East Carolina University's Marching Pirates, armed with an assortment of big heads including announcer Dick Vitale and coaches Jeff Lebo and Heather Macy, try to distract a Central Florida shooter during a recent game at Minges Coliseum. (Aileen Devlin/The Daily Reflector)

Big heads becoming familiar faces in crowd at ECU games
By Kim Grizzard
Tuesday, February 28, 2012

Whether the Pirates win or lose the last home basketball games of the season, ECU freshman Matthew Scarborough wants the coach’s head.

It’s nothing personal. Scarborough is a huge fan, which is why he likes waving the head coach’s head around at home games.

College basketball’s big head trend — those king-sized cutouts of celebrities and sports figures — has struck a chord with East Carolina’s pep band this season. It’s not unusual for fans watching the band to see the faces of ESPN’s Dick Vitale, WWE’s Vince McMahon — even Betty White. (She really is everywhere.)

In the second half, when a player from the opposing team steps up to the free-throw line, Stewie from “Family Guy” rears his ugly head. Basketball pep band members like Nate Ricer, a sophomore from Charlotte, reach for giant photos like those of ECU coaches Jeff Lebo and Heather Macy and start waving them in the air.

“You’ll see a sea of heads come from the pep band,” Jacob Daniel, a freshman from Pinehurst, said. “It’s really a sight to see.”

First seen at San Diego State nearly a decade ago, big heads are said to be the brainchild of Conor Mongan, who created the first one of Michael Jackson. The off-the-wall posters began catching on across the country, featuring everybody from Siegfried and Roy to Andre the Giant.
But they were not a big trend at ECU until Lebo was hired in the spring of 2010.

“When Lebo came here, they (Auburn University) sent the head with Lebo,” Scarborough said. “It’s kind of like a tradition.”

For his part, Lebo hasn’t let it go to his head that there’s a 4-foot likeness of his face being waved around the stands.

“I don’t know how I got to be the first one, why they pick who they pick,” he said. “There’s no way to make my head look good, so it doesn’t matter what they put up.”

Band members believe it does matter. Though there are no statistics available on whether waving big heads affects free-throw percentages, Scarborough thinks it can be an effective distraction.

“You just try to be as loud and distracting as possible,” he said. “It’s more personal in basketball because you’re right up in their face. They can’t help but see us.”

The big heads are hard to miss. There’s a skull and crossbones and PeeDee the Pirate.

There’s even one of C-Bass, an ECU graduate so well known for his presence at Pirate basketball games that he was voted the Conference USA ultimate fan in 2009.

All season long, new heads have been popping up. Band members don’t take credit for the phenomenon. In fact, the growth of the trend has some scratching their heads.

“We don’t know where they come from,” Scarborough said. “They just drop them off at the ticket office or give it to the band director.”

Quietly heading up the effort has been Scott Wetherbee, ECU’s assistant athletics director for marketing and ticket operations. After Wetherbee and his colleagues noticed the way students responded to the larger-than-life Lebo photo, they started putting their heads together to come up with new faces to add to the crowd.

“They get a good laugh thinking, ‘Who are they going to have this week?’” Wetherbee said. “The idea was more entertainment and fun than anything else.”
The heads aren’t cheap. The 2-foot-tall version runs $25-$30, with 4-foot heads costing anywhere from $75-$100. But Wetherbee considers it a small price for creating an atmosphere.

Daniel agrees. He said band members have gotten no complaints from any fans about the posters blocking their view, only requests from some who want to use their heads.

“It’s all in good fun,” he said. “When we play teams we haven’t played before and they see these heads, the look on their faces is just priceless.”

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Editorial: Learn from Ohio school tragedy
Tuesday, February 28, 2012

In a few days, the nation will likely forget about the tragedy that befell the community Chardon, Ohio, on Monday morning when a high school student opened fire in the cafeteria, killing one classmate and wounding four more. The dead will be mourned, the injured wished a speedy recovery and the town slowly confined to memory — until the next school shooting.

