THE DAILY CLIPS

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Alliance to hold 15 community forums

By Jackie Drake
The Daily Reflector
Tuesday, March 16, 2010

A new alliance will host 15 community engagement forums across the county during the next month to identify and address critical issues in order to make positive changes in the community. The Pitt County Impact Alliance, an open partnership convened by the United Way of Pitt County, will kick off the “Conversation on Community” forum series at 10 a.m. on March 27 in Bethel.

The hour-long interactive community forums will provide opportunities for residents across Pitt County to share their concerns about the needs and problems in their areas.

“This is truly a collaborative effort,” said James Wagner, director of public relations and community development for the United Way of Pitt County. “This will unite individuals, organizations, governments, businesses, schools and more across the county. It’s time to work together. Our goal is to enact substantial, targeted, measurable change.”

Forums will take place across the county on weekday evenings and Saturday mornings in Greenville, Winterville, Ayden, Farmville, Fountain, Grifton, Grimesland, Chocowinity and Belvoir. The forums also will serve as an opportunity for more individuals and entities to join the alliance, which includes Pitt County Memorial Hospital, the Greenville-Pitt County Chamber of Commerce, East Carolina University Colleges of Business and Human Ecology, Pitt Community College, Pitt County Schools, Pitt County Government, The Daily Reflector, Pitt Resource Connection, Greenville-Pitt Public Access Television and the United Way of Pitt County.

“The alliance will be the group doing all the work; United Way is just the facilitator,” Wagner said. “This is a countywide coalition that can address problems and help us focus on issues in the community.”

The forums will help guide the United Way’s focus on issues in the community as the organization switches to a community impact model.

“United Way of Pitt County has been active for 52 years, and for about 50 of those years, we had a traditional funding model where we raised money and allocated it to member agencies,” Wagner said.

The agencies did good work, Wagner said, but soon United Way began seeing that root problems remained.

“Separate organizations can help many individuals, but they cannot solve community-wide problems,” Wagner said. “In switching to a community impact model, we will form partnerships and pool resources. We’re now working more like a grant model where we fund programs, not agencies.

“The agency work was excellent, but we need to bring everyone together to get at the root of the problems,” Wagner said. “For example, we could fund beds at a homeless shelter, which we will
continue to do, but we will focus on why people are homeless and how we can keep them from becoming that way."

The forums will help identify such source issues in the community.

After compiling resident feedback from the forums, the alliance will convene April 29 to identify the most pressing needs and choose which ones to focus on.

All forums are open to the county residents:
March 27 at 10 a.m., Bethel Senior Center, 7406 Main St., Bethel.
March 29 at 7 p.m., Eppes Recreation Center, 400 Nash St.
March 30 at 7 p.m., Jaycee Park Auditorium, 2000 Cedar Lane.
March 30 at 7 p.m., Belvoir Fire Department, 4189 N.C. 33 West, Belvoir
April 6 at 7 p.m., Ayden Community Center, 4354 Lee St., Ayden
April 8 at 7 p.m., Grifton Town Hall, 528 Queen St., Grifton
April 12 at 7 p.m., Fountain Community Building, 3865 W. Wilson St.
April 13 at 6:30 p.m., Chicod School, 7557 N.C. 43 South.
April 15 at 7 p.m. at Boys & Girls Club Minges Unit, 621 W. Fire Tower Road.
April 17 at 10 a.m., Farmville Community Center, 3886 S. Main St.
April 20 at 7 p.m., Sadie Saulters Elementary, 1019 Fleming St.
April 22 at 7 p.m., Pitt County Community Schools & Recreation Building, 4561 County Home Road.
April 24 at 6 p.m., Winterville Police/Fire Building, 259 N. Railroad St.
April 26 at 7 p.m., Grimesland Fire Department, 4663 First St.
April 27 at 7 p.m., River Park North Science Center, 1000 Mumford Road.

At the conclusion of the forums, the Impact Alliance will meet from 8 a.m. to noon on April 29 at the East Carolina Heart Institute Conference Room A at 526 Moye Blvd.

