Tentative new site for intermodal center
By Michael Abramowitz
Monday, April 9, 2012

The latest attempt by Greenville officials to develop an Intermodal Transportation Center in the downtown area will move forward today when city staffers present a new site selection contract for the City Council to consider.

The staff will present a site selection and environmental proposal from the Moser Mayer Phoenix (MMP) engineering and development firm of Greensboro, the firm that conducted the first feasibility study for the city, Interim City Manager Thomas Moton told the council in a Feb. 29 memo. The discussion of the center is expected toward the end of today’s council meeting, scheduled to begin at 6 p.m. at City Hall.

The council approved a resolution in October to suspend acquisition of property located on the blocks bounded by Evans, Cotanche, Eighth and Ninth streets and start a new site selection process after city staff became aware that another site had become available from a private developer.

The previous site selected for the multi-use transportation transfer hub was approved by the council in May 2008, part of the Center City Redevelopment process. In February 2011, some members expressed concerns about the process.

Bryant Kittrell, then mayor pro-tem, talked about the increasing length of the project timeline — five years by that time — and insisted an estimated
completion date was necessary. Councilman Max Joyner had concerns about the project’s budget and the potential loss of federal funding caused by further delay. He and Kittrell voted against approval of a new consulting contract without a budget and deadline but were out voted by council members Rose Glover, Marion Blackburn, Kandie Smith and Calvin Mercer.

Adding impetus to the latest changes and delays were concerns expressed by East Carolina University officials about potential bus-pedestrian conflicts on Cotanche Street near the center. Uptown Greenville, which had given its support to the project, also expressed concerns about the site location. The site issues began to be raised after the Federal Transportation Administration gave final environmental clearance for the site last June and property appraisals and site acquisitions were under way.

In August, the staff learned that another site planned for private development, located at the intersection of Dickinson Avenue and Reade Circle, might soon become available for consideration as a location for the intermodal center, they said. A preliminary analysis determined that it met several of the selection criteria already established, including proximity to the downtown and ECU areas and access to a developed street system. That information and combination of assessments and concerns resulted in the resolution to suspend the first site development process, Moton said.

Federal Transportation officials confirmed that the city would not have to pay back grant funds it has spent for the project thus far as long as all requirements are met in the evaluation for moving the location. Another City Council resolution would be needed, however, to change to another site, city staff said.

To date, costs for the project are at $235,251, with federal funds covering 80 percent and NCDOT and the city each covering 10 percent, city officials said.

Contact Michael Abramowitz at mabramowitz@reflector.com or 252-329-9571.
Kudos
BUSINESS ACCOLADES

- Eight nurses were inducted to the Hall of Fame in the East Carolina University College of Nursing. Inductees were Linda Burhans, associate executive director for education and practice for the N.C. Board of Nursing; Martha Bartt, director of nursing services at ECU's Brody School of Medicine; Nettie Evans, vice president of patient care services and chief nurse executive for Vidant Roanoke-Chowan Hospital; Susan Gerard, senior director for growth and clinical services for Vidant Beaufort Hospital; Sue Lassiter, president of Vidant Roanoke-Chowan Hospital; Joanne Stevens, state advocate for the American Association of Nurse Practitioners; Carmen Vincent, vice president of corporate accreditation and regulatory compliance at Vidant Health; and Anna Weaver, assistant vice president of transplant, trauma and surgical services at Vidant Medical Center. All are ECU alumni.
RALEIGH Lawyers will begin with jury selection Monday for a kind of trial that’s become increasingly rare and difficult – a capital murder case.

Jason Williford, 32, is accused of sexually assaulting and murdering Kathy Taft, a mother, grandmother and state school board member, on March 6, 2010, when she was found bloodied and unresponsive in the Raleigh home of a friend.

Taft, a 62-year-old from Greenville, had been staying in the multi-story house of a friend on Cartier Drive, recovering from cosmetic surgery to her neck.

Williford, a local jam-band bassist, was unemployed at the time, living with his wife in a residence about two-tenths of a mile from the home where Taft and her sister were guests of a lawyer who was out of town visiting his mother.

Police have described the killing as a random act of violence, saying they knew of no connection between the suspect and victim.