While incidents like the one in Chardon are rare, they require consideration, especially for the protection of students attending schools in Pitt County. It should remind this community that a well versed plan of response is as important as outreach to these girls and boys who may be less capable of enduring the rigors of the classroom and need special attention.

Preliminary reports about Monday’s violence offer the all-too-familiar tale of a disaffected teenager, bullied to a breaking point, who lashes out at his fellow students in deadly fashion. There is evidence that the student warned of his isolation and the potential for taking drastic action. And there are stories of courage, as well, of teachers responding both swiftly and selflessly to stop the carnage.

Such horror has not visited this community — pray it never does — though Pitt County should count itself fortunate. As recently as this month a student was arrested and charged for bringing a weapon to school, and that has happened several times prior. Consider, as well, that only three months have passed since East Carolina University went into lockdown over fears of an on-campus gunman.

That incident showed the type of reaction expected from school officials, a response that values safety and speed. East Carolina learned from the 2007 Virginia Tech killings that, like the 1999 murders at Columbine High School, showed the importance of a rapid response. Pitt County Schools has surely taken that lesson to heart as well.

However, if the shooter in this case is as has been described — a loner and outcast who was bullied to a breaking point by classmates — then it also serves to highlight the problem of intimidation and abuse seen in the classroom, particularly in high school. And it offers an important reminder
that listening to these boys and girls about their emotional roller coaster may help to stave off this type of violence before it unfolds.

When these events happen, it is critical they be probed for clues that can help keep local schools safe. Pitt County can ill afford to forget any lesson that might prevent such tragedy here.
Another Republican candidate for governor

The Republican primary field for governor continues to become more crowded.

Jim Mahan, 73, who owns a real estate company, American Group in Denver, N.C., planned to file to the Republican nomination.

Mahan said he would campaign on the platform of returning prayer to the public school, restoring full employment, promoting the housing/real estate industry, run a health campaign to encourage people to lose weight, and increase teacher pay to make it the national leader.

Mahan said he planned to run a positive campaign, that will avoid negative campaigning. He is a former class president at East Carolina University and a former college and tennis player at Lees McRae College. He is also a former school teacher.

He is the fifth candidate in the GOP primary. The others are former Charlotte Mayor Pat McCrory, James Harney of Fayetteville, Paul Wright, a Wayne County attorney, and Charles Kenneth Moss of Randleman.
UNC-Chapel Hill will test emergency sirens today

The Associated Press

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is scheduled to test its emergency sirens as part of a campus-wide safety awareness campaign.

The test is scheduled for today between noon and 1 p.m.

Officials say anyone outside on or near campus may hear the sirens, which will sound an alert tone along with a brief pre-recorded public address message. When testing is complete, a different siren tone and voice message will signal all clear.

During the test, the school also will send test text messages - one when the sirens sound along with a second one to mark the all clear - to more than 50,000 cell phone numbers registered by students, faculty and staff in the online campus directory. Of those numbers, more than 28,500 belong to students.
Chancellor Charlie Nelms, right, teaches freshmen, from left, Jowan Council, Dennison Phifer and Desmond Boone how to tie a necktie Monday during the Ties of Honor Campaign at N.C. Central University in Durham.

Saunders: Attire taught at NCCU

BY BARRY SAUNDERS - Staff Writer

DURHAM–Know the old Bible verse that goes, "What doth it profit a man to gain the whole world if he loses his soul?"

Here's an updated one: What doth it profit a man to have a great education from an esteemed university if he can't get past the HR department because he looks like a bum?

Want to bet that more jobs have been lost because an applicant didn't know how to present himself for the interview than because he was stupid or didn't know how to interface a media file extension, whatever that means?

