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East Carolina University News Bureau
E-mail to durhamj@ecu.edu Web site at http://www.news.ecu.edu
252-328-6481 FAX: 252-328-6300
Actress Grant shares experience with students

By Kristin Day
The Daily Reflector

Tuesday, March 31, 2009

Her name isn’t the most recognizable in the entertainment industry, but without a doubt, you know her face.

East Carolina University distinguished alumna Beth Grant visited Greenville’s Sheppard Memorial Library to share life experiences, her professional advice and her constant positive attitude with local students.

Grant has been in the entertainment biz for more than three decades mastering roles of tough Southern women.

She’s acted in more than 70 feature films such as “No Country For Old Men,” “Little Miss Sunshine” and “Speed” and cult films such as “Donnie Darko” and “Sordid Lives.” She performed in more than 30 stage plays including “Sid/Arthur” and “Holy Ghosts” and guest-starred on hundreds of television series, from “Friends” and “My Name Is Earl” to “Malcom In The Middle” and “Yes, Dear.”

Her career began in 1972, after she graduated from East Carolina University’s School of Theatre and Dance.

“Go Pirates!” she shouted over applause following a montage of her greatest work. “What beautiful faces. Thanks for coming.

“I sure can be ugly, can’t I?”

Grant and acting moderator Jeff Elwell, dean of the College of Fine Arts and Communication, reminisced about her time at ECU, when she served for two years as president of the ECU College Democrats and started the children’s theater. She was not, however, star of the stage.

In fact, she spent much of her time learning about directing, writing, lighting and costumes, she said. It wasn’t until her senior year that she landed a leading role in Romulus Linney’s “Holy Ghost.”

In short, her time here was suitable preparation for her upcoming trials through New York and Hollywood, she said.

“I had to have tenacity and perseverance,” she said before the event Tuesday. “...So by the time I got to New York, I understood rejection.”

She left Greenville and worked the theaters in the Big Apple before heading to Los Angeles, where she got her first job on the television series “BJ the Bear” and followed some small projects until she turned 30. That’s when she really became focused, she said.

She began taking classes again and learned to be a character actress. Shortly after that, she was cast in “Rain Man” as the mother at the farmhouse, and the work started rolling in.

“They’re supporting roles, so that helps,” Grant said of fitting all those jobs into her schedule. “But I’ve always had a lot of energy ... I think energy creates energy.”

And through those roles, she’s had several run-ins with fellow ECU student Sandra Bullock, of whom she admits she was jealous until they met at a table reading for “Speed.”

“I thought, ‘Oh, my God, it’s that girl from ECU,’’ she told her audience Tuesday afternoon. “Then she looked at me, and I fell in love.”

Bullock would end up being the only reason a homesick Grant stayed with the movie. This October, you can
see Grant play Bullock's mother in the movie “All About Steve.”

Grant has been busy lately.

She will appear in 10 films that are still in production. Even when they are completed, Grant said she still has some goals to accomplish.

"I've been trying to break into leading roles for the last 10 years," she said, adding that most of her past roles were there to bring color to the story. "... I'm trying to do characters that have more of an arch."

Two of those roles include "Trials and Tribulations of a Trailer Trash Housewife," a play which could be revived at ECU sometime soon, and "Herpes Boy," a film based on a kid one of her director-friends found on YouTube.

The movie features Ahna O'Reilly of “Forgetting Sarah Marshall” and "Nancy Drew” and Julianna McCarthy of “The Young and the Restless,” as well as Grant's daughter, Mary, and husband, Michael Chieffo, also an actor. They are submitting the film to festivals and its first screening will be on May 1.

"It's so low-budget that I think surely we'll make a dollar," Grant said laughing.

She also hopes to work on another film based on her experience working with underprivileged children on a softball league, Pigtail Softball, in North Carolina.

Then perhaps, one day, she'll fulfill her fantasy to retire and settle back in Greenville — one day.

"You can't stop a train while it's moving," she said. "So I have to keep working while I can ... I love ECU and I love this town. It's home to me."

Check out Beth Grant's latest project at www.herpesboy.com or view the trailer on YouTube. Contact Kristin Day at kday@coxnc.com or (252) 329-9579.

Even when she graduated from Governor's School at 16, they told her she didn't have natural talent. She was a hard worker, and that was going to take her places. But one role she hated! let go was as xxxx on CBS' "Jericho."

