THE DAILY CLIPS

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University of North Carolina President Tom Ross gives a "state of the system" address to the Greenville-Pitt County Chamber of Commerce power luncheon on Tuesday at Brook Valley. (Rhett Butler)

Official: Revisit role of colleges
By Jackie Drake
Wednesday, February 22, 2012

Colleges must find ways to improve how they operate to continue serving the community in the wake of unprecedented budget cuts, and East Carolina is doing its part, University of North Carolina System President Tom Ross said in a visit to Greenville on Tuesday.

“The UNC campuses have to play a vital role, and they have to do that in new ways,” Ross told business leaders at the Greenville-Pitt County Chamber of Commerce Power Luncheon at Brook Valley Country Club. “We’re going to figure out how to do business differently, and we’re doing that in this community right now.”

ECU and other system universities plan to raise tuition by an average of about 9 percent next year, but that only will regain a portion of the $400 million the system lost in state funding this year. Universities must become more efficient and seek support from alumni and local businesses, Ross said.

“We are at a crossroads in this state,” he said. “We’ve taken some severe budget cuts, and we felt like we had to raise tuition this year to create some stability. This will allow us some time to focus on efficiency and fundraising.”
ECU is in the midst of an academic reorganization effort in which funding is being prioritized among programs and structure of departments is being evaluated.

The Program Prioritization Committee is seeking feedback on a list of suggestions released this month and is due to have an initial plan out by March 30.

“I think East Carolina is definitely heading in the right direction, but they’ve got some tough decisions yet to be made,” Ross said in an interview Tuesday morning.

“We’ve seen it (consolidation) work well on other campuses. It is somewhat disruptive, but I think we have to figure out how we can be more efficient. It’s difficult, but it’s part of what has to be done,” he said.

The system is looking at other ways to consolidate services. Most of the smaller campuses already are on a unified payroll system, Ross said. Determining a student’s resident status is another possibility for fewer staff. For now, that is done separately at each campus, but many students apply to more than one, Ross said, so that could potentially be done in one office for all students.

“We’re seeing activity on a number of our campuses in that regard,” Ross said. “And we’re hopeful that people will help us through these tough times by contributing more.”

Higher education is important to the economy, and ECU plays a dynamic role in the development of its region, Ross said.

“This university touches the community in lots of different ways, so their futures are intertwined together,” he said. “I think if the university is successful, the community will be more successful along with it.”

By 2018, up to 59 percent of jobs will require some sort of post-secondary education, according to the figures Ross presented.

“If we’re going to compete in the world, we have to have a prepared workforce,” he said.

The UNC system serves more than 220,000 students and is the second-largest employer in the state behind Wal-Mart, according to Ross.

If it were its own city, the system would be the third-largest in the state behind Charlotte and Raleigh.
There are more than 4,600 university employees in Pitt County, “and they spend their paychecks right here,” Ross said.

More than 20,000 people in the county graduated from a UNC system campus.

The past three years, more than $56 million in research has been conducted in Pitt County through ECU. Every $1 million spent in research supports 37 jobs, according to an N.C. State study cited by Ross.

ECU works with businesses, farmers, doctors and health care professionals throughout eastern North Carolina and is making a difference in people’s lives, Ross said.

“All the programs that East Carolina offers end up producing people who can provide real service and benefit to the people of eastern North Carolina,” he said.

“That’s part of the reason I think East Carolina is such a strong university, because it does have close ties with the community and support of the community.”

The economy is showing signs of turning around, and Ross believes better times are in sight.

But until then, “we’re going to figure it out,” Ross said.

“We have our mission of teaching, we have our mission of research, but we also have our mission of serving the people of North Carolina.

“There’s not a better example than East Carolina University,” he said.

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Students apply themselves at job fair
Wednesday, February 22, 2012

A career fair for East Carolina University students and graduates at the Greenville Convention Center on Tuesday was filled to capacity with employers seeking qualified young applicants, indicative of a national upsurge in employment.

