Pitt County serves as the hub for education and commerce in eastern North Carolina, but its ample resources and generally stable employment market did not spare it the hardship of recession. Though it has fared better than many of its neighbors, thousands of county residents remain without work as an economy that hemorrhaged jobs for two years struggles to replace them.

Public employers like East Carolina University and Pitt County Memorial Hospital have helped the community endure this difficult period, and remain reliable resources for the future. That basis in education, which includes the invaluable opportunities at Pitt Community College, should add to residents’ optimism as signs of growth appear and prospects for recovery seem brighter.

Before the end of 2010 and the start of the new year, economists predicted that the recession that formally began in December 2007 showed indications of abating. Some growth in the labor market, as well as movement on the housing front and a growing sense of confidence by consumers, gave further credence to that perspective. Wanda Yuhas, director of the Pitt County Development Commission, became the latest to offer support for that conclusion, saying that signs of growth, though incremental, are evident.

Pitt County workers are among those in a 13-county region who saw about 15,000 jobs disappear in 2009, the worst of the economic downturn for this region. Unemployment reached as high as 11.3 percent in June of that year, though this community fared far better than surrounding counties, like Martin, Edgecombe, Beaufort and Lenoir, where joblessness is more prevalent.

Residents here are fortunate because of a diversified work force and the strong, stable institutions that are the foundation of the job market. Employers like East Carolina and the hospital are reliable and generally see little fluctuation, thus insulating the work force in times of economic distress. Pitt Community College is another tremendous resource, offering two-year degrees and worker training programs to help the unemployed position themselves for new opportunities.

The local area added 3,000 jobs last year, according to John Chaffee, the former head of the Pitt County Development Commission. That is modest and hardly makes up for the thousands of jobs lost previously, but it does give reason for cautious optimism that a permanent recovery is building. Local residents should consider themselves fortunate to have institutions that provided relief and assistance in the depths of recession, as those contributions to the work force and the economy cannot be emphasized enough.
Monday, February 21, 2011

As a state legislator, Lincoln tried to play the 'run away' game, too

Events in Wisconsin -- particularly the indignation of Republicans who are now seething at the Democratic state senator's parliamentary trick of running away to avoid a legislative quorum -- prompts me to reprint this passage from "Did Lincoln Own Slaves? And other frequently asked questions about Abraham Lincoln" by my long-time friend Gerald J. Prokopowicz, history department chairman at East Carolina University and former historical director of the Lincoln Museum in Fort Ft. Wayne, Ind.

In the 1840s, the Whigs' grandiose plans to build canals and railroads across Illinois were in ruins, victim of the economic downturn that historians call the Panic of 1837.

The Democrats in the state legislature, who had opposed the plan, now had an opportunity to destroy one of the most important elements in the Whig plan for centralized economic development, the State Bank of Illinois.

Previous legislation had specified that the state bank would be required to pay its debts in gold instead of paper money, starting with the end of the next legislative session. The bank did not have nearly enough gold on hand
to meet its obligations, so the requirement to pay specie was tantamount to the ruin of the bank.

The Whigs thought that they had until March, 1841, when the regular legislative session normally ended, to find a solution. But the Democrats cleverly moved to adjourn the legislature in December, 1840, which would trigger the bank’s demise, after which they would immediately begin a new session.

There was only one way that Lincoln and his fellow Whigs could find to stop the Democratic majority from passing a motion to adjourn: Don’t show up.

With the Whigs absent, there would be no quorum. The Democratic Speaker sent the sergeant at arms into the streets and saloons of Springfield to round up any nearby Whig legislators, while Lincoln and two comrades sat in the back of the room making sure that their strategy was working.

Whatever satisfaction they felt at having pulled off their parliamentary trick evaporated when the Speaker recognized them as present and announced that a quorum had been met.

