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ECU officials adopting new 'road map' for future

By Josh Humphries
The Daily Reflector

Thursday, March 05, 2009

As East Carolina University continues to grow, officials will have adopted a new "road map" for the future.

The ECU Board of Trustees approved a plan called the Strategic Enrollment Management Task Force last week that will be used to guide the university into the future.

"It is a road map for us to examine our practices and policies and enrollment growth and make adjustments as necessary to sustain enrollment and enhance retention and graduation rates," said Judi Bailey, director of enrollment management at ECU.

The plan was crafted over the course of a year with input from faculty, staff and students.

It addresses enrollment issues on both the graduate and undergraduate level to make sure that as the number of students increases at ECU over the next decade that the growth is controlled, Bailey said.

ECU is expected to grow to more than 36,000 students by 2017, an increase of more than 10,000 students in 10 years.

Last year's freshman class of 4,516 was the largest in the school's history.

The freshman class for the fall of 2009 will not be as big, but it will be close, Bailey said.

The plan focuses on recommendations that are consistent with ECU Tomorrow and UNC Tomorrow, master plans for ECU and the University of North Carolina system, respectively.

Administrators also have to consider that 65 percent of ECU's students are from west of I-95 and determine what that means to the mission of the university.

The four main components of the plan address defining and embracing an access mission, improving student retention and graduation, determining an effective academic mix and making sure that the infrastructure of the university is correct.

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Relevant education

The name alone reveals part of the predicament.

These days, what most of us know as vocational education is being called career and technical education by public school officials.

It's only the latest tag for hands-on classes focused on skilled trades.

The reason for the different names is obvious. It's the stigma. Vocational education — learning engine repair, carpentry, tool and die making — is for those who can't cut it in tough academic courses that prepare students for four-year college.

At least, that seems to be a pretty pervasive belief among a lot of students and parents.

The reality out there in the job market doesn't jibe with those notions.

As new graduates of four-year, liberal arts colleges well know, some of those degrees and $3 will get you a cup of coffee at Starbucks right now.

Students moving through a machinist vocational education program at a high school and into a machinist and computer assisted design program at a community college will find something quite different upon graduation. Try a $45,000 job awaiting them. It's the same for health care-related programs.

Some state officials who want to increase vocational education offerings point to another advantage. They say students enrolled in the classes graduate from high school about 90 percent of the time. That compares to an overall graduation rate of about 70 percent.

Those numbers are behind an effort by state Sen. Harry Brown, an Onslow County Republican, to beef up vocational course offerings in low-performing schools. Brown plans to file a bill that would require more clusters of vocational courses in high schools which fail to graduate 60 percent of more of their seniors for two consecutive years.

Brown has some support for his idea.

State Schools Superintendent June Atkinson and two key House budget writers, Democrats Doug Yongue and Jim Crawford, turned out for a news conference where Brown announced his proposal.

Yongue is a former vocational education teacher and local schools superintendent. He noted that vocational education classes engage students and allow them to develop a real rapport with their teachers.

What's also clear is that the instruction makes it much easier for students to connect the dots between educational opportunity and career path.

A kid meandering through school — with vague notions about college, work and without the grades to put it together — is going to question the relevance of a high school education.

Policymakers who don't get that may be more dense than those students.

Maybe public schools need to adopt a new motto, one that James Carville might appreciate: It's the relevance, stupid.

Kids enrolled in vocational education course see the relevance of their education. They get it. That's why they're graduating.

Brown's idea might help. It's not nearly enough.

UNC-CH students remember Eve Carson

ANNE BLYTHE, Staff Writer
Comment on this story

CHAPEL HILL - Katherine Rieger never met Eve Carson, but the UNC-Chapel Hill senior's outlook on life changed a year ago when she learned the admired student body president had been shot to death.

"That's the biggest thing -- not knowing someone who completely changed my life," Rieger said. "In her 22 years, she did so much. She had so much passion, and she genuinely cared about people. It makes me think, 'OK, what am I doing right now? What am I doing to better my life, to better my community?' When I get frustrated about a bad grade or have a tiff with a friend, I kind of step back and remember Eve."

