Magazine ranks ECU among top primary care medical schools

By ECU News Bureau
Special to The Daily Reflector

The Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University is ranked among the top medical schools in the country that emphasize primary care, according to the annual listing of the top graduate schools by U.S. News & World Report magazine.

ECU is 17th among primary care schools this year. ECU also ranks in the top five among primary care medical schools with 60 percent of its graduates entering primary care residencies between 2005 and 2007. U.S. News defines primary care as family medicine, pediatrics and internal medicine. In rural medicine, the school is sixth, up three spots from last year.

"I am very pleased that the Brody School of Medicine continues to be recognized nationally for its outstanding work in the areas of primary care and rural medicine," said Phyllis Horns, interim vice chancellor for health sciences at ECU and interim dean of the Brody School of Medicine. "These areas of medical practice are among the highest in demand in the nation and serve a vital role in maintaining access to health care for all Americans."

Archeologist will speak at lecture

A biblical archeologist will be the speaker for the 16th annual Jarvis Lecture on Christianity and Culture, 7:30 p.m. tonight at the Harvey Banquet Hall at ECU's Murphy Center. William G. Dover will present "Did God Have a Wife?: Archeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel." Free.

Gill receives state award

John Gill, ECU's grounds department coordinator and assistant director for facility services, was awarded the 2008 Laura Thomas Award from the North Carolina Association of Higher Education and Disability, for his continued effort to improve accessibility across campus.

"Mr. Gill serves as our 'eyes' and 'ears' in matters related to physical access on campus," said Diane Majewski, of ECU's Disability Support Services. "It is not uncommon for Disability Services to receive a call from Mr. Gill when he notices a situation on campus that creates a barrier for students, faculty and staff with disabilities."

Gill received the award March 10. The award was established to recognize an outstanding professional on a college campus setting who does not work in disability support.

Pulitzer Prize-winner to read

Natasha Trethewey, the 2007 Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, will give a free reading at ECU's Hendrix Theater at 8 p.m. Wednesday.

Trethewey, author of the collection, "Native Guard" (Houghton Mifflin 2006), examines racial turmoil and personal identity growing up in the deep South, said John Hopenthaler, an ECU poetry professor.

"The book is also about her mother's subsequent death at the hands of a black stepfather, as well as about the Native Guard, Louisiana's celebrated regiment of black men during the Civil War," Hopenthaler said.

ECU researchers to present work

From shipwrecks to cancer cells, a weeklong symposium featuring the research of ECU students and faculty members will be held today through Friday.

See ECU, B3
Pediatric weight center award

The Pediatric Healthy Weight Research and Treatment Center received an award from the National Initiative for Children's Healthcare Quality during its National Childhood Obesity Congress.

The award recognizes programs making a difference in addressing disparities in childhood obesity. The center primarily serves families from rural eastern North Carolina with overweight children ages 2-18, most at the highest risk of obesity and its complications.

Body image talk

"Muscle Bound," a one-man show that addresses issues of male body image will be presented at 7 p.m. Monday in Wright Auditorium. The event is free.

Youth Arts Festival coming

The fourth annual Youth Arts Festival is scheduled for 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday on the ECU center campus mall. More than 100 artists and performers will share their skills during the family-friendly event. If it rains, activities will move to Jenkins Fine Arts Center. Contact 328-5749 for more information.

Tibet teach-in scheduled

The Religious Studies department is holding a "Tibet Teach-In: What Happened and Why?" at 7 p.m. April 9 in the Science and Technology Building Room C-209. Derek Maher, co-director of Religious Studies, will discuss the recent violence in Tibet, the Dalai Lama, human rights in China, and the Olympics in Beijing.

Students install computers

ECU students installed more than a dozen computers March 19 at Jones Senior High School in Trenton. The computers were funded through a grant from the National Science Foundation designed to promote science and math course development in high schools in the region.

Known as the Innovative Technology Experiences for Students and Teachers, or IT-EST, the program has allowed more than 100 students and faculty members from Greene, Duplin, Onslow, Wilson, Jones and Wayne counties to participate in IT-EST summer academies at ECU.

Jeff Penn, Doug Hedges and Rayna Welner, students at ECU, delivered and installed the computers under supervision of professor Lee Toderick.
Pancoast joins Brody School of Medicine faculty in internal medicine department

Dr. Thomson "Pete" Pancoast has joined the faculty of the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University.

Pancoast joined the Department of Internal Medicine section of pulmonary and critical care medicine as a clinical assistant professor and program director of the pulmonary disease and critical care medicine fellowship. He comes from Bridgeport, Conn., where he held leadership positions with Bridgeport Hospital/Yale-New Haven Health.

Pancoast has a medical degree from George Washington University in Washington, D.C., a master's degree from Hunter College-City College of New York and a bachelor's degree from Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. He completed residency training in internal medicine and a fellowship in pulmonary and critical care medicine at New York University Medical Center.

-Pancoast served as a pulmonary/critical care

See PEOPLE IN BUSINESS, Page 6
Plow it purple: Dozer honors ECU retirees

By Mike Grizzard
The Daily Reflector

Douglas Kruger looked perplexed when he was handed two plaques and asked to make a presentation. His surprise only grew when he discovered the occasion. Hidden under a large, blue tarp behind an East Carolina University transit bus sat a bulldozer donated to the ECU Department of Construction Management to honor Kruger and Sue Williams, who each plan to retire in 2009. A "move that bus" command was given, and the purple-and-gold D9K Caterpillar bulldozer was revealed.

A stunned Kruger admired the new piece of equipment. Along with the school colors is an engraved plate honoring Kruger and Williams. There also is a Pirate in a hard hat carrying a hammer and try square.

"This is too much, absolutely too much," Kruger, the department's chairman, said. "This was a total surprise. No one, ifs or buts. They did a real good job of keeping everybody quiet. I'm absolutely flabbergasted."