Williford pleaded not guilty to the crimes in February. His trial, projected to last four to six weeks, will be the first in Wake County during the past two years in which the death penalty is being sought.

Wake County District Attorney Colon Willoughby has said he is pursuing capital punishment because, in the scenario put forth by prosecutors, it is a
case of someone coming into a home, uninvited, and sexually assaulting and bludgeoning a woman in bandages from surgery.

Willoughby has described the case as one “so egregious” that it should be up to a jury to decide whether the state’s harshest punishment should be applied.

The last time the Wake district attorney sought the death penalty in a murder trial, a jury spared the life of the defendant, Samuel J. Cooper, a man described as a “monster” and “cold-blooded serial killer.”

One juror in that case held out against the death penalty and eventually swayed the 11 others to settle for a sentence of life without possibility of parole for a man convicted of killing five people. Jurors said they were willing to accept a life sentence because they thought the death penalty might be abolished during the next decade.

Since 1996, the number of capital trials in North Carolina has dropped from dozens a year to single digits. Death sentences have become even rarer.

**Why no executions?**

Several issues have factored into the decline of the death sentence. With advances in science and the creation of an innocence inquiry commission, wrongful convictions have been exposed in many states, including North Carolina.

Claims that racial discrimination shaped jury selection and the prosecutors’ decisions to seek a death sentence have triggered questions about fairness.

The higher costs of capital trials, too, have prompted calls for abolishment of the death penalty.

North Carolina is one of 34 states with a death penalty. Last week, Connecticut took a major step toward abolishing capital punishment when the state senate voted to end the option of execution.

In North Carolina, all but a few of the 157 inmates on the state’s death row have challenged their sentences using the fledgling Racial Justice Act, arguing that racial bias played a role in their cases.

The inmates have used a Michigan State University law school study in their complaints showing that defendants who killed a white person in North Carolina were 21/2 times more likely to be sentenced to death than those whose victims were black.
They also show juries were disproportionately white and African-American jury pool members who were not rejected for cause – such as opposition to the death penalty – were struck by prosecutors at about two times the rate as similarly situated whites.

In Wake County, it was even higher, with qualified potential African-American jurors rejected at 2.5 times the rate of all other jurors.

Jury selection in the Williford trial could take several weeks.

**Glimpses into the defense**

In February, when the defendant was in court arguing for the quashing of crucial DNA evidence, defense attorneys and prosecutors gave glimpses of strategies that could be used at trial.

Defense attorneys said they planned to ask potential jurors about their experiences with mental illness, alcohol abuse, homosexuality and child abuse.

Williford, who had an arrest record that included several burglary charges and a breaking and entering conviction in 2001, had issues with alcohol abuse, according to court documents related to other cases.

Defense attorneys said they did not plan to use a defense related to mental health issues, but prosecutors had a state psychiatrist test Williford in recent months.

Defense attorneys also persuaded prosecutors to let the judge review medical records in private for Dina Arnold Holton, the sister of Taft who called emergency dispatchers on March 6, 2010, to summon medical help.

Taft died in a Wake County hospital a few days later.

For weeks, police hunted for her killer.

Investigators collected DNA samples from men who lived near the Cartier Drive home, asking them to voluntarily stand for swabbing, according to police reports.

Williford refused to be swabbed, according to testimony from previous hearings in his case.

A Raleigh police officer staked out Williford’s apartment complex and collected a cigarette butt from the parking lot that contained DNA evidence that led investigators to their suspect.
Taft was dead for 41 days before investigators pulled Williford from a Jordan Lake campground on a warm April day and accused him of murder and sexual assault. He has been jailed, awaiting trial, since then.

Blythe: 919-836-4948
East Carolina University might be the youngest medical school in the state, but an addition to its campus has a lineage that goes back thousands of years to the father of medicine himself.

A descendant of the “Tree of Hippocrates” is now growing in front of the Brody Medical Sciences Building. The tree was propagated locally from seed from a tree at the National Library of Medicine. That tree grew from a cutting off of a tree on the Greek island of Cos. That tree’s parent is where Hippocrates is said to have taught medicine to his students.

The tree, Plantanus orientalis, or Oriental plane tree, is related to the American sycamore, Platanus occidentalis. Grounds staff members at the National Institutes of Health (which includes the NLM) made numerous attempts to grow cuttings and seeds from the tree it received from Cos, but none survived. That’s where Dr. Walter Pories, an ECU surgeon and researcher of most anything he takes an interest in, took over.

