Financial aid form help offered Saturday
Friday, February 17, 2012

Students can get help with financial aid forms for college at an information session this weekend.

East Carolina University is hosting a FAFSA Day Saturday to help students fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid.

From 9 a.m. to noon in Joyner Library, staff from ECU, Pitt Community College and Miller-Motte College will be available to help students and families complete the FAFSA form, which is used to determine eligibility for most financial aid programs to assist in the cost of higher education.

FAFSA events will be held at more than 300 locations across the state, concluding a week of attention to financial aid awareness.

North Carolina Gov. Beverly Perdue proclaimed Financial Aid Awareness Week in North Carolina from Feb. 13-19, urging students and families to learn more about the process of applying for financial assistance for college.

Another option is the FAFSA Phone-In offered every Tuesday night in February. Financial aid specialists will be available 5-8 p.m. to answer specific FAFSA questions on the toll-free number, 1-866-866-2362.

Financial Aid Awareness Week is sponsored by the N.C. Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators.

The association also joins College Foundation of North Carolina (CFNC) and the State Employees’ Credit Union to make FAFSA Day available.

Registration is recommended for Saturday’s event. To register or for more information, visit http://www.cfnc.org/fafsaday or call 866-866-2362.
Editorial: ECU baseball's hopeful start  
Friday, February 17, 2012

Bart Giamatti, the former commissioner of Major League Baseball, once wrote that the game is designed to break hearts by inspiring hope at the outset, only to see it dashed by season’s end. That is a feeling shared by fans of East Carolina University’s baseball program, which has been tantalizingly close to its dream of playing in the College World Series only to fall short.

With the season set to begin, the familiar wellspring of hope has returned to Clark-LeClair Stadium and with it the rekindled aspirations of seeing the Pirates reach Omaha and play for the national championship. Optimism abounds in advance of the first pitch this afternoon and the purple and gold faithful will watch, setting aside fears of yet another broken heart.

The University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee baseball team serves as the guests this weekend as East Carolina baseball returns to Greenville. The Pirates were selected by the media to finish third in an always competitive Conference USA, and the team begins the year ranked just outside the top 25 in many of the college polls. Following that script would likely see East Carolina make the postseason but miss the College World Series once again.

Of course, the team’s destiny will be determined on the base paths and in the field, not by the members of the media and university coaches who cast preseason votes. The Pirates have made the postseason 11 of the last 13 years and return a strong nucleus of players who know what it takes to succeed against the best teams in the nation. And Head Coach Billy Godwin has shown in his six seasons to be a talented and capable leader.

There is another element that promises to play a vital role in the team’s performance this year. East Carolina is fortunate to have one of the most influential home field advantages in the nation at Clark-LeClair and a loyal fanbase that routinely affects the action on the field. Pirate fans have propelled the players to remarkable heights before and will be needed throughout the season as the team looks to make a run deep in the postseason.

Giamatti may be correct that the game of baseball is designed to break hearts, but such is the unfortunate cost of unadulterated devotion. This community loves Pirate baseball, despite the heartache, and looks forward with great anticipation to another year of excitement on the diamond.
East Carolina's Philip Clark bunts the ball during the team's first practice of the season at Clark-LeClair Stadium on Friday. (Aileen Devlin/The Daily Reflector)

**Pirates’ baseball journey begins**

*By Nathan Summers*

Friday, February 17, 2012

Despite sporting a tan that even North Carolina could rarely produce in mid-February, East Carolina baseball coach Billy Godwin looked like he’d never left as he oversaw practice inside Clark-LeClair Stadium on Wednesday afternoon.

As his team went through some final preseason preparations, a chipper Godwin was fresh from serving a 14-day suspension during which he said he went away with his wife and spent a good deal of time reading and thinking. Fittingly, his reading list included a book on perseverance, and perhaps he will be able to impart some of what he absorbed onto his baseball team starting today.

“My wife and I spent some time away, and I think that was really good,” the seventh-year coach said of his time away from the team due to a self-reported, secondary NCAA violation that stemmed from a housing issue that began prior to his tenure. “I tried to prepare myself mentally for things that were going to happen during the season.”

That season begins today at 3 p.m. with the first of three games against Milwaukee-Wisconsin.