Contact Jackie Drake at jdrake@reflector.com or (252) 329-9567.
FILE - This Jan. 27, 2010, file photo shows Charlotte basketball coach Bobby Lutz reacting to a call in the first half of an NCAA college basketball game against Temple, in Charlotte, N.C. Charlotte has fired coach Bobby Lutz after his 12th year was marred by a late-season collapse and a costly blunder in a first-round loss in the Atlantic 10 tournament. Chancellor Philip Dubois said in a statement Monday, March 15, 2010, that the move was in the "long-term interest of 49ers basketball and the university as a whole." (AP Photo/Chuck Burton)

Lutz's name emerges in ECU search
The Daily Reflector
Tuesday, March 16, 2010
East Carolina’s search for a new men’s basketball coach appears to be heating up. Rumors circulated on Tuesday that Bobby Lutz, who was fired Monday after 12 years at Charlotte, was spotted on the Pirates’ campus.
Also on Tuesday, ECU Director of Athletics Terry Holland posted a message on the school’s athletics Web site that discussed the search and seemed to indicate that Basketball Hall of Fame member Bobby Knight had been contacted about the position.
While Holland didn’t mention specific names of candidates in his online post, he did state that when he started his search he focused on assistant coaches with previous head coaching experience.
“One of those interviews developed into extensive positive conversations, but we were unable to keep those conversations going,” Holland wrote.
At the same time, Holland added that he took a “long-shot chance at a Hall of Fame coach who is now broadcasting.”

He stated that the conversations had positive results through last weekend.

“However, when I called him Monday to get his ‘final answer’ and he whispered into the telephone ‘Have to call you back, in the Cardinals’ dugout and we just lost to the Mets on a ninth inning home run,’ I knew that he was not coming back into college coaching,” Holland said. “He later confirmed that in an hour-long walk down memory lane after Tony LaRussa finally calmed down.”

While Holland didn’t mention Knight by name, the former Indiana and Texas Tech coach is a close friend of LaRussa’s and has spent time with the St. Louis Cardinals at spring training. Holland also mentioned that the numbers of candidates with head coaching experience has increased after several have been dismissed after not making a postseason tournament.

“This expansion is a double-edged sword as it also means more athletic directors are competing for the most attractive candidates in the pool,” Holland said. “There are several excellent candidates with ties to this area in the available pool at this time, and we are evaluating each through telephone and in-person interviews.”

Lutz, who is Charlotte’s winningest coach with a 218-158 record, was fired after a 19-12 campaign that saw the 49ers miss the NCAA tournament for the fifth straight season. According to Associated Press reports, Lutz, who is scheduled to make about $600,000 this season, is due another $948,000 over the next four years unless he accepts another head coaching job.
Unrequited life: Hunt for otherworldly aliens
The search continues, lonely but hopeful

BY SCOTT LAFEE, UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER
MONDAY, MARCH 15, 2010 AT 12:04 A.M.

The official Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence or SETI is 50 years old

And we are apparently still alone.

But that said, efforts to find evidence of life beyond Earth, intelligent or otherwise, have only broadened, deepened and become more determined over the years. "One of the things we've learned in the search for extraterrestrial life is that people get upset when you don't find it," said John Rummel, an astrobiologist at East Carolina University. "But you can't just go out and find life. First you have to find places where life can exist."

Which, of course, is what people like Rummel, who once held the title of "planetary protection officer" at NASA, are doing. There are planned and proposed missions to Mars to further explore its popular possibilities. There is much interest in certain moons in the solar system — Titan and Europa in particular — that are known to either possess water ice or perhaps hide a subsurface liquid ocean.

The presence of water is presumed to be a prerequisite for life to exist.

Beyond the solar system, at least 430 "exoplanets" have been identified, and the number is growing. Most of these are uninhabitable gas giants like Jupiter, but a few smaller exoplanets have been detected, and some researchers say it's only a matter of time before an exoplanet similar in mass to Earth is discovered.

Indeed, the cosmos is so large and crowded with interesting matter that many scientists contend Earth cannot be uniquely hospitable to life.

Astronomer Frank Drake at the Green Bank observatory in West Virginia, among the first sites for astrobiological research.

