Public Forum

Don't give up on Imperial building

As an ECU alumnus living on the west coast, I do my best to keep up with what's going on at ECU and in Greenville. So you can imagine my surprise when I read the devastating news about the loss of the historic Imperial Tobacco Co. building in downtown Greenville.

Sadly, this kind of conflagration is too often the end of these great, rare old buildings. But more and more people are beginning to realize we as a society are too quick to give up on these buildings, even when there seem to be no restoration solutions in sight.

But perhaps there is. What if our ECU construction management and engineering programs used the building as a revolutionary restoration project? What if we didn't "write off" the now charred timbers and found a way to rebuild the old lady? Could we use laminated timbers and keep the facade? Have we asked all the questions before giving up? I see this kind of effort out here in Seattle, where historic buildings are almost never given up on because there are so few of them left. For instance, I've seen burned buildings completely gutted, leaving only their facades.

Laminated timbers or metal I-beams are then used to rebuild the buildings with historic sensitivities. Sometimes skyscrapers are even built behind the facades, giving pedestrians a historic sense of the area while accommodating new high-density construction.

Imagine the national press ECU and Greenville would garner if the project succeeded? Imagine the invaluable lessons our students would gain? Plus, new research and knowledge would surely be gained by discovering new ways to restore seemingly hopelessly burned out buildings.

Let's not give up now. Let's find a way to overcome the adversity. It's what ECU and eastern North Carolinians do best.

WARD DUFT
ECU, Class of 1967
Spokane, Wa.
Dealing with the media: wrong way vs. Friday way

By Jack Betts

Raleigh

Mike Easley is surely sick and tired of getting knocked around in the press for the way his administration deals with the media and handles requests for public information.

I don't blame him. I'd be tired of it, too. But at least the governor has performed this public service: He has shown the Republican and Democratic contenders for governor the perils of playing favorites, of making it harder for the public to find out about how their government works, of avoiding public appearances and of engaging in — as Easley himself has put it — "pettiness" in dealing with the news media.

For Democrats Bev Perdue and Richard Moore and Republicans Bob Orr, Fred Smith, Pat McCrory and Bill Graham, the message ought to be clear by now: If you think the Easley administration's way of dealing with requests for public information is a good model to follow, think again.

It has, as the governor acknowledged in a recent interview with editors, gotten in the way of his administration's initiatives in some areas and distracted from the focus he wanted to put on his final year in office.

Whether the candidates to succeed Easley have gotten the message is another question. Some of them — such as former Supreme Court associate justice Bob Orr — are easily accessible and comfortable discussing issues on almost any topic. Others, such as Lt. Gov. Bev Perdue, appear to be wary of too much public availability and more comfortable with having close aides handle the media.

If they're looking for a model among recent governors, Jim Hunt's public record is generally one of openness. There aren't many public appearances that Hunt wouldn't accept, and it usually was possible to land an interview within a day or two, even on controversial subjects. He wasn't perfect, but he was accessible.

But to my mind the gold standard for dealing with the public and the press was Bill Friday, the longtime president of the University of North Carolina system. He was, and is, as skilled a politician as any elected official of the 20th century.

Here's what biographer William Link wrote in "William Friday: Power, Purpose and American Higher Education":

Bill Friday's administrative style "embodied the qualities of Friday's personality: gregariousness and sensitivity, idealism and cold-hearted efficiency, and unassuming accessibility and constant communication with the state and national power structure."

And in dealing with the news media, Link wrote, "Friday's approach was simple: to remain open and honest and to avoid withholding information. When he felt compelled not to reveal everything, he would often tell reporters, 'I can't talk about it now, but call me later.' He 'worked very hard' at reinforcing the press's confidence in him; when reporters called his office, he later said, 'if it could be discussed, they would get it all' and 'know the truth.' This meant 'good and bad, and there was plenty of bad, but I never withheld.' In this way Friday sought a press relationship 'that provided the university with the means of getting its story before the people.'

I don't think any of the current candidates for governor have all of Bill Friday's personal skills or the depth of his understanding of what makes North Carolina tick. But I do think they would benefit from considering the simple fact that Friday understood the needs of the media and what that really represented — the opportunity to increase the public's understanding of its system of higher education and the impact it had on a rapidly growing state.

No public figure in my memory was more adept at marrying the needs of a public institution such as UNC with the daily demands of an inquisitive and sometimes unrelenting press.

Friday came away with his share of scar tissue during some of the battles he fought for public support of the university. But he also left office with a breadth and depth of public admiration and respect that no governor in recent memory could dream of enjoying.

