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Official: Think beyond borders
By Jackie Drake
The Daily Reflector
Tuesday, March 2, 2010
It’s about more than a border and who is allowed to be on what side — it’s about a partnership between two cultures and working together to meet the needs of society.
That was one of the key points made by Carlos Flores Vizcarra on Tuesday at St. James United Methodist Church during an event hosted by the East Carolina University College of Human Ecology. Vizcarra is the consul general of Mexico to the Carolinas. Appointed in 2009 by Mexico President Felipe Calderon, Vizcarra provides guidance and resources on Mexican affairs to Mexicans and others in North Carolina and South Carolina from the consulate in Raleigh.
Tuesday’s talk focused on population trends, their economic impact across the United States and Mexico, and how those factors affect the opportunities and challenges for Mexicans in North Carolina.
“We are excited to hold this event, and we think that it is an important one for eastern North Carolina,” said Linda Carawan, assistant professor in ECU’s School of Social Work and one of the planning committee members. “This is a great learning opportunity for our students and the community. I think it will have a positive impact. The more we learn, the better job we can do addressing the needs of all community members. We also need to recognize the knowledge and gifts Latinos provide to the overall community.”
Shelia Bunch, interim director of the School of Social Work, said the College of Human Ecology works to promote diversity among faculty, students and the community.
“Each of the six schools or units within the college are charged with sponsoring a diversity event during the year,” Bunch said. “This month it’s the School of Social Work’s turn, and we chose March because it is also Social Work Awareness Month.”
Vizcarra’s audience included ECU students interested in pursuing social work and reaching out to the Mexican-American community. “I believe in today’s world we need more social initiatives,” he said. “There have been so many advances in other fields like technology and communications and finance; we need to bring up social work as well.”
A study by the University of North Carolina Kenan Center estimated that there were 600,913 Hispanics in North Carolina in 2004. The Pew Hispanic Center estimated 636,000 Hispanics lived in the state in 2007.
According to the U.S. Census, North Carolina has the fastest-growing Latino population in the country — increasing 394 percent from 1990 to 2000. That trend is expected to continue when the 2010 Census results are announced.
“We are seeing that Mexicans are moving away from the traditional gateway states in the Southwest like California and Texas and moving to the mid-Atlantic states,” Vizcarra said, “because it is less expensive and there is less competition and more economic opportunity.”

The idea that undocumented immigrants do not contribute to the economy and do nothing but use up resources is a misguided one, he said.

“Immigrants collectively earn $240 billion a year and pay $9 billion in taxes and only take $5 billion in benefits,” Vizcarra said. “They contribute billions to the local economy through consumer spending. They do not take more than they give.”

The UNC study estimated that “Hispanics contributed $9.2 billion to the state’s economy but cost the state more than they pay for public schools, health care and corrections.”

Vizcarra stressed that immigration from Mexico is not a threat to the United States. The Mexican government supports making immigration “all documented, legal and orderly” so immigrants can fare better in their new country, according to Vizcarra.

One of the biggest challenges facing Mexicans in North Carolina is that they are often living in a “state of insecurity and fear” and are “isolated by the system.”

“They need a voice to speak for them,” he said.

More recourses are needed for families torn apart by deportation, Vizcarra said.

One of the solutions, he suggested, is more widespread and thorough teaching of languages in schools.

“You have so many people going between the U.S. and Canada and Mexico. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if all three nations could speak all three languages?” Vizcarra asked.

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ECU

East Carolina University will host Michael Les Benedict, professor emeritus at The Ohio State University and a constitutional scholar, at 7:30 p.m. today in Room 0C-209 of the Science and Technology Building. Benedict will present “The First Question: Constitutional Politics in the Gilded Age,” discussing a time when people considered almost every political question to involve constitutional issues, when the constitutional authority to enact laws was “the first question” to be decided and when the people decided how the Constitution should be interpreted.

