits they understand.

The faculty who teach distance education courses are the same ones who teach regular classes.

"So, it's in no way watered-down or inferior," Durham said.

Originally, Lewchuk intended to attend classes on campus. But her medical condition -- an illness that attacks her immune system -- flared up and relegated her to her home in Vilas, near Boone, where she lives with her parents.

She started selecting distance education courses that would count toward a bachelor's in philosophy. Each year, N.C. State offers more than 1,000 online course sections. In the 2007-08 school year, 9,408 N.C. State students took at least one distance education class.

At N.C. State, the distance education program began officially in 2000, but individual courses were offered before that.

**Alone in the dark**

Attending school on her own timetable meant some late-night study sessions. Occasionally, Lewchuk would submit work in the black of night. "My professors would see the 4 a.m. time stamp and probably think, 'What is this girl doing?' " she said.

Though she acknowledges she missed out on making friends and participating in campus life, Lewchuk tries to dwell on the opportunities she's been given.

For one thing, being isolated led to very good study habits and a 4.0 grade point average. "I have such a restricted life that I threw myself into my education," she said. "I was happily surprised that all that work paid off."

Lewchuk is now undergoing treatment for her illness in Toronto and working part-time, writing children's stories and doing freelance Web design. And she hasn't taken a break from Internet learning: She's at work on a master's in philosophy through Southern Evangelical Seminary's distance education program.

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**LONG DISTANCE LEARNING**

The commitment to distance education varies by school. As of fall 2008:

**EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY:** 22 percent of ECU's enrollment of 28,000 were solely distance education students. Thirty-one percent of students took at least one distance education class.

**N.C. STATE UNIVERSITY:** 7 percent of N.C. State's enrollment of 33,000 were solely distance education students. Seventeen percent of enrolled students took at least one distance
education class.

UNC-CHAPEL HILL: Four percent of UNC-CH's enrollment of 28,500 were solely distance education students. Eight percent of enrolled students took at least one distance education class.

DUKE UNIVERSITY: No undergraduate distance education courses offered; some graduate-level distance education courses offered in fields including nursing and business.

THE UNIVERSITIES

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UNC-CH has threat of explosive device

ERIC FERRERI, Staff Writer
Comment on this story

CHAPEL HILL - Campus police evacuated several buildings near the central UNC-Chapel Hill gathering spot late Sunday after a threat about an explosive device.

Police responded after a threat was called into the Orange County 911 line, said UNC police spokesman Randy Young.

"An individual said he was in possession of an explosive device in The Pit area," Young said.

UNC and Chapel Hill police were investigating.

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More parents search for college aid

High school seniors and their parents can attend free sessions Saturday for help filling out the financial-assistance form

JANE STANCILL, Staff Writer

Comment on this story

As North Carolinians lose jobs and watch their savings evaporate, they’re looking for a lifeline to send their children to college.

So far this year, applications for federal financial aid have soared 29 percent over this time last year in North Carolina. Colleges are preparing for an onslaught as March deadlines approach.

This Saturday, at 65 locations across the state, students and parents can get free help filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. The form is the starting point for anyone who wants federal and state grants and loans to pay his or her way through college. Awards are calculated based on the financial data disclosed on the form.

You have to apply on time, or you risk losing out on federal and state grants and low-interest loans. The dollars are distributed first to those who apply by the deadlines set by each college.

This year, the deadline could be more important than ever. A crush of students is expected to seek help this year during the worsening recession, though the government stimulus plan does increase tax credits and federal spending for financial aid, which could help. The state is projected to offer about $300 million in need-based aid this year.

"This year is going to be interesting," said Julie Rice Mallette, N.C. State University’s associate vice provost and director of scholarships and student aid. Already this school year, 6.6 percent more NCSU students sought financial aid compared with last year.

But Mallette says, so far, NCSU has not experienced a shortage of available loan support from the federal government, though some private loans have dried up as a result of the national credit crunch.

The FAFSA can be bewildering, not unlike tax returns. Indicative of the times, the form has a couple of new questions this year -- asking students whether they have become homeless or whether a parent has lost a job.

