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Student loan reform will benefit ECU students

The exceeding high cost of a college education burdens students long after they receive their degrees. Facing budget cuts and declining endowments, many universities continue to move the burden of payment onto students, saddling recent graduates with crushing debt that can take more than a decade to resolve.

The federal student loan reform approved last week may not erase that burden, nor will it ensure that students can enter the workforce without the demands of repayment. But it should provide a needed boost in those first years after school while saving Washington billions, achievements that Americans should enthusiastically support.

Included in the final legislation to overhaul the nation’s health care infrastructure was significant reform of the student loan process. A system that burdens recent graduates with crushing financial debt will soon see significant change, as Washington seeks to reduce the long-term cost of pursuing a higher education in a way that should produce significant savings for the federal government.

The authorizing bill is broad and ambitious in its scope. The central reform is to remove private banks as the gatekeepers to education loans, putting the government in charge of lending money to students. Loan repayment will change as recent graduates will only need to pay 10 percent of their salary each rather than the 15 percent they pay now.

Removing those middlemen should produce about $68 billion in savings over the next decade, and that money will be used to double the funding for Pell Grants, which help about 8.5 million students attend college. Additionally, the law will distribute $2 billion to community colleges over four years, and $2.55 billion to historically black colleges.

For a community that boasts two premier institutions of higher learning, this represents a long-overdue attempt to mend a broken system.

Though East Carolina University is one of the most affordable colleges in North Carolina, students still leave here with crippling debt and serious financial obligations during their first years in the job market. These changes will reduce that burden, and the Pell Grant reform should allow more children from lower and middle-class families to seek degrees. Pitt Community College could stand to benefit as well, depending on how the resulting windfall is distributed.

