Concerns about the market value of their education brought a group of East Carolina University construction management students together outside Mendenhall Student Center on Tuesday to discuss their fears and seek some answers from department heads.

Students had heard about some faculty and curriculum changes in the construction management department, part of the College of Technology and Computer Science, including a decision not to extend some teacher contracts and issues about departmental accreditation, senior Christina Ramos said.

Ramos circulated a petition requesting university administrators to stay the course of a balanced curriculum that gives both theoretical and research-based knowledge and practical training from faculty with applied experience.

That balanced approach to construction management education has made ECU the school of choice for many students, those at the gathering said. “We understand there is a purpose for research professors in the construction management program, but there is also a necessity for instructors with skill sets,” Ramos said. “They educate us from their experiences in the field and share that in our education. They give us information without which we won't go far.”

Students want the choice of going straight to the workforce as qualified field leaders at construction sites or to go on to graduate studies where research is stressed, Ramos said.
The students also expressed concerns about the program's accreditation status. The perception at the meeting was that the department is at risk of losing its national accreditation because it has not held on to qualified teachers whose experience meets the practical requirements.

Students need to be made more involved in the curriculum-building process, and they want their fears about faculty changes addressed, they said.

The focus of student questions and concerns was first-year department chairman Syed Ahmed, sophomore Oscar Guarin said. The chairman's lack of knowledge of faculty strengths and weaknesses has contributed to some decisions that saw favored teachers leaving the program, he said.

“This is Dr. Ahmed's first year here, and a lot of the faculty have been here 15 to 20 years. He hasn't worked with them and is changing things with a blindfold on,” Guarin said.

The students said they have not been made aware of the process that brought about the changes.

“We were only told that the information is public and we can look it up, but unless you know how budget politics works in the state's university system, you really don't know how to find it,” Ramos said.

Ahmed provided some answers at his office following the student event. He said there is no cause for concern about the program's accreditation status or the direction the curriculum is taking.

“These are absolutely baseless rumors that are being spread,” he said. “There is no truth whatsoever to the belief that we are moving from a more practical format of teaching and preparation to a more theoretical and research-based format. As far as the rumors of our loss of accreditation, that blows my mind away.”

The chairman produced documents he received March 15 from the American Council for Construction Education that show the department has been recommended for reaccreditation for six years, the maximum allowed period.

The accreditation summary acknowledges “weaknesses and concerns” discovered during the council's examination process but said they could be corrected immediately and reflected in the department's first progress report.

“The issue of faculty tenure and promotion guidelines needs immediate attention,” the summary indicates. “The committee expects the program to aggressively pursue remedies for faculty inexperience and course rigor.”

Ahmed acknowledged the validity of the accreditation committee's concerns.

“There are always strengths and weaknesses in any program in the country,” he said. “There is no construction program in this country in which an accreditation results in no concerns or weaknesses.”
Ahmed avowed his intention to assure that the program's direction forward would be one that balances theoretical knowledge and research with practical education from experienced faculty.

He said his appointment to the chair in August placed him in a poor position to evaluate faculty who were being reviewed for contract renewal, so he deferred to the opinions of the faculty selection committee members and concurred with their decisions.

“I am in a better position to play a decisive role in the hiring of new faculty members, and I can assure our students that I will make sure that our faculty continues to have the necessary practical experience for providing a balanced education to our students,” Ahmed said.

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Hospitals under the University Health Systems of Eastern Carolina umbrella provided health care to many of the people who suffered injuries related to Saturday's tornadoes, an official at Tuesday's meeting of Pitt County Memorial Hospital's board of trustees said.

PCMH is one of the UHS hospitals that treated people. Bertie Memorial Hospital in Windsor, among the UHS system of eight hospitals, treated and released 13 patients. Roanoke-Chowan Hospital in Ahoskie saw 42 patients and also received “10 of the bodies that did not survive,” Roger Robertson, president of East Carolina Health, which oversees the regional hospital, told the PCMH board at the meeting at Rock Springs Center.

“You as a board should be proud of the way our health system responded at that time,” he said.

Of the injured statewide, at least 22 patients were transferred to PCMH.

“PCMH and (East Carolina University's) Brody School of Medicine responded phenomenally,” Robertson said.

Statistics released Monday from the N.C. Division of Emergency Management indicated that 22 people died statewide — the count was raised to 23 Tuesday — and 125 people required medical care. Eleven of those deaths occurred in Bertie County. Gov. Beverly Perdue declared a state of emergency Saturday.