Five years ago, during a visit to the library, he saw the tree with a plaque identifying it as the Tree of Hippocrates along with a message about the tree’s history. “In view of the construction at ECU, I thought it would be fun to plant another descendant on our campus,” Pories wrote in a letter about the tree. “However, I was unaware how difficult it is to propagate this species of tree.”
He collected seeds, but none germinated. He tried again in 2008 with cuttings. All died. “In 2009, still determined, I collected another set of seeds,” Pories wrote. “According to instructions from a forester, I put six in the freezer before planting, I gave another six to a forestry professor from N.C. State and the last six to Tommy Lassiter at the Plant and See Nursery here in Greenville. Again, mine failed to germinate as did those of the professor, but in (the) fall, Mr. Lassiter called me and asked me what he ‘should do with all those trees.’”

Pories took several to his Falkland farm and gave one each to Dr. Paul Cunningham, dean of the Brody School of Medicine, and Steve Lawler, president of Vidant Medical Center.

In late March, a landscaping crew from ECU dug up one of the trees at Pories’ farm and transplanted it on the Brody campus. It’s in the grassy island between the two main parking lots in front of the Brody Building.

John Gill, the university landscape architect, said crews will keep a close eye on the tree as it gets accustomed to its new home. Once it begins to mature and branch out, it could be a spot for teaching, just as its ancestor was in ancient Greece.

“It’s a cool tree, it has a great history, and the great thing is (Dr. Pories has) a couple more at his farm,” Gill said.

Pories’ story goes further.

“I was reminded that I had stolen federal property and that I needed to make peace with someone to be sure that we could use the tree,” he said. “Accordingly, after a discussion with the leadership of the NIDDK (National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases), who support our research, I was referred to the head of the grounds department.

“They were delighted to learn that we had propagated the tree and asked if they could have one or two with the explanation that they always kept one or two ‘stand-ins’ for ceremonial trees, but they had been unable to propagate this one in spite of all sorts of tries.”

**Grammer, Cole to perform at ECU**

Recording artist Andy Grammer will sing his hits “Keep Your Head Up,” “Fine by Me” and other songs at an 8 p.m. concert Monday at Wright Auditorium on the ECU campus.

Tickets are $8 for students and $10 for others.
For more information, email sabentertainment@ecu.edu.

On Thursday, Grammy-winner Natalie Cole will perform in an 8 p.m. concert at Wright Auditorium.

Cole’s performance is part of the S. Rudolph Alexander Performing Arts Series. Call 800-ECU-ARTS or visit http://www.ecu.edu/srapas for tickets. Tickets are $65 for adults and $25 for students/youth.

Young writers summer camps

This summer, the Tar River Writing Project at ECU will sponsor several camps for young writers in Pitt County and the surrounding area.

Young writers at all ability levels are invited to experience a fun and creative writing community at ECU this summer.

Each camp offers the chance to develop writing and digital literacy skills and to build a writing community with other writers from across the county. Students from public, private and home school environments will find an engaging and instructive experience with writing.

Camps offered include the following:

- “Subscribe to Writing” (rising fourth–sixth graders): June 25-30, 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
- “Subscribe to Writing” (rising sixth–ninth graders): July 9-14, 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
- “Where We’re From” (rising sixth–ninth graders): June 25-29, Monday-Thursday 12:30-5:30 p.m.; Friday 12:30-6:30 p.m.
- “Geo-Tagging: Digital Expression is not a Crime” (rising ninth–12th graders): June 18-29, 9 a.m.-noon.
- “Write Here! Write Now!” (rising ninth–12th graders): June 13-22, 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
- “Wilderness Writing” (rising ninth–12th graders): July 23-27, July 30-Aug. 3, 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. with one overnight trip each week.

Space is limited for all camps. Detailed descriptions and applications are online at http://www.trwp.org/ywc2012.

Each applicant must submit the following information: name, grade, address, parent information, T-shirt size, proof of health insurance, recommendation from a teacher or family friend and a writing sample.
Participants will be considered until each camp is full. At the time of application, a $25 non-refundable application fee is due. Full payment is due by June 1. Registration fees for each camp include instruction and supplies for the duration of the camp and a commemorative T-shirt.