"Our sun is one of 100 billion stars in our galaxy," said the late Vernher von Braun, who helped launch the U.S. space program in the 1950s. "Our galaxy is one of billions of galaxies populating the universe. It would be the height of presumption to think that we are the only living things in that enormous immensity."

Still, says Dan Werthimer, chief scientist of the SETI@home project: "I tell people not to hold their breath."

There are at least two fundamental challenges to finding extraterrestrial life in the universe. One, you have to know where and how best to look for it.

Two, you have to recognize life when you see it.

It remains to be seen whether modern science can do either, now or in the future.

"We're limited in our thinking by our own technological standards," said astronomer and SETI founder Frank Drake, who also crafted the eponymous equation calculating the potential number of extraterrestrial civilizations in the Milky Way. (Because none of the factors in the equation has known values, there is no actual number, only a probability that it's greater than 1.)

Looking for life
At least as far back as the early 19th century, scientists have been concocting methods intended to communicate with any extraterrestrial civilization. The ideas were often creative, if not particularly plausible. They ranged from carving massive geometric symbols in the ground similar to the ancient Nazca lines in Peru to igniting large ditches filled with kerosene and erecting gigantic mirrors.

At the turn of the 19th century, pioneering inventors Nikola Tesla and Guglielmo Marconi both took a shot, each transmitting radio frequencies into space. Neither realized the frequencies were not powerful enough to escape the Earth's atmosphere. "They had no chance, but they couldn't know that at the time," said Drake.

Later efforts were only slightly less naive. In the 1950s, some researchers made preparations if aliens suddenly came calling: "They were standing by with their reel-to-reel machines," said Drake, "just in case it was possible to record the greetings of aliens."

The debut of SETI in 1960 marks the first fully dedicated, scientific attempt to search for evidence of extraterrestrial life, primarily through the detection of alien electromagnetic transmissions. Though the SETI Institute is based in Mountain View, the overall effort is widely distributed with coordinated projects and programs around the world, operated by universities, institutions and individual researchers. All are searching for essentially the same thing: a signal from a source that emanates from a single location, remains steady or regular and cannot be explained.

"We pick up signals all of the time," said Drake, "but they're all from Earth."

Still, there's plenty to do. SETI scientist Peter Backus notes that organized searching has examined fewer than 800 star systems in the galaxy, but that there are an estimated 1 million stars similar to the sun within 1,000 light-years of Earth. In 1999, Werthimer created SETI@home to help handle the astronomical number crunch. The popular experiment links private personal computers into a kind of combined supercomputer to analyze SETI data when the PCs are not being used. SETI@home now has more than 190,000 volunteer participants using 280,000 computers. Its combined average computational power equals 917 teraflops (617 trillion calculations per second), which makes it comparable to the world's fifth most powerful supercomputer.

Even so, alien hunters are looking for more help. China is building a radio telescope almost twice the size of the 1,001-foot-wide telescope in Arecibo, Puerto Rico. In the Cascade Mountains of Northern California, the Allen Telescope Array, a collection of 42 connected 20-foot radio dishes, is under construction. "The idea is to make a big radio telescope out of a bunch of little radio telescopes," said Werthimer. There have been proposals to build an observatory on the far side of the moon — the one place in the solar system where the Earth and its confusion of noisy signals cannot clutter the sky.

What life looks like

If astronomers or space-faring astronauts ever do discover life, they will likely have modest, perhaps microbial-sized, expectations.

"There's a public assumption that extraterrestrial life, if it exists, will look a lot like us and that intelligence is a natural product of evolution," said Linda Billings, a communications research professor at George Washington University and NASA consultant.

In 1984, scientists recovered a 4.5 billion-year-old Martian meteorite that had landed in Antarctica 13,000 years earlier. The 6-pound meteorite, ALH84001, became international news when some researchers hypothesized that it contained fossil evidence suggesting the past existence of primitive, bacteria-like organisms on Mars.

The largest of the purported fossils was less than 1/100th the diameter of a human hair. Most were 10 times smaller.

Other scientists scoffed, arguing that the evidence was actually inorganic, formed by Martian geology and chemistry, or the result of contamination by Earthbound organisms. The debate continues. "The important thing," said Fummi, "is not that anything was proven, but that nothing could be immediately disproven."

