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E-mail to durhamj@.ecu.edu  Web site at http://www.news.ecu.edu
252-328-6481
Region ripe for biotechnology
By K.j. Williams
The Daily Reflector
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North Carolina ranks third nationally in bioscience companies, and a nonprofit organization that promotes these industries said the goal is to make the state an international leader.

Mark Phillips, executive director of the Eastern Regional office of the N.C. Biotechnology Center, said the center wants to work with more businesses by providing grants to encourage biotechnology activity. Grants for research for commercial purposes of biotechnology result in job creation, as do loans to startup companies, he said at the Greenville-Pitt County Chamber of Commerce Power Luncheon on Tuesday at Brook Valley Country Club.

“Biotechnology is business development,” Phillips said.

Nationally, California ranks first in the number of bioscience businesses, followed by Massachusetts. North Carolina ranks third with more than 530 companies in bioscience or ones related to that field.

Biotechnology refers to a number of areas, from agriculture where nontraditional crops can support new uses to aquaculture, to marine research, pharmaceutical manufacturing and medicine.

Phillips said the area has the resources to develop more biotechnology ventures, including East Carolina University, the Brody School of Medicine, Pitt Community College and University Health Systems of Eastern Carolina.
“Obviously, we want to be the international location for biotech,” he said.

The nonprofit has given more than $8 million in grants in eastern North Carolina, about $5 million of which has been designated to ECU.

Statewide, biotechnology is a $64.6 billion business that has grown 29 percent in the last seven years. It generates $1.9 billion in local and state taxes.

The nonprofit's eastern regional office serves 27 counties. Agriculture is one area that's ideal for biotech due to the availability of farmland. A local consortium, Northeast Alliance for Agriculture in Biotechnology, is working to develop that sector, Phillips said.

He added that the N.C. Biotechnology Center has the goal of adding $30 billion worth of business to agriculture in the next decade, called the “30-in-10” initiative. Other alliances promote other sectors, including life sciences and manufacturing, which could result in the development of medicines and medical devices. An alliance of Pitt County and surrounding counties has the manufacturing experience to handle more pharmaceutical industry related to biotechnology, Phillips said.

The N.C. Biotechnology Center also is active in schools, providing training to science teachers and presenting programs in the public schools about biotechnology and the careers it's expected to create. The center is funded by the Legislature and has been in existence for 26 years. Any possible budget cuts won't affect its core mission, Phillips said.

“The one thing that we'll continue to push is creation of jobs,” he said.

In Greenville, there are startup companies at The Technology Enterprise Center involved in biotechnology, Phillips said. The Pitt County-owned facility is managed by the Pitt County Development Commission.

The goal is to develop industries that “heal, feed and fuel the world,” Phillips said. “Biotech is global.”

Contact K.J. Williams at kwilliams@reflector.com or (252) 329-9588.
Coach Billy Godwin says his team has the athleticism to strike in many ways.

**Pirates look to run under the radar**

BY JAVIER SERNA - Staff Writer

GREENVILLE–This year's East Carolina baseball squad might not resemble the high-power teams of recent vintage, but it shouldn't be hurt too much by the new NCAA specifications for metal bats that are expected to remove a lot of the power from the game.

"I like this team," Pirates coach Billy Godwin said. "I think it's a different type of team. ... This team has the athleticism to score and strike in many ways. We have guys that can hit for an average that have average to above average speed."

Godwin has put increased emphasis in practice on defense and manufacturing runs.

That's a change from his teams that hit around 100 home runs for several years in a row.

"There's not going to be any waiting around to see if we get the big three-run home run or grand slam," said senior Trent Whitehead, one of a handful of
Pirates who should still provide some power. "You've got to capitalize and get things going."

What's more, Godwin's pitching staff is experienced, perhaps the most experienced it has ever been.

"We're very deep on the mound," Godwin said. "We've got some experience, and we've added enough depth in the interim to really make me excited."

This all figures to help a team that failed to qualify for postseason play after losing four players to suspensions and dismissals in the middle of last season for undisclosed reasons, per federal student privacy laws.

"It was kind of a let-down," senior pitcher Seth Maness said. "Those people that got kicked off and whatever happened. We could never really get back on track. That kind of affected everybody, myself included. It didn't feel like the team was clicking."