"Jericho' was great," she said. "I hated getting killed. It was so sad."

"good attitude"

"Be professional on the set," she said. "Be kind. Talk to the prop guy. Learn about the technicians."

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PCC stepping up efforts to enforce smoking policy

By Brock Letchworth
The Daily Reflector

Tuesday, March 31, 2009

WINTERVILLE — Pitt Community College officials say they have stepped up their efforts to monitor compliance regarding the campus’ smoking policy.

Complaints from some students and staff have members of the PCC Tobacco Free Campus Initiative Task Force paying closer attention, keeping an eye out around campus to see if students and staff are adhering to the prohibition of smoking in all buildings, vehicles and within 25 feet of all PCC building entrances.

Officials from the office of Student Development Services also have asked all staff and students to participate in a survey to determine whether smokers are still lighting up in restricted areas.

Donald Spell, vice president of Student Development Services, said their findings will be used to determine if the policy, which has been in place for more than two years now, needs to be revised or if penalties should be enforced.

There is no penalty for a failure to comply, Spell said, although students could be written up for a violation of the Student Code of Conduct.

"Some of us have gotten e-mails from people complaining about people not respecting the rules so we wanted to look beyond the anecdotes to determine if people really aren't complying," Spell said.

"This does not mean that there will be any changes or modifications. We are just looking to see what the situation is because it has always been the policy of the college to provide employees and students with a working and learning environment that contributes to their personal health, safety and well-being. Certainly, second-hand smoke has been shown to be problematic."

Spell said the survey ended Tuesday and officials will begin evaluating the results in the next couple of days.

There are currently no plans to make the campus tobacco-free, Spell said.

PCC was one of 10 universities and community colleges to receive a Tobacco-Free Colleges grant last year from the Health and Wellness Trust Fund. PCC uses its $67,846 to fund its Tobacco Free Campus Initiative Task Force, Spell said.

East Carolina University also was awarded a $70,000 grant to help it expand its comprehensive tobacco use prevention and cessation program. ECU's smoking policy for its main campus is similar to the one at PCC.

It restricts smoking in all university facilities and vehicles and within 25 feet of all buildings.

As of the first of this year, ECU's policy at its Health Sciences campus restricts smoking anywhere on the grounds.

Spell said PCC officials will continue to ensure that those on campus are well educated about smoking policies, but everyone needs to chip in.

"You have so many new students coming in each semester so it is a constant education campaign," Spell said.

"At some schools, students are an integral part of making sure people adhere to the policy. They remind each other and spread the word. We are encouraging our students to do the same."
18-year-old arrested in brutal beating of UNCC professor

By Steve Lyttle
slyttle@charlotteobserver.com
Posted: Tuesday, Mar. 31, 2009

Weaver

More Information

- Interactive Map: Crime in Mecklenburg County

Police have made an arrest in the brutal beating of a UNC Charlotte professor who was left in a coma for months and is still recovering from those injuries.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg police say they took an 18-year-old man into custody Monday in Davidson County and charged him with the robbery and beating of UNCC faculty member Narayan Dhakal last fall.

Two more suspects are being sought, police add.

Maurice James Weaver was taken into custody about 1 p.m. Monday in South Lexington, with officers from CMPD and the Davidson County Sheriff's Office joining forces. Police say Weaver was arrested without incident.

Dhakal, a 42-year-old mathematics teacher, was leaving a bar in Charlotte's uptown area about 1:40 a.m. last Oct. 10 and was walking back to his car, when he was approached by three men. Police say the attackers began kicking Dhakal in the head, kicking him several times and leaving him unconscious. He was left in a coma for about two months. Dhakal also was robbed during the attack.

In January, NewsChannel 36, the Observer's news partner, talked to Dhakal's brother, Abi, about the professor's
recovery from the beating.

"He can communicate, but the verbal part is not very clear," his brother told NewsChannel 36.

Police say their Violent Criminal Apprehension Team developed leads that pointed them in the direction of Weaver as one of the suspects.

He is in a Mecklenburg County jail.

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Graduating With a Major in Go-Getting

By TODD GUTNER

Darvika Sarin had been working toward finding her first post-college job since she arrived at school her freshman year.