**Coming events**

Saturday: Fifth annual Pirate Alumni Road Race and Fun Run. Race-day registration will be 7:30-8:30 a.m. at U.B.E., 516 Cotanche St., Greenville. The race and fun run begin at 9 a.m. Registration is $25. Call Tanya L. Kerns at 800-ECU-GRAD or 328-1958.

See [http://www.ecu.edu/cs-ecu/calendar.cfm](http://www.ecu.edu/cs-ecu/calendar.cfm) for times, places and more information on other activities at ECU.
Lt. Chris Sutton of the East Carolina University Police Department recently attended the Academy for Venue Safety and Security weeklong training in Dallas, Texas.

The Academy for Venue Safety and Security, a division of the International Association for Assembly Managers, is an intense training academy in security, planning and life safety management for the public assembly industry. The academy’s mission is designed to teach and promote the best practices of safety and security protocols, methods and procedures.

Venue management professionals are provided the information, tools and methodologies to protect guests, customers, employees, property and assets through risk identification, implementation of risk management practices and procedures, emergency planning, preservation of economic viability and facilitation of recovery.

Topics covered during training included: legal risk management, national fire protection code in venues, emergency planning, emergency preparedness, the American With Disabilities Act in venues, security planning and developing a security plan, incident command analytical
training simulation, conducting a debrief/hotwash, and facility management law school.

Attendees included representatives from the United States, Canada, Europe and Hong Kong employed by the NBA, NFL, MLB and NASCAR venues and NCAA universities as well as privately owned arenas and stadiums such as AT&T Performing Arts Center, American Airlines Center, Edmonton Northlands Center, HP Pavilion, Phoenix Convention Center, Spokane Convention Center, Quicken Loans Arena and the Massachusetts Convention Center Authority.
Pigskin Pigout begins Wednesday
Friday, April 6, 2012

Get out your purple and gold and get ready for some eastern North Carolina barbecue. The 29th Annual Purple/Gold Pigskin Pigout will be held on the East Carolina University campus Wednesday-April 15. Highlights include the annual ECU spring football game and the barbecue cooking contest.

Wednesday
- 4-10 p.m.: Pigskin Pig-Out carnival
- 6 p.m.: Pirate Baseball vs. Old Dominion, tickets are $3-$6

Thursday
- 4-10 p.m.: Pigskin Pig-Out carnival
- 7-9 p.m.: Pirate Golf Classic social and auction

April 13
- 7:30 a.m.: Pirate Golf Classic at Brook Valley registration, four person superball
- 8:15 a.m.: Pirate Golf Classic at Brook Valley, morning round
- 1:15 p.m.: Afternoon round
- 4-11 p.m.: Pigskin Pig-Out carnival
- 6-10:30 p.m.: Pig cooking venue open to public, cornhole tournament, $40 per team maximum of 32 teams. Registration deadline is today.
- 7-10:30 p.m.: Special Occasion on the mixer 10.0 stage
- 9 p.m.: Fireworks
- 9:15 p.m.: Parade of pigs
April 14
- 8 a.m.: Pig Cookin’ contest judging begins
- 9 a.m.: Pirate Alumni Road Race, University Book Exchange. Registration is $25.
- 10 a.m.-11 p.m.: Pigskin Pig-Out carnival
- 10:30 a.m: Barbecue drive-through open, $10 per meal
- 10:30 a.m.: Pig Cooking contest awards ceremony
- 11 a.m.-2 p.m.: Emily Minor Band on the mixer 10.0 stage
- 11:15 a.m.-noon: Team meet-and-greet autograph session
- Noon: Cheer for ECU kids’ games and tattoos
- 12:30 p.m.: PeeDee the Pirate birthday
- 1 p.m.: Men’s tennis vs. Elon
- 2:30 p.m.: Purple/Gold Pigskin spring football game, tickets are $10 (includes barbecue plate)
- Alumni football game immediately following spring game

April 15
- Noon-6 p.m.: Pigskin Pig-Out carnival
Natalie Cole coming to ECU
Friday, April 6, 2012

She’s the daughter of jazz legend Nat King Cole and a talented singer and songwriter in her own right who has been performing since she was 11.