The obvious challenge, he said, is extrapolating modern science's limited understanding of life systems on Earth to other planets where possible life might operate by unknown or unimaginable rules. The fact is, said Gerald Joyce, a molecular biologist and chemist at The Scripps Research Institute in La Jolla, "there's no scientific definition of life on Earth."

The working assumption seems to be that if extraterrestrial life should someday appear, humans will recognize it as, well, extraterrestrial life. It is that astounding, if utterly remote, possibility that drives the labors and imaginations of Earthling alien hunters everywhere.

"In what other field of science," asked Paul Horowitz, an astrophysicist at Harvard University, "do you have a chance in a million (or more) to become the most famous person in the history of the world?"

Or worse.
But what if college just isn’t for everyone?

Needs of ‘forgotten half’ get increasing attention

By Mary Beth Markein
USA TODAY

WATERLOO, Wis. — Debbie Crave once assumed that all of her children would go to college. Then she had kids.

Son Patrick is a junior at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Debbie’s alma mater, and plans to one day help manage the family’s 1,700-acre, 1,000-cow dairy farm here.

Brian, 17, would rather sit atop a tractor than behind a desk. “He’s been afraid we might push him” to go to college, his mother says. But her eyes have been opened: “Kids learn differently, and some just aren’t college material.”

Continued from 1A

The world’s most famous college dropout, has poured more than $2 billion into programs and scholarships to help more students complete college.

Some concerns about the focus on a college education are being acknowledged.

Obama includes readiness for both college and careers in his discussions of education reform — most recently last weekend, when he announced an overhaul of the No Child Left Behind law.

And although the term “college” has long referred to four-year bachelor’s degrees, policymakers are broadening the definition to include two-year community college degrees and other credentials earned after high school.

But what’s still getting lost, some argue, is that too many students are going to college not because they want to, but because they think they have to.

“We’re force-feeding them” the idea that “you must go to college or you’ll be a second-class citizen,” says Marty Nemko, a California career counselor.

Economic benefits, and more

The debate over college is not new, but today’s economic climate has raised the stakes.

Since 2000, the percentage of Americans who believe college is essential to success in today’s world has gone from 31% to 55% — “a remarkable change in a fairly short period,” according to Public Agenda, which has conducted multiple surveys on the topic.

There’s beginning to be a lot of concern among the American public that … if you don’t get into that upper tier, you’re going to struggle your whole life,” says Public Agenda’s Jean Johnson.

A four-year degree is no guarantee of wealth, of course. About 25% of those with bachelor’s degrees earn less than those with two-year degrees, studies by Georgetown University’s Center on Education and the Workforce have found. But research consistently has shown that, on average, those at the top of higher education’s pecking order reap the most benefits, both economically and beyond.

“Class is real, and it has consequences. The position you hold, where you work, really determines your empowerment.”

CONT. . .
Falling through the cracks

Economists continue to debate the nuances of trend data for jobs and wages. But some argue that college dropout rates alone suggest many students are wasting their time—and money.

Federal data show that fewer than 60% of new students graduate from four-year colleges in six years, and just one in three community college students earn a degree. More than 350,000 students who borrowed for college in 1995 had no degree six years later, according to a 2005 study for the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.

Apostsecondary boom

The percentage of students who enroll in college or a trade school within 12 months of graduating high school has climbed steadily. Education Department data from 1976 to 2006 suggest those pursuing associate or bachelor's degree increased fastest.

1976: 10%
1980: 15%
1985: 20%
1990: 25%
1995: 30%
2000: 35%
2005: 40%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, American Council on Education

“It’s fine for most kids to go to college, of course, (but) it is not obvious to me that that is the best option for the majority,” says Mike Gould, founder of New Ventures, a Washington, D.C.-based organization that provides scholarships for low-income students pursuing anything from a two-year degree to a massage-therapy certification. “Some education may be a good thing or it may just be a lot of debt,” he problem, Gould and others say that many high schools fall so much on college that low-leving students fall through cracks. A Public Agenda report this month raises similar concerns about high school guidance counseling. It follows up on a survey that concludes most young workers who have a college degree “are not by choice,” and that guidance toward a career path “is hardly clear and purposeful.” That resonates with Erica Card of Washington, D.C.