The presentation is sponsored by Charles W. Calhoun, ECU professor of history and the 2009 Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences Distinguished Professor. Contact Calhoun in the Department of History at 328-6666 or at calhounc@ecu.edu.
Local officials take time out for children

The Pitt County Association of Educators sponsored a Read Across America event Tuesday at the Boys & Girls Club on Fire Tower Road.

The event included readings by N.C. Sen. Don Davis and state Reps. Marian McLawhorn and Edith Warren, along with Pitt County Schools Superintendent Beverly Reep and members of the Board of Education.

In addition, a drama group from East Carolina University presented a skit based on some Dr. Seuss characters.

Read Across America is a national event that is sponsored by the NEA in conjunction with the birthday of the late Theodor Geisel, also known as Dr. Seuss. For more information, visit www.nea.org/readacross.

A GROUP of girls look at the illustrations in a Dr. Seuss book.
Off-target tuition increases

BY JAY SCHALIN
AND JENNA ASHLEY ROBINSON

A controversy is brewing over University of North Carolina tuition hikes. And there's plenty of bad behavior to go around.

Last summer, the legislature decided to raise in-state UNC tuitions for the 2010-11 school year by either $200 or 8 percent, whichever amount is the least on each campus. This comes out to an average increase of approximately 7.2 percent for all 16 undergraduate-degree-granting institutions in the UNC system. Unlike most tuition raises, the additional revenues will not go directly to the schools, but will instead become part of the state's general appropriations fund. This year, the university system received 14.2 percent of general fund expenditures.

The legislators' plan is "creative taxation." They saw a pot of money that belonged to somebody else -- students and their parents -- and decided to take it for their own purposes because they can. This sort of behavior is usually frowned upon in proper company.

The UNC system administration is fighting to prevent the legislature from taking that money. However, the system is not exactly coming to the rescue of the students. Instead, it wants to take a slightly smaller pot of money from them for its own pet projects.

UNC's counter-proposal includes a tuition increase that will average approximately 5.2 percent at all campuses. This money will go to the universities rather than to the general fund. But only 25 percent will be devoted to academic programs.

The rest will be used mostly for students who do not pay tuition at all -- 50 percent will go for need scholarships, while the remaining 25 percent will be used to expand programs to improve "graduation and retention." These programs are used to help get students who are academically unprepared for college up to speed. The students who participate in such programs are generally on need scholarships as well.

UNC's proposal is intended to increase "access" to higher education. But scholarships funded by raising tuition do not increase overall access. Rather, they make college more accessible for low-income residents while decreasing accessibility for the tuition-paying middle-class -- a classic example of wealth redistribution.

Understandably, the UNC Association for Student Governments (ASG) is also battling the legislature's tuition plan. The student organization, which represents UNC students in general, has circulated a petition with over 20,000 signatures that decries the legislature's plan as a "backdoor tax increase on students and their families to balance the state's budget."

However, the ASG is oddly in favor of the universities' proposal to raise tuitions nearly as much -- even though it also hurts students and their families.

ASG president Greg Doucette recently declared that "all the students are on board" with the tuition hike -- obviously overstated rhetoric.

In November of 2009, students at UNC-Chapel Hill protested when the trustees voted to raise tuition by 5.2 percent. And some students are not happy about paying for others' educations. N.C. State student Quentin Farmer emailed the Pope Center to say he was adamantly against "the plan to use 50 percent of the tuition increase only to benefit students on need-based grants." He said "this policy hurts thousands of students who don't qualify for financial aid, but are still struggling to pay for college themselves."

Furthermore, the petition does not reveal what the administration's plans are, only that "the money raised through higher tuition rates should go back to the students through higher University funding." This omission of the administration's intent could be misleading to students asked to sign the petition.

Maybe everybody involved needs to be taken to the woodshed -- the legislature, the university system and the ASG. And they should then go back to the drawing board. There are countless alternatives better than either existing proposal.

For instance, tuition increases could be limited to the amount needed to maintain academic quality, helping out the tuition-paying students. Or the legislature could take it easy on the people who really foot the bill, the taxpayers who provide some of the nation's most generous higher education subsidies. In this scenario, UNC schools could raise tuitions and keep the money, but only if their state funding was cut by the amount of revenue produced. The savings could then be passed on to the public with tax cuts.