Kruger, in turn, presented plaques to Caterpillar and Gregory Poole Equipment Co. acknowledging their support of the construction management program. The bulldozer marks the sixth piece of equipment Caterpillar has donated to ECU. In 2006, the Caterpillar Excellence Fund and Gregory Poole, a Caterpillar dealer in Raleigh, agreed to donate $500,000 during a five-year period to the construction management department.

"Caterpillar International and Gregory Poole Equipment Company out of Raleigh have been extremely good to the program," Kruger said. "They endowed a high-bay lab on a campus. They provide us with a tremendous amount of resources for us to be able to do some things that we would never be able to do with state dollars. They're just a super group."

Scott Cooper, a 1990 ECU graduate and marketing manager for Caterpillar in Cary, helped establish a relationship with Kruger and his department. He was on hand last Thursday at Brook Valley Country Club for the presentation, which followed "See DOZER, B3"

DOZER

Continued from B1

the 11th annual East Carolina Construction Association Golf Tournament.

"In 1999, I was in a position where I could actually do some donations of pieces of equipment, so I came and talked to Dr. Kruger and a couple of others and we started a relationship and a bond," Cooper said. "My overall goal was to get Caterpillar closer to the construction management department. One of the things we keep hearing from our customer groups is, 'OK, you're giving us great equipment, but what are you doing for us on the front side to support us?' In the construction industry, it's hard to get good 'supervisors' and managers and things like that. This is a way that Caterpillar can do something on the front end, donate money and equipment to get all the students trained up and experienced and also get our brand recognition out there."

ECU's construction management program began with 17 students in 1983, branching out from the Department of Technology. It now has about 660 students and about 1,900 graduates.

"It's been a rewarding career," said Kruger, who is in his 33rd year and is set to retire on July 1, 2009. Williams, an administrative assistant, also is retiring after more than 30 years in the program. The task of finding Kruger's successor as chairman has begun, and search committee member Ron Sessions said he's glad there is some time.

"It is not going to be easy," said Sessions, who has been at ECU since 1999 after retiring from a private-practice engineering company. "We're spoiled. That's the problem. We're so spoiled with him and how he has guided this department. In our minds, we have to go out and find somebody equal to him and that's going to be a tough thing to do. He has set the bar so high for somebody coming in here."

"He is what has made this department what it is," Sessions said. "His way with the students, his way with the faculty, the contacts he has out in the industry over these years is just unbelievable."

Mike Grizzard can be contacted at mgrizzard@coxnc.com and 329-9590.
Colleges are keeping closer watch over strange or troubled students

By Jeffrey McMurray
The Associated Press

LEXINGTON, Ky. — On the agenda: A student who got into a shouting match with a faculty member. Another who harassed a female classmate. Someone found sleeping in a car. And a student who posted a threat against a professor on Facebook.

In a practice adopted at one college after another since the massacre at Virginia Tech a year ago and at Northern Illinois University last month...

"You've got to be way ahead of the game, so to speak, expect what may be coming. If you're able to identify behaviors early on and get these people assistance, it avoids disruptions in the classrooms and potential violence," said Maj. Joe Monroe, interim police chief at Kentucky.

The Kentucky panel, called Students of Concern, held its first meeting last week and will convene at least twice a month to talk about students whose strange or disturbing behavior has come to their attention.

Such committees represent a change in thinking among U.S. college officials, who for a long time were reluctant to share information about students' mental health for fear of violating privacy laws.

"If a student is a danger to himself or others, all the privacy concerns go out the window," said Patricia Terrell, vice president of student affairs, who created the panel.

Terrell shared details of the four discussed cases with The Associated Press on the condition that all names and identifying information be left out.

Among other things, the panel can order a student into counseling or bar him or her from entering a particular building or talking to a certain person. It can also order a judicial hearing that can lead to suspension or expulsion if the student's offense was a violation of the law or school policy.

Although the four cases discussed last week were the ones administrators deemed as needing the most urgent attention, a database listing 26 other student cases has been created, providing fodder for future meetings.

Students are encouraged during their freshman orientation to report suspicious behavior to the dean of students, and university employees all the way down to janitors and cafeteria workers are instructed to tell their supervisors if they see anything.

Virtually every corner of campus is represented in the group's closed-door meetings, including dorm life, academics, counseling, mental health and police.

"If you look back at the Virginia Tech situation, the aftermath, there were several people who knew that student had problems, but because of privacy and different issues, they didn't talk to others about it," said Lee Todd, UK president.

High schools have been doing this sort of thing for years because of shootings, but only since Virginia Tech, when a disturbed student gunman killed 32 people and committed suicide, have colleges begun to follow suit, said Mike Dorn, executive director of Safe Havens International, a leading campus safety firm.

"They didn't think it was a real threat to them," Dorn said.

Virginia Tech has added a threat assessment team since the massacre there. Boston University, the University of Utah, the University of Illinois-Chicago and numerous others also have such groups, said Gwendolyn Dungy, executive director of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.
Author offers words of wisdom to students
in first event of ‘Published Pirates’ series

By Kristin Day
The Daily Reflector

"It's really about self-esteem and working on that first," said Dating
Dahling Candace McKenzie as she spoke to a room of university stu-
dents Thursday afternoon. "Then those right choices and right people
will come along."

McKenzie, a
dating coach and
author of "Be A
Dating Dahling," was in town for a
lecture and book
signing in the
Alumni Center
at East Carolina
University. It was
the first event in the Alumni Associ-
ation's new series called, "Published
Pirates." McKenzie graduated from
ECU in 1991 with a bachelor's degree
in theater arts, before she moved to
Los Angeles and became an expert in
serial dating.

Her experiences, as well as those
of her divorced friends, are all fair-
game as she teaches the single how to
date safely and practically now, "be-
cause dating today is a lot different."