A 2006 high school graduate, Card held a series of low-skill jobs while dropping in and out of community colleges for two years. Then she found Year Up, a program for recent high school graduates. The program helped her develop professional skills and land an internship on the help desk of a corporate information technology department. In February, the company hired her full time, and she has been accepted to Trinity University in Washington, where she plans to study business this fall.

“In high school, I really applied myself,” says McCard, 21, who was brought up by her grandmother before moving into a foster home. No one offered much help for life after high school, either, she says. “I had to find out on my own.”

The apprentice model

Debbie Crane and her husband, Charles, feel lucky in that regard.

They enrolled Brian in Wisconsin’s Youth Apprenticeship Program, established in 1991 to help high school students explore career options. Brian started by tending newborn calves under the mentorship of his uncle Mark at Crane Brothers Farm and is now also preparing equipment in the farm shop for spring planting.

Over the next year, Brian will take on more responsibilities as he works his way through a checklist of industry skills developed by state agricultural leaders. When he graduates from high school, he’ll also receive a certificate confirming he has met those standards.

Brian, who must maintain his grades in other high school classes to stay in the program, says he likes the arrangement because he can “get out of school and still get credit for it.”

Steve Leistico, Brian’s agriculture sciences teacher at Waterloo High School, says the apprenticeship model “is going to give some direction to Brian.”

Apprenticeships have long been popular in Europe, but workforce-oriented high school training is not nearly as common in U.S. schools. One reason is that such programs sound dangerously similar to tracking — sorting students by ability level, a practice repeatedly rejected in U.S. culture, in which the dominant philosophy is that all students should have opportunity to meet their full potential.

If high schools were to advise students that some education beyond high school is not necessary for everyone, “there’s a little bit of a concern that … we’re saying a lesser goal is OK for the population of students who have been historically least well-served by higher education,” says Jane Wellman, executive director of Delta Project, which studies higher education spending.

In recent years, male college-going and completion rates have raised concerns. But those least well-served historically are low-income and underrepresented minority students, who are less likely than their peers to pursue two- and four-year degrees, and most at risk of not completing college if they do enroll.

Some evidence suggests, though, that students already are being held to different standards. A recent national survey of high school teachers by ACT Inc., the educational testing company, found 71% agreed “completely” or “a great deal” that high school graduates need the same set of skills and knowledge whether they plan to go to college or enter the workforce, yet 42% said teachers reduce academic expectations for students they perceive as not being college-bound.

Studies released in November by Deloitte, an international consulting firm, suggest another disconnect: A survey of 400 low-income parents found that 89% say it’s “extremely” or “very important” that their child goes to college, but just 5% of high school teachers viewed preparing students for college as their most important mission.

Deloitte CEO Barry Salzberg, chairman of the College Summit, which seeks to increase college enrollment rates, says that’s misguided. “I think we should measure high schools on their college entrance rate and figure out a way to track performance of high school graduates in college and see how many go beyond one full year of college.”

But others say the zeal to increase college-going rates ignores the reality that many students will be in over their heads once they start college.

“College preparation for everyone is a very nice idea, but we have a very high failure rate,” says Northwestern University professor James Rosenbaum, author of Beyond College for All: Career Paths for the Forgotten Half. “If we don’t start letting counselors be candid, we’re not going to fix this system.”
Nurses covering more health care

Ky. is among states looking to fill gaps by expanding roles of other caregivers

By Deborah Yetter and Jessie Halladay
USA TODAY

FRANKFORT, Ky. — Each year, Wendy Fletcher says she and two partners see more than 5,000 patients at their practice in Morehead, Ky.

They are not doctors, but rather registered nurse practitioners who say they are able to increase access to health care and make it more affordable.

“None of us are trying to play doctor,” she said.

“If we wanted to be doctors, we would have gone to medical school,” added nurse practitioner Melinda Staten of Louisville.

The Kentucky Medical Association claims otherwise and is fighting proposed legislation that would lift some limits on the ability of about 3,700 nurse practitioners in Kentucky to prescribe medication and perform other, mostly routine tasks such as signing a child’s immunization certificate or certifying the need for employee sick leave.