The cost of college may remain high, but streamlining the loan process represents an exciting step toward making college more affordable. President Obama’s commitment to this reform is admirable and its effects will benefit students in this community.
Students will notice little change in loan process
By JOSH HUMPHRIES
The Daily Reflector
Sunday, April 4, 2010
East Carolina University students will notice few changes to the process for obtaining students loans after the new law governing federal financial aid goes into effect, said Julie Poorman, director of the financial aid office at ECU.
The new law will eliminate fees paid to private banks to act as intermediaries in providing loans to college students and the federal Department of Education will manage and grant student loans beginning this summer.
“We are hoping to minimize the impact,” Poorman said. “We had forewarning that this was likely coming and we have been setting up the software.”
The biggest change students will notice will be in their repayment options after graduation, she said.
“Student will not notice a difference except when it comes to repayment,” Poorman said. “This legislation created new, more user-friendly options for repayment.”
Congress has set the interest for student loans for years, but private lenders controlled the repayment schedule. The new law will give students different options for repayment.
Students who borrow after July 2014 will be allowed to cap repayments at 10 percent of income above a basic living allowance, instead of 15 percent.
If graduates keep up with payments, their balances will be forgiven after 20 years instead of 25 years — even sooner at 10 years for those in public service like teachers, nurses and military personnel.
Because the federal government will not be paying administration fees to banks, it will save billions of dollars. The law includes a $2 billion investment in community colleges across the country.
Poorman said students will have to sign a new promissory note and conduct a new loan entrance interview.
Students who want loans for the second semester of summer classes this year must get materials in by June 25, Poorman said.
Private lenders will not be allowed to make new loans after July 1, when the program will be taken over by the Department of Education.
Contact Josh Humphries at jhumphries@reflector.com or (252) 329-9565.
ECU police investigate car break-ins
The Daily Reflector
Thursday, April 1, 2010
East Carolina University police are investigating a rash of nine car break-ins in one week at a parking lot adjacent to campus, reports showed.
Eight break-ins occurred at Reade Circle parking area number three, ranging from about 5 p.m. until just after midnight March 24-25, according to the reports. A ninth break-in reportedly occurred sometime between 6 p.m. March 26 and 8:40 p.m. March 29. Not every car had items stolen, according to ECU reports.
“None of the stolen property has been recovered yet, but we’re conducting a combined investigation with the Greenville Police,” ECU Assistant Chief Dawn Tevepaugh said Wednesday.
Stolen items from the vehicles included an MP3 player, jewelry, earphones and car chargers, a curling iron, sunglasses and a vehicle registration with a total value listed at $405.
A Greenville Police Department spokesman confirmed that the investigation is ongoing and GPD detectives are continuing to conduct interviews.
Investigation of fatal fire continues
By Michael Abramowitz
The Daily Reflector
Sunday, April 4, 2010
Greenville Fire-Rescue officials continued to investigate the death of a Greenville woman in a fire on South Harding Street as her neighbors and friends gathered outside her home Saturday to place memorial flowers and share stories of her life.
Investigators stayed at 116 S. Harding Street, the home of Franceine Perry Rees, 64, until midnight, sifting through debris for a cause and point of origin of the fire, but have not released any official findings.
A chair seemed to be the likely point of origin for the fire, a Fire-Rescue spokesman said after the preliminary investigation.
“There was heavy smoke throughout the house, but less fire damage,” the spokesman said.
Officials are awaiting the results of a State Medical Examiner’s autopsy and toxicological report before making a final determination, the official said.
Rees, a retired East Carolina University news bureau employee, was alone in her home when her neighbors, Marsha Ironsmith and John Lutz, noticed smoke coming from a window on the side of the residence about 6:30 p.m.
“Marsha called 911, and I went and checked the doors, which were all locked. The front door was ajar but held by a chain,” Lutz said.
A Greenville police officer arrived within minutes, followed by Rees’s son, Lutz said.
Greenville Fire-Rescue personnel arrived 10 minutes after that, Lutz said, “but I think it was too late by then.”
“We broke the chain on the door, but the smoke was so thick, we couldn’t get in,” Ironsmith said.
Neighbors Lena and Roy Carowan joined the effort to force their way into the house and rescue Rees.
“First we broke a window and called her name out, but there was no answer,” Lena Carowan said. “Then Roy forced the door open, and it was just a wall of thick black smoke. There was no way to advance in, and we knew it was bad for her.”
The neighbors said medical personnel worked to revive Rees after they brought her out of the house. Their efforts were unsuccessful, and Rees was declared dead at Pitt County Memorial Hospital, her friends said.
After her retirement, Rees — an enthusiastic Democratic Party supporter — assisted voter registration efforts and local party candidates. She also had an interest in genealogy and was an active member of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, her neighbors said.
Pam Johnson, a neighbor for nearly 20 years, said that Rees, a former Greenville Historic Preservation Commission member, was deeply interested in her neighborhood and her neighbors.
“She had great fun for many years in decorating her home as a haunted house; it was the place to come in Greenville for Halloween,” Johnson said.
St. Paul’s pastor the Rev. Bob Hudak took time from his Easter preparations Saturday morning to speak about Rees at his parish office.
“She was a devoted and faithful member of St. Paul’s, volunteering in the office and in the food pantry,” Hudak said. “At her best, she was a bright, witty and delightful person who loved people. I will be asking our members to remember her and her family at our Easter services.”
A memorial service for Rees will be held at 2 p.m. Tuesday at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church.
Funeral arrangements are being handled by Wilkerson Funeral Home.
Contact Michael Abramowitz at mabramowitz@reflector.com or (252) 329-9571.
Linda Brown Cartner Miller

