A proposal to create a college for science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) at East Carolina University generated much discussion at a campus forum on Monday.

About 30 faculty members spoke in a full social room in the Mendenhall Student Center as part of a university reorganization process begun last year to increase efficiency and save money in the wake of repeated state budget cuts.

Creating a STEM college by merging the College of Technology and Computer Science with departments from the College of Arts and Sciences was one of many options in four scenarios released at the end of March. The university’s largest college would become the College of Social and Behavioral Science and Humanities.

Most faculty at Monday’s forum were against the separation of arts and sciences, but some wanted more discussion, and one spoke in favor of the change. The other three scenarios range from no major changes to moving a few departments to other college-level dissolutions and mergers.

Discussions will continue on the other scenarios in a series of forums through Thursday, all from 3-5 p.m. in Mendenhall. The Program Prioritization Committee, which is facilitating the process, is expected to give a final recommendation at the end of the month. Any decision will not be final until approved by the chancellor and board of trustees.

The four scenarios are based on a list of 57 individual options for change released in February. The committee sought feedback through written statements, special meetings and an online survey.

“I’d say that the majority are against it, but a STEM college is not a bad idea,” Ron Mitchelson, geography professor and chairman of the committee, said. “You may have some strong comments, and we welcome that.”

The creation of the STEM college would save roughly $400,000 annually. The committee acknowledged that savings would be modest but emphasized increased visibility, synergy and outside funding sources.
“This scenario threatens to erase the name of Thomas Harriot and the liberal arts education it represents,” Jeffrey Johnson, chairman of the Department of English, said in reference to the Renaissance man who is the college’s namesake. “Pulling apart departments that constitute the College of Arts and Sciences declares at a systemic level that ECU no longer values the liberal arts. Dismantling the College of Arts and Sciences would undermine our primary purpose as a state university. Thomas Harriot is not simply a name, but our identity. ... If we enact this scenario, it would be a clear sign that as an institution we are losing our way.”

Committee members assured faculty that the university is not moving away from liberal arts, but many remained skeptical, fearing marginalization and loss of funding.

Several faculty members asked about the effect on students. Some said that students aren’t concerned with which college they’re in; some asked administrators not to put up barriers for students who still are figuring out what they want to do.

“Regardless of logo or letterhead, the notion of collaborative research is not going to be lost,” said Ricky Castles, a professor in the Department of Engineering in the College of Technology and Computer Science. “There is some concern about that division (of arts and sciences), but I do appreciate how you’ve thought about how a lot of the physical science and engineering departments go together, that makes a lot of sense, but at the end of the day, there may be some consequences there. Regardless of how this plays out, I think we will continue to be a university that embraces collaboration.”

Vice Chancellor Deirdre Mageean said she didn’t think the consolidation of the sciences equalled the devaluation of the humanities.

“I know there’s been a lot of angst but this is one of many options and this is a conversation that has to happen,” Mageean said. “The budget will no longer support business as usual. These ideas need to be explored.”

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Editorial: Trial begins in Taft killing
Tuesday, April 10, 2012

North Carolina lost a relentless advocate for education and a tireless public servant when Kathy Taft succumbed to a vicious attack in March 2010. More importantly, four children lost their mother, five others lost their grandmother and thousands of people in this community and across the state lost a woman they considered a friend and trusted confidant.

For those reasons, the trial of 32-year-old Jason Williford, accused of murder and sexual assault in the case, will be scrutinized considerably, especially here in eastern North Carolina. All those monitoring the events unfolding in Wake County will share a similar hope that fair and impartial justice will be served and that those who knew Taft finally have a measure of closure.

It was with a mixture of shock and disbelief that this community first received the news that Greenville native Kathy Taft was in a coma after suffering life-threatening injuries. Staying at the home of a friend while recovering from surgery, Taft was found the morning of March 6 with a laceration on the back of her head and remained unconscious before her death a few days later.

For weeks, the case frustrated law enforcement, which did not believe Taft knew the perpetrator prior to the attack. They operated under the added pressure of knowing that Taft, 62, was a member of the State Board of Education, where she had served 15 years. She counted people like Gov. Beverly Perdue, former Gov. Jim Hunt and many other prominent state leaders among her friends, which put the investigation squarely in the spotlight.