Lincoln and his fellow Whig enforcers quickly tried to leave, and, finding the chamber doors locked, resorted to climbing out of a window and dropping to the ground. Their self-defenestration was in vain, however, as the motion to adjourn passed, with the predicted consequences for the state bank. Lincoln was afterward embarrassed by what he had done and did not speak of it.

(“In December, 1840, the Old State Capitol was not yet even the new State Capitol. It was still under construction, and the legislature was meeting temporarily at the First Methodist Church a few blocks away. There was a drop of about five feet from the meeting room’s windowsills to the ground.”)

About "Change of Subject."
"Change of Subject" by Chicago Tribune op-ed columnist Eric Zorn contains observations, reports, tips, referrals and tirades, though not necessarily in that order. Links will tend to expire, so seize the day. For an archive of Zorn's latest Tribune columns click here. An explanation of the title of this blog is here. If you have other questions, suggestions or comments, send e-mail to ericzorn at gmail.com.
Program focuses on family time, reading

By Kim Grizzard
The Daily Reflector
Tuesday, February 22, 2011

Many parents read their children a bedtime story each night as a way to settle them down for sleep. But local literacy advocates believe the family story time serves a different purpose: to awaken a love for learning.

That is one purpose behind Family Read, a new program being launched this week by Literacy Volunteers-Pitt County. The program, adapted from the nationally acclaimed program Motherread, invites mothers, fathers, grandparents or any adult caregiver to learn to use children's books to not only enhance reading ability but to improve relationships.

"It's actually not like any other special class we have," Theresa Barefield, executive director of Literacy Volunteers-Pitt County, said. "It's family inclusive, all the adults that help to raise a child."

Once a week for an hour, adults will meet in groups to read and discuss titles such as “Where the Wild Things Are,” “Ira Sleeps Over,” “Angel's Kite” and “Moon Rope.” Two of the children's picture books featured in the six-week session contain text in both English and Spanish.

Each week, adults will review the core message of the book, such as establishing independence or expressing feelings. Each session includes ideas for take-home activities for parents to initiate with their children.
“We're just kind of making an easier way to talk about those things as a parent to your child by using a children's book,” Courtney Albertson, a Literacy Volunteers intern, said. “These are really simple, very inexpensive or basically free ideas and ways that people can just make the story fun, make the experience of reading more than just reading.”

Albertson, who is pursuing a bachelor's degree in social work at East Carolina University, said the experience of reading is far less common in families than it once was. Previously an elementary education major, Albertson saw many children come to school without the benefit of having a parent reading to them at home.

“These families are predominately low-income,” she said. “These parents are struggling so hard to work two or three different jobs and keep food on the table and just be home that there is literally no time to sit down and read with their children.”

Barefield said busy schedules tend to interrupt reading time for many families, not only those who struggle financially. Extracurricular activities and electronic gadgets can all compete for the time families might otherwise have to read together.

Literacy advocate Jim Trelease believes that is an unfortunate sacrifice to make. In his best-seller “The Read Aloud Handbook,” Trelease, a former artist and writer for the Springfield Daily News, said neither “Hooked on Phonics” nor costly SAT preparation courses are the key to helping students succeed. “The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children,” Trelease writes, quoting from “Becoming a Nation of Readers,” a report issued in 1985 by the Commission on Reading.

A 1995 study of families in Kansas City by language experts Betty Hart and Todd Risley showed that children from low-income families enter school having heard 30 million fewer words than children from professional families, leading to a language deficit and low literacy.

Glenda Roulhac, perinatal service supervisor at the Walter B. Jones Alcohol and Drug Abuse Treatment Center, counsels mothers and mothers-to-be who are patients at the center to read and talk with their babies.

“We have had some patients in the past who have said, ‘I feel stupid talking to my baby,' ... because they say, ‘My baby don't understand,’” Roulhac said. “If they feel stupid talking to their baby, they're not going to be reading to their baby.”

The Family Read program hopes to show them how. Ten perinatal patients at the center are scheduled to begin classes this week.