Godwin said even with all the distractions, he never felt like the team (32-27 in 2010) gave up.

"We were within an out or two of the conference championship game," he said. "That speaks volumes about how the guys pulled it together in the end. But close doesn't get you anything in this game."

Added Whitehead: "Guys realized they have to be accountable for their mistakes."

Godwin stressed that with 13 new players, he hasn't dwelled much on the past.

"We haven't talked a lot about last year," he said. "We talk a lot in baseball about having amnesia. So we're going to have amnesia and move on."

Last year's team entered the season ranked in many preseason polls, which isn't the case this year.

"We're fired up about flying under the radar," said senior outfielder Austin Homan, who was chosen to wear No. 23 in honor of late ECU coach Keith LeClair, who died of Lou Gehrig's disease. "Right now, we don't have any targets on our back. Hopefully, by the end of the year, we will have targets on our back."
Even without a preseason ranking, it won't be easy. Godwin, as usual, has put together another difficult non-conference schedule to test his squad, with an away series at Virginia and Pepperdine coming to Greenville.

"We've got to prepare our kids," Godwin said. "I want to play the best people I can possibly play outside of our league."

That could be a good test for a team with the talent and potential to get back to postseason play.

"This team is going to be able to pitch, throw strikes, play defense and, I think, we're going to be able to create some pressure offensively," Godwin said.

But there's a lot of baseball to be played.

"Of course, we want to win the conference and we want to play in Omaha," Whitehead said. "But opening day is [Friday] and it's a long season. We're just taking it one game at a time right now."

javier.serna@newsobserver.com or 919-836-4953
It's much more than just a name change, but the name really says it all.

East Carolina has gone from playing at the ECU softball field to calling the ECU Softball Stadium home.

The Pirates will open their brand new $4-million, 1,000-seat complex this afternoon when they host UNC Wilmington at 4 o'clock. ECU Chancellor Steve Ballard and head coach Tracey Kee will speak to the crowd prior to today's game, which is the first of 11 consecutive home contests for the Pirates.

Although her team has had a chance to get familiar with the ins and outs of the stadium since practice began last September, Kee admitted it won't truly feel like home until they've played a game in it.

“(Not) until you actually put on your real uniforms and play real competition,” Kee said prior to Wednesday's practice.

Kee's club has gone from playing on what was essentially an open-air stadium with no press box to taking the field in what the coach said was easily the nicest stadium in Conference USA. A brick facade encases aluminum bleachers that can seat 800 spectators as well as 200 chairback seats and a press box that will house working media as well as ECU staffers.

A large video screen-digital scoreboard combination stands just beyond the center field wall and there are covered batting cages just to the right of the fence along foul territory
down the right field line. It's quite a departure from the bare bones site where the Pirates have played in seasons past and Kee, who's been with the ECU program for 25 years, beams with pride when asked about the new digs.

“The only thing we brought from the old stadium were our foul poles,” said Kee, who's in her 14th season as head coach of the Pirates. “Other than that, there wasn't anything I wanted from there.

“Having been here as long as I have, and having played on that other field and then coached on it for so many years, to be able to come out here every day to one of the best facilities, I think, on the east coast. ... we definitely don't take it for granted.”

East Carolina is off to a 2-3 start after playing five games in three days at last weekend's season-opening Red and Black Showcase in Athens, Ga.
The Pirates beat Lipscomb and Iowa and lost to Illinois State, Georgia and Maryland.

Contact Tony Castleberry at tcastleberry@reflector.com or (252) 329-9591.
North Carolina Gov. Beverly Perdue delivers her State of the State address before a joint session of the North Carolina General Assembly in the House chamber in Raleigh, N.C., Monday, Feb. 14, 2011. Listening at left is Lt. Gov. Walter Dalton. Perdue says she'll offer a two-year budget proposal that will pay for every current state-funded position in public school classrooms while reducing corporate tax rates to make them the lowest in the Southeast. (AP Photo/Gerry Broome)

Reflector.com

Editorial: Governor's plan comes up short
Wednesday, February 16, 2011

North Carolina Gov. Beverly Perdue often boasts of the state's climate for business, touting its ranking by Forbes magazine as one of the best places in the country to work, live and play. That made it surprising when, in her State of the State address on Monday, she set aside concerns about a massive revenue shortfall in favor of a 2 percent reduction to the state's corporate tax rate.