Ben Kittner, a spokesman for the College Foundation Inc. said experienced financial aid professionals will volunteer across the state Saturday to walk people through the process step by step. Last year, 3,600 people attended the free sessions, and many left having completed the form.

"The earlier you do it, the better off you are, because there's a finite amount of money," he said.
SITES FOR FAFSA DAY

Parents and students can get free help filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid on Saturday from 9 a.m. to noon.

DURHAM: H.M. Michaux School of Education at N.C. Central University, 1801 Fayetteville St.
LOUISBURG: Louisburg College library, 501 N. Main St.
PITTSBORO: State Employees' Credit Union, 35 Industrial Drive
RALEIGH: Science and Math Building at Meredith College, 3800 Hillsborough St.; Student Services Building at Wake Technical Community College, 9101 Fayetteville Road.
SMITHFIELD: Wilson Building at Johnston Community College, 245 College Road.

TO GET THE MOST OUT OF FAFSA DAY

* The program is meant for high school seniors and their parents. To register, go to www.cfnc.org or call 866-866-2362.

* Bring student's and parents' federal 1040 tax forms and W-2 forms for 2008 to the session (even if you haven't finished your taxes, the form can be completed with data from the W2).


* It's also helpful to complete a pre-application worksheet, available at www.fafsa.ed.gov.

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How to open the door to college

Community colleges better the odds for transfers

ERIC FERRERI, Staff Writer

Comment on this story

Can't get into UNC-Chapel Hill right out of high school?

There's a side door you may want to try. It's called community college.

As the demand for higher education continues to swell, UNC-CH and other four-year institutions are partnering with the state's community colleges, creating direct pipelines that, in some cases, give students better odds at a four-year degree.

Consider: This fall, UNC-CH will enroll about 3,900 new freshmen, 17 percent of the 23,000 who applied.

By comparison, it will also take 750 transfer students selected from about 3,000 applicants. That means 25 percent of applicants are accepted. Better odds and, in some cases, an easier application process.

"On balance, transfer admissions is a little less competitive," said Stephen Farmer, UNC-CH's director of undergraduate admissions. "[But] this is not charity work. These people have earned their spots here."

In community college transfers, university officials see motivated, mature students clear about their career aspirations. They often bring experiences to a four-year campus that other students do not. Many are raising children. Others may not have been able to afford a four-year college right out of high school. Some are academic late bloomers.

Take Joni Newkirk, who is preparing to transfer to UNC-Chapel Hill after excelling at Wake Technical Community College.

"In high school, UNC was always my dream school," said Newkirk, a graduate of Raleigh's
Sanderson High School. "But I never had the grades."

And it doesn't hurt that the students' first two years of schooling have been completed. Consequently, a four-year college has to spend less on a student that will eventually earn one of its diplomas.

Since the 1990s, the UNC system has had a formal agreement easing the transition for community college students to the state's public universities. But individual campuses have, in recent years, fostered direct relationships with local community colleges in hopes of latching onto promising students.

N.C. Central University, for example, has benefited from a link to nearby Durham Technical Community College, which sends plenty of talented students its way. NCCU, which for years has struggled to retain its own freshmen and sophomores, sees community college transfers as solid bets to graduate. It enrolled about 300 transfers last year and plans to eventually admit about 1,200 a year.

In the past decade, the UNC system has made more of an attempt to reach out to residents and to tailor education to their needs -- thus the closer ties with community colleges and a greater reliance on distance education -- another way to reach North Carolinians who cannot get to one of the state's 16 public university campuses.

"We sometimes underestimate how much variety there is in life circumstances for people trying to get through higher education," Mabe said. "Providing access isn't just making sure the doors are open."

If you go to Wake Technical Community College, a 3.0 grade point average there will get you into N.C. State University.

NCSU and Wake Tech have a new program dubbed Partnership for Access to College, guaranteeing Wake Tech students with a 3.0 GPA and at least 12 credit hours admission to NCSU. It's an alternative for students who didn't get into NCSU right out of high school, said Thomas Griffin, NCSU's undergraduate admissions director. And it's strictly based on performance.