Greg Cooper, a former Kentucky Medical Association president and family physician from Cynthiana, Ky., who testified against the Kentucky bill, said he objects to what he said “is this constant push by nurse practitioners to be physicians.”

“It’s a little bit frustrating, the way this has evolved,” he said. “The family physician is the foundation of health care.”

That argument has been echoed nationally by the American Medical Association, which issued a report last fall critical of the training that nurse practitioners receive.

Dealing with doctor shortage

As the debate over health care legislation continues in Washington, advocates for nurse practitioners say it is these primary care nurses who will make up for the shortage of primary care physicians and at the same time keep costs down.

According to the American Nurses Association, as of November, the median expected salary for a typical nurse practitioner in the United States was $83,293, while the median expected salary for a typical family practice physician was $160,586.

Rebecca Patton, president of the American Nurses Association, said that year, state legislatures are seeing measures proposed that seek to increase the capabilities of nurse practitioners and in many cases eliminate a level of supervision from physicians.

Among recent examples she cited:

► In January, Ohio’s Democratic Gov. Ted Strickland signed a bill that did away with the need for nurse practitioners moving to Ohio to repeat training with an Ohio physician as long as they have had prescribing privileges in another state at least one of the prior three years.

► In July 2009, Hawaii enacted a bill that gave nurse practitioners there broader prescription authority that includes controlled substances.

In addition, the association cited several additional states that have bills pending that would either broaden or restrict prescription writing ability for nurse practitioners, including bills in Alabama, Colorado, Washington and West Virginia. And Alabama, Connecticut, Mississippi, Nebraska and New York have bills pending related to removing requirements for physician supervision or collaboration agreements.

‘Don’t see a big difference’

Nurse practitioners are “gaining traction because people are seeing how cost-effective they are,” Patton said. “The primary care physician shortage is going to drive it.”

Judi James, 56, who lives in Morehead, Ky., says she gets her basic medical care from a nurse practitioner and has no qualms about going to see a nurse rather than a doctor.

“I really just don’t see a big difference,” James said. “The nurses are the ones who take care of you anyway, not always the doctor. If I need a specialist, she’ll send me there.”

Each state sets up regulations for nurse practitioners. In Kentucky, for example, nurse practitioners are able to practice independently without being supervised by a physician. But in order to prescribe medicine they must obtain a signed agreement from a physician, even though that physician may not work directly with or consult with the nurse.

The Kentucky bill would allow nurses to forgo the agreement when it comes to certain medications, such as antibiotics and blood-pressure medication. Prescribing controlled drugs, such as narcotic painkillers and sedatives, would still require the physician agreement.

The Kentucky bill passed out of committee and could come to the full house for consideration as soon as Monday, said its sponsor, Rep. Mary Lou Marzian, a Louisville Democrat. Marzian said she’s not sure the bill can make it through the Senate.

Twelve states, including Alaska, New Mexico, Montana, Wisconsin and Wyoming, and the District of Columbia allow nurse practitioners to prescribe independently, including controlled substances, according to the American Nurses Association. In 29 states, laws require physician collaboration for prescribing controlled substances.

Some states have limits on which controlled substances can be prescribed by nurse practitioners. Laws in Florida and Alabama prohibit nurse practitioners from prescribing any controlled substances.

Yetter and Halladay report for The (Louisville) Courier-Journal
Republicans criticize Democrats' plan to overhaul student lending

By Nick Anderson
Washington Post Staff Writer
Wednesday, March 17, 2010; A04

Republicans assailed a proposed overhaul of student lending Tuesday as a "government takeover," a "job killer" and an "outrage," seeking to rally opposition to a Democratic measure that would cut private lenders out of the federal loan market.

The measure is expected to be merged this week with a health-care bill and could come to a vote in the House by Saturday. It would end a student loan program begun in 1965 in which private lenders receive a government guarantee of repayment if borrowers default.

At the same time, the proposal would expand a government lending program. Direct lending would become the only option for federal student loans on July 1, a shift that the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates would net the Treasury $62 billion through 2020. Most of the savings would be channeled into Pell grants for needy college students.

Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) said student borrowers would receive worse service if the government monopolizes the business. "That'll make getting a student loan about as pleasant as standing in line to get your driver's license," he said.

Rep. Howard P. "Buck" McKeon (R-Calif.) said the proposal would eliminate 30,000 loan industry jobs. "It boggles my mind," McKeon said.

Democrats and the Obama administration said that the guaranteed loan program amounts to a giveaway to banks that could be better spent on students. The two parties have been at odds over the issue since direct lending began in the early 1990s, but the debate appears to be coming to a head.

Many colleges have been switching to direct lending in recent months or preparing to do so in case the Democratic proposal becomes law. Last year, the guaranteed lending program accounted for 69 percent of the dollar amount of new federal loans, the CBO estimates. This year, that share is expected to fall to 55 percent.

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After 3 Suspected Suicides, Cornell Reaches Out

By TRIP GABRIEL

ITHACA, N.Y. — All weekend, Cornell University’s residential advisers knocked on dorm rooms to inquire how students were coping.

On Monday and Tuesday, the start of a stressful exam week before spring break, professors interrupted classes to tell students they cared for them not just academically, but personally. Both days, the university president, Dr. David J. Skorton, took out a full-page ad in the campus paper, The Cornell Daily Sun, saying: “Your well-being is the foundation on which your success is built. If you learn anything at Cornell, please learn to ask for help.”

The university is on high alert about the mental health of its students after the apparent suicides of three of them in less than a month in the deep gorges rending the campus. The deaths, two on successive days last week, have cast a pall over the university and revived talk of Cornell’s reputation — unsupported, say officials — as a high-stress “suicide school.”

“I think everybody’s kind of shaken. I know I am,” said Nicole Wagner, a 19-year-old freshman from Newport Beach, Calif. “I wanted to go home.”

She was crossing the Thurston Avenue Bridge, which was strewn with red carnations and affixed with fresh stickers for a suicide prevention telephone line.

On Thursday, the body of a sophomore engineering student, William Sinclair, of Chevy Chase, Md., was recovered from the rugged gorge more than 70 feet below the bridge, where the fierce waters of Fall Creek sluice through a narrow corridor. The body of Bradley Ginsburg, a freshman from Boca Raton, Fla., was found in the same vicinity on Feb. 17.

Then on Friday, Matthew Zika, a junior engineering student from Lafayette, Ind., died when he dropped from a suspension foot bridge a short distance downstream, according to the
university. Rescue workers have yet to recover his body in the rain-swollen creek.

The Ithaca Police Department is investigating both of last week's deaths, but the university is responding as if they were suicides. Besides aggressive mental health outreach, Cornell has stationed guards on the bridges through the end of the week.

"While we know that our gorges are beautiful features of our campus, they can be scary places at times like this," Susan Murphy, the vice president for student and academic services, said in a video message posted on a new Web site, caringcommunity.cornell.edu.

As disturbing as the recent deaths are, they are just the latest of 10 by enrolled students this academic year, including deaths from illness, accident and no fewer than six ruled as suicides by the county medical examiner or still under investigation, according to campus officials.

Last Thursday, e-mail blasts went out to 35,000 students and faculty and staff members acknowledging Mr. Sinclair's death, followed by a message to parents and one from the college president.

"Unbelievably, shockingly, we had to do the same thing the next day," said Thomas Bruce, the vice president for communications.

Despite the half-dozen known or suspected suicides this year, Timothy Marchell, a clinical psychologist in Cornell's campus health services whose specialties include suicide, said that, historically, Cornell suicides have not been higher than what national statistics predict for a university population of 20,000 students: about two per year.

Between 2000 and 2005, there were 10 confirmed suicides, Dr. Marchell said, and from the beginning of 2006 through the beginning of this academic year, there were none.

Dr. Marchell said he was "well acquainted with the perception of Cornell as a suicide school," having grown up in Ithaca and graduated from Cornell. But it is an urban legend, he said, largely fueled by the fact that suicides there are often shockingly public.

"When someone dies by suicide in a gorge, it's a very visible public act," he said.