While reducing the tax burden on business represents a compelling strategy to jump-start job creation, that would be best achieved through comprehensive tax reform and not amid a budget crisis that threatens the broad scope of public services in North Carolina. Her proposal is likely to find favor in the Republican-controlled General Assembly, but that does not make it a reasonable way forward for the state's future.

After providing a revised projection of the state's budget shortfall at $2.4 billion, far below the $3.7 billion originally expected, the governor devoted her second State of the State address to charting a centrist course for the balance of her term in office. Presenting her two-year budget proposal, Perdue offered a passionate defense of education funding and proposed a new career education program, ideas sure to find favor with her Democratic colleagues.

Then Perdue showed herself cognizant of the changed environment in Raleigh by cribbing several pages from the Republican playbook. She spoke about shrinking the size of government, cutting public employees and strengthening small businesses. These are, of course, noble goals that should find broad support, depending on the path taken to achieve them.
Helping corporate employers and small businesses clearly serves the interests of the state. However, that is best accomplished through a larger framework that seeks to modernize the tax structure and provide relief across the economic spectrum. Annual deficit projections show that, in addition to excessive spending, the state's system of revenue collection is insufficient for its needs. Raleigh will likely find no better time than in the crucible of this budget crisis to tackle comprehensive tax reform, where a bipartisan spirit could help create a more equitable foundation for revenue collection.

Sadly, as usual, the state's chief executive stopped short, proposing only a piecemeal solution to a far greater problem. In doing so, Perdue joins several of her predecessors who lacked the willingness, resolve or courage to tackle so massive a task, thus kicking the can down the road for another year, another governor, another generation.
State workers pitch budget ideas

BY LYNN BONNER - Staff Writer
RALEIGH—State employees on Tuesday outlined more than two dozen ideas - most focused on health care and corporate tax breaks - that they say would raise about $10 billion for the state budget.

The morning after Gov. Bev Perdue's State of the State address, during which she offered a few hints about the budget proposal she'll reveal this week, the State Employees Association of North Carolina offered suggestions that ranged from the studied-but-rejected to the novel.

The state's budget shortfall of more than $2 billion has state employees fearing extensive layoffs, leading SEANC to aggressively push alternatives to job cuts. Perdue is set to deliver a budget Thursday that includes suggestions for privatizing some services, and legislative Republicans have said for weeks that their budget will likely include state employee salary cuts and layoffs.

Dana Cope, executive director of SEANC, characterized Perdue's address as a framework for draining vital state services while backing dubious incentive programs for private industry.

"Why are we allowing disastrous policies - failed policies, I might add - to strip away vital services to taxpayers so the rich can get richer?" Cope asked. The employees' report says the state would save $5.8 billion if it ends corporate tax breaks and could save millions more if it drains the Golden LEAF Foundation and One North Carolina economic development accounts.

Other ideas include:
• Instituting a four-day work week to save on utilities.
• Eliminating the state health plan insurance as an option for legislators.
• Legislators are technically part time, and the health insurance is for full-time workers, the report says.
• Consolidating all state-paid health care - including Medicaid, prison health care and the state employee health plan - and negotiating universal medical reimbursement rates.

• Offering voluntary furloughs.

• Charging $5 admission to state museums.

Some of the suggestions have already been rejected. The report lists privatizing the state system of alcohol sales - an idea Perdue has already discarded - and extending the temporary taxes and raising the cigarette tax by $1 a pack.

Republicans say they will let temporary tax increases expire, and before SEANC released its report, Senate leader Phil Berger said Senate Republicans aren't interested in any tax increases.

Senate Republicans want a comprehensive review of the state tax code, Berger said, but to "do it for the right policy reasons rather than [to] find another pot of dollars."

lynn.bonner@newsobserver.com or 919-829-4821
Editorial - Governor says she can cut taxes while keeping free two-year tuition promise

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Nice speech, Madame Governor, but the public wants details before passing judgment.

In her State of the State speech, Gov. Beverly Perdue tried to walk a fine line between addressing a very real budget problem and, at the same time, emphasizing that a sagging economy is no excuse to stop pushing North Carolina boldly toward the future.