Linda Brown Cartner Miller BLOUNTS CREEK - Dr. Linda Brown Cartner Miller died at U.H.S. Inpatient Hospice with her family present on March 31, 2010 at the age of 54. A memorial service will be announced at a later date to be held at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Greenville. Interment will be private. Dr. Miller was born Jan. 11, 1956, in Lenoir, daughter and second child of John Alexander Cartner Jr. of Lenoir and Anna Gertrude Hardison Cartner of Pitt County. She was educated in the public schools of Greenville and graduated from Stuart Hall School, Staunton, Va. in 1974. She attended and graduated from North Carolina State University in textile engineering in 1978 and was awarded the M.S. degree in the same field in 1980 where her thesis was on the knot strengths of sutures. She was employed in the textile industry in Tennessee and North Carolina where she developed a further interest in medicine from her volunteer efforts as an emergency medical and paramedical technician. Dr. Miller graduated from the Brody School of Medicine of East Carolina University in 1999 and where she performed her resident training in psychiatry. She subsequently practiced in Beaufort, Martin and Pamlico Counties as a child psychiatrist. She is survived by her husband, Donald S. Miller; daughters, Sarah T.C. Miller, student at Meredith College, and Elizabeth R. B. Miller, student at P.S. Jones Middle School; brother, John A.C. Cartner and wife, Mary Charles, of Alexandria, Va. and Beaufort; uncles, George Hardison, of Wadsworth, Ohio, and C.J. Cartner, of Newport News, Va.; brother-in-law, Edgar M. Swindell and wife, Jessica Parks, of Alexandria, Va.; nephew, Christian W.J. Cartner; nieces, Natalie V.O. Cartner, Allison P. Swindell, and Caitlin P. Swindell; and grand-niece, Skyley O.G. Cartner. The family request donations in lieu of flowers be sent to Susan G. Komen for the Cure, Attn: Donor Services, PO Box 650309, Dallas, TX 75265-0309 in memory of Dr. Linda B. Miller or to the Service League of Greenville Inpatient Hospice, C O PCMH Foundation, P.O. Box 8489, Greenville, NC 27835-8489. Online condolences at www.wilkersonfuneralhome.com. Arrangements by Wilkerson Funeral Home and Crematory, Greenville.

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PEOPLE IN THE NEWS SPOTLIGHT

Wanda Scarborough retires after 40-year career at ECU

Wanda Scarborough of Kinston has retired after a 40-year career at East Carolina University. She was director of Dowdy Student Stores, a position she had held since 1996. Scarborough began her career at ECU in 1970 as a teller in the student bank. In 1971, she joined the Student Supply Store staff as an assistant to the supply department manager. She spent her next 39 years at the store, moving to supply and merchandise manager in 1981 and assistant store manager in 1992. She was appointed acting director in 1995 and named director eight months later.

As director, Scarborough was responsible for the operation of the main campus bookstore and the medical bookstore at the Brody School of Medicine. She also was in charge of souvenir and merchandise sales at Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium, Minges Coliseum and Clark-LeClair Stadium.

Under her leadership, Dowdy Student Stores was recognized as a leading contributor to the ECU General Scholarship Fund and an annual contributor to athletics and medical scholarship funds. Scarborough also was instrumental in the development of the Employee Textbook Loan Program and led the Coalition for Affordable Textbooks at ECU. She worked with faculty, Student Government Association representatives, Parents' Council members and store staff to develop programs and partnerships that provide ECU students less costly textbook alternatives.

Scarborough was involved in college and university store associations on the state and national level in addition to numerous campus committees. She was a member of the board of trustees for the North Carolina Association of College Stores, working on behalf of ECU and sister institutions.

Scarborough is the former Wanda Askew of Roanoke Rapids. A graduate of Roanoke Rapids High School, she attended Atlantic Christian College (now Barton College) in Wilson.
ECU's Trent Whitehead, left, congratulates Dustin Harrington after hitting a home run during the third inning at Clark-LeClair Stadium on March 21. (Scott Davis/The Daily Reflector)

**Pirates dismiss Harrington, Sowers**
The Daily Reflector
Thursday, April 1, 2010

East Carolina junior shortstop Dustin Harrington and junior pitcher Sthil Sowers have been dismissed from the baseball team, ECU coach Billy Godwin announced Thursday. Godwin would not elaborate on a reason for the dismissal, citing federal student privacy laws. Harrington, the reigning Conference USA Hitter of the Week, was the team’s batting average leader among starters. He started 25 games this season and is currently ranked fourth in the conference with a .443 average.
The Taylorsville native also has a team-high 31 runs scored to go along with his five home runs and 21 RBIs.