On Thursday, she covered all the
basics — ways to approach a person
of interest, the first date, when and
how it's OK to kiss, pick-up lines,
breaking up, sex, stalkers and online
dating — while answering rela-
tionship-based questions from the
students.

But anyone looking for a nice
"love-at-first-sight-is-real" talk,
would've been a bit disappointed.
McKenzie remained blunt and hon-
est, even through her humorous
anecdotes.

"If they don't call you back, they're
not interested," McKenzie told one
student. "That's it."

"Be A Dating Dahling" is a book
of 31 conversational chapters with no
more than a few pages of stories, tips
and Dating Dahling mantras. McKen-
ze said she always wanted to write a
book, and decided to publish this one
after gaining enough experience in
the dating world.

The exposure led to interviews
with Maxim and Playboy, television
appearances and spokesmodeling.
She's also pitching a new reality
series called, "The Travelling Heart,"
where she will go to different states
teaching, in each, a new person how
to date properly.

Aside from regular lectures, McKen-
ze gives weekly dating lessons,
including separate weekend semi-
nars for men and women and classes
for senior citizens.

It was an auspicious start for the
new alumni series at ECU.

See DATING, B3

DATING
Continued from B1

Paul Clifford, associated
vice chancellor of alumni
relations, said he hopes
they can have as many as a dozen
Published Pirates events an-
ually.

"It gives us a way to feature
alumni who have written
some pretty interesting
things," Clifford said.

"(With McKenzie), students
can hear what she's written
about, and it's done in an
entertaining way ... Plus, it's a
hot topic."

For more information on
the Dating Dahling, or to
purchase the book, visit www.
thedatingdahling.com.

Contact Kristin Day at 329-
9579 or kday@coxnc.com.
Darts — To rising utility costs that Greenville Utilities customers can expect to see in May. The Greenville Utilities Board of Commissioners approved raises of water and sewer rates this week, with the average customer expecting to see a $1.47 monthly increase in utility bills. With rising prices and a slowing economy, this rate hike comes as one more unfortunate setback.

Laurels — To a workshop hosted by the city of Greenville this week that aimed to teach better personal finance habits to residents. As the national economy teeters near recession, residents must take care to avoid a ruinous spiral of personal debt. Some have never embraced sound financial strategies, and workshops like the one on Wednesday can make a world of difference.

Darts — To the annual pollen inundation that consumed eastern North Carolina over the past week. Storms expected this weekend should help bring relief to those who are allergic to the yellow mist, but the powder had thoroughly blanketed the area all week, covering houses and cars in a thick film. It may be a rite of spring, but it is one that most would happily do without.

Laurels — To assurance from the N.C. Forest Service that the fire tower, from which the road is named, will remain standing for the foreseeable future. Rumors have circulated that the tower, standing taller than 100 feet, might be relocated as that part of the city continues to grow, but they appear to be false.

An ECU birthday

Darts — To the reckless and dangerous habits of teens behind the wheel, where a mistake can turn deadly. SAFETeens, a three-hour program encouraging good driving habits, is presented to each of the county high schools in order to urge teenage drivers to be careful on the road. With a spate of deadly car accidents involving teens in Pitt County, it’s a good message to heed.

Laurels — To East Carolina University’s Founder’s Day celebration, the annual event marking the school’s birthday. Though the Legislature approved the college on March 8, 1907, Founder’s Day was held belatedly this year in order to involve the student population. East Carolina continues to celebrate its centennial anniversary, marking its beginnings and looking toward the future.

Laurels — To the successful and engaging gubernatorial debate on Thursday night at East Carolina’s Brody School of Medicine. Four Republicans and two Democrats offered their views on issues important to the state and to eastern North Carolina in a rare opportunity for this region. The next leader of this state must be eager to address the problems with unemployment, poverty and health care that plague the East, and it was exciting to see many of the candidates do so on a stage in this city.

Compiled by Brian Colligan, editorial page editor of The Daily Reflector. Contact him at 329-9507 or via e-mail at bcolligan@coxnc.com
WANTED: MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDERS
Seventeen of North Carolina's 100 counties have no psychiatrist, and at least 65 others have fewer than one per 10,000 residents, creating gaps in care for mentally ill residents.

Nurses help fill gap in psychiatric care

BY JEAN P. FISHER
STAFF WRITER

The School of Nursing at UNC-Chapel Hill is increasing the scarce supply of mental health providers by retraining nurses to diagnose and treat psychiatric illness.

What's more, the program recruits at least half its students from North Carolina counties with the greatest shortfall of providers. That means new providers often return to practice where they are most needed.

UNC-CH is one of a handful of universities nationally that trains registered nurses to be psychiatric nurse practitioners. Here, and across the country, such professionals are emerging as critical players in efforts to address a growing shortage of psychiatrists.

Seventeen of North Carolina's 100 counties have no psychiatrist, and 27 others have...
NURSES
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1A

significant shortages, according to the Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research at UNC-CH.

Because of the shortages, many patients with mental illness, particularly in rural parts of the state, go undiagnosed or untreated. Some seek help from primary care doctors who typically lack the specialized training to provide optimal care. In the worst situations, untreated patients wander the streets, land in hospital emergency rooms or end up in jail.

"You have terrible access across the state," said Dr. Marvin Swartz, chief of the division of social and community psychiatry at Duke University Medical Center in Durham. "It's a very challenging situation." Duke is also trying to address the shortage by training physician assistants in a one-year fellowship program that provides advanced training in psychiatric care. Upon completion, physician assistants will be able to function as primary mental health care providers.

Swartz and others say mental health reforms adopted by the state in 2001 only exacerbated problems by closing down county-run psychiatric programs. In theory, private providers were to step in to care for patients. Most counties are still waiting for that to happen. Others have overpaid for services that benefit easy-to-treat people, leaving profoundly sick patients with little care.