Her proposal to cut taxes while finding money for an ambitious but potentially transformational program guaranteeing North Carolina students a two-year college education left many people skeptical – particularly Republican leaders whose assistance she will need to get her budget through the General Assembly.

As with the president’s State of the Union address, Perdue’s budget speech was the political spin on the spending package she plans to present, and takes an optimistic view of the economic outlook. She projects a smaller budget shortfall – $2.4 billion – than the $4.5 billion some educated observers are predicting, while assuming that the state’s economy will kick into higher gear.

The Democratic governor also beat Republicans to the punch on a key Republican issue: She proposed lowering the corporate tax rate from 6.9 percent to 4.9 percent, which would be the lowest in the Southeast. This, she declared, will inspire businesses to create more jobs for North Carolina’s out-of-work residents.

But as a New York Times story this week noted, tax rates typically don’t increase prospects for new jobs or insulate states from losing jobs during a recession. Businesses consider many other factors, most of them even more important than the tax rate. That’s why North Carolina is consistently ranked
as having one of the most desirable business climates in the nation, despite having the highest corporate tax rate in the region.

The story quoted, among others, Matt Murray, a University of Tennessee professor whose areas of expertise include state finance: “Concerns about taxes are overstated,” he said. “Labor costs, K-12 education and infrastructure availability are all part of a good business climate. And you can’t have those without some degree of taxation.”

Education, in particular, takes a strong financial commitment. It is heartening to see that Perdue is attempting to push through her “Career and College Promise,” which was a centerpiece of her 2008 gubernatorial campaign.

It will be a challenge to pay for that as well as keeping a promise not to cut teaching positions in the public schools. But even if phased in over time it would help solidify North Carolina’s reputation as a state that makes sure its work force is ready to meet the needs of employers. That makes it an investment.

All of the lofty promises, however, are subject to the reality test: how much money will be available and how much she can get past a Republican-dominated legislature with its eye on taking the governor’s mansion in 2012. There’s also the question of how any budget cuts will affect the state’s most vulnerable residents.

The public won’t have any details until Perdue unveils her budget proposal on Thursday. At that point the real battle begins; North Carolinians must hope that reason wins out over politics.

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A College That’s Pleased With Its Drop in Applicants

By JACQUES STEINBERG

In an era in which universities are expected to draw more and more applicants each year — as if they were Fortune 500 companies being forced to show annual profits — Ursinus College, a liberal arts institution outside Philadelphia, would seem to have little reason to celebrate.

Applicants for this fall’s freshman class have plunged by 1,700 — or nearly a third — when compared with last year at this time.

And yet, Richard DiFeliciantonio, the university’s vice president for enrollment, said on Monday that the drop was not only welcome but deliberate, after a five-year period in which Ursinus saw its applications nearly triple.

“Those numbers aren’t real,” Mr. DiFeliciantonio said from the school’s campus in Collegeville, Pa. “People count anything that moves as an application. Everyone is going up 10 percent every year for 20 years. It’s absurd.”
“At some point,” he added, “the credibility of those numbers is questionable.”

Mr. DiFeliciantonio readily admits that Ursinus, until this year, was happy to let itself be swept up in the admissions race.

In fact, Ursinus decided in 2005 that it needed to get bigger. Specifically, the college wanted to increase its freshman class by about 100 — to just under 550 — in part to bring in students to fill classes in new disciplines like biochemistry and environmental studies.

Mr. DiFeliciantonio hired a direct-marketing firm from Virginia, Royall & Company, and its initial recommendations were that Ursinus waive the $50 application fee and essay requirement. In one year, from 2005 to 2006, applications to Ursinus more than doubled, to 4,413 from 1,725. Two years later, they grew by another 40 percent, to 6,179.

While emphasizing that Royall did exactly what Ursinus had asked it to do, Mr. DiFeliciantonio said he had become increasingly uneasy.

His main concern was that every year Ursinus received more applications and offered admission to more applicants, but that the percentage who accepted the offer, known as the yield, went down steadily. For example, in 2005, the year before it brought on Royall, the yield was about 30 percent — meaning that of the 1,290 high school seniors offered admission, about 420 enrolled.

But by last year, the yield figure had plunged to 13.5 percent.