N.C. Central University Chancellor Charlie Nelms is trying to ensure that NCCU alumni don't have that problem. On Monday night, Nelms and other members of the university's faculty met with male students to provide them with neckties, to teach them how to tie a tie and, more importantly, when to know a tie is called for.
Kevin Rome, vice chancellor for student affairs, called the event "an informal, fun setting to teach them and let them get to know the chancellor and the staff."

Behind the fun, though, he said, were some important lessons.

"We're also teaching them to make sure their shoes are shined, their suit is pressed, when they go on job interviews," Rome said. "It's the little things like that that a potential employer will look at and make a huge assumption about you and your work ethic."

Go ahead and smirk at the idea of a university teaching something many of us learned to do in grade school. Before you do, though, realize that not everyone has had the same advantages you had. Like a daddy.

A lot of the male students, Rome said, "may be like I was and may have grown up without a father in the home."

Rome said he learned to tie a tie the way many young people learn everything these days: "On YouTube.com," he said.

Hmmph. That sounds like cheating. When I started wearing bowties because columnist Chuck Stone wore them, the Internet hadn't even been conceived. That meant I had to start getting dressed for dressy events an hour earlier than usual because it would take that long to get a presentable knot.

Rome said, "I wear bowties exclusively, and Chancellor Nelms didn't know how to tie one. ... He said, 'Kevin, you should have something to teach students how to tie a tie.'"

In addition to teaching them to tie different knots - I still can't get that little dimple thing in mine - and when to wear one, NCCU is providing ties and suits to the students who need them. Rome said suits donated to the school's Shepherd's Closet program are provided to students in need.

The School of Business requires its students to dress up at least once a week, and it often has events that require students to dress in business attire, Rome said.

More universities ought to adopt such a full-service approach to education as NCCU has and impart knowledge on etiquette and general comportment.

Trust me: Sending forth grads with bad table manners - or who answer their cellphones in an interview - can be just as damming to your school's reputation as an ill-tied tie.

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William & Mary ditches its traditional viewbook

By Jenna Johnson

When the College of William & Mary admission staff decided to redesign the brochure it mails to prospective students, they wanted something different. Something eye-catching, memorable. Something high-schoolers wouldn’t throw away.

"We wanted people to open the mailbox and say, ‘Viewbook... viewbook... viewbook... spaceship!’” said Dean of Admission Henry R. Broaddus.

As I talk with college admissions officials, I keep hearing about their attempts to move away from “three and tree” — brochures that prominently feature a photo of three diverse students studying under a tree on a gorgeous sunny day. The universal thinking seems to be that today’s college-bound teens want something that stands out in the mailbox, that speaks to them without using marketing-speak and that points them to an interactive online feature.

Many of the viewbooks that land in my mailbox look more like a coffee table book or magazine than a brochure. With their funky photos, edgy...
design, unusual color palettes and one-word headlines, these viewbooks look like something you might find on a bookshelf at Urban Outfitters.

The University of Maryland, Baltimore County, just published comic-book-style brochures and a Web site that features students dressed as superheroes. American University, which branded itself as being a home to “wonks,” hands out artsy seven-by-seven-inch square books. Flipping through the viewbook for Loyola University Maryland is like reading a well-designed teen magazine that plots dry statistics and facts on colorful graphics.

In William and Mary’s deck of cards, the language is casual, inside-ish and a little nerdy. For example, a card labeled “Home & Away” features a photo from move-in day and reads, in part: “At some point during your second week at William & Mary, you’re going to be at the IHOP with some hallmates... and you’re going to say it. ‘Let’s go home.’ You won’t be referring to your parents’ split-level ranch in Bethesda. You’ll be talking about Barrett, where you and a stranger from Idaho (now your second-best friend) share 345 square feet of barely contained chaos.”

“The voice on those cards is very strong. It’s authentic,” Broaddus said. As staffers edited some of the cards, they wondered, “Is it too inside? I don’t think so. I think we pulled that off.”