Karen Thompson, director of the ECU Career Center, reported a 23 percent increase in the number of employers registered for the ECU career fair — 160 up from the 134 employers that participated in 2011.

Thompson said employers are flocking to university career fairs because the events offer a high return for a minimum of investment. Employers may send one or two recruiters to a career fair, and in return receive broad exposure to a large and diverse population of students.

Employers scouting out student interns are on the rise as well. In her 26 years working in university career centers, Thompson said she has seen a huge increase in the internship trend.

“It makes good sense,” Thompson said. “With a one-semester investment in an intern, employers have the opportunity to evaluate the skills and strengths of a potential employee at a lower expense for salary and benefits” than hiring that person full time.

“The internship is where the future will be,” Thompson said.
GREENVILLE

Cancer survivor program offered

Leo W. Jenkins Cancer Center is partnering with the Comprehensive Cancer Support Program to offer a nationally recognized program that helps cancer survivors make the transition from active treatment to post-treatment care.

Cancer Transitions is a six-week free program that offers cancer survivors information on issues such as exercise, nutrition, emotional health, quality of life and medical concerns after cancer treatment ends.

The sessions will be held weekly on alternating Mondays and Tuesdays, starting Monday from 5:30-8 p.m. at the American Cancer Society Hope Lodge. To register or for more information, contact Judy Koutlas at 744-5342 or koutlasj@ecu.edu.
Exhibit to feature Avett art

By Caroline McMillan

Fans of heralded musician and artist Scott Avett, founding member of the folk-rock band Avett Brothers, will get a chance to view and purchase his paintings at an exhibit Feb. 25 at The Morrison condominiums in SouthPark.

The exhibit, called "The Paintings of Scott Avett: Exploring Story and Spirituality," is proceeded by a private reception and fundraiser Feb. 24, where Avett will discuss his faith journey and how his spiritual life informs his art.

The band has progressed from playing small festivals to sold-out shows and high-profile gigs at Radio City Music Hall and the Grammys.

Avett plays the banjo, while his brother, Seth Avett, plays the guitar, and Bob Crawford plays the stand-up bass. Cellist Joe Kwon and drummer Jacob Edwards are touring members of the band.

Proceeds from the fundraiser will benefit The Educational Center, a Charlotte-based nonprofit that creates resources and opportunities for people of all ages and faiths who are looking for spiritual growth and enrichment. Its community of educators, writers and researchers hold workshops, create
film series, plan retreats and publish lecture-based resources used by Christian educators across the country.

Saturday's exhibit will be open to the public at no cost from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Visitors will have opportunities to purchase original artwork and commemorative posters.

Avett, 35, was raised in Concord. He started his art career in 1999, when he began studying painting and print-making at East Carolina University.

Once called an "artist hobo" by a close friend, Avett spends nearly as much time creating art on the road as he does in his studio in Concord, where he briefly owned his own gallery.

Avett has said his goal is to change his artistic methods with each piece. He believes small shifts in technique - from one fewer layer of paint to a simple, thinner glaze - can produce very different and exceptional results.

Avett is known for reflecting religious archetypes, his travels and personal narratives in his artwork. He believes portraits are the most intimate form of personal narrative.

He prefers to work with subjects he knows well, as he likes highlighting their strengths, weaknesses and triumphs in his work.

Tom Schulz, husband of outgoing executive director of the Educational Center Shelia Ennis, will curate the exhibit.

Schulz founded Empathinc., an organization that offers opportunities for the creative community to engage the public in dialogue about the purpose and meaning of art.

Avett collaborated with Schulz twice before when he exhibited his work at the Empathinc. Gallery, formerly in NoDa.

His artwork has also been featured at the Center for Faith & the Arts in Salisbury, the Lee Hansley Gallery in Raleigh and the Envoy Gallery in New York City.

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JOHNSTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Lance Gooden, a Phi Theta Kappa advisor at Johnston Community College with Floyd Allen Strader, Strader just won the honor of having his short story "Charlie's Watch" published in the 2011 edition of Phi Theta Kappa's, Nota Bene. Strader's short story was one of 950 entries competing for the honor and only 16 entries were submitted to the publication including Strader's short story.