“The basis of the program is to help the parents with self-esteem and encourage increasing involvement in their child's education,” Roulhac said. “We're helping the moms to improve the bonding with their babies by encouraging them to read with their babies and also helping them to do better parenting with children who may be at home.”
Theresa Edmondson, facility director, said addiction can be a tremendous hurdle for parents who want the best for their children but feel incapable of providing that.

“Often times for women who have addictive disease problems, that becomes a No. 1 focus in their lives,” she said. “While they may have good intentions and they try to be good moms, that alcohol and that drug is what takes them away from those experiences.”

A Family Read program also is planned for the Greenville Community Shelters.

“One of the things we hope to do is to get the parents more involved with their child at an earlier age so that reading is important,” Albertson said. “We're just getting families reading together more frequently.”

Contact Kim Grizzard at kgrizzard@reflector.com or (252) 329-9578.
UNCW trustees weigh effects of proposed budget cuts

By Jason Gonzales
Jason.Gonzales@StarNewOnline.com
Published: Saturday, February 19, 2011 at 9:25 p.m.

The UNCW Board of Trustees met Saturday and gave more insight into what the governor's proposed budget cuts will do at the school.

With a proposed 9.5 percent cut and nearly 1,900 jobs expected to be lost throughout the system, officials at the University of North Carolina Wilmington are preparing for the worst.

"We are using the best information to look at the worst-case scenario," said Charles Maimone, vice chancellor for business affairs, who presented the budget scenario to the trustees. "Obviously, there are a lot of variables."

The school estimates that the cuts would cost the school about $10 million in state appropriations and the school would lose about 90 jobs. Some of those jobs could include faculty.

"We had 90 positions cut last year and 90 more expected to be cut this year, that's 180 jobs over two years," Maimone said. "That's a lot."

Maimone said it becomes harder and harder for the business side of the university to function with every lost job.

Chancellor Rosemary DePaolo said she worries about the morale of employees who have had to take on more responsibilities over the years and will have to take on even more responsibilities next year.

"Think of the strain that it puts on our people, and the constant effects of that strain," she said.

Trustee Jeff Etheridge said the school has historically operated off of less funding than other some campuses in the UNC system, and legislatures should take that into consideration during the budgeting process.
"There is some fat to be cut around the system, but we have always run lean," he said.

Trustees will be making their case to legislators.

Trustee Gary Shipman said the university is a vital tool for the community because it provides qualified employees who give back more money to the state than those with a high school diploma.

"We are the solution, not the problem," he said.

Along with the employee cuts, the school will also have to reduce its regional collaboration at Onslow County, implement an employee retirement incentive program and there would be no cost of inflation adjustments for utilities, library materials and equipment.
Cathy Donohue, a library technician at NCSU, gets her first chance to try the 90-inch Perceptive Pixel Multitouch Wall at D.H. Hill Library.

NCSU students get familiar with interactive tools

BY JAY PRICE - Staff Writer
RALEIGH N.C. State University students can now unleash their inner CNN, using sweeps of their hands to manipulate large amounts of data via graphics, text, photos and video on a giant screen.

Library officials have installed a "multitouch wall" with the same giant touch-screen technology that the cable news network trots out to wow viewers as John King waves his hand and twitches his finger to magically summon and organize swarms of red state-blue state factoids.

The Perceptive Pixel display wall, which was switched on last week, is the $100,000 centerpiece of the new "Technology Sandbox" at the D.H. Hill Library. The sandbox is a room of cutting-edge, interactive gadgetry that's aimed partly at familiarizing students with the latest high-tech hardware, particularly large displays and gesture-based computing. It was paid for with
a federal grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services that is administered by the State Library of North Carolina.

"They are going to be using these tools down the road in their jobs, and the idea is to get these things into their hands now," said David Woodbury, the Learning Commons librarian, who oversees the tech sandbox. "Then they'll be able to go out in the workplace with that experience already."