UNC-CH's psychiatric nurse practitioner program helps by producing highly skilled clinicians who can assess and diagnose psychiatric illness and treat it with both psychotherapy and medication. In North Carolina, psychiatric nurse practitioners are the only nonphysician mental health providers who can prescribe powerful anti-psychotic drugs. State law does require them to work in collaboration with a physician, though the doctor need not be on site.

Employers call with offers

Aubreé Ryans of Jacksonville graduated from UNC-CH's program in December to find employers clamoring for her expertise.

"For the first time in my nursing career, I have not had to look for a job — people are calling me," said Ryans. "I have turned down at least 10 job offers."

Ryans, a former psychiatric nurse, has accepted a part-time position at a private mental health services practice in Jacksonville, which is an underserved area. She will perform psychological assessments and manage patients' medications. She is considering a second position with a provider in Wilmington.

"I'm excited and raring to go," said Ryans, who loved her work as a nurse but felt too limited in what she could do for her patients. "Now I am going to be able to help people so much more."

UNC-CH has had a psychiatric nurse practitioner program since 2002. But enrollment didn't take off until the next year, when the School of Nursing received state and federal grants to target nurses already living and working in underserved areas across North Carolina. The program also seeks to enroll nurses who are racial minorities or come from poor backgrounds.

Students entering the program may have a two-year or four-year nursing degree, or they may already have a master's degree in nursing. Depending on the level of training coming in, it takes one to three years to complete the degree.

Nurses recruited through the grant-funded program, called Nurses Enhancing Mental Health Options for the Underserved in North Carolina, receive resources such as a free laptop computer. Tuition assistance is also available in exchange for a commitment to work in an underserved area.

To make attending school as easy as possible, UNC-CH modeled the psychiatric nurse practitioner program after executive degree programs that require only weekly or monthly visits to campus. It also incorporated courses taught via teleconference. That has enabled nurses from remote parts of the state to work toward degrees while continuing to work in their home communities.

A desperate need

"I probably wouldn't be able to do this without distance learning," said Kim Bronson of Garland, a small town in Sampson County about a two-hour drive from Chapel Hill.

Bronson, a single mother, works full time as a substance abuse nurse while also attending the psychiatric nurse practitioner program. She hopes to stay in Sampson County after she completes her training. Her dream is to open a substance abuse treatment center there or in nearby Robeson County. Both counties have a desperate need, she said.

"A lot of people don't know where to go or what to do to access services," Bronson said. "The emergency departments are inundated with psychiatric patients."

Since 2003, enrollment in the UNC-CH program has grown from two students to more than 50. Fewer than six have completed their psychiatric nurse practitioner degrees to date, but at least 14 more are expected to graduate this summer.

"We started slow, and we started small, so the numbers are not that impressive," said Linda Beebe, a professor of nursing at UNC-CH and founder of the psychiatric nurse practitioner program. "But give us a couple of years. It's certainly not the answer to the whole problem, but it's one proactive thing that nursing can offer."

jean.fisher@newsobserver.com
or (919) 829-4433

THE NEWS & OBSERVER
MONDAY, MARCH 31, 2008
Doctors rethink treatment after cholesterol drug fails

Physicians are urged to use older statin drugs instead of Vytorin, which was introduced in 2004.

BY MARILYNN MARCHIONE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHICAGO — Leading doctors urged a return to older, tried-and-true treatments for high cholesterol after hearing full results Sunday of a failed trial of Vytorin.

Millions of Americans already take the drug or one of its components, Zetia. But doctors were stunned to learn that Vytorin failed to affect heart disease even though it worked as intended to reduce three key risk factors.

"People need to turn back to statins," said Yale University cardiologist Dr. Harlan Krumholz referring to Lipitor, Crestor and other widely used brands. "We know that statins are good drugs. We know that they reduce risks."

Results were presented at an American College of Cardiology conference in Chicago on Sunday and published on the Internet by the New England Journal of Medicine.

Doctors have long focused on lowering LDL, or bad cholesterol, as a way to prevent heart disease. Statins such as Merck & Co.'s Zocor, which recently came out in generic form, do this, as do niacin, fibrates and other medicines.

Vytorin, which came out in 2004, combines Zocor with Schering-Plough Corp.'s Zetia, which went on sale in 2002 and attacks cholesterol in a different way.

The study tested whether Vytorin was better than Zocor alone at limiting plaque buildup in the arteries of 720 people with super-high cholesterol because of a gene disorder.

Results: 'Zilch'

The results show the drug had "no result — zilch. In no sub-group, in no segment, was there any added benefit" for reducing plaque, said Dr. John Kastelein, the Dutch scientist who led the study.

That happened even though Vytorin dramatically lowered LDL, fats in the blood called triglycerides, and a measure of artery inflammation called CRP.

Some doctors noted that hope one pills for menopausal women and torcetrapib, a promising cholesterol drug that Pfizer Inc. recently abandoned, also lowered cholesterol but were found in big studies to raise heart risks, not lower them.

In a related decision Friday, other researchers plan to expand enrollment in a more pivotal study of Vytorin to 18,000 people because early results suggest it will be harder than anticipated to see whether it is any better than Zocor alone.

"It will be 2012 — 10 years after the drug was introduced — before we know the answer," said Dr. Steven Nissen, a Cleveland Clinic cardiologist who has no role in the studies and has criticized the drugmakers over the study reported Sunday.

Dr. Robert Spiegel, chief medical officer for Schering-Plough, said the study was done "with the highest integrity" and that doctors can believe the results "because of the time we took to make sure the data are right."

"We were disappointed that it was not a very balanced panel discussion" by the heart doctors who urged their peers to focus on more established treatments.

However, Kastelein said the data were far more consistent than anticipated and ample to show that the drug simply did not work.

No one should ever stop any heart drug without talking with their doctors, heart specialists stressed.

However, doctors "should be thinking twice," said Duke University cardiologist Dr. Robert Califf. He takes the drug himself because he cannot tolerate the high dose of statins he would otherwise need.