Cornell's mental health outreach in recent years, which has attracted national attention, is intended to bring students who are at risk, and who might not seek help, into counseling. Custodians are trained to look for signs of emotional trouble when cleaning out dorms; therapists hold open-door hours at 10 campus locations; and a faculty handbook advises professors about how to spot students' distress in its many contemporary forms, from disturbing artwork to clothes that disguise self-mutilation.
Despite these efforts, Dr. Skorton said in an interview, “We are not getting the job done,” adding that suicide among young people is a national health crisis and is not specific to one campus. Administrators at Cornell have been “very intensively reassessing” existing programs in recent weeks, he said.

Around campus, students and staff wondered whether some combination of familiar stresses — the long upstate New York winter, classroom demands of an Ivy League university — and new factors, like the evaporation of internships and jobs for graduates during a bleak recession, had provoked the recent deaths.

Dr. Marchell cautioned that it is almost impossible to link broad causes to suicide rates, that “the psychology of suicide can be very individual.”

He and others, however, are concerned that students’ deaths may lower barriers for others who are contemplating it. “We have to be thinking about the potential influence on the collective psychology,” he said.

Mr. Zika, the most recent to die, was remembered by friends not as lonely and stressed-out, but as quick to laugh and a caring friend — he drove for hours during the recent winter break from New York to Indiana visiting friends, recalled Deirdre Mulligan, one of those he dropped in on.

Mr. Zika, who had been a star baseball player in high school, played Ultimate Frisbee with Cornell friends, wrote poetry on his Facebook page and had a tattoo with a lyric from the rock band Incubus: “If the wind blew me in the right direction, would I even care? I would.”

Nicole Huynh, a freshman who began dating Mr. Zika last semester, said in an e-mail message: “During this current semester, some who knew him more than others could see he was having a rough time. He’d talk, but it wasn’t as much. He slept more than usual. Didn’t feel motivated about some things. Tried distancing himself, little by little.”

She does not think the stress of studies pushed him to the edge, but rather troubles he carried from early in life. She suspected he was having suicidal thoughts, and both she and Ms. Mulligan said close friends had urged him to seek counseling, but they did not know if he did. The university declined to comment, citing privacy laws.

Ms. Huynh said she and Mr. Zika agreed to suspend their relationship a few weeks ago as he pushed her away.

“Many people listened and cared a lot about him,” Ms. Huynh said. “But no matter how great his support system was, his mind was set, and he was going to do whatever he wanted to do.”
Secretary of Education Duncan proposes bans for low grad rates

By Erik Brady, USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — If U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan had his way, a dozen of the teams in the men's NCAA basketball tournament would not be eligible to play in it, including top-seeded Kentucky.

Duncan proposes teams with graduation rates of less than 40% be banned from postseason play.

ARNE DUNCAN: Basketball provided a life assist for education secretary

DUNCAN ON COLLINS: Education secretary fan of Kansas guard

"That's a low bar," Duncan said Tuesday. "If you can't graduate two out of five of your student-athletes, how serious are you about the academic part of your mission?"

The schools that have men's basketball teams with graduation rates of less than 40% are Arkansas-Pine Bluff (29%), Baylor (36%), California (20%), Clemson (37%), Georgia Tech (38%), Kentucky (31%), Louisville (38%), Maryland (8%), Missouri (36%), New Mexico State (36%), Tennessee (30%) and Washington (29%).

Those figures come from NCAA rates compiled by The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport at Central Florida. They do not include transfers or players who leave early for the NBA. They do not reflect athletes who will play in the tourney, as they include the most recent four-year classes that have had six years to graduate.

Duncan will participate in a teleconference today with the study's primary author, Richard Lapchick.

The Department of Education cannot impose a 40% solution on NCAA schools, but Duncan said he would use his office to advocate for reform.

"Why do we tolerate the bad apples ... when the vast majority are doing things well?" he said.

"Everybody sees it. It's out in the open. ... And somehow things don't change."

The NCAA uses a formula called the APR that measures school success in retaining athletes, keeping them eligible and graduating them. Penalties include a postseason ban, but that has happened once in Division I basketball (8-21 Centenary this season).

Lapchick said using APRs provided a more current snapshot than using graduation rates.