Sowers appeared in five games out of the bullpen this season, allowing six runs on 15 hits in 11 innings of work while posting a 4.09 ERA.
In his first four outings, Sowers didn’t allow an earned run, which included a shutout inning of relief against then No. 2 Virginia Feb. 21.
The 23rd-ranked Pirates (17-9) are set to host Tulane this weekend in their C-USA opener at Clark-LeClair Stadium. First pitch tonight is scheduled for 7 and the two teams will play a doubleheader Saturday beginning at 1 p.m.

— ECU Media Relations
GO-Science building before City Council

By Kathryn Kennedy
The Daily Reflector
Sunday, April 4, 2010

A local nonprofit offering science education and hoping to increase their services by establishing a permanent center will ask the City Council to purchase a building for their use at tonight’s meeting.

GO-Science organizers want the city to purchase the former Pugh’s Tire facility, 729 Dickinson Ave., for $378,000.

The Pitt County Online Parcel Information System lists the property’s total market value at $123,509. It was last assessed in 2008. City Planner Carl Rees said a recent appraisal determined the property’s worth at $315,000, and redevelopment commission policy adds 20 percent to that price.

The proposed science museum and education center would develop over three multi-year phases to include a Challenger Space Flight Simulator, the portable planetarium, earth-science and weather-related exhibits, science activities for toddlers, and Science Cafe activities for enthusiasts of all ages. GO-Science selected the site in part because of its unusually high ceilings, on-site parking and central location, Executive Director Roger Conner said.

The Redevelopment Commission recommended the group’s funding request unanimously Feb. 2, but not without noting the hefty price tag. The commission itself has a budget but lacks the money needed for this purchase. Funds from a general obligation bond for revitalization in West Greenville have already been spent.

GO-Science provided a $10,000 option fee to keep the property off the market for six months, Conner said. It will be applied to the overall cost if the City Council agrees to the purchase. He added that for every dollar spent, the community can expect a $14.80 return. Visitors to the science center would also spend money in local restaurants and stores, Conner said.

If approved, city staff recommends funding the purchase through the capital reserve fund, using money previously designated for a potential downtown parking deck. A second option detailed in the agenda materials suggests using center city bond money if the City Council finds that project would aid in revitalization in that area — a method allowed by the city’s bond attorneys.
Letters of support from Uptown Greenville, the East Carolina University Chancellor, ECU’s Dean of the Brody School of Medicine, the president of Pitt Community College, and the N.C. Biotechnology Center’s Eastern Office have already been submitted to City Council members. The City Council previously endorsed the establishment of a science center with a resolution of support adopted in May 2007.

Also on tonight’s City Council agenda:
Revisions to a resolution taking previously unaccepted streets with expired bond sureties into the city. Allen Ridge is proposed for acceptance. Ashley Place was intended to be accepted as an N.C. Department of Transportation street and has been removed from the list. The developer of Brighton Place is completing the necessary repairs per a final inspection. Letters will be sent to each of the developers of Carrington Square, Firetower Commercial Park, North Campus Crossing, University Suites, and Westpointe with a list of items that need to be completed for acceptance.

The council is scheduled to consider a pilot program offering grants for development along the Dickinson Avenue corridor. Modeled on the existing facade grant program, it would provide a direct grant of $2,500 for eligible exterior repairs and site renovations and a dollar-for-dollar match of an additional $7,500. The Redevelopment Commission unanimously recommends approval. City staff identified $10,000 within the Community Development Department’s 2009-10 fiscal year budget that may be used for a pilot grant cycle this spring.

Council members will discuss three legislative initiatives the city will pursue in the General Assembly short session beginning May 12. Those include preserving municipal revenue sources, reasonable adjustments to city-initiated annexation laws and support for ECU capital and operating priorities. City Council can suggest additional issues to be voted on Thursday. A preview of the upcoming 2010-11 fiscal year operating budget is the final item of new business scheduled for tonight.

The City Council meets at 6 p.m. on the third floor of City Hall, 200 W. Fifth St.
Contact Kathryn Kennedy at kkennedy@reflector.com or (252) 329-9566.