MORE CHECKS

The study on Vytorin was closely watched because Zetia and Vytorin have racked up $5 billion in sales despite limited proof of benefit. Two Congressional panels started probes into why it took drug makers nearly two years after the study's completion to release results.

In addition, New York State Attorney General Andrew Cuomo subpoenaed the companies in a similar probe in January.

"While these corporations profited, Americans were left in the dark," Cuomo said in a written statement Sunday.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
President installed at Bennett College

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

GREENSBORO — The new president of Bennett College wants the school to become an oasis for education.

Julianne Malveaux said it is important that the historically black women's college answer the call to nurture the intellect, education and academic achievements of its students.

Malveaux also pledged during her installation as the school's 18th president that Bennett will move from good to great.

The News & Record of Greensboro reported that a number of speakers and dignitaries attended Saturday's ceremonies, among them Susan L. Taylor, editor-in-chief emeritus of Essence magazine.

Taylor challenged Bennett students, faculty and staff members to stop feuding with each other and to start working together.
Teens, parents dream of big time, or at least, free tuition

BY WADE RAWLINS
STAFF WRITER

Joe Herod and Kevin Riggs, who grew up as neighbors in Clayton, have been enjoying baseball together since they were children playing catch. Now high school sophomores, Herod dreams of pitching for UNC-Chapel Hill. His buddy Riggs would love nothing more than playing first base or outfield at N.C. State University.

On a rainy Sunday, which coincided with the opening day of Major League Baseball in the U.S., Herod, Riggs and about three dozen other young athletes, along with their parents, showed up at Athletic Performance Center, an indoor gym in Raleigh, to audition their dreams of playing baseball beyond high school.

On the synthetic grass, the boys showed off their skills at pitching, hitting, running and catching for coaches from MVP Baseball, a private, for-profit player development program that markets itself as a college advisory program helping players get noticed.

In the next room, the coaches braced the parents about the realities of playing at the next level, the business of baseball and the stiff competition for college scholarships.

"To be a collegiate athlete is a monumental task that requires the whole family to make a sacrifice," said Harry Grunet, the general manager of MVP Baseball.

"It's more competitive than ever before, and it's going to get more competitive with college education costs increasing."

SEE BASEBALL, PAGE 4B

BASEBALL
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1B

Grunet urged parents to focus on the long-term goal of securing a college scholarship for their sons rather than getting caught up in the emotion of winning games and trophies in high school. He advised parents about contacting college coaches and sending videos showing their sons' skills.

"Your son is a product, and you're his agent," Grunet said. "You're behind the scenes marketing your son."

MVP held player tryouts to put together teams that will travel to baseball showcase tournaments in the summer and fall where college coaches and scouts might spot them.

Cost as investment

The tryouts and player evaluations were free. But the commitment is substantial for the young-
Students use science for art of predicting blooms

D.C. visitors depend on cherry tree forecast

BY MICHAEL E. RUANE
THE WASHINGTON POST

WASHINGTON—Every year, Rob DeFeo consults nature to figure out when Washington’s cherry blossoms will bloom. The National Park Service chief horticulturist, who has rough hands and wears a battered leather jacket, studies plants and trees, ponders seasons past, and taps instinct born of decades watching winter turn to spring.

Millions of dollars ride on his forecast, as does as the fate of the city’s annual tourist extravaganza, which began Saturday. DeFeo says he has been on target 13 out of 16 years.

But now come Virginia Tech’s Vidiya Dass and Elizabeth Brennan, students equipped with artificial neural networks, evolutionary computations, the Arrhenius equation, linear regression and something called fuzzy logic to suggest an alternative to DeFeo’s seasoned eye.

Which is to say: Might the brain of a computer, some day, match human blossom intuition?

It is, if you will, algorithm vs. biofeedback, a finger on the “enter” button vs. a finger in the wind, artificial intelligence vs. a guy who once had 300 species of azaleas in his yard.

The students’ idea grew out of an artificial intelligence class they took last spring as part of a master’s program at Virginia Tech’s Falls Church, Va., campus. Their teacher, assistant professor Chang-Tien Lu, suggested that they try using artificial intelligence to predict the peak bloom period.

The task has traditionally been done by DeFeo, 52, a wiry New Jersey native and lifelong horticulturist who is an expert on the life and lore of the renowned cherry blossoms. DeFeo scrutinizes such things as early flowering elms, maples and cornelian cherry dogwoods, as well as the weather and other recurring clues to the advent of spring.

This year, according to the forecast he issued this month, the peak bloom period would be from March 27 through April 3. He said Friday that Saturday was the peak bloom day, when 70 percent of the blossoms would open. The bloom generally continues for several days beyond the peak period, depending on the weather.

Man vs. computer

Dass, 33, a native of India, and Brennan, 24, from Baltimore, set out to see whether a computer model might, theoretically, do as well or better, making it easier for tourists to plan visits and officials to plan the National Cherry Blossom Festival.

“We hoped to create a model that would allow the best prediction with the minimum amount of input,” Brennan said, meaning as early in the season as possible. The goal was “to see how our artificial techniques compared to human methods.”

They tried an array of computer methods to see how each worked, the two said in interviews. They produced a paper last spring based on the research.

Their approach was far different from that of DeFeo, whom they consulted and who admits he understands little of what they report. “I don’t have a clue what they’re saying,” he said Friday.

Neither would most people.

Dass and Brennan said they focused on computational intelligence and essentially tried to mimic the working of the human brain. This involved considering things as “multiple-layered feedforward neural networks,” they wrote in their paper, as well as “delta rule,” “topology” and “Stochastic gradient method.”

The students started their project in January 2007 and observed the start of the annual blossom bloom. “They were quite striking, very beautiful,” said Brennan, who had never seen the flowers before.