Police ultimately arrested Williford and charged him with rape and first-degree murder. The Raleigh musician lived close to the house where Taft was recovering, and police used DNA pulled from a discarded cigarette as part of the evidence against him. Jury selection began on Monday and Williford could face the death penalty if convicted, though the state has not conducted an execution in nearly six years.

The goal here is not vengeance, however, but rather justice. This state lost a valuable voice when Taft died two years ago; her family and friends lost
someone they loved dearly. No manner of punishment can resurrect Taft or remedy the terrible act that claimed her life, so instead there should be hope for a fair and just resolution and peace for all those who shared the pain and anguish that followed her death.
After hearing presentations from an architect and development consultant, the Greenville City Council on Monday unanimously voted to award a contract to Moser, Mayer, Phoenix to perform a second site selection study and the required Federal Transit Administration environmental report for the proposed Greenville Intermodal Transportation Center.

The City Council directed staff at the Oct. 10 council meeting to conduct another site selection process for the center, which would serve bus, taxi, bicycle and pedestrian traffic. The Public Works Department solicited proposals from firms to undertake the second site selection study. Moser, Mayer, Phoenix (MMP) was selected as the most qualified firm. The negotiated fee for this phase of the project is $159,391.32.

A Federal Transit Administration Section 5037 grant will fund 80 percent ($127,513.06) of the project, the N.C. Department of transportation will fund 10 percent ($15,939.13), and the city will pay the remaining 10 percent. Funds are available in the Intermodal Transportation Center capital project budget for the city’s 10 percent match.

Also Monday:

The council unanimously voted to grandfather backyard refuse collection customers for five years as it transitions to a full curbside refuse pickup system. Three-person sanitation crews will be kept in place during the transition period.

Delbert Bryant of the Public Works Department’s sanitation division presented the council two possible options for proposed changes.

A second option, which was not selected, would have been to convert the entire system to curbside pickup only within one year, which would require only two-person crews while the city gradually converts to newer trucks.

Monthly fees are $9.57 plus a 42-cent recycling surcharge for multi-family residences, $9.60 for curbside service for single-family residences and $26 for backyard service.
Proposed rate changes will be discussed during the upcoming budget process.

The council voted 5-1 to support a resolution by Councilwoman Marion Blackburn that would oppose passage of the proposed N.C. Constitutional Amendment One, which would make marriage legal in the state only between a man and a woman. Councilman Max Joyner Jr. was the lone vote in opposition to Blackburn’s amendment, saying citizens should vote individually on the amendment.

Blackburn said the proposed amendment, which voters decide May 8, would add bureaucracy regarding unmarried couples without additional benefit to citizens. It would eliminate the protections in place for long-term committed heterosexual couples and affect visitation and domestic violence protections, she said.

Two state statutes ban same-sex marriage, so the amendment is not needed for that purpose, Blackburn said.

Several residents, including East Carolina University students, addressed the council with opinions about the proposed amendment during public opinion portion of the meeting. Most of the opinions were in opposition to the amendment, saying it goes beyond simple opposition to gay and lesbian marriage to block all forms of legal union other than heterosexual marriage. One person spoke in support of it.

The council agreed to identify initiatives it wished to consider pursuing with the city’s local legislative delegation during the Legislature’s upcoming short session. It voted unanimously to consider preservation of municipal revenue sources. It voted 3-2 — with Joyner and Rose Glover opposing and Dennis Mitchell, Kandie Smith, Calvin Mercer and Blackburn supporting — to consider asking the Legislature to broaden cities’ authority to regulate concealed handguns on campgrounds and greenways. It voted unanimously to consider preservation or enhancement of authorities to enter into public-private partnerships and supporting organizations that assist in economic development efforts. The final council vote on submitting these items will be taken Thursday.

The council also:

Voted unanimously to approve the appropriation of $276,429 from the city’s fund balance of the Vehicle Replacement Fund to purchase and equip an ambulance for Fire-Rescue Station 4.
Voted unanimously to delete one crew leader position and one refuse collector position in the Public Works Department sanitation division to make way for the addition of a sanitation operations supervisor. The salaries of the two eliminated positions are sufficient to cover the salary of the new supervisor position.

Voted unanimously to adopt a resolution accepting dedication of rights-of-way and easements for Bernice Branch Division, Revision of Lots 6, 7 and 8, Section 2, and for Melody Lane. This action is the final step in the completion of the first section of Melody Lane that was constructed to allow traffic access to the area after the closing of the Dudley Street railroad crossing. Through an agreement with the N.C. Department of Transportation Rail Division, CSX and Norfolk Southern Railroad, the Dudley Street railroad crossing closure was one of five closures completed.