A business and psychology major at Franklin & Marshall College in Lancaster, Pa., Ms. Sarin consistently kept in touch with professionals she met working as a summer intern, including stints with an investment bank in India and at National Economic Research Associates in New York City. Her networking, follow-through and focus paid off. The latter firm offered her a full-time position after she graduates. "I was fortunate," says Ms. Sarin.

Many college students graduating this spring haven't been as lucky. That's no surprise given that the number of U.S. job openings sank to below three million in January, according to the Labor Department, the lowest level since 2000. Worse, employers recruiting on college campuses expect to hire about 22% fewer graduates from this year's class than last year's, according to a new report from the National Association of Colleges and Employers. But with the right strategy, you may be able to turn the odds of success in your favor, as Ms. Sarin did.

"It's probably never been harder for a degree holder to find a job," says Rabia de Lande Long, a human-resources consultant with Chartwell Advisors in New York.

Still, career experts say graduates have some advantages over senior professionals. "There are definitely benefits to hiring graduating students," says Kerri Day Keller, who directs career services at Kansas State University.

Youth Has Advantages

First off, newbie grads are less expensive than job seekers with a few years of work experience under their belts. In this belt-tightening economy, getting more for less is an attractive option for many firms. While new graduates might not have the breadth of experience, they usually are willing to work hard and do what's required to get ahead, says Ms. Keller.

What's more, recent graduates tend to be more flexible than more-established workers. Without the burden of a mortgage, a spouse and children, many graduates are willing to take a less-than-perfect job that is located in a less-desirable city or may require significant travel or has a lower salary than an experienced hire would accept. For Allison Lakey, a graduating senior from Milliken University in Decatur, Ill., her first post-college year will be spent visiting each one of the 134 chapters nationwide of the Tri Delta Sorority as a regional consultant for the organization. "I'll be on an airplane every three to five days, but it's a great first job," says Ms. Lakey, a communications major and a Tri Delta member herself.

Being open-minded and creative when you think about what you want to do -- and where you might be able to do it -- is important too, say career experts. "If you listen to common wisdom, finance is dead," says Frank Tortorello, executive director of career services at Franklin & Marshall and a former manager of college recruiting for Merrill Lynch. "Maybe finance on Wall Street is dead, but lots of companies still need help in this area," says Mr. Tortorello.

Young people tend to be more open to alternatives than professionals already on a well-worn career path, he says, and would be
smart to look at finance jobs outside of banking, like at a hospital or transportation company.

Don’t rule out internships even though they’re temporary and pay little or nothing. They’re something few experienced workers can afford to pursue. "It’s a great way to get your foot in the door of a company," says Brad Karsh, president of JobBound, a career-coaching company in Chicago and co-author of "How to Say it on Your Résumé." Internships can give graduating students new skills, a broader network and a way to set themselves apart from others. And if the job market improves, an intern who was well-regarded is in a good position to be hired.

Be Creative

Of course, to get the most out of this edge, college grads need to be more creative than their experienced counterparts. In your résumé, "focus on and give specifics of the things you have done or accomplished," says Mr. Karsh. "Don’t just describe the position," he says. You’ll also want to broaden your definition of experience and highlight it. Mention your internships, sports and volunteer activities. Describe actions and accomplishments that show leadership skills and initiative. If you were the treasurer for your college student government, highlight the size of the budget you managed and any results you delivered.

More critical is a strong network of mentors and contacts, like the sort that Ms. Sarin fostered. "It’s practically impossible to land a job today without some kind of professional connection," says Michael A. Sciola, director of the Career Resource Center at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Conn.

Young people have had less time to build contacts, which means reaching out in unconventional ways. "Ask the friends of your parents for advice and information, but not a job," says Gail Rooney, the director of the University of Illinois Career Center. Tap your alumni databases to find people at companies you’d like to work with. And join networking sites like LinkedIn.com to foster relationships with professionals who can get your résumé in front of decision makers.

Reach Out to the Industry

You also should attend industry conferences; introduce yourself to more experienced attendees and request their business cards. Email new contacts with your résumé, says Ms. de Lande Long. Ask for 20 minutes of their time to get feedback and suggestions on how to move forward with your job search.

Edward Stautberg, a master’s degree student in the Energy and Earth Resources program at the University of Texas in Austin, has employed these tactics. "I am pursuing every opportunity I can find to promote the program and myself," he says.