Natalie Cole will perform a one-night concert at 8 p.m. Thursday at East Carolina University’s Wright Auditorium as part of the S. Rudolph Alexander Performing Arts Series.

“An Unforgettable Evening with Natalie Cole” is part of her tour for her 21st album, “Still Unforgettable.”

“I love recording and still love the stage, but like my Dad, I have the most fun when I am in front of a kick-butt Big Band,” Cole said in a press release about the tour.

Cole has won eight Grammy Awards, including Best New Artist in 1975. She’s a versatile singer who performs in R&B, pop and jazz genres. She has several No. 1 hits to her name including “This Will Be (An Everlasting Love),” “Inseparable,” “Our Love,” “I’ve Got Love On My Mind,” “Pink Cadillac” and “Miss You Like Crazy.”

When Cole’s “Unforgettable … With Love” came out in 1991, the jazz collection set a new standard for reinventing the Great American Songbook. The CD won six Grammy Awards including Album and Record of the Year and has sold more than 8 million copies in the U.S. alone.

Just as she lovingly partnered with her late father, Nat King Cole, for a posthumous duet on the title track on the 1991 masterpiece, in “Still Unforgettable” they reunited on the delightful “Walkin’ My Baby Back Home,” first recorded by Cole’s father in the early 1950s.
“If there was going to be another ‘duet’ with Dad, I felt it should be more whimsical, fun and light,” Cole said. “It’s adorable and loving between parent and child. He’s right there with me. How do you top that?”


In her second book Cole details her battle with hepatitis C and having a kidney transplant.

Cole may have contracted hepatitis C in the 1980s when the singer admits she used heroin and shared needles with other addicts. She was treated with chemotherapy in 2008 and is now hepatitis free as well as drug free.

What may or may not have been a complication of hepatitis, Cole’s kidneys began failing in 2009. She was on dialysis and without a transplant her future was uncertain. She got the call that a kidney was available and she needed to have surgery immediately. The call came during the time that her sister Cookie was struggling for her own life with lung cancer.

On May 18, 2009, Cole had a kidney transplant. But her surgery meant that Cole would not be by her sister’s side as she passed away from her cancer.

The autobiography is a candid account of Cole’s struggles and her rise again as a musician.

**Where to mix**

**What:** Natalie Cole  
**When:** 8 p.m. Thursday  
**Where:** Wright Auditorium  
**Cost:** $20-$65  
**Visit:** [www.ecuarts.com](http://www.ecuarts.com)
Erika Richard, a cardiovascular trained nurse, takes Mary Turney's vitals in the intermediate cardiac step-down unit at Rex Hospital in Raleigh on Wednesday, April 4, 2012. Richard, 43, graduated from UNC-Chapel Hill in 2010 and is now making her way through the orientation program for new nurses at Rex with the help of her preceptor and fellow nurse Jessica Padgett.

**Demand for nurses remains high, but competition for openings increases**

By David Ranii - dranii@newsobserver.com
Published Sun. Apr 08, 2012

As the Triangle unemployment rate has remained stubbornly high in recent years, one group of job seekers has continued to see healthy demand for their services: newly minted nurses.

The job market for nurses is one that graduates in practically any other field would be delighted with, but even it hasn’t been immune to the economic downturn.

“There was a time (before the recession) when our nursing students had five or six job offers, actually, before they graduated,” said Stephen Scott, president of Wake Technical Community College. Today they may only have one or two, he added.

The reduction in offers is the result of a number of factors, including lower turnover and ex-nurses returning to the fold, which have led to a more competitive job market.

“It’s not a matter of getting a job, it’s getting the job they want,” said Helen Ayres, program director for the associate degree nursing program at Durham Technical Community College. “I am not aware of anybody who has not been able to get a job if they have looked.”
Madeline Yeung, 23, a senior nursing student at UNC-Chapel Hill, is among those who is now competing for a job. She recognizes her timing isn’t optimal.

“You can’t be as choosey as in the past,” she said. “You’re thankful for what you’re given.”

Camila Salvo, 21, also a senior nursing student at UNC, has adopted a shotgun approach.

“I’ve applied (for) some public health fellowships, things like that,” she said. “I’ve also applied to some things in the hospital. My ideal job would be doing home visits with at-risk mothers and babies.”