JCC student receives writing honor

A short story written by a Johnston Community College student will appear in the 2011 edition of Phi Theta Kappa’s, Nota Bene. This is the society’s honors anthology.

Floyd Allen Strader “Charlie’s Watch” was one of 16 entries selected out of 950 submitted for the publication. A resident of the Cleveland community, Strader is a student in Wells Fargo Partnership East, a teaching degree program offered through East Carolina University and North Carolina community colleges.

Strader’s short story is based on a real watch he received from his grandmother and the unexpected gift’s connection and meaning to him.

“I enjoy writing, and I enjoy getting thoughts out of my head and onto paper in a way that people may like,” says Strader, who hopes to become a middle school math and science teacher. “The story affects me personally, but to
hear that something you’ve written is enjoyed by educated strangers is humbling and puts a big grin on your face.”

Strader, an Ohio native, worked many years in construction before being laid off. He enrolled at JCC in 2009. “JCC has given me a new start,” Strader says. “With the help and support of the instructors, I not only have knowledge but confidence in my abilities.”

PTK is the international honor society of two-year colleges. Nota Bene was founded in 1994 to showcase exceptional writing among community college students. Copies of Nota Bene are distributed to community college libraries and to Phi Theta Kappa leaders.

“We are very proud of Allen’s recognition and his excellent representation of Johnston Community College in this national literary competition,” said Lance Gooden, co-advisor of the college’s PTK chapter and math instructor at JCC. “Allen is an outstanding student, and we wish him well in his pursuit of a teaching career.”
The three very chilly winners of a Polar Plunge competition Feb. 11 at Wrightsville Beach emerge from the water after an hour and 45 minutes. They are Bob Wassell (from left), Erica Shoppe and Patrick Duffy. Photo by Bud Meade

**Fraternity’s plunge raises money for Autism Speaks**

By Bud Meade
Contributed article

WRIGHTSVILLE BEACH | The sun disappeared and temperatures plummeted on Feb. 11 minutes before the start of the third annual Polar Plunge at Wrightsville Beach hosted by the Pi Kappa Alpha Fraternity at the University of North Carolina Wilmington.

Add a little wind and the many participants in this fundraising event to support Autism Speaks had a real “polarizing experience” as they competed to determine who could stay in the water the longest.

After an hour and forty-four minutes, the last three survivors – Bob Wassell, Patrick Duffy and Erica Shoppe – walked out of the water together to the cheers of the remaining spectators and other participants who had not retreated to a warmer environment.

Matt Soles, vice president of Pi Kappa Alpha and a senator in UNCW’s Student Government Association, said the fraternity also held raffles and sold T-shirts to raise money for Autism Speaks.
They raised a total of $788 for the autism science and advocacy organization.

Since its inception in 2005, Autism Speaks (www.autismspeaks.org) has committed more than $173 million to research and developing innovative resources for families.

Thanks go to Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity for its efforts in support of “Autism Speaks” and congratulations to the three finalists who set a new “staying-in” record that will be hard to beat!

Bud Meade is retired from State University of New York. He and his wife, Sandy, were visiting Wrightsville Beach when Bud saw the polar plungers and went to get to know them.

The StarNews will consider publishing articles contributed by readers. They should be 400 words or less and accompanied by a good-quality photograph. Contact Community News Editor Si Cantwell at 343-2364 or si.cantwell@starnewsonline.com.
WASHINGTON — In a 2003 decision that the majority said it expected would last for 25 years, the Supreme Court allowed public colleges and universities to take account of race in admission decisions. On Tuesday, the court signaled that it might end such affirmative action much sooner than that.

By agreeing to hear a major case involving race-conscious admissions at the University of Texas, the court thrust affirmative action back into the public and political discourse after years in which it had mostly faded from view. Both supporters and opponents of affirmative action said they saw the announcement — and the change in the court’s makeup since 2003 — as a signal that the court’s five more conservative members might be prepared to do away with racial preferences in higher education.