The Pitt County chapter of the American Red Cross released preliminary figures showing that about 6,000 homes were damaged and 600 homes were destroyed in eastern North Carolina.

The board also heard a report on the previously released State of the County health report by Dr. John Morrow, director of the Pitt County Health Department.

Morrow talked about the alarming rate of obesity in the United States and the implications on the life span of obese children. “So this is an epidemic by any definition,” he said. “This is likely to be the first generation of children who won't live as long as their parents, and that is a really scary thought.”
Morrow also noted where improvements of the county's health had been achieved and remarked on PCMH's contribution to those gains.

Steve Lawler, PCMH president, reported on the Greenville hospital's progress toward meeting its strategic plan goals.

“In all areas, we've improved over last year,” he said.

PCMH has achieved a 95 percent retention rate of its employees, surpassing its goal of 87 percent. The hospital has a recruitment effort under way to add 180 nurses. Lawler said 22 doctors had been recruited to PCMH. The hospital also is working to hire more minorities at the management and administrator levels.

“We're focused and committed to increasing our diversity at the leadership level,” he said.

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RALEIGH With two dorms lacking power and some students questioning the school's decision not to close, the president of St. Augustine's College, Dianne Boardley Suber, met with students Tuesday to give them a progress report and a stern talking-to.

Her message was simple: Thank you to those who have adjusted well to difficult conditions on campus after Saturday's tornado. To everyone else, grow up. "You are not 5 years old. You are at least 18. You are at least in a position where you are getting ready to make life decisions as adults," Suber said. "What I am asking you to do is try to understand the limitations that we have."

Suber called the meeting after hearing via social networking websites that some students were growing disgruntled and increasingly vocal about the return to class Tuesday. More than 150 students gathered on the second floor of the Martin Luther King Jr. College Union to hear Suber's explanation.

The school was hit hard by the storm, with dozens of fallen trees turning the campus into a "jungle" Saturday evening, Suber said. No building escaped damage, and large sections of campus lost power. Crews of workers, including faculty, staff and students, pitched in while classes were canceled Monday to clear the area in time for school to re-start Tuesday morning.

That's in contrast to Shaw University a few miles away. Shaw administrators chose to cancel classes for the rest of the semester because of the severity of tornado damage that included the roof being ripped off the student union.

St. Augustine's decision not to follow Shaw's lead has outraged some students. Two St. Aug's dorms, Boyer Hall and Falkcrest Commons, were without power until 2 p.m. Tuesday. Students say the disruption has left them without adequate time to complete final projects and prepare for exams. Senior Fatima Kearney said her dorm smells of spoiled food from the rooms of absent students.

Other students, like sophomore Shakara Thomas, are worried about security. Three thefts have been reported around campus since the storm, including a 52-inch television taken from Boyer Hall on Sunday night.

"It's pitch black when I walk back to my dorm at night," Thomas said. "You don't feel safe."
A mocking retort
Suber's assertion that security has been out "in full force" was greeted with laughter from some students at Tuesday's meeting.

St. Aug's Chief of Police George Boykin said security officers have been working 12- to 16-hour shifts since Saturday, with 14 officers stationed around campus 24 hours a day, including at the two dorms that have lacked power. The school's escort service for pedestrians is always available but has been little used since Saturday, Boykin said.

Suber acknowledged students' frustration with the situation but said the school had provided necessities during the crisis and is bringing back conveniences as quickly as possible. She asked for patience.

"It's not realistic to think it will be like it is when we have full power," Suber said. "Think about it."
"You think," a male voice called from the crowd.
"What you have to understand and accept is that there are things you can't control, and a tornado is one of those things," Suber said calmly.

The cost of the storm
A financial assessment of damage to the campus will not be available until Friday. Senior grade deadlines have been extended a day to give faculty more time to work with students.

Some students booed when Suber finished speaking Tuesday.
"You can get mad, but we have told you all that we know," Suber said.

She urged students to maintain perspective.
"There are 1,000 students on this campus and no injuries," Suber said. "You are blessed."

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UNC-CH loses fight to shield records
BY KEN TYSIAC AND LUKE DECOCK - Staff Writers
Published in: North Carolina

UNC-Chapel Hill withheld documents that should have been provided to The News & Observer in response to an open-records lawsuit filed by a consortium of media groups against the university, Wake County Superior Court Judge Howard Manning ruled Tuesday.