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the job market for nurses here is stronger than in some other regions, which is causing some recent graduates to relocate.

Sarah Dickinson graduated from a nursing program in Richmond, Va., last June and spent the next few months applying for local jobs. Frustrated after not landing a single interview, Dickinson, 24, moved to Raleigh in September.

“I had a couple of friends here ... and I knew there were a lot of good hospitals in the area,” she said.

Three weeks later she was interviewing at Rex Healthcare, which eventually led to her job as a nurse in Rex’s cardiac intermediate care unit.

“Being in a specialty like this, you learn specialty skills other nurses don’t have,” Dickinson said. “I thought it was a great place to start.”

Growing demand for nurses is also attracting workers from other professions, particularly those reeling from the recession.

Gabe Beecher, 35, of Raleigh, was a carpenter before going back to school to become a nurse. He graduated with a nursing degree from UNC-Chapel Hill last August under an accelerated 14-month program for students who already have a bachelor’s degree. Unfortunately, graduating in the summer was out-of-synch with the hiring cycle of local hospitals, which typically hire new nurses after they graduate in May or December.

So he took a temporary nursing job “for financial security and for experience and because I was getting bored and anxious” while continuing to apply for permanent full-time work. Finally, after months of frustration, he got two offers in the same week.
“I was lucky and thrilled and think that was somewhat of an anomaly,” said Beecher, who started working at WakeMed in February. “For months I didn’t have anything.”

Although the recession has reduced demand for health care, that hasn’t led Triangle hospitals to stop growing their nursing staffs. An expanding population has pushed them to add new services and new facilities.

For example, Rex Healthcare, which has about 1,700 nurses, added 38 nursing positions last year. The total number of nurses that Rex hired last year was much greater — 278, including 67 new nursing grads — to replace nurses who moved to other jobs within Rex or who left the hospital.

Demand is even outstripping supply for experienced nurses in specialties such as operating room and emergency room nurses, said Anna Baird-Hensley, director of talent acquisition and retention at WakeMed.

Consequently, WakeMed has launched an in-house training program for experienced nurses who want to enter those fields.

Last year, roughly one-third of the graduating class at UNC had secured jobs by the time graduation rolled around in May, said Kathy Moore, director of the office of admissions at the nursing school. Another third had jobs within three months after graduating, with the rest landing positions within six months.

There are some signs that this year’s job market for new nursing grads might be a bit better than in 2011. Durham Tech’s Ayres said she is encouraged that offers for this spring’s graduates are coming in earlier than they have over the past few years.

Longer-term, the market for new RNs in the Triangle and nationwide is expected to expand significantly.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that increased demand for nursing will make it one of the nation’s fastest-growing occupations this decade. The agency projects that the number of employed RNs will expand by 26 percent, or 712,000, from 2010 to 2020.

Peter Buerhaus, a nursing professor at Vanderbilt University, has a similar outlook.

Among the nation’s many and varied occupations, he said, “it’s hard to come up with a more optimistic forecast” than the market for registered nurses in the years ahead.

Staff writer Tori Stilwell contributed to this story.
A spring break of service in Haiti

By John Drescher - jdrescher@newsobserver.com
Sat. Apr. 07, 2012

Ah, college spring break. Maybe travel to a warm place and lounge poolside. Or go home for a week, kick back in the den with the remote and sleep late.

Eight senior nursing students from N.C. Central University got the warm place but not the lounging or the sleeping in. They went to Grand Goave, Haiti, for a week in March to help people each day from 7 a.m. until at least 5 p.m.

They did health histories, physical exams and vision screens. They gave nonprescription medications. They served about 50 people a day.

Their leader was Linda Vanhook, associate clinical professor of nursing at Central who has volunteered in Haiti since 2005. When Vanhook told her students about the needs in Haiti, they wanted to go – even though each student had to pay $1,300 to cover travel and expenses.

They were the first Central nursing students to work in Haiti. They were determined to go. They were determined to serve.

“I’ve always wanted to help people that really needed us,” said Kartrina Wright, who is from Oxford. “I didn’t have a choice but to go.”
Shandolyn Brown, from Garner, also felt compelled. “It’s an experience I’ve always wanted – a mission in a different area,” she said. “It was something I had to do.”