Voted unanimously to approve the supplemental agreement with the DOT for construction of sidewalk along Red Banks Road from Charles Boulevard to 14th Street.

Voted unanimously to award a construction contract for the Lynndale Storm Drainage Improvements Phase 1A to Lanier Construction Co. for $402,536.25. The improvements include replacing 400 linear feet of undersized outfall pipe across Queen Anne Road in the Lynndale subdivision. The Stormwater Fund will pay for the improvements. The proposed budget for the project, including a 15 percent contingency, is $462,917. Although that exceeds the originally planned budget, there is sufficient funding available in the project account, staff said.

Voted unanimously to sign a two-year contract with Greenville Public Access Television Corp. (GPAT) to continue operation of its a public access cable television channel (Channel 23) on behalf of the city. The contract is set to expire on June 30. An amount of $33,000 is provided in the proposed budget for each year.

Voted unanimously to approve the police department’s purchase order request for 19 police cars from the 2012 Model Year Law Enforcement Vehicle State Purchase Contract. The cost is $545,525.70, or $29,001.30 each for patrol cars, and $28,578.30 each for detective cars. The police cars will not increase existing maintenance and fuel costs. Nineteen police cars will be removed from the fleet and sold as surplus units.

Voted unanimously to appropriate grant funds and fund balance monies for several programs, including evidence-gathering tools for the Greenville Police Department’s gang unit ($7,675), completion of the Green Mill Run
pedestrian and bike link between Evans Park and East Carolina University ($150,000); the introduction of golf to disadvantaged youth through the PAL (Police Athletic League) program ($2,500); development of the police department’s crime plan ($10,000); emergency repairs to the Aquatics and Fitness Center’s swimming pool dehumidifier ($35,000); and assorted projects for the Greenville Recreation and Parks Department ($250,000).

Voted unanimously to approve a capital project budget ordinance for Greenville Utilities Commission’s Sanitary Sewer Outfall Rehabilitation Project Phase III. GUC has been pursuing a phased approach to rehabilitate aging concrete sewers since the completion of an initial engineering evaluation in December 1997.

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City of Greenville employees are urged to “Take Step Two” as part of a wellness campaign that champions a healthier lifestyle.

New initiatives as of last month include providing healthier food in vending machines, as well mapping out downtown walking paths to promote exercise.

Frank Salvato, the city’s benefits manager, said the city was awarded a $1,000 grant from the N.C. Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention program to subsidize the cost of providing healthier alternatives at about a dime less than the sugar-laden stuff at more than 30 vending machines in city offices and Greenville Utilities.

Allison Swart, a work site wellness coordinator with the Greenville-Pitt County Chamber of Commerce, worked with Salvato on the vending machine initiative. First Choice Food Services in Wilson won the contract, pledging to make half of its offerings healthy choices.

Swart offers assistance at no charge to any entity interested in improving employee health. Her position is funded through the federal Communities Putting Prevention to Work grant. The $1.6 million grant is managed by the Pitt County Health Department. Officials say the program’s mantra is “making the healthy choice, the easy choice.”

Swart said that a group of dietitians met last year and decided upon acceptable nutritional standards for heart-healthy vending machine fare. These standards were used to create guidelines to assist companies with creating policies.

“We’re trying to support healthy decisions,” she said.

Salvato also consulted on dietary matters with Kathryn Kolasa, a dietitian and professor of family medicine at East Carolina University’s Brody School of Medicine.

Along with better nutrition, the city’s initiative encourages employees to exercise more.
With Swart’s assistance, Salvato plotted out three different downtown walking routes that are registered with the American Heart Association. One route is a mile; the others are one-half and three-fourths of a mile.

Salvato said signage with directional arrows featuring the heart association’s signature red hearts will be installed on posts to mark the routes, all of which start and finish in front of City Hall.

“Now that we have the walking paths, the next thing is the 10,000-step club,” he said, for which participants will wear pedometers. “You can’t improve unless you measure.”

Some employees already have routes they regularly travel and have incorporated healthy snacking into their lives.

Bernita Demery, director of financial services, has been walking consistently during lunch with Tronette Greene.