The university had cited FERPA, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, as justification for withholding phone records and parking tickets requested by The N&O. But in a memorandum regarding his decision, Manning wrote, "FERPA does not provide a student with an invisible cloak so that the student can remain hidden from public view while enrolled at UNC."

Manning did rule that the identities of student tutors working with athletic teams are protected by FERPA. Lawyers for UNC provided the plaintiffs with a list of non-student tutors at the beginning of a hearing Friday.

Manning directed lawyers representing the media groups to prepare an order implementing his decision. Once the order is signed and entered, UNC will have 30 days to decide whether it wants to appeal.

The lawsuit, brought in October by a group of news organizations led by The News & Observer and The Charlotte Observer, sought the release of records related to the NCAA investigation into the UNC-CH football program.

Still to be decided is one major area of the lawsuit, which is the request for all documents relating to investigations into the UNC football program. Manning and the lawyers for both sides agreed at a hearing last week that it was necessary first to decide the three other areas of dispute: phone records, parking tickets and tutor identities.

Through a school spokesman, UNC Chancellor Holden Thorp released a statement on the decision.

"We are pleased that Judge Manning appears to have affirmed the privacy of student tutors. We are disappointed with the court's apparent interpretation of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) as it applies to student records related to phone numbers and parking tickets," Thorp said. "This has far-reaching implications for all of our students and their records that we believe federal law protects. When the judge's instructions are finalized in an order, the University will review the ruling and evaluate its options for appeal."
Thorp also said in the statement that the university has already provided more than 23,000 pages of documents in response to 85 record requests filed at the time of the lawsuit. "A number" of the documents, Thorp said, were produced in unredacted form or with minimal redactions.

"We did so as part of the University's commitment to meet its obligations under North Carolina's Public Records Law and to respect the privacy rights of our students and employees," Thorp said.

**Tickets in previous case**

Amanda Martin, the lawyer representing the media consortium, said in an email message that she preferred to hold off on commenting on Judge Manning's order until it is signed.

Parking tickets were upheld as a public record in a previous lawsuit when the University of Maryland student newspaper sued for documents the school said were protected by FERPA after it was discovered in 1996 that a basketball player owed $8,000 in parking tickets. The student newspaper won the case.

In his memo, Manning wrote that a student's telephone number is not part of the education record protected by FERPA, and that the records provided will not include the content of any of the phone calls.

The N&O and Charlotte Observer, both McClatchy newspapers, joined in the suit with the DTH Media Corp., which publishes the UNC-CH student newspaper, The Daily Tar Heel; News 14 Carolina, a cable TV station operated by Time Warner Entertainment-Advance/Newhouse Partnership; WTVD Television; Capitol Broadcasting; The Associated Press; and Media General Operations.

The suit names Thorp, athletics director Dick Baddour, football coach Butch Davis and Jeff McCracken, head of the UNC-CH public safety department, as defendants.

**What was provided**

The original suit contained six items of contention, but both sides agreed at last week's hearing that UNC had complied by providing two of the six:

The names of individuals and organizations that provided impermissible benefits to UNC players.

The names of recipients of athletic scholarships.

The other four items were placed before Manning. All parties agreed to set aside the issue of documents related to the investigation in order to decide on the phone records, parking tickets and student tutor records.

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State workers' premiums in talks
BY CRAIG JARVIS - Staff writer
Published in: State
Published Wed, Apr 20, 2011 06:12 AM

RALEIGH State House Republican leaders and state employee groups are negotiating a compromise that could spare workers from having to pay health insurance premiums.

Lacking the votes to override Gov. Bev Perdue's veto from last week, as the Senate did Thursday, the House on Tuesday fashioned a compromise bill that instructs the state treasurer to find savings to keep premiums as low as possible. That bill sped through two committee meetings and tentatively passed along mostly party lines in a 61 to 54 House floor vote.

But the proposal could look different as early as today, when the full House is scheduled to take its final vote on it.

Rep. Jerry Dockham, a Davidson County Republican who is the primary sponsor of the bill, told legislators that it was still a work in progress that could result in a no-premium option for active and retired employees.

Alternatives are being hashed out by House Speaker Thom Tillis in talks with employee groups. Tillis expressed frustration with the governor for vetoing the bill without an alternative.