Vanhook, Wright, Brown and four other students sat down with me this week to talk about their experiences. Joining us was Jerome Pasaporte of Carrboro, a registered nurse who accompanied them on the trip. Catreina Cherry and Natalie Turkaly, both from Durham, were unable to join us but also went to Haiti.

Haiti, often known as the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere, was desperately poor before the 2010 earthquake that devastated parts of the Caribbean country. Among the hard-hit areas was Grand Goave in southwestern Haiti.

The Central students started each day early and were greeted by long lines of friendly, grateful Haitians. The students worked with the African American Baptist Mission Collaboration, which took care of them in Haiti and arranged sites for their work.

Each day, the NCCU students set up a temporary clinic in a church or small building. Their patients waited outside, sometimes under the shade of a tarp or tree. Temperatures in Haiti in March typically reach the low 90s.

The nursing students had none of the medical technology typically available to them back home in Durham. They knew that would be part of the challenge.

“I wanted my limits tested,” said Nykiya Lee, who is from Inkster, Mich. “I wanted to see if my skill set from Central would help those people.”

There were many other challenges, as there always are in Haiti. The students had to haul their equipment up a mountain by foot. Only one of the students, Farrah Latortue of Boston, spoke Creole, the native language. Her family is from Haiti but she had never been there.

The students were there to provide health care but they also connected with their patients emotionally. Latortue bonded with a girl, about 10 or 11, who had lost both parents. Latortue gave the girl her cell number – and was joyful when the girl called her recently for what Latortue called “an informal follow-up.”

“They needed to know that we cared,” said student Cassie Johns of Butner. “They are people just like us, people striving to do the best they can.”
At NCCU, service is part of the campus culture and spirit. The Corporation for National and Public Service recently named Central a national finalist for its President’s Award. Of 642 colleges, NCCU was one of 14 finalists. Five received the President’s Award (one of them was N.C. State University, as described in a recent story in The News & Observer).

Just as service is important to Central, Haiti is important to many North Carolinians. In the Triangle alone, dozens of churches and aid groups support orphanages, schools and medical clinics there. In Gonaives, Haiti, earlier this year, I spotted boxes of food from Stop Hunger Now, a Raleigh-based group that relies on volunteers to pack meals that are sent to Haiti and all over the world.

Those who go to Haiti, including the NCCU nursing students, talk when they return about how their visit increased their understanding of American affluence. Of not taking food and shelter for granted. Of the gratitude of their Haitian friends. Of their obligation to reach out.

Raya Wilson, a nursing student from Wilmington, had never been outside the U.S. before her trip to Haiti. “I didn’t want to come back,” she said. “I was crying inside.”

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Wake Forest examines value of college education
By TOM BREEN - Associated Press
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RALEIGH, N.C. -- For Bill Zandi, the son of Moody's Analytics Chief Economist Mark Zandi, enrolling as a student at a prestigious private institution like Wake Forest University was less surprising than the student's choice of major: philosophy.

"Originally I was going to follow in my dad's footsteps, but I've always been more interested in philosophical ideals," the younger Zandi said.

With the cost of higher education soaring, from Ivy League schools to community colleges, an increasingly loud chorus of voices is questioning whether the results justify the cost, and whether the traditional liberal arts education, with its ideal of shaping well-rounded lives, is outmoded in the contemporary world of high-tech work.

To answer those questions, Wake Forest is convening a gathering of faculty, administrators and thinkers from around the country to examine the value of higher education. The "Rethinking Success" conference is scheduled to start Wednesday with a keynote address from former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and run through Friday.

One of the major tasks confronting higher education today is responding to skeptics who question the value of, say, a philosophy degree. Last fall, Florida Gov. Rick Scott made headlines when he told a radio talk show host that many humanities degrees were essentially luxuries, and that, "I want to spend our dollars giving people science, technology, engineering (and) math degrees."

The reason, Scott said, was simple: "So when they get out of school, they can get a job."

Many students apparently agree: between 1990 and 2009, the number of liberal arts colleges in the United States dropped from 212 to 136, according to study by Michigan State University researcher Roger Baldwin. And while more than 20 percent of bachelor's degrees today are granted in business, about 8 percent are granted in humanities majors.
But the idea that employers are looking for graduates with only a narrow set of skills is not borne out by Wake Forest's experience, according to Andy Chan, vice president of Personal and Career Development.