- Login or register to post comments
Abel Sutton talks with a group of high school seniors from Pitt County as part of a program at Pitt Community College.
Contributed photo

**PCC program emphasizes education**
The Daily Reflector
Sunday, April 4, 2010

WINTERVILLE—Minority males from each of Pitt County's six high schools were on the Pitt Community College campus last week for a program emphasizing the importance of higher education.

The event — called "College Bound: Here We Come" — first began in 2007 as part of PCC's commitment to removing barriers that may make it difficult for minority males to continue their studies after finishing high school.

This year's program, held in the Craig F. Goess Student Center, featured a presentation by Elizabeth City's Abel Sutton, an East Carolina University graduate and professional public speaker.

The 25-year-old Sutton, who also spoke at last year's College Bound program, once again drew upon his life experiences to encourage the students to seek higher education.

"You've got to prepare yourself to win the game of life," Sutton said. "?EUR? When preparation and opportunity collide, success is the only possible result."
Sutton urged the students to dream big and find their niche in life, saying “Most people fail not because they aim too high and miss but because they aim too low and hit.” Sutton’s remarks echoed those of Dr. Virginia Hardy, a member of the PCC Board of Trustees who provided the welcome for this year’s College Bound program. Hardy, who is ECU’s Vice Provost for Student Affairs, advised the students to step out of their comfort zones and take chances in life to achieve success. “Dare to fail in order to be successful,” she said. As part of their PCC visit, College Bound participants took campus tours and discussed college readiness with mentors from the school. In addition to Sutton, previous College Bound events have featured remarks from N.C. Court of Appeals Judge James A. Wynn Jr. and Elizabeth City State University Chancellor Willie Gilchrist.
University dining expands

CHAPEL HILL -- At lunch, the main dining hall at UNC-Chapel Hill gets so packed that freshman Jay Lomax has to strategize his way around the crowd.

First, he hustles in before the noon rush. Second, he fills a takeout carton at the one-price-for-everything food stations. Third, he scurries back downstairs to the slightly-less-chaotic ground level where students have their pick of retail restaurants. There, he plops in a seat to eat on the periphery of the madness.

"Sometimes it gets a little crowded here and we have to save our table," Lomax said. "But it's nothing like up there."

"Up there" is Top of Lenoir, the second-floor section of Lenoir Hall, the cafeteria closest to The Pit, student union and other gathering places, and by far the top campus lunch spot for busy, hungry students.

Now, a dozen years after a $13 million makeover, planners want to expand Lenoir again. A new, $5 million project would add second-floor seating and redesign the nearby food court, where the many pizza, burger and salad stations create the sort of backups that might lead a traffic pattern expert to develop a nervous tic.

"We are just besieged," said Mike Freeman, director of auxiliary services. "Part of it is that we've gotten better, and part of it is that it's so darn convenient. And we can barely handle it."

Around the Triangle, universities are spending big on food. N.C. State University is planning a $4 million expansion of a food court, while N.C. Central University last year unveiled its own expanded cafeteria, a $13 million quantum leap in size and offerings from the previous facility.

When Lenoir was first expanded in 1998, UNC-CH had about 24,200 students. By last year, enrollment had grown to nearly 29,000 students, about two-thirds of them undergrads who constitute the hall's main customer base.

Campus officials have built several new residence halls on South Campus, as well as the nearby Ram's Head Center, which includes a large new dining hall. But classes are closer to Lenoir, on central campus, so students who eat breakfast and dinner where they live still choose Lenoir for in between. Each of the hall's two dining areas can seat 650, and at least 2,000 students eat lunch there each day.

Planners want to move some food stations for better flow and add 200 seats on the expanded second floor. Construction is slated to start in January and end by fall 2011.

Freeman also hopes to ease the crunch by adding a new restaurant to the student union next door. There's a bagel shop there now, and Freeman thinks another fast-food operation - he's pitching a 24-hour Wendy's - will draw some students out of Lenoir as well.

Lenoir could use the breathing room. At noon on most days, it's mayhem. Students pile into two lines
that snake from the first-floor escalator down steps and nearly out the front door. Upstairs, they jostle for position, bumping backpacks as they scope out the brick oven pizza, hot food bar, rotisserie chicken and other selections.

It's a headache.