A prolonged economic downturn is no time for politicians and bureaucrats to be picking the pockets of students and taxpayers to pay for their profligate ways.

Jay Schalin is a senior writer for the Pope Center for Higher Education Policy. Jenna Ashley Robinson is the Pope Center's Campus Outreach Coordinator.
House to hear Muslim chaplain

Duke University's Muslim chaplain will deliver the opening prayer for the U.S. House of Representatives today, an honor few clergy, and even fewer Muslim clergy, get.

Abdullah Antepli, appointed the university's first full-time Muslim chaplain in 2008, was invited to give the 10 a.m. prayer by Rep. David Price, a Democrat from Chapel Hill.

The Turkish-born chaplain is one of a dozen Muslim chaplains at U.S. universities, of which only a handful are full-time staff members. He directs religious programs for Duke's Muslim students and teaches in the Duke Divinity School and the Duke Islamic Studies Center.

Antepli said Price called the Duke Islamic Studies Center a few months ago and asked for a meeting with faculty members. The two developed a friendship that led to the invitation.

Each member of Congress is allowed to nominate one clergy person per session to give the opening prayer. North Carolina's congressional delegation has frequently taken advantage of the guest chaplaincy program. Last year, the Rev. Michael Cummings, past president of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina and the first Native American to hold that post, was invited by Rep. Mike McIntyre, a Lumberton Democrat.

Guest chaplains are allowed no more than 150 words. Antepli said he was able to negotiate 188 words.

He said he will pray for members of Congress' health, and ask God to make their efforts to eliminate poverty, ignorance, hate and racism successful.

"I am deeply honored and humbled to be able to do this," said Antepli, 36. "It's wonderful that Congress, through their invitation, is acknowledging Duke's commitment to diversity and a pluralistic society."

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Graduates Fault Advice of Guidance Counselors

By JACQUES STEINBERG

Most people who graduated from high school in the last dozen years believe that their guidance counselors provided little meaningful advice about college or careers, a new study has found. And many said the best advice on their futures came from teachers.

“Most young adults who go on to college believe that the advice of their high school guidance counselors was inadequate and often impersonal and perfunctory,” according to the study by Public Agenda, a nonprofit research organization.

“Most troubling, and potentially significant for policy makers,” the study added, “is that young people who characterized their interactions with guidance counselors as anonymous and unhelpful were less likely to go directly from high school into a postsecondary program.”

The researchers surveyed 600 people who graduated from a variety of high schools across the country in the last 4 to 12 years. The study was sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which has sought to shed light on low completion rates at both the high school and college levels.

As the study notes, counselors’ caseloads and responsibilities have only grown in recent years. While the American School Counselor Association considers a ratio of 100 students to each counselor to be “optimal,” according to the report, that ratio is closer to 1,000 to 1 in California’s public schools; 700 to 1 in Arizona, Minnesota, Utah and the District of Columbia;
and 265 to 1 nationally.

"It is also important to remember that advising students on higher education choices is just one of many things that guidance counselors do," the researchers wrote, adding that "much of their effort is devoted to discipline issues and sorting out scheduling and other administrative mix-ups within the high school."

In an interview, Jim Jump, a high school college counselor who is the president of the National Association for College Admission Counseling, echoed the report’s findings in expressing his concern that “so many other things are tossed on counselors’ plates that actual counseling takes up a very small part of the time.”

Mr. Jump, the academic dean and director of guidance at St. Christopher's, a private school in Richmond, Va., added, “I worry that’s just going to get worse, as school districts encounter the economy and don’t see counselors as essential instructional personnel.”

In the study, 67 percent of those surveyed rated their counselor as “poor or fair” at “helping you decide what school was right for you”; 54 percent gave similar ratings to their counselors for “explaining and helping you with the application process,” and nearly half said their counselors made them feel “like I was just another face in the crowd.”

The survey had a margin of sampling error of plus or minus five percentage points.