"At a very high level, we're doing a lot of things to help students understand what the direction is they want to choose no matter what their major is," he said.

Since Chan came to the school two years ago, his office has expanded from seven to 30 employees, and has raised roughly $8.5 million for a variety of career development efforts. Students now create profiles to track their interests and skills, attend career fairs even as freshmen and sophomores, and are urged to think about how to apply their talents after graduation. The response has been enthusiastic from undergraduates who are keenly aware of the difficult job market, Chan said.

"They feel a lot of the pressure," he said. "They feel a lot of stress about, 'What am I going to do after college?'"

Bill Zandi already had an idea of what he wanted to do when he enrolled at Wake. As a high school freshman in Pennsylvania, he wanted to find a way to help students like him after Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast. That eventually led to two tractor-trailers of school supplies and furnishings donated from local schools being shipped to New Orleans, and to the group Students Helping Students, which is now a nonprofit group that has expanded to include schools in Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Florida.

For Zandi, who plans to continue running the group after he graduates, philosophy is perhaps the most practical discipline he could have studied in college.

"I wanted to gain certain skills from this major," he said, including critical thinking, formulating arguments and counter-arguments, and improving his writing and communication skills. "I really do believe that it gives me a greater perspective on how we're living life today and maybe how we should strive to be living."

Mark Zandi, who spends his days training his perspective on everything from the inner workings of the Federal Reserve to the rising cost of gasoline, might have felt initial surprise at his son's decision, but he said it makes good practical sense.

"I hire a lot of kids in my work, and the skills I look for are: Are they articulate, can they present a thought in a cogent way, do they write well, can they express a perspective and a point of view?" he said. "I think we
need more scientists and engineers, but there's always going to be a demand for people with a varied educational background."

That's something that's been noted in rapidly growing Asian economies like China, Chan said, where universities are scrambling to launch liberal arts programs of their own.

"Ironically, at the same time that's happening in Asia, in the United States we have people saying we should forget the liberal arts because they're not preparing students for careers," he said.
DURHAM -- Blogs, Twitter and online petitions are forceful tools that activists can use to galvanize support for local and national causes, participants at a Duke University forum said Saturday.

Social media can quickly draw attention to issues and lead to national and international news coverage, said panelists taking part in the Black Thought 2.0 forum on new media and black studies. Twitter users can release a flood of news as it’s happening, and social media can link like-minded people from around the world, creating international crusades.

“The petition, on-the-ground protests, blogging – a combination of these is creating a zeitgeist to talk about these issues more and more,” said Salamishah Tillet, an assistant professor at the University of Pennsylvania.

Saturday’s forum came just weeks after an online petition and Twitter users brought international attention to the shooting death of black teenager Trayvon Martin in Florida. Activists can use social media “to change the conversations about things that are important,” said Jasiri X, an emcee who uses hip-hop music for social commentary.

Social media also helped highlight the case of the Jena 6, black high school students from Louisiana who were charged with attempted murder and conspiracy after a school fight with white students.

And because of social media, Troy Davis, a Georgia man executed last year for murdering an off-duty policeman, convinced thousands around the world that he was innocent. A Twitter campaign argued for a stay.

“This represented Twitter at its best,” Jasiri X said. “It was such a powerful generation of tweet support (and) online town halls,” he said.

Going viral
Jasiri X experienced the expansive reach of social media firsthand after he wrote a song about the Jena 6 that was posted online. Soon, nationally syndicated talk show host Michael Baisden played it on his radio show.

Jasiri X said he just completed a song about Trayvon Martin.
“I’m writing this song and putting it in a space to help lead a conversation about violence against black men and race in this society,” he said.

Twitter and blogs are also important in local protests, participants at the Duke event said.

“If you’re not on Twitter, you’re not getting the news first,” said Kimberly Ellis, a blogger and activist from Pittsburgh.

Fighting a casino

Ellis used her blog in 2006 to fight a plan to put a casino in her neighborhood. The casino plan died. She also said she live-tweeted during a protest of a G-20 summit in 2009 and found that mainstream news outlets were following hers and others’ tweets.

“Being the first to reveal the news is extremely important,” she said.

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