“It’s fun this time of year — it’s beautiful outside,” Demery said as she ate an orange at her desk. “I do think it affects your attitude for sure. There’s a lot of things that could be depressing about working on the budget this time of year.

“It sure is stress relief for me,” she added, saying the walks allow them to “get refreshed and renew our minds.”

Greene said that she and Demery walk different routes, including the greenway.

“It curbs my appetite,” she said.

And she appreciates the nutritional options in the vending machines like salads and turkey sandwiches on whole wheat bread.

Salvato said the aim of instituting health-driven programs along with others that already were in place is to produce a “culture change” among city workers.

One of the goals is to lower health insurance costs for the city’s self-funded program. In 2010, a wellness initiative began with a $35,000 donation from Cigna, the city’s health insurance carrier. A variety of programs were introduced. This year, a citywide healthy eating policy was implemented, requiring that a “healthy alternative” be provided at meetings where food is served.

Employees are rewarded with a $150 Visa gift card for taking part in an annual health screening and health plan.
“That’s what we use for our metrics to make sure we’re improving, as well as assessments to see if we’re targeting the right risks,” Salvato said. “The basic things are increasing physical activity, better nutrition and smoking cessation.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website, excessive alcohol use is another precursor to chronic disease, and poor health habits as a whole are “responsible for much of the illness, disability and premature death related to chronic diseases.”

There are other related benefits besides wellness from the city’s efforts, like healthier and happier employees, Salvato said, and that translates into higher productivity and lower absenteeism.
BLOOMINGTON, Ind. -- Mark Lenzi struck gold when he switched from wrestling to diving in the mid-1980s.

Over the next decade, he became the 1992 Olympic 3-meter springboard champion, earned a bronze medal four years later in Atlanta and became the first diver to score 100 points on a single dive.

On Monday, Lenzi, the last American male diver to win Olympic gold, died at the age of 43 in Greenville, N.C.

Lenzi's alma mater, Indiana University, posted the announcement on its web site but did not provide a cause of death. His mother, Ellie, told the family's hometown newspaper, The Free Lance-Star of Fredricksburg, Va., that Lenzi had been hospitalized the past two weeks because of fainting spells that were caused by low blood pressure.

"Mark came from a wrestling background and the goal of any wrestler is to pin you," former Olympic teammate and current Texas diving coach Matt Scoggin told USA Diving. "When Mark got into a contest, he was going to pin you. I remember before his first World Cup, he was going to win 1-meter, I thought there was no way - it was my third World Cup and I was still trying to get on the podium. He won. He was a very confident competitor."

It almost didn't happen.

Lenzi was wrestling in high school when he was suddenly captivated by Greg Louganis' remarkable Olympics performance in 1984. Lenzi quickly changed sports and dove right into his new passion.

In 1989, he swept the Big Ten titles in the 1-meter, 3-meter and platform competitions, then went on to win the first of his back-to-back 1-meter national championships in '89. He was selected the NCAA's diver of the year in 1989 and 1990.

But Lenzi was just beginning to emerge on the international stage.
His victory on the 3-meter board at the Barcelona Olympics gave the Americans their third straight title in that event. Four years later, following a brief retirement, Lenzi earned an Olympic bronze medal.

No American male diver has won an Olympic diving medal since Lenzi in '96.

"Mark grabbed onto a dream," Scoggin said. "He wasn't going to believe anything was impossible. It was amazing how rapidly he became an Olympic champion."

Lenzi's impressive resume includes 18 international springboard championships. He was the first diver to score more than 700 points in an 11-dive competition on the 3-meter board and was the first American to successfully complete a forward, 4 1/2 somersault in competition.

"As an Olympic gold and bronze medalist, Mark was one of our country's greatest divers, and he will be missed tremendously," USA Diving chairman Bob Rydze said in a statement posted on the organization's web site.

After his diving career ended, Lenzi went into coaching. He helped four divers win national age-group titles with Indiana's junior diving team and coached men's and women's divers at East Carolina from 2009-11.

Lenzi is survived by his wife, Dorothy, his mother, two brothers, one sister and his grandmother, Mary Cochran. Lenzi's funeral and viewing will be held Tuesday at Wilkerson Funeral Home in Greensville from 6 to 8 p.m.

"Mark and I spoke just a few weeks ago, my heart goes out to you," Louganis wrote on the USA Diving web site. "There are no words to express how heartfelt a loss this is. Healing hugs, Greg."