The most talked-about card in the pack (at least in our office) is labeled “Naked & Friendly” and features a photo of the school’s mascot, The Griffin, who appears to be giggling. The Griffin was once criticized by W&M alum Jon Stewart on the Daily Show for not wearing any pants. While some schools might be offended by such a slam, William and Mary promises students that at August move-in they will be “greeted by a pants-less Griffin.”

“Jon Stewart, being an alum. We can’t claim that often enough,” Broaddus said.
How Affirmative Action Backfires at Universities

The policy of placing students with better-prepared peers ultimately makes classrooms less diverse. Here's why

By Heather Mac Donald

The Supreme Court announced last week that it would hear a challenge to the University of Texas’ use of racial preferences in undergraduate admissions. Since the court last reviewed college affirmative action in 2003, a body of empirical research has emerged showing that racial preferences can hurt their purported beneficiaries by catapulting them into schools for which they are inadequately prepared. Placed in classrooms pitched above their current level of knowledge, they learn less than they would if they were among peers whose academic skills more closely mirror their own. This “mismatch” effect is particularly relevant to the University of Texas case, Fisher v. University of Texas, because the university claims that it needs to admit students according to race in order to achieve “classroom diversity.” Mismatch theory predicts — correctly — that using racial preferences will have the opposite effect.

Here are the details: black and Hispanic undergraduates at the University of Texas cluster in certain programs like education and are only minimally present in more challenging majors, according to the Fifth Circuit opinion upholding Texas’ policy. A study out of Duke University demonstrates how this happens. Black freshmen arrive at Duke overwhelmingly planning to major in natural sciences and economics, but over half of them drop out of those fields and switch to the humanities and soft social sciences, leaving the hard sciences largely the province of whites and Asians. Whether a Duke student will switch out of the hard sciences is wholly a function of his incoming academic qualifications, measured by SATs and high school GPA, black students whose academic qualifications match those of their white and Asian peers are no more likely to drop out of quantitative fields than other students. The average black SAT score at Duke, however, is over one standard deviation below those of whites and Asians, thanks to the university’s use of racial preferences, and it is those preference beneficiaries who are exiting the science classes in disproportionate numbers. Had they instead found themselves in a freshman chemistry class geared toward
learners with similar academic backgrounds as their own, they would have been far more likely to persist in their science careers, as the success of historically black colleges in graduating science majors demonstrates.

The Duke findings accord with common sense — none of us with middling math skills is going to be able to keep up or even feel comfortable at MIT — and they have been replicated in a variety of contexts. Freshmen with credentials more than one standard deviation below their science peers at the University of California are half as likely to end up with science degrees as similar students attending schools where their credentials are closer to those of their classmates, according to a working paper by UCLA law professor Richard Sander and statistician Roger Bolus. Kenyan students in tracked classes learn more than students in academically heterogeneous classes where their academic skills are far from the mean, MIT economist Esther Duflo and colleagues at UCLA and Harvard have shown. Black law students have a much harder time passing the bar than white students with similar LSATs because the black students are much more likely to have been snatched up by elite law schools and placed in faster-paced classes than they are ready for.

Even the Fifth Circuit acknowledged the mismatch effect. The University of Texas’ practice of accepting all students from the top 10% of their high school class, no matter how academically weak those schools are, has further widened the “credentials gap” between minority and nonminority students, judge Patrick Higginbotham observed. That gap in turn “risks driving away matriculating minority students from difficult majors like business or the sciences,” he wrote, making Texas’ goal of “classroom diversity” as elusive as ever.

Several amicus briefs seeking Supreme Court review of the Fifth Circuit opinion in Fisher v. University of Texas brought mismatch theory to the court’s attention (here and here). If the court invalidates Texas’ racial preferences, expect mismatch research to play a significant role in its reasoning. The burden will then shift to advocates of affirmative action to justify their claim that racial preferences are a boon to their recipients, but so far, they have failed to make that case.

Mac Donald is a John M. Olin Fellow at the Manhattan Institute and a contributing editor to City Journal. The views expressed are solely her own.