A good deal of Godwin’s wisdom has long since resonated with his team, as embodied by the steady, constant growth of senior opening day starter Kevin Brandt.
Beginning the final chapter of a career that began with a masterful freshman campaign, the lefty was quick to point out just how much pressure he’s feeling for today’s game and his final season.

“None,” said Brandt, who delivered big freshman wins over Oklahoma State and North Carolina, and who has 19 career victories. “All I’ve got to do is throw the baseball like I usually know how to throw it. Added pressure is just a waste of time.”

But behind Brandt the question marks loom on a staff which lost almost all of its innings from the 2011 season, a campaign that ended with a loss to Virginia at the Charlottesville Regional.

Highly-touted newcomer Jharel Cotton has won the Saturday slot, but the Sunday role is still a toss-up between junior Tyler Joyner and sophomore Austin Chrismon. Also back with starting experience is junior Joseph Hughes, and newcomer DeShorn Lake also promises to command innings.

Permanent bullpen jobs are also up for grabs, but Godwin said the favorites to take the closer role vacated by Seth Simmons are sophomore infielder/pitcher Drew Reynolds and redshirt Dario Santangelo.

“We keep talking about the potential this pitching staff has,” Godwin said. “But I think one of the things you’ll see us do is mix and match a lot, even if a guy goes out and has a good inning, because we want to give that guy some confidence and we want to be able to build experience.”

With all of the newness on the mound, the Pirates will undoubtedly lean on a batting order that lost virtually nothing from last season.

Godwin said he likes both junior outfielder Philip Clark (.310 average, 28 RBIs, 13 stolen bases in 2011) and sophomore shortstop Jack Reinheimer (.311, 23 RBIs) in the leadoff spot. He said with Clark at the top and Reinheimer second, he can put senior third baseman and 2011 RBI leader Corey Thompson (six HR, 11 doubles, 47 RBIs) at the No. 3 spot.

Presumably behind them in the power roles will be senior catcher and 2011 home run leader Zach Wright (13 HR, 15 2B, 39 RBIs), junior corner infielder John Wooten (16 2B, 28 RBIs) and sophomore first baseman/designated hitter Chase McDonald (four HR, 11 2B, 31 RBIs) in the 4, 5 and 6 holes.

Also back in the infield are senior former junior college transfers Mike Ussery — the recipient of the No. 23 jersey in honor of former head coach
Keith LeClair — and Tim Younger along with junior Bryan Bass and Reynolds.

In the outfield, sophomore Ben Fultz joins Clark after batting .303 and hitting four home runs and four triples in his rookie season. Junior Chris Gosik and sophomore Jonathan Holt are also back, and junior college transfer Jay Cannon could be in the mix.

“We’re going to be able to put a bunch of different lineups out there that are deep,” Godwin said.

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RALEIGH—A year after it began a campuswide reorganization to cope with annual budget cuts, N.C. State is deep in the throes of merging divisions, departments and offices, and a task force is poring over freshly generated data on more than 260 academic programs that might be eliminated, shrunk or boosted.

University leaders also are planning tweaks to help students graduate on time, something that has become harder as five consecutive years of state funding cuts have forced the university to slash the number of classes and classroom seats available.

Provost Warwick Arden told university trustees that NCSU plans to make more high-demand courses available during the summer to help students who may have struggled to get the ones they need during the spring and fall. Also, he said, NCSU wants to change its policy to allow full-time, on-campus students to take courses online for free, something not possible now.

If the UNC system approves the change, it will take effect this fall.

Arden, Chancellor Randy Woodson and Vice Chancellor Charles Leffler gave the trustees an update on the retooling Thursday. Woodson had set it in motion last year, just before a $79 million funding cut from the legislature.

The idea, Woodson said then, was to reshape the university in a way that would allow it to be effective, while fitting both the new budget and the ever-changing needs of the state's economy. Simply cutting evenly across the board, he said, inevitably would result in an organization that wouldn't work as well as it could.

Arden said Thursday that the deep evaluation of the academic programs was particularly daunting, given the scope, complexity and delicacy of the task.

"We're asking the question of, not how academically rigorous they are, but more fundamental questions: How effective and efficient are they?" he said.

Arden said he expects recommendations from the task force examining those programs within weeks, and will then hash it over with the deans and department heads.
Another change will be moving business functions out of a host of departments and into a handful of larger, centralized offices that can do the work more efficiently.