"I'm very disappointed in the governor's lack of leadership on this issue," he said. Tillis said the gap between the legislature's proposal and the governor's needed to be addressed. "Tell us what you want," he said of the governor. "This is a waste of legislative time."

He said it would cost roughly $14 million if employees don't pick up the cost of premiums. "That has to come from somewhere," Tillis said.

The bill the governor vetoed was an attempt to close a projected $515 million shortfall. It would have required employees to pay premiums, and instituted higher co-pays and deductibles.

Perdue, in her veto message, said the bill would, in effect, be a pay cut for teachers, who haven't had an increase in three years.

On Tuesday, Perdue spokeswoman Chrissy Pearson said the governor is waiting to see what kind of proposal the negotiations produce. "She is glad to see what looks to be positive movement, though," said Pearson by email.
At the morning news conference, Senate President Pro Tem Phil Berger said he didn't have any objection to the bill that worked its way to the floor vote Tuesday.

Democratic House members were skeptical of the bill. Minority leader Rep. Joe Hackney urged Democrats to vote against it, since the negotiations were still under way.

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UNC breaks ground on hospital in Hillsborough
By Katelyn Ferral - Staff writer
Published in: Orange County
Wed. April 20, 2011

HILLBOROUGH--UNC Hospitals is breaking ground today on its new 68-bed hospital in Hillsborough. The hospital will include 50 acute care beds, 18 intensive care unit beds, six operating rooms, two procedure rooms and an emergency department. The $200 million project will be completed in two phases. The first part, which will include an outpatient clinic with urgent care, imaging and oncology services will be finished in 2013. The second phase will include all in-patient beds would be completed in 2015.

UNC Hospitals main campus in Chapel Hill has been overcrowded for a decade, with room capacity at 80 to 90 percent most days, said Jennifer James, spokesperson for the hospital. The new hospital will provide more room and is part of the hospital's long term plan to move less-complicated medical cases off of the main campus and streamline services in Chapel Hill for complicated cases.

"The idea is to try to diffuse some of the crowding and some of the space constraints here on campus and provide services more directly to communities," she said.

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Students faced with wait-list limbo can take action
BY LEE BIERER - CORRESPONDENT
Published in: Education

Computer servers at colleges across the country notice a spike in activity on Friday afternoons about 5 p.m. during the months of March and April. Five o'clock is the standard release time for college notifications; students find out if they have been accepted, rejected or wait-listed. This year, when April Fools' Day fell on a Friday, the irony wasn't lost on most high school seniors.

Informing students on Fridays reduces some of the "next day drama" in high schools and the 5 p.m. notification diminishes the reflex response of parents to contact college admissions offices asking for explanations. Finding out on Friday gives students a buffer - the happy students can celebrate, the unhappy students can cry, share their misery with those closest to them and begin considering Plan B.

So what exactly does being wait-listed mean and how should you respond? As a wait-listed student, you're in purgatory with a choice of either continuing to wait and see whether you'll be accepted or choosing closure by telling the college you're no longer interested.

When colleges notify you of your wait-list status they'll ask you to decide whether to remain "active." Unless you actively declare that you'll stay on the wait-list, you'll be considered "inactive" and removed from consideration. Read and follow the notification instructions carefully.

After informing the college that you are interested in staying on the wait-list, consider the following:

Contact the Admissions Office to try to obtain an accurate assessment of the wait-list history and the best guess for this year's class. Wait-list acceptances vary dramatically year to year, depending on the number of students that accept offers. Some colleges put hundreds and even thousands on a wait-list knowing they will only offer acceptances to just a small percentage of students.

Write a letter demonstrating your continued interest. If you're certain you will attend if accepted, be sure to let the college know. Before you write the letter, do more research on majors and identify a specific course or professor that interests you; convey your enthusiasm. Let the admissions officials know how you will contribute to the college community.
Update your application. Send a new transcript with first semester grades and a revised rank in class. Inform the admissions office if you have any new extracurricular activities, accomplishments, honors, scholarships, awards, employment, internships, etc. Submit any new and improved standardized test scores.

Ask the college if it will accept an additional letter of recommendation.

Evaluate your backup plans and accept another offer of admission. You may not be notified of the outcome of the wait-list until summer. You need to make a decision by May 1, accept one offer and pay a deposit.

Recognize that you are not in the driver's seat. Do your best to not take this personally. And try to put all of the acceptances, rejections and wait-lists in perspective. They are not a barometer of who you are as a person or of the success you'll have in life.

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