The consequences of such a decision would be striking. It would, all sides agree, reduce the number of African-American and Latino students at nearly every selective college and graduate school, with more Asian-American and white students gaining entrance instead.

A decision barring the use of race in admission decisions would undo an accommodation reached in the Supreme Court’s 5-to-4 decision in 2003 in Grutter v. Bollinger: that public colleges and universities could not use a point system to increase minority enrollment but could take race into account in vaguer ways to ensure academic diversity.

Supporters of affirmative action reacted with alarm to the court’s decision to hear the case. “I think it’s ominous,” said Lee Bollinger, the president of Columbia University, who as president of the University of Michigan was a defendant in the Grutter case. “It threatens to undo several decades of effort within higher education to build a more integrated and just and educationally enriched environment.”

Opponents saw an opportunity to strike a decisive blow on an issue that had partly faded from view. “Any form of discrimination, whether it’s for or against, is wrong,” said Hans von Spakovsky, a legal fellow at the Heritage Foundation, who added that his daughter was applying to college. “The idea
that she might be discriminated against and not be admitted because of her race is incredible to me.”

Arguments in the new case are likely to be heard just before the presidential election in November, and they may force the candidates to weigh in on a long dormant and combustible issue that has divided the electorate. There was little immediate reaction from the campaign trail and in official Washington on Tuesday, which may be attributable to the political risks the issue presents to both Democrats and Republicans.

Some polls show that a narrow majority of Americans support some forms of affirmative action, though much depends on how the question is framed, and many people have at least some reservations.

The new case, Fisher v. University of Texas, No. 11-345, was brought by Abigail Fisher, a white student who says the University of Texas denied her admission because of her race. The case has idiosyncrasies that may limit its reach, but it also has the potential to eliminate diversity as a rationale sufficient to justify any use of race in admission decisions — the rationale the court endorsed in the Grutter decision. Diversity, Justice Sandra Day O’Connor wrote, encourages lively classroom discussions, fosters cross-racial harmony and cultivates leaders seen as legitimate. But critics say there is only a weak link between racial and academic diversity.

The Grutter decision allowed but did not require states to take account of race in admissions. Several states, including California and Michigan, forbid the practice, and public universities in those states have seen a drop in minority admissions. In other states and at private institutions, officials generally look to race and ethnicity as one factor among many, leading to the admission of significantly more black and Hispanic students than basing the decisions strictly on test scores and grades would.

A Supreme Court decision forbidding the use of race in admission at public universities would almost certainly mean that it would be barred at most private ones as well under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which forbids racial discrimination in programs that receive federal money. In her majority opinion in Grutter, Justice O’Connor said the day would come when “the use of racial preferences will no longer be necessary” in admission decisions to foster educational diversity. She said she expected that day to arrive in 25 years, or in 2028. Tuesday’s decision to revisit the issue suggests the deadline may arrive just a decade after Grutter.

The court’s membership has changed since 2003, most notably with the appointment of Justice Samuel A. Alito Jr., who replaced Justice O’Connor
in 2006. Justice Alito has voted with the court’s more conservative justices in decisions hostile to government use of racial classification.

Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. has been particularly skeptical of government programs that take account of race. “Racial balancing is not transformed from ‘patently unconstitutional’ to a compelling state interest simply by relabeling it ‘racial diversity,’ ” he wrote in a 2007 decision limiting the use of race to achieve integration in public school districts.

Justices Alito, Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas agreed. Justice Anthony M. Kennedy, the court’s swing justice, also voted to invalidate the programs. But he was less categorical, sharply limiting the role race could play in children’s school assignments but stopping short of forbidding school districts from ever taking account of race. Still, Justice Kennedy has never voted to uphold an affirmative action program.

In Texas, students in the top 10 percent of high schools are automatically admitted to the public university system, a policy that does not consider race but increases racial diversity in part because so many high schools are racially homogenous. Ms. Fisher just missed that cutoff at her high school in Sugar Land, Tex., and then entered a separate pool of applicants who can be admitted through a complicated system in which race plays an unquantified but significant role. She sued in 2008.