"It's not SAT scores or extracurriculars; it's just what you're doing with your college work," Griffin said. "It's pretty much an automatic thing if you go and do the work."

At UNC-CH, the 3-year-old Carolina Student Transfer Excellence Program -- or C-STEP -- offers a direct route to the Chapel Hill campus for community students who meet certain criteria.

The program is for low- to moderate-income students at Wake Technical Community College, Alamance Community College and Durham Technical Community College. Financially eligible students with a 3.0 grade point average in a two-year program at one of those community colleges are eligible. Once accepted, they are guaranteed admission to UNC-CH, and full financial aid is provided through grants, scholarships and loans.

When Christina Edmiston graduated from Cary's Green Hope High School two years ago, she didn't have the grades to get into UNC Chapel Hill, nor the money to attend a four-year institution.

So she went to work at Starbucks -- 5 to 11 each morning. She attends Wake Tech in the afternoon. Her plan was to transfer somewhere once she had finished Wake Tech, but until she got into the C-STEP, she wasn't sure where she would end up.

Now her future's clear. She'll enroll at UNC-CH in the fall and plans to be an elementary school teacher.
"Once I was accepted to C-STEP, my worries were gone," Edmiston said.

Ten years ago, Newkirk, the Sanderson high graduate, dropped out of Bennett College and then N.C. State because she couldn't afford the tuition. Years went by. She was occasionally homeless, sleeping in her car, and cutting off "my winter shirts so I could have summer shirts."

She eventually found her way to Wake Tech and C-STEP. Now, she's gunning for UNC-CH's journalism program with an eye toward being a television sports reporter.

Newkirk shakes her fist for emphasis when she tells her story.

"C-STEP has made me feel I have a purpose," she said. "I'm taking classes I never thought I could take. I look at this as a second chance."

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Tuition break? Call a technical

BY STEVE FORD

Comment on this story

Start with the name, generic and calculated to generate a few warm fuzzies -- Citizens for Higher Education. Who, we'd like to know, is against higher education? But this group's efforts to promote what it sees as the interests of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill have taken it down some curious paths.

Along the way, it presumably has encountered another group with an opaque name, the UNC Educational Foundation. Of course the foundation, which is the main booster group for athletics at UNC-CH, doesn't shy away from its familiar moniker, the Rams Club.

Here's a question for Citizens and Rams alike: How does it advance the core educational mission of UNC-CH and other campuses in the UNC system to burden the public with the expense of helping to defray the cost of athletics scholarships?

Well, the scholarship subsidy doesn't work exactly like that, but the effect is the same. And certainly it's one of the banner achievements of UNC-CH athletics boosters and their allies in the political arena.

The money in fact is allocated by the General Assembly to make up for tuition discounts that are provided to full-scholarship students from out of state. Some beneficiaries are academic scholars, it's true, but the majority of those students are athletes.

UNC-CH has been the largest recipient, followed by N.C. State. What if the money -- at least the athletics-related portion of the overall $10 million or so per year -- had been added to the schools' budgets, perhaps for upgraded academic programs, rather than just compensating for tuition not collected?

Universities that compete in the top ranks of college sports put together huge "programs" that have the trappings of a professional, major league club. The way it looks to me, it's gotten out of hand -- as if universities had as part of their mission of education, research and public service to find students who could reliably provide entertainment for the legions of couch potatoes and bleacher creatures.

Defenders say that at least the UNC-CH athletics department is self-supporting -- and also that revenue from big-time football and basketball pays for the less-visible sports such as volleyball or tennis. The booster clubs -- the Rams at UNC-CH, Wolfpack Club at NCSU and so forth -- help out with their aggressive fund-raising.

It's the boosters who customarily have funded athletics scholarships. So, when out-of-staters are charged the much lower in-state tuition rate, those boosters can save a bundle. Perhaps the savings get plowed into other athletics investments, but the result is to stretch the boosters' dollars.