Rieger, a communications major from Charlotte, was among thousands gathered on campus
Thursday afternoon to remember Carson on the anniversary of her death.

Chancellor Holden Thorp recalled the eager and erudite student leader who took on adult missions and service projects while sprinkling exclamation points through e-mail messages as a giddy 10-year-old might.

Tears soaked the faces of the Clef Hangers, the student a cappella singing group, as they sang James Taylor's "Carolina In My Mind," the unofficial school anthem. Carson never missed a performance.

Students lingered afterward, embracing and promising to make marks on the world that might have made Carson proud. "For me, I try to make a conscious effort to tell people how much they mean to me," said Emily Marsland, a junior dramatic arts major from Raleigh. "A year ago, I might not have done that."

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By Anne Blythe

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UNC health care chief sees need for overhaul

SARAH AVERY, Staff Writer
Comment on this story

With an overhaul of health care the topic of discussion Thursday at the White House, we talked with William L. Roper, chief executive of the UNC Health Care System and dean of the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Medicine, about the prospects of changing the Americans health-care system.

Roper, a public health expert who headed the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention during the administration of George H.W. Bush, said he would like to see universal health coverage in some fashion -- he's not picky about the details. And he'd like to see it soon, he said, because the problem is growing dire.

Here are his thoughts:

Q: You have indicated that we need to broaden health insurance coverage to all Americans. Why?

A: We have approaching 50 million Americans who don't have health insurance, and because they lack health insurance they don't have full access to the health-care system. There is very strong evidence that their health is worse as a result. People are harmed, and we as a nation are hurt.

We should create a system of universal health-care coverage. We don't need to have one plan that covers everybody, but we do need to have everybody covered.

Q: So how would you like to see that take shape?

A: We have a lot of Americans covered under Medicare or Medicaid, others who are covered under private insurance, others through the VA and so on. Here at UNC Healthcare, we see a growing number of people every day who don't have health insurance, and this is a huge problem.
Tinkering around the edges is not the solution. We need a full-scale assault on health care ... and we can't take a very expensive program and make it more expensive. We have to do something about the cost. You could use that savings to buy coverage.

Q: Where do you see savings?

A: A lot of things done are not necessary, or are not guided by the best of medical evidence. There are administrative wastes in the system. Duplication and inefficiencies are rampant.

We don't use modern information technology in a widespread fashion to produce the quality and efficiency Americans deserve.

Q: You mention information technology, and the president has frequently cited electronic records as an efficiency. Explain how that might benefit people.

A: I'll answer with an anecdote. I ordered a lamp for my wife back in the fall from L.L. Bean, and ordered it online. She told me before it arrived that she wanted two of them. So I called the L.L. Bean 800 number, someone answered on the second ring and said, 'Mr. Roper.' I said yes, in a startled way, and they asked, 'What can I do for you?' ... Boom, that was it. From when I dialed to when I hung up wasn't more than 90 seconds. It was entirely satisfying.

Why can't we do that in health care? We expect that in business transactions but somehow have led ourselves to believe that health care is different. The paperwork is mindlessly complex, we're treated like social outcasts, we're disrespected at every turn. It doesn't need to be that way.

Q: You mentioned that UNC Healthcare is seeing a growing number of uninsured people. How much charity care is provided?

A: The amount of uncompensated care that we gave away -- from our costs, not charges -- was about $215 million last year, and the current year we are projecting $260 million to $270 million. We get an appropriation from the state that is $48 million a year for uncompensated care.

How do we make it work if we give away $270 million in care, and the state pays us $48 million? The only way is to charge our paying customers substantially more than what it costs to deliver their care.

That works if there are enough paying customers and few enough of nonpaying. The problem we're seeing now is both numbers are heading in the wrong direction.

We're seeing a softening in the number of paying customers, and we're seeing a tidal wave of North Carolinians who are coming to us without insurance.

Q: What do you give the chances of reform being adopted?

A: The way they're going about it is very sound. They will be charting some principles for reform and asking Congress to develop the details, instead of what happened in 1993 (during the Clinton Administration). They have a much better game plan this time. It's a huge and daunting task, but I'm optimistic.