Multitouch computing has taken off with the help of the popular iPad, he said. The next step forward is large-scale multitouch. And to really understand how it works, users have to work with it directly.

Library staff will help students learn to use the equipment and help them with projects such as developing new applications for it.

But students aren't the only ones getting something out of the gadgetry. Working with them while they use it helps library leaders pick up ideas about how to equip NCSU's James B. Hunt Jr. Library, which will be one of the world's most technologically advanced libraries when it opens next year. It's expected to include dozens of rooms set up with hardware to enhance things such as collaborating on class projects, developing computer games or creating elaborate presentations.

Experience with the sandbox will help library officials develop a kind of "tool kit" for other libraries to use in designing their own technology-enhanced learning spaces, an increasingly important part of libraries' mission as the digital revolution eclipses the importance of books.

Indeed, more electronic devices such as laptops, iPads and iPods are checked out at D.H. Hill now than are books other than textbooks.

Library staff at NCSU have a reputation for being among the nation's savviest about the changing nature of libraries, and they got another federal grant, for $313,000, to develop that tool kit for other libraries.

"Everybody has a laptop or cell phone that is as powerful as desktop computers were 10 years ago, and libraries have become places where people come to work and collaborate," Woodbury said. "These tools are really focused on that, that libraries are places where you come to work in a
group, and you need the tools to visualize the data, to share what's on your screen with your partner."

Sam Brubaker, 22, an art and design major from Asheville who works with 3-D modeling, was among the first to try it. It could be particularly interesting, he said, to use the technology to explore things such as 3-D animation.

First, though, students will have to learn which gestures do what.

"I think there's at bit of training people will have to do," Brubaker said. "It's a little bit obscure, for example, whether to use one finger or two, or one hand or both, and people will have to kind of retrain themselves. It's almost something you can't explain, kind of motor-skills training that you have to learn by doing."

NCSU officials believe that it's the only Perceptive Pixel wall in a library anywhere and maybe the only one at a university. Those in use elsewhere are seldom accessible for public use. This one will be right there, ready to touch 24 hours a day, five days a week, and much of the other two.

College being college, inevitably some of the experimenting won't be serious.

"I think I'm going to do the same thing every other student is going to do here, which is showing each other YouTube videos on a large screen," Brubaker said, laughing. "I have to be honest, that's immediately the first thing that came to mind."

jay.price@newsobserver.com or 919-829-4526

**Other toys in the sandbox**

The dazzling visuals of the Perceptive Pixel are almost impossible to ignore when it's on and someone is making huge images jump around or manipulating a 3-D object. There is more to the Technology Sandbox, though. Other equipment in the 1,700-square-foot room, which is walled off from the rest of the library by glass panels that you can write on with special markers, includes:

**A quad-panel display**, with four screens arrayed together that can display images from up to four computers at once, or one giant image across four screens at once. It's
particularly useful for collaborative work such as developing group presentations or group computer coding.

**A SMART Board**, which is a kind of digital white board, or chalk board. Mainly a tool for education, it can project a giant image of whatever your computer screen is showing, and you can manipulate the image in basic ways with your hands, for instance by drawing a circle around an important number with your finger as you talk about it.

**A pair of Microsoft Surface tables.** These look like giant horizontal iPads and work something like the larger Perceptive Pixel. They're particularly useful for two users sitting across the table from each other.

**A Microsoft Kinect** is coming soon. It's a new type of computer gaming equipment that doesn't require controllers, kind of the next step after the Wii video game console. Players use gestures to control the action on-screen. This is expected to be a boon to the university's community of game developers.
A University of Virginia student has a bright idea: 'Flash seminars'

By Daniel de Vise
Washington Post Staff Writer
Sunday, February 20, 2011; 10:43 PM

CHARLOTTESVILLE - Flash mobs assemble in public spaces to dance, protest or do battle with lightsabers.