He recently attended the North American Prospect Expo, the major annual oil and gas industry conference in Houston, and introduced himself to the marketing people manning the booths to find out if any company recruiters were in attendance. His approach: "I’m here today trying to sell myself," Mr. Stautberg says he told people. As for his success, he says he "got lots of laughs [and] a number of business cards." Even better, Mr. Stautberg is still in contact with some about potential positions.
Recession Has Silver Lining for Class of '09
Many Private Colleges Are Admitting More Applicants to Ensure Full Enrollment

By Susan Kinzie
Washington Post Staff Writer
Wednesday, April 1, 2009; A01

Many private colleges have admitted more students than usual this year, hedging their bets as they wait to find out whether families find higher tuitions difficult to manage in the recession.

After years of increasing selectivity driven by bumper crops of strong applicants, many private college officials are concerned that more students will turn to public universities, which are less expensive. As of today's deadline to notify most applicants, many schools have sent out more acceptance letters and e-mails, built bigger waiting lists and pumped more money into financial aid to lure students to their campuses.

The bottom line: It will be slightly easier to gain admission to some private colleges this year, officials said.

The private schools' concerns are part of a confusing overall admissions picture for the high school Class of 2009, the largest ever at 3 million students. Many public universities have experienced increases in applications, but it is unclear whether that has made admission more difficult across the board. And some elite universities such as Harvard and Dartmouth are even more competitive than usual this year, in part because they have assured low-income students that they won't have to borrow money to pay their costs.

At Johns Hopkins University, officials were on edge in the fall when applications were down by as much as 35 percent, then taken aback by a surge that left them with a 1 percent increase over last year's record number. Still, they offered admission to 250 more students than usual and increased the size of their wait list by about 10 percent.

"The world is changing pretty fast," said John Latting, dean of undergraduate admissions at Hopkins. "I just don't know what's going to happen."

Bill Conley, dean of enrollment and academic services at Hopkins, said: "We think more kids will be looking at lower-cost flagship publics. We think some kids will perhaps get better financial aid packages elsewhere."

At Dickinson College, a small liberal arts school in Carlisle, Pa., the number of applications dropped about 5 percent from last year's total. The number of early-decision applicants who were admitted but pulled out for financial reasons doubled. Officials are expecting more students to reject the school this summer as they consider their finances and its $50,200 price tag.

"That makes it very, very difficult for us to project our classes," said Robert Massa, Dickinson's vice
Because of Recession, Many Private Colleges Admitting More Stude...  http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/3...

president for enrollment.

Dickinson increased financial aid and accepted 48 percent of its applicants, up from 42 percent last year. American University took steps early on to reassure families about financial aid and experienced only a small decline in applicants.

At public colleges, demand is high -- in some cases, it outpaces state school budgets. But officials are anticipating that fewer students they accept from out of state will choose to attend.

For the institutions, enrollment is crucial at a time of budget cuts and shrinking endowments. If calculations yield too few students, a school could fall short on tuition revenue; if too many decide to attend, costs could rise and housing shortages could result. School officials also are worried about "melt," the number of students who drift away over the summer as family finances change or they are taken off wait lists elsewhere.

David Hamilton, director of college advising at St. Mary's Ryken High School in Southern Maryland, said: "I tell students, 'You think you're stressed out, figuring out where you're going to go? Admissions officers, presidents, provosts are looking at the numbers hour by hour because 17-year-olds are making decisions.' This won't be put to bed till the end of summer."

Families will be weighing their options, comparing financial aid packages and trying to predict their economic futures. More than 90 percent of the students surveyed by Royall & Co., a higher education marketing and research firm, said they were changing their college plans because of the economy.

The national survey of college-bound high school seniors found that many plan to keep their options open: Twenty-eight percent said they would send deposits to more than one college, a 160 percent increase over last year.

"Students are shopping around -- no doubt about it," said Phil Day, president of a financial aid administrators association.

When asked how the economy was affecting their decisions, more than half the students surveyed late last year said they were more likely to go to home-state schools. In a February follow-up, that number had risen 10 percent.

In the fall, Bill and Mary Becker of Bethesda told twin daughters Emily and Lauren they no longer had the luxury of choosing any school regardless of price. Emily Becker was interested in private schools such as Tulane and Syracuse.

When his son chose a school previously, money did not come up, Bill Becker said, "Now it's become a much more important criterion than we ever thought. I'm sure there are tens of thousands of families concluding that very same thing."