Citizens for Higher Education operates as a political action committee, funneling contributions
to friendly candidates. The watchdog group Democracy North Carolina reports that this PAC, along with a similar one flying NCSU colors, has spread money around in impressive fashion -- $1 million over the past four years (nine-tenths of that from the Chapel Hillians). That puts Citizens toward the top of the list of interest groups flexing their financial muscles, along with Realtors, homebuilders and others trying to sway legislation in their favor.

With that kind of dough being distributed, the legislator who wasn't on the list must wonder whether he or she had some bad breath going on. Upwards of 90 current legislators received at least $3,000 during the period from one or both of the PACs, Democracy North Carolina says. Senate kingpins Marc Basnight, Tony Rand and David Hoyle collected $24,000, $18,000 and $18,000, respectively.

Bob Hall of Democracy North Carolina notes that Citizens for Higher Education is "interlocked with trustees and Rams Club boosters" of UNC-CH. According to the PAC's Web site, it works on behalf of UNC-CH and "the state's other research universities." The site also says, "Our positions have always been consistent with the UNC-Chapel Hill Board of Trustees."

That board, and the PAC that's so closely aligned with it, seem happy to act as if the UNC system to which UNC-CH belongs scarcely exists. It's the system that's supposed to be setting higher education priorities and advocating for them -- priorities that balance the interests of all the system's campuses to best serve the public.

An attempt to cancel out the tuition discount for out-of-state athletes cleared the House two years ago but died in the Senate. Now another such attempt is in the works, and with the state budget in dire straits, this perk for the athletics-industrial complex belongs on the chopping block.

How about a memo from Erskine Bowles, the system's president, to the lords of Chapel Hill informing them that he and his shop will do any 'splaining that needs to be done at the legislature, thank you very much. And, oh yes, that any subsidy to out-of-state athletes should not leave ordinary taxpayers on the hook.

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Death penalty filing details Carson shooting

ANNE BLYTHE, Staff Writer
Comment on this story

GREENSBORO - Demario Atwater, one of two suspects charged with murdering Eve Carson, shot the UNC-Chapel Hill student body with a shotgun after she had already been hit by four small-caliber bullets, federal prosecutors alleged in court documents filed late Friday.

The details are included in the federal prosecutors' notice of their plans to seek the death penalty in their federal carjacking and kidnapping case against the 22-year-old suspect.

Atwater also has been charged with first-degree murder in state courts, and Orange County District Attorney Jim Woodall is likewise seeking the death penalty in that case.

Laurence Alvin Lovette, 18, also is charged with first-degree murder in the case. He does not face the death penalty because he was 17, a juvenile, last March when Carson was found shot to death in Chapel Hill about a mile from the UNC campus.

In their document Friday, prosecutors accused Atwater of enlisting the aid of a juvenile in committing the crimes they have charged, but Lovette was not named.

Federal prosecutors brought charges against Atwater in October, nearly six months after the state charges.

They have accused him of carjacking, weapons and kidnapping violations that could bring the death penalty if done during the commission of a homicide.

In mid-January, several days before the transfer of presidential power, Michael B. Mukasey, the departing U.S. attorney general, issued his decision to seek the death penalty in the federal charges against Atwater.

Late last month, a federal grand jury indicted Atwater on the federal kidnapping charge, claiming he used automated teller machines, telephones and interstate and public roads in the commission of the offense.

The grand jury's revised indictment, entered in court Jan. 30, also lists some of the aggravating factors that prosecutors plan to use in their push for the death penalty.

The homicide was committed in such an "especially heinous, cruel and depraved manner" that it "involved torture and serious physical abuse to the victim," the indictment says.

The document filed Friday mentions torture, but does not elaborate.

Investigators have said that Atwater and Lovette kidnapped Carson early in the morning March 5 and forced her to withdraw $1,400 from automated teller machines before they shot her with a .25-caliber handgun and a sawed-off shotgun.

Atwater is in federal custody, but no decision has been made on whether the state or federal case would be tried first.