The two did not hazard a forecast but plugged in historical data about past blooms and associated weather conditions. Because they used previously recorded data and outcomes, they were able to see which models worked best.

They found several models that were accurate to within a few days of past peak dates.

The students say some models, according to their calculations, came three days closer to the peak bloom date than DeFeo’s predictions.

But DeFeo focuses more on a bloom range, and, anyway, “it’s a crapshoot,” he said.

DeFeo said Friday that his track record is good, though his prediction is subject to the whims of the weather. He fretted, for example, about a forecast for some stormy weather next week, which could strip the delicate blossoms.

“I missed it three years,” he said. “All three years, they bloomed early on me. Two of those years, I missed it by five or six days; the other year, I missed it by one day.”

You must have “intimate daily contact with your tree population, or any existing thing, in order to understand it,” he said.

Computers “certainly have their use, but when they forecast the blossoms, I would never want to substitute a computer for going out and looking at the buds and seeing where they’re at.”
University puts premium on travel

BY CHERS NEWSMARKER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
TRENTON, N.J.

Welcome to Princeton University! Your first assignment is to take the year off.

The Ivy League university is starting a new program to encourage as many as 10 percent of their incoming freshmen to take off a year between high school and college to do social service work around the world.

"We think this kind of service experience abroad will give them a very different perspective on their Princeton education," Provost Christopher Eisgruber said.

The program, which university officials hope to have in place by the 2009-10 school year, would eventually involve as many as 100 students from each incoming class.

Eisgruber said the university wants to achieve two things: Allow the high-achieving students who get admitted to take a breather, and give them a chance to serve others while learning about the world.

Sophomore Eliza MacFarlane spent the 2005-06 school year helping autistic children in a rural Irish community, an experience she said helped prepare her for college and life.

"If everyone here spent a year focusing on someone else's needs, I think Princeton would be transformed," said MacFarlane, 21.

The university is trying to work out details about what kind of programs students might partner with and how much the initiative will cost.

Sandra Bermann, a literature professor working on the program, said living and working abroad would help students interpret what they read.

"When you're reading a text of poetry, it helps when you understand the cultural assumptions there," Bermann said.

Allan Goodman, CEO of the New York-based Institute of International Education, which promotes closer relations between educational institutions in the U.S. and abroad, sees potential in the program.

"The rest of the world will get to see our future leaders doing really significant and socially important things," he said.
Questions of coverage in student slayings

Mahato, Carson cases marked by uneven responses," read the headline in the Duke student newspaper last week. "Race, sex may affect news."

The stories in the Duke Chronicle struck a nerve with students in a class that I teach at Duke. Why, they wondered, was there such a disparity in the coverage of the murders of Duke graduate student Abhijit Mahato and UNC-Chapel Hill student body president Eve Carson? The Carson case was shocking. The story received front-page headlines in the Triangle and national coverage on network and cable television. In The N&O, her name comes up in 88 stories, editorials and letters to the editor published this month.

By contrast, after Mahato was found slain Jan. 18, the first mention of him was in a story on Page 2B on Jan. 20 about two slayings in Durham on the same night. His name has appeared 41 times in The N&O since January. Most of those stories came this month, after it was reported that the same person, Laurence Alvin Lovette Jr., had been charged in both killings.

There are obvious parallels in the cases. Mahato and Carson both were college students, both were victims of apparently random violence and both are tied to the same suspect. But the coverage was very different.

The students themselves last week pointed to differences in the cases that explained, if not justified, the varying news coverage.

- Carson was the student body president, Mahato a grad student. Relatively unknown outside his circle of acquaintances and fellow graduate students in the engineering school.

- UNC-Ch, with 28,000 students, is a much bigger campus community than Duke, with 13,000, so a student's death has wider reverberations.

- Mahato was an international student from India, a lower-profile population in the community.

- Carson's murder, as the second campus killing, made it a bigger news story.

- Carson was a young, attractive white female, and the suspect is a black male, which gives the story race and gender dimensions not present with the Mahato case.

- Some of the students last week saw the media as embracing a Southern miscegenation narrative playing to unhealthy stereotypes.

- "We as a society would like to say that nobody's tragedy is more tragic than another's, but the amount of media coverage devoted to a particular case versus another says otherwise," said a comment posted on the Chronicle Web site by a Duke alumnus. "This is very telling as far as the value we place on certain groups of people in this country, and that may be the biggest tragedy of all."

- Linda Williams, The N&O's senior editor responsible for local news coverage, has noted that similar questions were raised about the discrepancy in the coverage of Carson and Denita Smith, a 25-year-old black graduate student at N.C. Central University who was killed in January 2007. Smith's killing did not receive as much coverage, especially in the early going.

"One important reason is that the Durham police took more than 24 hours after the woman's body was found to acknowledge that the death was a homicide," Williams wrote in a blog on the N&O Web site, www.newsobserver.com. "The initial reports from police were perplexing. After confirming the homicide, police were still tight-lipped for a very long time about what happened."

- Williams said that as more information came out, the Smith story did move to the front page. "The lesson here is that we do not diminish our reporting and presentation when someone like Carson is killed, but that we work harder to get equitable treatment when people are involved from communities that have traditionally not been as forthcoming and as trusting of the press," she wrote.

- An N&O reader noticed that in a recent story about Lovette, the suspect in both the Carson and Mahato deaths, the newspaper never referred to Mahato. "Is it because Mahato is dark-skinned and from India?" I'll give the writers of the article the benefit of the doubt and say that the racial and ethnic overtones were unintended, but it's time for us to be more sensitive and more attuned to matters of race and ethnicity," wrote Louise Lockwood-Zorowsk, of Cary.