“That meant almost 87 percent we admitted weren’t going to come,” Mr. DiFeliciantonio said.

So how did Ursinus manage to consciously slim down?

For one thing, it ended its relationship with Royall last spring. (The company’s founder, Bill Royall, did not respond to a message left at his office on Monday.) For another, Ursinus restored the essay questions to its application. Applicants were also required this year to submit a graded term paper.
In the process, Ursinus has become that rare college that has made it harder to apply — thus ensuring that students who submit applications are more likely to consider attending if accepted.

“We’ve taken a bit of a leap,” said Mr. DiFeliciantonio, adding that he was unaware of another college that had taken a similar step, at least not in recent years. “I hope our yield pops up, ideally to 16, 17 percent. If it does, we’ll have a class of about 460.”

“And that,” he added, “would be just fine.”
Andrew Carnegie didn't think much of college. More than a century ago, he looked around at the men commanding the industries of the day and found that few had wasted their time lollygagging on a campus quad. "The almost total absence of the graduate from high positions in the business world," he wrote in "The Empire of Business," "seems to justify the conclusion that college education, as it exists, is fatal to success in that domain."

How different things are now. Though a number of famous successes didn't collect a sheepskin before embarking on a career—Steve Jobs, Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg among them—most corporate executives these days have college degrees, if not MBAs.

The earning power of the average university graduate, relative to that of a high-school grad, has been going up for decades. We're convinced the skills needed to compete in the complex, ever-changing modern workforce are acquired through scholarship. Which is one reason colleges have been able to ratchet up tuition at twice the rate of inflation.

And yet, as the reward for the collegiate credential has been going up, what goes into getting that degree has been going down. So find sociologists Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa in their book "Academically Adrift" (University of Chicago Press). Institutions of higher learning are "focused more on social than academic experiences," they write. "Students spend very little time studying, and professors rarely demand much from them in terms of reading and writing." More than a third of students do less than five hours of studying a week—and these shirkers end up, on average, earning B's.

Ms. Roksa, who teaches at University of Virginia, and Mr. Arum, a professor at New York University, mined data from thousands of sophomores who retook a learning assessment test they had first been given when they arrived at college. Nearly half the
students showed no sign of intellectual progress after two years of undergraduate endeavor.

The Journal's "Numbers Guy," Carl Bialik, has already captured the debate the study has provoked over what counts as learning and whether there is any quantifiable measure of modern erudition. But the book's most damaging and unambiguous finding was reported by the students themselves—that in college they get away with a bare minimum of academic work. The average American junior-high or high-school student's days are packed with classes; the nights, with homework. And once in the workforce, Americans are notorious for jamming as much work as they can into a week. Which makes the college experience a strange interlude of lassitude filled with kegs and canoodling.

What would Mr. Carnegie have thought of it? "While the college student has been learning a little about the barbarous and petty squabbles of a far-distant past," he wrote, "or trying to master languages which are dead...the future captain of industry is hotly engaged in the school of experience, obtaining the very knowledge required for his future triumphs." Mr. Carnegie may have thought the knowledge gained at college was "adapted for life upon another planet," but he did expect that the students were gathering some sort of knowledge. Shouldn't parents footing the massive tab for tuition be able to expect the same?

Mr. Carnegie's contempt for college was not universal in his day. Best-selling 19th-century author William Makepeace Thayer specialized in hokey biographies of men who came from nothing to achieve greatness. But he didn't see an early devotion to commerce as the path to success. Instead, it was study he banked on—the more intensive the better.

"Some bright people think that the higher education," Mr. Thayer wrote, "makes young men and women lazy." But academics meant studying "more hours in twenty-four than the farmer or mechanic works." It wasn't students, he noted, who were agitating for an eight or 10-hour workday: "The question with them is not how few hours they can devote to the pursuit of knowledge, but how many." Has that equation been reversed?

There are plenty of serious students who strive to do the kind of hard work Mr. Thayer championed. But our universities seem designed to accommodate, if not encourage, laziness. Could it be that colleges are neglecting the most important thing one can learn in school—not the body of some arcane academic specialty, nor even a more general cognitive dexterity, but rather the ability to work hard at a sustained mental task?

—Write to me at EricFelten@WSJPostmodern.com