# # #
He was here a minute ago ...

Duke scientist zips like Google Earth

JAY PRICE, Staff Writer
Comment on this story

Last week, Google plucked Green Beret-turned-cutting-edge-Duke-environmental-scientist Pat Halpin out of a conference in Long Beach, Calif., and flew him to San Francisco, where he chatted with Al Gore and watched Jimmy Buffet croon "Son of a Son of a Sailor" at the rollout of Google Earth's new virtual oceans.

Halpin helped develop the watery leap forward for the free online model of Earth -- which until then allowed its half a billion users to explore only terrestrial features -- and joined a handful of other scientists in demonstrating Version 5.0 for a media mob.

A few days later, on Saturday, PBS aired a National Geographic TV "Wild Chronicles" segment about a whale tagging project off Massachusetts involving Halpin. By Wednesday, the frequent-flying professor was in Chicago, where he crossed paths with Gore again at the annual meeting of the world's largest general science society and gave a presentation on the potential effects of climate change on marine parks.

Suddenly it's as if Halpin, perhaps the world's leading expert on computer mapping of the oceans and sea life, is everywhere.

Or maybe not so suddenly.

"We call it Halpin Space, when you start to get so busy that you're approaching the level that he operates at," said Andrew Read, a conservation biologist at Duke's Marine Lab in Beaufort who has worked with Halpin on several projects. "That kind of pace makes most of us worried."
Google needed Halpin to oversee construction of the 129 undersea "virtual expeditions" that are a key oceanic attraction in the new version of Google Earth. At Duke, he is director of the Marine Geospatial Ecology Laboratory at the Nicholas School of the Environment and, with Read, runs the OBIS SEAMAP, a center for international data on marine mammals, turtles and sea birds. He also teaches popular courses -- so many at one point that one staff member recalls wondering whether the school had two professors with the same last name.

**Tagging and tangies**

Away from the university, he's involved in other projects, including a major 10-year study called the Census of Marine Life, for which he's the lead scientist on mapping and whale tagging. He represented that group on Google's small advisory panel. In two months, he'll be in Antarctica for yet more field work.

Halpin also has worked on habitat models for the Navy to help ship crews know when to avoid turning on sonar to avoid injuring marine mammals. The humpback whale tagging project, which involved scientists from several agencies and institutions, was similar: Having more information on whales' movements could help merchant crews know when to slow down to avoid potential collisions and help fishermen choose equipment less likely to entangle the giant mammals.

In both cases, Halpin said, the goal was a pragmatic approach that could help wildlife avoid the ships -- and help the Navy and ship owners avoid lawsuits from environmentalists.

It might be more interesting to tag Halpin himself and map his movements.

"He's always moving, always looking for the next big thing," said Bryan Wallace, a science adviser with Conservation International in Washington, D.C., which works with Halpin's lab on sea turtle tracking. "He's also really good at surrounding himself with people who are extremely competent, this team that is really loyal, really cutting-edge, and that means they can get these big things done and do them better than anyone else in the world."

**Wink and nod**

Halpin was born in Washington and raised mostly in nearby northern Virginia. His father worked for a civilian intelligence agency that Halpin declined to name. That continued when the family lived in Thailand from 1969 through 1972, during the war in nearby Vietnam.

"On paper, at least, he was formally at the State Department there," Halpin said. "I guess we can just say wink, wink, nod, nod."

As a child, Halpin had two ambitions: to be a research scientist and a Green Beret.

"I often say the only smart thing I did was do those things in the right order," Halpin said. "You definitely want to do the hanging-off-the-side-of-the-helicopter part when you're young."

When he was 6, his father took him to a public event at Andrews Air Force Base. The 7th Special Forces Group was offering short jumps from a tower with pre-opened parachutes and they strapped him in for a try.

He parents also indulged his interest in research: They took him to lectures at the National Academy of Sciences when he asked.

After high school, he went into the Army and eventually became a noncommissioned officer in the 7th Special Forces Group -- the same unit that gave the 6-year-old Halpin a tower jump. He may have been in some other unusual units but declines to talk about that or his missions, other than to say there were "interesting things going on in Tehran and South America then" and that he had spent time strapped to the outside of a small helicopter with
a gun.