- I agree with the reader that the disparities in coverage are unintended. Other factors in the coverage — prominence of the individual, details of the crime, availability of information from police and other authorities — do genuinely account for differences in coverage. I wouldn't have lessened the coverage of Carson's death. But I do worry that we in the media are slow to recognize the same elements of waste and..."
Her Mini Page makes news kid-friendly to millions

BY ROGER VAN DER HORST
STAFF WRITER

RALEIGH — Granted face time with Supreme Court justices, first ladies and a U.S. senator, Betty Debnam Hunt has enjoyed the kind of access that inspires the respect, if not outright envy, of other journalists.

Debnam Hunt managed to build a certain cachet inside Washington not as a major player in the mainstream media but as the creator, reporter, editor, artist, saleswoman and guiding spirit of a four-page weekly newspaper that is delivered inside other papers.

What The Mini Page has lacked in traditional name value, it has gained over 37 years with its ability to reach a maximum audience, mostly children and educators, that has grown to include grandparents, parents, prisoners, really anyone learning to read.

It is syndicated in about 500 papers with a combined readership of about 13 million. It is used in school libraries. It is "one of the major phenomena in newspaper publishing over the last 35 years," says Dave Jones, the retired newspaper executive who helped Debnam Hunt launch it in Raleigh.

Finally, Debnam Hunt, 78, is stepping aside as the full-time editor and publisher. The official word came Tuesday, although she sold The Mini Page to Universal Press Syndicate, which has distributed the feature for 30 years, in May 2007.

"Don't use that word," she says.

"Don't say I'm retired. Say I'm moving on to other things."

She wants to paint more. She wants to write children's books. She wants to visit schools to see firsthand what's being taught and how.

She wants to spend more time working with the Debnam Hunt Literacy Resource Center at East Carolina University. She wants to spend more time with family and friends. She wants a dog.

But she cannot break free entirely. She will continue to write occasionally for The Mini Page and to offer suggestions. It's in her blood.

A journalistic family

Her grandparents ran the weekly Standard Laconic in Snow Hill. Her grandmother, Birdie Speight Debnam, put it out into her 80s, by which time her sight was failing but she used magic markers to better see what she had written in longhand.

Debnam Hunt's father, W.E. Debnam, became popular in North Carolina for his radio program, "Debnam Views The News."

With a political science degree from UNC-Chapel Hill, though, Betty Debnam dreamed of being named an ambassador somewhere. She first tried other lines, such as writing advertising copy for a department store and doing public relations work, before setting into a career as a second-grade teacher in Raleigh.

The Mini Page evolved from an idea she had for a curriculum tool called The Mini Unit, which was intended to make it simpler for teachers to quickly grasp different topics. The Raleigh school weren't interested, so she began to think she could apply the same concept of digestible chunks of information for teachers and students to newspapers.

She pitched the idea of a tabloid-size paper for children to Jones then the advertising director at The News & Observer, who liked it but told her she'd have to sell 12 ads before the paper would run it. Done. In keeping with the educational bent, she invented characters for the ads that would teach something about the products and services. For Jesse Jones Hot Dogs, Frankie and Frances Purter would do the selling. For North Hills Shopping Center, the task went to Paul and Polly Politely, who taught good manners.

She would invent other regulars as well — Polly Ticks, Alpha Betty, Mini Spy and Mighty Funny, for example.

The first Mini Page, a back-to-school issue, appeared on a Sunday, Aug. 31, 1969. (The Mini Page now goes into Monday's N&O.)

The first one included a "Who Am I" segment (Spiro Agnew, spelled backward), an "Animal of the Week" (the walking catfish) and a "Let's Take A Trip" (to Research Triangle Park) feature.

"I love what Dave Jones said about me, that I drew like a talented 4-year-old," she recalls.
Early on, she wanted to change what Jones described as the "very primitive, Grandma Moses-type" masthead she had drawn to something "slicker." Jones says he persuaded her to leave it alone, and it looks the same today: "I said, 'Part of the appeal of The Mini Page is the fact that it looks natural, like it was done by children.'"

**The big time**

Eventually, she took the idea to Charlotte and then to Norfolk, Va., ultimately hooking up with United Press and branching into books on various topics. A major breakthrough came, she says, when The Washington Post picked up The Mini Page in 1981. "A lot of our sources were in Washington, so the fact that we were in The Post helped, particularly locally," she says.

She also allowed sources to view proofs of her pieces before they are published — a no-no for traditional newspaper reporters — to make sure she got it factually right. "They like that. That's another reason we got good sources," she says. But The Mini Page never dropped a story because of any pressure from a source.

Universal Press gave her help. Longtime editor Alan McDermott recalls the Debnams "system."

"Every week I would get this big package full of her layout sheets, her copy sheets and any kind of illustrations or photos," he says. "It was a big jumble. It was like a big puzzle we assembled every week." Even as the staff grew to include a managing editor and others, Debnam remained so central to the feature that imagining it without her is like imagining the Dave Matthews Band without Dave Matthews.

She had been weighing the decision to step aside for some time. Her husband, retired Marine Col. Richard Hunt, was suffering from Alzheimer's disease. Hunt was a former N&O reporter, a military adviser to the late Vice President Hubert Humphrey and a lobbyist. He died in July at age 92.

"I just decided that this was a good time," says Debnam Hunt, who says she had nearly sold The Mini Page several times.

The constant deadline pressure had worn on her, bringing to mind a line by the late Charles Schulz, the creator of the "Peanuts" comic strip: "You always felt it was Sunday night and you had a quiz on Monday morning."

**Future editions**

Protective of her creation, she is keenly interested in where it is headed. Managing editor Lisa Tarry says the long relationship between the syndication company and Debnam Hunt has allowed her to step aside with a sense of trust that The Mini Page will not be dramatically altered. Indeed, Tarry says, no major changes are planned except for an increased online presence, which Debnam Hunt endorses.

Debnam Hunt, who will split time between homes in Washington and Raleigh, says that while the art has gotten better, The Mini Page has preserved its educational approach. It's the newspaper approach that raises doubts about its future, given the industry's overall circulation losses. Asked whether she had detected any corresponding loss of relevance in the Internet age, she gives it a moment's thought.