And at the University of Virginia, thanks to Laura Nelson, they gather to learn.

Once or twice a week, students at the state's flagship public university collect in some idle classroom or lounge for a "flash seminar," an ad hoc performance of pedagogy.

The time and place, professor and students are always different. But the goal never varies: "to find learning outside the classroom," said Nelson, 22, a senior from Westwood, Mass., who is majoring in political and social thought. "To find other people who really value being a student."

With flash seminars, Nelson has found a solution to a hot-button issue in higher education: the dwindling time American students spend engaged in actual learning outside class. Research shows a steady decline in weekly study time, from about 25 hours in the early 1960s to 15 hours today. One influential study is provocatively titled "Leisure College, USA."

Nelson's idea - new to higher education, as far as university officials can tell - helped her win one of the nation's 32 Rhodes Scholarships last year. "What I love about it is, it's purely for the love of learning," said Teresa Sullivan, university president.

Nelson turned down Yale to come to Charlottesville as an Echols scholar, part of an honors program that freed her to study pretty much what she wished. Before long, though, she and some like-minded friends grew frustrated with how little time their classmates spent pursuing the life of the mind when not in the lecture hall.

"I found it difficult to find an intellectual community here," Nelson said.
U-Va. is one of the nation's top public universities, a campus of overbooked overachievers, well-rounded students pulling down good grades even as they juggle busy schedules filled with athletics and nonacademic extracurricular activities. It's a routine of resume-building shaped by the elite high schools that provide many of the university's incoming students each year.

"Participating in extracurriculars is an important part of U-Va., but sometimes it's a distraction," said Lily Bowles, a junior from Northwest Washington who helped Nelson launch the seminars.

Nelson was a product of the same culture. She played varsity field hockey in her first year at U-Va. and took leadership positions in various student organizations. But she came to view those activities as a digression. She quit field hockey because it required too much time and started searching for ways to tap the university's rich intellectual capital.

In fall 2009, she launched a weekly e-mail called Engage UVA. It was a simple list of scholarly events on campus, sent every Monday to a group of about 20 friends. A classmate, senior Anna Duning, built it into a newsletter with a subscriber base of 1,500.

Nelson doesn't take sole credit for the idea of flash seminars, which she says evolved "collectively"out of conversations among friends. She seized on it, though, and mapped it out in a series of online documents last summer: Nelson and her friends would seek out their favorite professors. Faculty would choose topics, assign any readings and set enrollment limits. Students would find teaching space.

She thought about approaching university leaders for approval, but she couldn't think of anything in her plan that required approval. "It's so simple, and I think that's what caught people off guard at first," she said.

On Sept. 13, U-Va. anthropologist Richard Handler taught the first flash seminar, "Liberal Arts in the Era of Late Capitalism," to an audience of 16 gathered inside Pavilion VI, part of the Academical Village designed by Thomas Jefferson. To populate the seminar with students, Nelson simply placed the event in the weekly e-mail blast.
Dozens of seminars have followed, typically with a few days' notice. They always fill up and often have a sizable waiting list, creating the sort of buzz that might affix to a trendy new restaurant.

Participants say the freewheeling format has spawned some inspired topics, from "Is Google Making Us Stupid?" to "The Death Penalty and Victor Hugo" and "To Be Modern and Completely Dependent on Money."

Seminars have touched on matters as sensitive as the homicide last year of U-Va. senior Yeardley Love and the school's involvement in slavery during the 1800s. Sullivan, a sociologist, will lead a seminar this spring on "Living the Good Life."

Historian William Hitchcock led a Veterans Day seminar called "Soldiers and the American Imagination" and found it "one of the highlights of my fall semester." Students, drawn not by a quest for credits or grades but from pure curiosity, arrived with "a sort of open mind and an enthusiasm that teachers just love," he said.

One evening last week, students gathered for a seminar, "How Do Americans Understand the Civil War," led by historian Gary Gallagher. The setting was casual - a circle of couches and easy chairs in a lounge on the ground floor of an academic building, with 15 students and two plates of cookies.