"The lines will go out into the waiting area, so it gets really crazy," said Jillian Kowalcyk, a junior from Mount Airy. "We try to avoid it."

[Email and phone number for contact]
NCCU: Worker diverted funds

DURHAM -- N.C. Central University has turned an internal audit over to state regulators after finding evidence that a former university employee may have embezzled money from a project funded in part by federal and state grants.

In a March 29 letter to state officials, NCCU Chancellor Charlie Nelms says that the former director of the Historically Minority Colleges and Universities Consortium funneled some of the group's funds into a personal bank account. NCCU is a member of the consortium and serves as its fiscal agent.

"It now appears that substantial funds may have been diverted into this Bank of America account," Nelms wrote. "The account may also have been maintained covertly by the former employee for improper purposes."

The letter doesn't say how much money was diverted, and NCCU spokeswoman Cynthia Fobert said the university doesn't know. Over the past decade, the program has received more than $13 million from state appropriations, federal and state grants and private foundations.

Nelms' letter does not name the employee, but the consortium's director at the time was Nan Coleman. Earlier this year, Nelms confirmed that Coleman had been fired from the university for poor performance.

An effort to reach Coleman on Thursday was unsuccessful.

The consortium represents a dozen public and private institutions across the state that have traditionally had heavy minority enrollment. Based at NCCU, it helps minority children close the achievement gap. More than a dozen programs operate under its umbrella.

In a statement released Thursday, Nelms said that the consortium has done some very good work for at-risk youth but that he has heard concerns about it since 2007 when he was hired at NCCU.

After consulting with the state Auditor's Office, the state Attorney General's Office and the State Bureau of Investigation, Nelms turned the investigation over to the state Auditor's Office because NCCU doesn't have the resources to untangle the "complicated network of accounts and transactions," he wrote.

"I believe my referral to these better-resourced state agencies will ensure that full discovery and prosecution, if warranted, takes place," he said.

eric.ferreri@newsobserver.com or 919-932-2008.
Shaw's status is on the line

RALEIGH -- Financially troubled Shaw University would be placed on probation if its accrediting agency evaluated the school today, interim President Dorothy C. Yancy said Thursday.

In an interview with The News & Observer's editorial board, Yancy said the historically black university's cash flow is positive but not nearly enough to satisfy the standards of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

"We'd be in trouble," Yancy said. "We'd be on probation."

Yancy replaced President Clarence Newsome last year and said she does not plan to stay beyond the end of this summer. She cited progress that can put Shaw over the hump by September 2011, when its report is due to SACS.

Shaw recently received a $31 million loan from the U.S. Department of Education, restructuring its debt at a 4.1 percent interest rate over 20 years. Also, she said, some scholarships for athletics and band have been cut, and staff levels have been trimmed. Private giving, meanwhile, is up, Yancy said.

And though the school's 2009-10 audit shows too little cash flow, she said, the audit from the year before showed Shaw fully in the red.

"You don't get in a hole overnight," Yancy said, "and you don't get out of it instantly."

Shaw, with enrollment just over 2,500, already has a high dependence on government loans, Yancy said. Roughly $38 million comes from federal and state loans, she said. More than 90 percent of its student body receives financial aid.

Yancy said she would not make Shaw's audits public and the federal department has adequate oversight to protect taxpayers' investment.

"I have never made my audits public," she said.

The school restructured several pieces of debt through the federal Historically Black College and University Capital Financing Program, making it one of 20 HBCUs - five public, 15 private, like Shaw - to receive roughly $750 million in federal funds. Of those 20, only one has defaulted.

Last year, after Newsome left Shaw, board chairman and prominent Florida lawyer Willie Gary said each of the university's board members would pledge $50,000 toward the school. Last month, a letter to Shaw administrators from Florida alumni expressed amazement that board members' giving had reached only about $40,000.

Yancy said Thursday that Gary pledged $100,000 at the school's homecoming.

"You need to have that conversation with him as to when he's going to pay his pledge," she said. "But the fiscal year ends June 30."

Gary has not returned several calls about his pledges this year. He could not be reached Thursday.