Ms. Fisher is soon to graduate from Louisiana State University. Lawyers for the University of Texas said that meant she had not suffered an injury that a court decision could address, meaning she does not have standing to sue.

Ms. Fisher’s argument is that Texas cannot have it both ways. Having implemented a race-neutral program to increase minority admissions, she says, Texas may not supplement it with a race-conscious one. Texas officials said the additional effort was needed to make sure that individual classrooms contained a “critical mass” of minority students.

The lower federal courts ruled for the state. Chief Judge Edith Jones of the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, dissenting from the full appeals court’s decision not to rehear Ms. Fisher’s case, was skeptical of state officials’ rationale. “Will classroom diversity ‘suffer’ in areas like applied math, kinesiology, chemistry, Farsi or hundreds of other subjects if, by chance, few or no students of a certain race are enrolled?” she asked.

Justice Elena Kagan disqualified herself from hearing the case, presumably because she had worked on it as solicitor general.
Colleges Worry That Court Could Make Diversity Harder to Maintain

By TAMAR LEWIN

The news that the Supreme Court is revisiting the use of race as a factor in admissions decisions, just nine years after upholding it in a University of Michigan case, has admissions officials worried about maintaining diversity and confounded that the question is being reconsidered so soon.

“Nine years, when you’re talking about a decision of this magnitude, it really took me aback,” said Tom Parker, the dean of admissions at Amherst College. “What happens with the next president, the next Supreme Court appointee? Do we revisit it again, so that higher education is zigging and zagging? If the court says that any consideration of race whatsoever is prohibited, then we’re in a real pickle. Bright kids have no interest in homogeneity. They find it creepy.”

While a handful of states have laws banning affirmative action, most colleges and universities seeking a diverse student body do consider race in admissions, said Ada Meloy, general counsel of the American Council on Education.

“You can’t give extra points or say you’re looking for three more black students,” she said. “That would be dangerous. But reviewing the entirety of an application, colleges and universities that use holistic admissions talk about, ‘Here’s this person, from this part of the country, who went to this kind of high school, is of this ethnicity and would bring these qualities.’”

And if they could no longer be allowed to do that, admissions officials say, it would be impossible to maintain their current level of diversity.

“We do focus on socioeconomic status and other factors, and they’re helpful, but without race-conscious admissions, I don’t think we could get the same results,” said Stephen Farmer, vice provost at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

“I don’t think any school has ever found a way to remain as racially diverse as it already is in the absence of the practices outlined in the Grutter case,” he added, referring to the Supreme Court’s 2003 decision that public colleges could take race into consideration.
The change would be noticeable, he and others said.

“The University of Michigan case restored the ability of institutions to do a vastly better job of forming their incoming classes by allowing them to bring race and ethnicity into the big picture,” said Barmak Nassirian, a spokesman for Accrao, a group of college registrars and admissions officials. “If you eliminate that possibility, that discretion, don’t be surprised if what you see is significant instances of segregation at some of our finest institutions.”

In December, the Obama administration issued guidelines urging colleges and universities to find ways to increase their racial diversity, by, among other things, looking at students’ socioeconomic profiles or granting preferences to students from certain schools based on their demographics.

Higher education groups and institutions, by the dozens, supported the University of Michigan in its quest to be allowed to consider race as a factor in admissions. But after decades of legal challenges and court decisions — with more to come — affirmative action remains a divisive political issue.

Inevitably, some of that heat spills over to the campus. At dozens of universities across the nation — including, in September, the University of California, Berkeley — Republican or conservative student groups have kept the issue at the boiling point with “affirmative action bake sales,” where the price for cupcakes or cookies is based on race, with whites charged more than blacks, Hispanics or native Americans.

Some institutions have blocked such bake sales, bowing to complaints that the price differences are inherently racist and that the sales create an unwelcoming campus atmosphere. But, wrote Shawn Lewis, president of the Berkeley College Republicans, “It is no more racist than giving an individual an advantage in college admissions based solely on their race or gender.”