Nelson started the session by asking students to tell "what caught your eye about the seminar." One student said she liked "to get my liberal arts in when I can." Another said her adviser had cited Gallagher as "a must-hear lecture." A third remarked, enigmatically, "It's personal in my family."

Gallagher held the group in thrall with a primer on common misperceptions about the war, such as the notion that Southerners and Northerners held dramatically different views on racial matters.

"By our standards, all Americans were racists in the middle of the 19th century," he said. "It's an American problem, not a Southern problem." He implored students to seek out the memoirs of Ulysses Grant and the major speeches of Abraham Lincoln. "And if you can read all of that and still not be interested in the Civil War, then you should move to New Zealand."
February 20, 2011

Isabel Castillo, 26, works as a waitress in Harrisonburg, Va., but spends much of her time supporting passage of the Dream Act, which would provide a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants.

**Dream Act Advocate Turns Failure Into Hope**

By MICHAEL WINERIP

HARRISONBURG, Va. — Isabel Castillo was counting on the Dream Act, and when the Dream Act was defeated in December, it upended her dreams. “Of course, I cried,” she said.

The Dream Act would have given legal status and a chance for citizenship to people like Ms. Castillo — illegal immigrants who were brought to this country at a young age (Ms. Castillo was 6) and then went on to attend college (Ms. Castillo, now 26, graduated magna cum laude).

“We came so close,” she said.

She was sitting in the gallery when the House of Representatives passed the bill. And though the legislation had majority support in the Senate — 55 to 41 in favor — 60 votes were needed for cloture and passage. It was a long drive back to Harrisonburg.
Ms. Castillo returned to small-town life, to getting by without a Social Security card, working off the books as a waitress and living in her basement apartment.

Nothing seemed to have changed, but it had. “I was not the same Isabel,” she said.

No longer was she invisible.

In the previous year, Ms. Castillo had organized the Harrisonburg Dream Act chapter (“Harrisonburg?” asked the national leadership in Washington); led local rallies; and mobilized 75 people to attend a meeting of the Harrisonburg City Council, which unanimously passed a resolution in support of the Dream Act.

She may have received more media coverage than anyone else in Harrisonburg (population 45,000) that year. She was interviewed by everyone from Brent Finnegan of hburgnews.com to the public radio host Bob Edwards.

Recently she was waiting on tables when her BlackBerry rang. “A reporter from Telemundo — they may want to do a phone interview,” she said, before disappearing into the kitchen to pick up two bowls of soup.

Like a lot of the Dream Act supporters, once she came out in the open, she had no intention of going back in.

“At first, I’d only allow the media to shoot my face turned away and only my first name,” she said. “And then it just progressed. I said, ‘O.K., use my face and you can say I went to a local university.’ Then it was, ‘I graduated from Eastern Mennonite University and I’m Isabel Castillo.’”

She could be deported at any time, but the Obama administration seems to have taken a hands-off approach to the hundreds of thousands of potential Dream Act students. In Ms. Castillo’s case, it is as if she’s coated with a protective shell.

She has stood face to face with several Virginia politicians who want to see an immigration crackdown and told them her status, and yet no one has turned her in. Indeed, they’ve been respectful and friendly. Last summer, at
a town-hall-style meeting, she had a long exchange with the governor of Virginia, Bob McDonnell, a Republican pushing for tougher deportation policies. Last month, she testified before a House of Delegates subcommittee full of legislators who wanted to expand police power to round up illegal immigrants.

Because of her Dream Act fame, she is much in demand and has to organize her work schedule around public appearances. Last Monday, she spoke to the women’s Bible study group at Asbury United Methodist Church; Tuesday she delivered a speech at James Madison University; Wednesday she testified in Richmond before a State Senate subcommittee; Thursday she addressed a luncheon group at the Winchester Rotary Club.