This year's admissions season follows a turbulent one a year ago, when some elite schools ended early admission and dramatically increased financial aid for many students, making it difficult for some schools to predict how many students to accept.

Some public schools, such as the University of Florida, are worried about over-enrollment; Florida admitted about 400 fewer students this year. At the University of Maryland, the number of applications was up 1 percent.

Some private liberal arts colleges are experiencing increased interest. At Trinity Washington University, a small private women's school in the District, applications are up more than 20 percent. At Georgetown University, which could have had a downturn because of its $51,500 total cost, the number of applications has remained steady.
Georgetown's Charles Deacon, like several other admissions officials in the District, believes financial worries were balanced this year by an "Obama factor" -- young people excited about the new administration and drawn to area schools because they want to be nearby.

The most elite private universities have been holding their own, with some experiencing big jumps in applications this year. Harvard had another record year for applications and admitted just 7 percent of its applicants.

Like Harvard, many of the most selective schools introduced generous new financial aid packages in recent years, assuring low-income families that they would not have to take out loans.

Some wonder whether the recession will make parents more willing to invest in higher education rather than less. "Just like we saw in the financial markets -- the flight to quality, people not wanting risk," Hopkins's Latting said.

The Becker twins were accepted at almost every school to which they applied, said Mary Becker. Lauren will probably choose one of two public universities. Emily was accepted at Syracuse, a school she thought was a reach for her.

"It's a private school, and it's very expensive," her mother said. "But the nice thing about Syracuse is she was offered some scholarship money, which helped, and she was also given some work-study money. . . . If we had not gotten that money, I don't think it would have been possible."

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Road to college is often grueling
Star players find process stressful

By Jim Halley
USA TODAY

CORAL GABLES, Fla. — For players who reach the level of a McDonald's All-American, basketball is a job, recruiting isn't fun for long and high school basketball would be better served if it used a shot clock.

At least that's the collective opinion of four McDonald's All-Americans who took part in a USA TODAY roundtable discussion Monday. The All-American Games are today with the girls game at 5:30 p.m. ET (ESPNU) and the boys game at 8 (ESPN).

All four players who were part of the roundtable have signed with major-college programs.

Forward Joslyn Tinkle of Big Sky (Missoula, Mont.), the only girls player in the group, is headed to Stanford; guard Xavier Henry of Putnam City (Oklahoma City) has signed with Memphis; Oak Hill center Keith "Tiny" Gallon has signed with Oklahoma; and forward Ryan Kelly of Ravencroft (Raleigh, N.C.) is bound for Duke.

The No. 1 topic for the athletes was recruiting.

"The schools will do a lot of stuff for you and tell you what you want to hear, but when they keep calling and then they text and they get people to start calling you, it begins to get on my nerves," Henry said. "They get the players to text you. It's good and all, but after a while you get tired of it."

Official visits can be a lot of fun — Gallon said he got to hang out with and even get his shot blocked by Blake Griffin on his visit to Oklahoma — but coaches often put enormous pressure on athletes to make their college choice during those visits.

"Some coaches were forcing you; that's why I didn't take too many visits," Gallon said. "I felt good pressure and bad pressure."

Kelly added that the recruiting process can be overwhelming.

"You have to control it, because it is impossible to handle all the phone calls you get or the number of text messages," he said.

The person getting recruited has to handle it and set lines where people can't cross, that say, 'I don't want you to call me that many times.' If they're recruiting you, they had better listen to what you say."

"For me, the pressure was more during the school year, because for a lot of the summer, they're not allowed to talk to you and I was away a lot with USA Basketball," Tinkle said. "That was kind of nice because I was away from recruiting for about a month."

As for on-court issues, Tinkle said she would like to see a shot clock become more common in high school basketball.

"A shot clock would prepare those who are going to the next level, and also it speeds up the pace of the game," Tinkle said.

"I think having a shot clock would speed up the game and even up the playing field in that a lot of teams couldn't hold the ball," Kelly said. "You run into weaker teams that hold the ball, and that's not exactly basketball."

All four players did charity work this week at a Ronald McDonald House in Miami, but none of the group has ever worked at McDonald's — or at any job, for that matter — outside of a little babysitting by Tinkle.

"I've never had a job in my life," Henry said. "My job is playing basketball."