"We've taken a number of budget reductions, and we have often done the people reductions without the process modifications to keep the service levels up," Leffler said.

Woodson told the trustees that the move to more centralized business centers was representative of the rest of the reorganization.

"The money's gone, the people are gone and this is all about trying to figure out how we can move forward with fewer people," he said. "There are units on the campus who have had to reduce their business office to one person, who might not do any of the processes particularly well, so this is really about economy of scale with the existing people.

The university has even revamped its rules, regulations and policies as part of the process, trimming the total from 613 to 553.

Barbara Mulkey of Raleigh, chairwoman of the board of trustees, pronounced the changes wise.

"I think it's great, and I see nothing here that wouldn't be positive for us to be doing whether we had budget challenges or not," she said.

"This is just the right thing to do."

Price: 919-829-4526
Play honors great black women
By Kelley Kirk
Friday, February 17, 2012

This weekend will mark a first for Michelle Atwater. Her writing will be performed on stage.

Ayden Community Theatre will present “African-American Women Who Changed the World” at 7:30 p.m. today-Saturday.

Atwater wrote and compiled a series of monologues, songs, poems and spoken-word pieces to celebrate black women’s struggles.

Originally the Ayden Theatre was going to produce “Don’t Bother Me, I Can’t Cope.” Difficulties arose with rehearsals and casting so the theater group decided to take a different route.

Anne Creech, president of the Ayden Community Theatre, still wanted to have a program celebrating Black History Month.

“The play is about different types of women and different ways that black women changed the world,” Atwater said.

Historically notable women mentioned in the production include Etta James, Bessie Coleman, Coretta Scott King, Oprah Winfrey, Halle Berry and Dorothy Dandridge, to name a few.

“It’s a celebration of contributions and what they have done historically,” Atwater said.

She wrote the pieces for the production and then they were edited by the director, Steve Harding.
Atwater is a stay-at-home mother of three children. She and her family moved to Ayden in January 2010 from Richmond, Va. Later that year, Atwater was cast in Tim Resier’s “A Fairytale Christmas” as Verdie McOink. Many of her family members were in the production and when the original actor backed out, Atwater was asked to join the cast.

“My sister knew that I couldn’t say no,” she said.

The Christmas play was followed by roles in “All the King’s Women” and as Odessa Mae Brown in “Waiting to be Invited.”

While her passion for theater is new, she’s had a life-long passion for writing.

Under the stage name M9dBodiSol, Atwater writes poems and spoken word. She’s been featured on “Love, Love & Pain,” “Moments of Chaos,” and recently on Inner Child Radio.

“African American Women Who Changed the World” is Harding’s first experience directing community theater, but he’s no stranger to the stage. As the Minister of Media and Arts at Oakmont Baptist Church, he has directed about 15 children’s musicals, three dinner theaters, five dessert theaters and countless other short programs for his church. He was in two East Carolina University productions while in undergraduate school — “Jesus Christ Superstar” and “Peter Pan” — sharing the stage with Sandra Bullock. More recently, Harding became involved in the local community theater with the Magnolia Arts Center as Harvey in “Lying in State” and in multiple characters in the Farmville Community Arts Council’s production of “The Wedding Singer.”

In Dunn this summer, Harding will have a small role in the independent film “Too Far From the Tree.” Prior to his position with Oakmont Church, he was an instructor in the English departments at East Carolina University and Pitt Community College.

Singers in the play include Doreen Strayhorn, Shameeka Edwards and Kim Britt. Princess Anne Dixon, Chyna Doll and Atwater will give spoken-word performances. Monologues will be acted by Nora Raspberry, Keisha Brown and Francine Strong. The Little Divas dance group also will perform.

“The little girls dancing is representing the future. We tried to create a play so that is appealed to a wide range of ages,” Atwater said.

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University of Texas moves to enforce ‘slacker’ rule

By Daniel de Vise

The University of Texas at Austin is one of the nation’s top research universities. But you wouldn’t know it from the school’s four-year graduation rate.