She hopes that if people get to see her close up, she will win them over. “I tell them I’m a human being living like anyone else, not a criminal. This is Isabel. This is my story.”

Her parents came here to the Shenandoah Valley to pick apples and stayed to work in a poultry plant. In 1991, she was smuggled across the border. The family lived in a trailer park, and Ms. Castillo’s first job as a girl was helping her parents sell tacos out of their home.

She attended Pleasant Valley Elementary, Wilbur S. Pence Middle School and in 2003 graduated from Turner Ashby High School with an A average and perfect attendance record.

To save money for college, she spent a year working seven days a week from 9:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. at a local restaurant. When she still didn’t have enough, she went to local business owners. “I’d say, ‘Do you have any scholarships or donations?’ ” she recalled. “One man gave me $1,000.”

By the time she had finished college, she had no money left, and her prospects were no better than they’d been in high school. So she moved back to the trailer park, sharing a bedroom with her older sister and her sister’s son.

She has had opportunities that were denied to others in her family. Her mother’s entire education was at a school in rural Mexico that offered classes only through the second grade. Because her mother doesn’t speak
English, one of the few jobs she could find here was at the poultry plant, cutting the necks off turkeys and cleaning the giblets.

Asked how she felt about her daughter’s education, she said, “I’m very proud she has something to defend herself with.”

Ms. Castillo’s efforts have had mixed results. In August, wearing her graduation mortarboard, she stood before the microphone at one of Governor McDonnell’s town meetings. (Her comments were captured on video by The Harrisonburg Times.)

“My name is Isabel Castillo,” she began.

“Hi, Isabel,” the governor said.

“I went to the elementary school here, middle school and graduated with a 4.0 G.P.A.”

“Wow,” the governor said, and the audience clapped for Ms. Castillo’s 4.0. The governor joked that in college, he got a 4.0, too — 2.0 the first semester and 2.0 the second.

Ms. Castillo told the governor that she had graduated from college in three and a half years with a degree in social work.

“Wow,” he said. “We need more people like this.”

“But I’m undocumented,” she said, and the room went silent.

When she asked the governor if he would support the Dream Act, his tone was kind, but he wasn’t swayed. “What we can’t do as Americans is to turn a blind eye and not enforce the law,” he said, adding, “People who come here illegally need to be detained, prosecuted and deported.”

His comments received much louder applause than Ms. Castillo’s 4.0 G.P.A. had.

She has beaten the odds so far and has a buoyant personality — a good thing, given her circumstances. But she has one worry bigger than the rest.
The Dream Act would apply only to people under 30. With the Republicans in control of the House, there is little chance the legislation will pass in the next two years. By then, Ms. Castillo will be 28. “You realize you’re fighting for your life,” she said.

One recent afternoon, after serving up two bowls of beef soup, she hung her apron in the back and hurried home to change for a speaking appearance at the University of Virginia Law School. She switched from Skechers to four-inch heels and put on a gray pencil skirt and a sweater.

She wanted to make just the right impression, and it took her forever to put on her makeup.

At the law school, she was one of three speakers at a public-interest class and later a student social-action club. It was Ms. Castillo who captivated the students. She was their age, she dressed like them (when they had to look like lawyers rather than students), she spoke as they spoke and had the same quick intellect.

She could have been one of them.

She told the story of being arrested for taking part in a sit-in at Senator Harry Reid’s office. They wanted to know how she could risk being so public. “I believe the more public you are, the safer you are,” she said.

When they asked how they could make a difference, she told them that in Virginia, each public college can choose whether to admit illegal immigrants as students, and that the University of Virginia is one that does not.

Her message was unspoken, but clear: If she was good enough to speak there, she was good enough to apply there.

The ride home took an hour. She was back before 8. Later that night, she went out to a local cafe, the Artful Dodger. In a tank top and four-inch heels, she danced to salsa music until 1 a.m.