"No," she says.

"Tarry says The Mini Page has remained more stable than newspapers in general because many papers sell ads for it, more than making up for the cost. "It has sort of an extra value that some things don't," she says.

It remains relevant "because it's something that kids can easily read in newspapers, which don't have a whole lot that kids can easily read," says Lesley Richardson, media and Web librarian for Learn NC, a network of educators brought together by UNC-Chapel Hill.

Beyond the hard copy, Debnam Hunt can envision a Web site, a Mini Page television show, more books, ideally. At the same time, she is worried about the time that many children devote to hand-held games, "so I'll be interested to see what sort of future" awaits The Mini Page and the partnership of newspapers and educators.

There is much to learn, and Betty Debnam Hunt is wrapping her arms around it.
School reviews students for threats

Team at University of Kentucky aims to avert bloodshed

By Jeffrey McMurray
The Associated Press

LEXINGTON, Ky. — On the agenda:
A student who got into a shouting
match with a faculty member. An-
other who harassed a female class-
mate. Someone found sleeping in
a car. And a student who posted
a threat against a professor on
Facebook.

In a practice adopted at one col-
lege after another since the mas-
sacre at Virginia Tech, a Univer-
sity of Kentucky committee of
deans, administrators, campus po-
lice and mental health officials
has begun meeting regularly to
discuss a watch list of troubled
students and decide whether they
need professional help or should
be sent packing.

These "threat assessment
groups" are aimed at heading off
the kind of bloodshed seen at Vir-
ginia Tech a year ago and at
Northern Illinois University last
month.

"You've got to be way ahead of
the game, so to speak, expect what
may be coming. If you're able to
identify behaviors early on and
get these people assistance, it
avoids disruptions in the class-
rooms and potential violence," said
Maj. Joe Monroe, interim police
chief at Kentucky.

The Kentucky panel, called Stu-
dents of Concern, held its first
meeting last week and will con-
vene at least twice a month to
talk about students whose strange
or disturbing behavior has come
to their attention.

Such committees represent a
change in thinking among U.S.
college officials, who for a long
time were reluctant to share in-
formation about students' men-
tal health for fear of violating pri-
vacy laws.

"If a student is a danger to him-
self or others, all the privacy con-
cerns go out the window," said
Patricia Terrell, vice president of
student affairs, who created the
panel.

Among other things, the panel
can order a student into counseling
or bar him or her from enter-
ing a particular building or taking
to a certain person. It can also or-
der a judicial hearing that can lead
to suspension or expulsion if the
student's offense was a violation
of the law or school policy.

Students are encouraged dur-
ing their freshman orientation to
report suspicious behavior to the
dean of students, and university
employees all the way down to
janitors and cafeteria workers are
instructed to tell their supervi-
sors if they see anything.

"If you look back at the Virginia
Tech situation, the aftermath,
there were several people who
knew that student had problems,
but because of privacy and dif-
ferent issues, they didn't talk to
others about it," said Lee Todd,
UK president.
As NCCU grows

N.C. Central University is a thriving university in the heart of Durham. Historically, it was the first state-supported liberal arts college for African-Americans in the country and in 2010 will celebrate 100 years of service to this state and nation.

While NCCU has managed well over the last 98 years with its current land mass, those of us affiliated with the university are all too aware that the campus is bursting at the seams. And yet, NCCU must continue to grow if it is to remain responsive and effective in preparing students to be successful in an ever-competitive global marketplace. We are projecting that enrollment will increase from the existing 8,300 students to 13,500 students by 2017. Such growth cannot be accommodated without additional classroom buildings, residence halls, parking structures and other facilities.

The proposed NCCU master plan not only calls for the construction of new buildings but also seeks to significantly improve the aesthetic beauty of the campus. We are committed to minimizing the potential impact imposed by a landlocked campus with an attitude of respect for the community that gave rise to this institution.

Despite the projected 62 percent growth in enrollment, we plan to hold our physical expansion to 160 acres, just 18 percent of our current size. Improvements to the campus will not only result in better academic and living spaces but also will attract visitors and investors to the area and ultimately increase the property values in the surrounding community.

N.C. Central University is an integral part of Durham's collective history, and we invite the community to partner with us in writing a new chapter in one of its own best success stories.

Charlie Nelms, Chancellor, NCCU, Durham

The length limit was waived.
Magazine's marks high for state's grad programs

FROM STAFF REPORTS

Graduate programs at North Carolina universities continue to earn high placement in U.S. News & World Report's "America's Best Graduate Schools" ranking.

The latest results will be featured in the issue that hits newsstands Monday. Each year, the magazine ranks graduate programs in the major disciplines of business, education, engineering, law and medicine. Here's how North Carolina schools placed in these categories:

- **BUSINESS:** Duke University (14); UNC-Chapel Hill (19); Wake Forest University (35); N.C. State University (59)
- **EDUCATION:** UNC-CH (22); UNC-Greensboro (73); UNC-Charlotte (87); N.C. State (119)
- **ENGINEERING:** N.C. State (30); Duke University (35); UNC-CH (72)
- **LAW:** Duke (12); UNC-CH (38); Wake Forest (42)
- **MEDICINE (RESEARCH):** Duke (6); UNC-CH (19); Wake Forest (42)
- **MEDICINE (PRIMARY CARE):** UNC-CH (2); East Carolina University (17); Wake Forest (35); Duke (41)

The publication reviews other programs on an occasional basis, and this year it released new rankings in audiology, clinical psychology, occupational therapy, pharmacy, physical therapy, social work, speech-language pathology, public affairs and public policy, and fine arts. U.S. News also updated its rankings in computer science, mathematics and physics to correct a problem with its 2006 survey.

To see the full list of rankings, go to www.usnews.com.