He is equally discreet with colleagues but has been known to tell harrowing stories -- minus sensitive details like places and dates.

"He's this humble guy, not gregarious and definitely not one who tries to grab the spotlight, but man, can he hold it," Wallace said.

"We don't get him mad because he probably has six or eight ways to kill us," Read said.

The adrenaline and camaraderie of high-end soldiering is addictive, and Halpin said the decision to leave the Army after six years was difficult. But he wanted to pursue that other childhood ambition, to become a scientist.

First, though, he had to redirect that high-octane military drive.

"When you land in a classroom after that, it's kind of like, OK, what do they do here for excitement?" he said. "I was fairly intense and trained to do 110 percent, so I channeled a lot of that energy into doing well."

He and his wife, Anne, have a 9-year-old son, Aidan. Wallace said that when Halpin is home, he becomes a fully-focused family man.

Halpin is gone so much, though, that he sometimes misses the high points of his own life. He didn't get to watch his brief star turn on TV last Saturday because he was flying home from California.

"That," said Halpin, as he printed material for his Chicago presentation, "is how you miss your own 15 minutes of fame."

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Bowles to review grade trends

ERIC FERRERI, Staff Writer

Comment on this story

CHAPEL HILL - A recent report detailing grade inflation at UNC-Chapel Hill has caught the eye of UNC system President Erskine Bowles, who said Friday that he plans to soon review the issue.

The report, written by an economics professor for UNC-CH's faculty council, was a snapshot of the fall 2007, when 82 percent of all grades given to undergraduate students were A's and B's.

More A grades were given that semester than any other grade, prompting some faculty to say that grading has gotten out of hand. The problem, they say, is that it becomes difficult for top students to distinguish themselves because so many get high grades.

Bowles said he heard from at least several members of the UNC system's governing board after a story about the issue ran in The News & Observer.

"I've had some discussions with [UNC Chancellor Holden] Thorp," Bowles said Friday. "It's something we will review in the coming months."

While many faculty say the growing number of high grades on the UNC-CH campus is a problem, others, as well as some students and parents, say high grades are simply the result of hard work.

Bowles said that while the issue concerns him, he has not yet looked into the matter enough to declare whether grade inflation is a problem in need of a solution.

But he said a review is worthwhile. "We have to protect the brand," he said. "I want to make sure that when someone graduates from the University of North Carolina, employers know ... they are hiring someone with a degree of real value."

The UNC-CH report, by economics professor Donna Gilleskie, analyzed more than 1 million grades dating to 2000. A similar report in 2000 found that 77 percent of grades given then were A's and B's.

Among Gilleskie's findings: The average undergraduate grade-point average has increased from 2.976 in 1995 to 3.2 in 2007.

Bowles said he cannot say whether grades are rising across the state university system because he doesn't have campus-by-campus data.

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UNC board OKs plan to raise in-state tuition

From Staff Reports

CHAPEL HILL - The UNC system's Board of Governors on Friday approved a plan to raise tuition and fees by an average of 3.9 percent for in-state undergraduate students at public universities.

Under the plan, tuition and fees for in-state undergraduates would increase by as little as $71 at East Carolina University and as much as $431.65 at UNC-Wilmington. The 3.9 percent tuition increase is low compared with tuition increases at public universities in other states.

"This is not a perfect plan," said Hannah Gage, the board's chairwoman. "But we've done something that gives us the flexibility to manage in a crisis."

Two of the board's 32 members, Steve Bowden and Gladys Robinson, opposed the tuition increases.

"This is a difficult time for us," Bowden said. "I know the art of compromise, but I for one can't vote for the tuition increase. I hope as we go forward, we can be mindful that these are tough times for North Carolina. I'm hopeful it will pass. I just can't vote for it."

The increase goes to the state legislature as it prepares a state budget for fiscal year 2009-10. University officials hope the state's revenue situation isn't so dire that the legislature is forced to raise tuition even more.

Many universities had sought higher increases, but UNC system President Erskine Bowles chopped each request by one-third, citing the state's economy and the financial stresses facing students and their families.

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