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Open bids urged for health plan

Two groups also call for an independent audit of a State Health Plan contract awarded to Blue Cross and Blue Shield

DAN KANE, Staff Writer

Comment on this story

The State Employees Association of North Carolina and the N.C. Justice Center's Health Access Coalition on Thursday called for an independent audit of the State Health Plan's contract to administer claims.

Both groups also want the state to submit the contract to open bidding. Legislation passed in 2005 allowed the health plan to bypass the open-bid laws to select a company to administer a new preferred provider organization option. The plan then awarded the contract to Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina. Another law so far has been interpreted to keep many of the contract's details under wraps.

The News & Observer reported Saturday that Blue Cross received $97.5 million in the 2007-2008 fiscal year for administering the PPO plan and a second plan that is being phased out at the end of this year. Blue Cross processed 9.4 million claims, which means the company received more than $10 per claim.

Electronic Data Systems, the company handling claims for Medicaid, is receiving 57 cents per claim from the state.

A state audit in 2007 also found that Blue Cross charged an average of $4.88 per claim to manage a health plan for low-income children. At that time, EDS was averaging 41 cents per claim under the Medicaid contract, the audit said.

"The huge gap between what it costs to administer other state health programs and what Blue Cross charges for the State Health Plan for a similar service raises serious questions," said Adam Searing, director of the Health Access Coalition. "To properly serve both state plan members and taxpayers, an independent audit and public bidding process are necessary."

Blue Cross officials contend their contracts with the state require more work than what is done by EDS for Medicaid. Blue Cross, a nonprofit organization that is the state's largest health insurer, also said its profit margin on the PPO contract is less than a penny on the dollar. Health plan officials say administrative costs, which include Blue Cross' contracts, are in line with 12 other states.

Searing and SEANC Executive Director Dana Cope say an independent audit might determine whether the state is overpaying on the contracts. State legislative leaders have introduced a bill that would cost taxpayers roughly $580 billion to bail out the plan. The legislation also requires higher co-payments and deductibles that would be paid by the plan's roughly 667,000 state employees, teachers and retirees.
Cope said the plan's dealings with Blue Cross need more sunshine, given recent findings that the nonprofit group is being paid $20 million more each year under the PPO contract than plan officials had anticipated.

"While state purchasing agents are required to bid office furniture, it's ridiculous that the $100 million annual health plan contract is not openly bid for the best services and price available," Cope said.

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Professor: Sexism still evident in combat

March 4, 2009 by News Staff

By Mary Kelley

The relationship between women and war is one that remains unchanged, despite efforts to the contrary, said Anna Froula, an assistant professor of film studies at East Carolina University.

"Our society continues to fight sexism but it is still there in combat, which is supposed to be the last male right of passage. Women are seen as how they look and not what they are capable of doing," Froula said.
Froula’s lecture Wednesday was part of the Women and War Series sponsored by the UK’s Gender and Women Studies Program and Transylvania University’s Women's Studies Program. At the start of World War II women were encouraged to help out with the war and take over the jobs of men that left to fulfill their war duties, Froula said. Rosie the Riveter was considered an icon to women and seen as masculine.

The media during World War II poked fun at women who were helping during the war, Froula said. Movies during this time showed women longing for their husbands to get back from war so they could get back to their duties at home.

"It was not surprising to me how women were portrayed in war and advertisements before World War II, it was not a good thing but not surprising at all,“ said Anna Richmond an undecided sophomore at UK.

There are cartoons and ads today that depict the same image, Froula said. In a recent issue of the magazine Marie-Claire there were army wives shown, waiting for their husbands to get back, in a feminine portrayal. There have also been cartoons of Condoleezza Rice being masculine and questioning if she could hold her job as well as a man could, she said.

"These movies and ads sustain our militarized society, there is a feminist sense of proving themselves and at same time they are seen as being in a service of killing. " Froula said.

The next lecture in the Women and War Series will be Thursday at 4 p.m. in room 211 in the Student Center there is a talk given by history professor Francie Chassan-Lopez about women and war in Mexico during the 19th century.