Just 53 percent of 2004 freshmen graduated four years later, according to the latest data from the federal government. The graduation rate jumps to 80 percent by year six. Six seems to be the magic number: UT’s grad rate improves only a few more points by eight years. All good things, as they say, must come to an end.
UT is one of many public universities where students tend to hang around. It’s set, after all, in Austin, one of the great college towns. Tuition is relatively low, living expenses modest, and many fifth- and sixth-year students can think of no earthly reason to leave. (For further study, consult the seminal Gen-X movie Slacker.)

Low four-year graduation rates are one of higher education’s dirty secrets. Berkeley, with a 91-percent graduation rate, gets only 69 percent of its undergraduates through in four years. The University of Wisconsin-Madison has a six-year graduation rate of 83 percent — and a four-year rate of 50 percent. The University of Colorado, Boulder, has a four-year rate of 41 percent, and a six-year rate of 68 percent.

Notice a pattern? These are all great universities set in lovely college towns. All are relatively cheap, at least by comparison to the top private universities.

But four-year graduation is becoming a priority for all of those schools. President Obama wants to regain the world lead in college attainment by 2020. Lawmakers in every state want to lower the cost of higher education — and a six-year BA costs more than a four-year BA. The schools want to move seniors out so they can move more freshmen and transfer students in.

UT summarized the case for on-time graduation in a report Wednesday:

“Students who graduate in that timeframe begin their careers or pursue graduate education sooner than their peers while taking out less in student loans. Their parents save money on tuition costs. The university, itself, proudly sends these graduates into the broader world as representatives of UT Austin while gaining additional capacity for new students.”

UT’s goal is to raise its four-year graduation rate nearly 20 points to 70 percent within five years.

Here are some of the report’s recommendations. I noted with interest that Texas has codified a formal “slacker” rule. Richard Linklater is driving fiscal policy!

One key move is to identify “bottleneck” courses, which are required for graduation but perennially oversubscribed. Students at UT, just like their peers at Berkeley and the other top publics, literally cannot register for some of the courses they need to graduate, because of reductions in faculty and space in the downturn.
Another is to enforce the state’s “slacker” rule, which increases tuition for students who fail to graduate despite having enough credits.

Others:

• Require orientation for all incoming first-year students,

• Create an online tool to better allow students and advisers to monitor progress to a degree.

• Develop more intervention programs to identify and assist students in academic trouble.

• Identify “bottleneck” courses where lack of available seats can impede students’ ability to graduate.

• Make it more difficult for students to change majors after four semesters, or to add a second major unless the requirements can be met within four years.

• Creating flat-rate summer tuition to encourage students to take more courses then. Austin and other college towns are virtually empty in summer, and vast learning space sits idle.
UC Davis settles discrimination suit by 3 former female wrestlers

The University of California paid $1.35 million to settle a lawsuit Thursday with three former UC Davis wrestling students after a federal court ruled that the school discriminated against the female athletes.

The plaintiffs -- Lauren Mancuso, Arezou Mansourian and Christine Ng -- alleged that the wrestling coach unfairly cut them from the men’s varsity team based on their gender.

The defendants, which included four now-retired university employees, denied the allegations and said that the athletes underwent the same tryout procedures as the men.

UC Davis never had a women’s intercollegiate wrestling team. Female wrestlers were granted unofficial status on the men’s team and received all the benefits of varsity status, according to the lawsuit.

But when a school official set a roster cap for the number of athletes on the Division 1 Pac-10 men’s wrestling team, players were forced to compete for their position.

Every wrestler, including the three females, were asked to participate in a “wrestle-off” with competitors of equal size and weight. The plaintiffs were cut from the team, along with several male wrestlers, according to the lawsuit.

The female wrestlers filed a formal complaint against the school that eventually landed in the courts.

In August, a federal judge found that UC Davis violated the Title IX requirement to offer equal sports opportunities for women. The ruling stated that the university failed to expand women’s intercollegiate sports between 1998 and 2005, the years the plaintiffs attended UC Davis. The university, however, says it added several women’s sports teams during that period.

A case against the employees alleging that the school officials violated the equal protection clause of the Constitution was dismissed.
The settlement marks the end of an eight-year court battle. In an earlier ruling, the judge ruled in favor of the university, but that judgment was overturned by an appeals court.

The $1.35-million payout covers the cost of the plaintiff’s attorney’s fees and court costs incurred during the case. No money was paid to the plaintiffs in the settlement.

University officials said the payout was significantly less than what the school may have been ordered to pay if the issue was decided in the court.