There's a lesson in there, for those who pay attention.

Jack Betts is a Charlotte Observer associate editor and columnist who is based in Raleigh.
UNC labor-practice protest continues

FROM STAFF REPORTS

CHAPEL HILL — A student sit-in outside the chancellor's office at UNC-Chapel Hill enters its sixth day today.

The students are demanding that the university join a program they say would enhance efforts to support fair labor practices in factories producing apparel with the UNC-CH logo.

Twenty-three people remained inside South Building when the doors closed Friday night, said Salma Mirza, a senior history major. Police allowed people to leave but not re-enter the building during the weekend. By Monday morning, four students remained, Mirza said.

About 11 remained in the building when it closed Monday, she said.

The sit-in follows a similar protest at Appalachian State University, where six students were charged with disorderly conduct and trespassing.

The UNC-CH students want the university to join the Designated Suppliers Program. They said that would ensure that clothing bearing the UNC-CH logo would be made in factories where workers earned a living wage.

In a statement, UNC-CH said it belongs to two labor monitoring organizations and had explored joining the Designated Suppliers Program beginning in 2005 but didn't reach consensus.

Campus officials have set ground rules for the protest. Protesters have been told they must respect university property, not disrupt operations during normal business hours, not occupy any offices, and not exceed the fire marshal's posted capacity for the rotunda.

The students have set up a Web site with video of the protest at dsp4unc.wordpress.com.

The university has posted a fact list at www.unc.edu/news/archives/apr08/lcifac041508.html.
The (Yes) Low Cost of Higher Ed

By DAVID LEONHARDT

ON Oct. 2, 2003, board members at the University of Virginia filed into the Upper East Oval Room of the Rotunda, the centerpiece of Thomas Jefferson’s campus design, for one of their regular meetings. As usual, they were joined by the university’s top administrators. Just before the meeting began, a member of U.Va.’s public affairs staff walked over to John T. Casteen III, the university president, to hand him a clipping from that morning’s newspaper.

The clipping described a sweeping new financial-aid program that the University of North Carolina had just announced. North Carolina was going to cover nearly the full cost of any student whose family made less than 150 percent of the poverty level or, for a family of four, about $30,000 in today’s dollars. Students would still have to work 10 to 12 hours a week in a campus job, but they would not have to take out any loans.

At the time, it was one of the most aggressive aid programs at any major university.

The program touched a nerve with Mr. Casteen. The son of a shipyard worker from Portsmouth, in the southeastern corner of the state, he was the first member of his family to attend college. But during his 13 years as president, tuition had risen significantly, as it had at many colleges, and the Virginia campus had become even more dominated by upper-middle-class students. North Carolina’s new policy, which had the potential to lure students away from Virginia, could aggravate the situation.

Before the meeting had ended, Mr. Casteen announced to the room that he wanted the financial-aid staff to come up with a response. He wanted it quickly, he said, and he wanted something bigger than what North Carolina was doing. Four months later, at the board’s next meeting, it approved a plan that was similar but somewhat more generous than North Carolina’s. Making sure everyone had a chance to attend college, Mr. Casteen would say, was “a fundamental obligation of a free culture.”

That same spring, officials at Harvard had been working on their own plan. Three weeks after Virginia’s announcement, Lawrence H. Summers, then Harvard’s president, traveled to Miami to give a speech titled “Higher Education and the American Dream.” In it, he alluded to Jefferson’s views on the importance of educating poor and rich alike, and he decried the paucity of low-income students on college campuses. The punch line came toward the end of the speech, when Mr. Summers raised the bar on North Carolina and Virginia. Harvard would cover nearly the full college cost for any student whose family made less than
$40,000.

The financial-aid bidding war at the nation’s top universities was under way.

North Carolina soon expanded its program, to cover 200 percent of the poverty level, or $41,300 today. In 2005, Yale undergraduates occupied the admissions office to demand that their university increase aid, and administrators soon did. The University of Maryland came forward with a plan. So did the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the University of Pennsylvania and Stanford. In 2006, Harvard raised the bar again, saying parents making less than $60,000 would not have to pay anything toward the cost of their child’s education.

All of these moves focused on low- and middle-income students — an ever-rarer breed at elite universities over the last generation. But in 2007, the bidding war took on a new character: it began to address the concerns of the upper middle class as well. In July, Amherst College announced it would eliminate loans for all students, no matter their income. In December, Harvard — under Congressional pressure, like other wealthy colleges, to spend more of its endowment — introduced a policy under which most families making less than $180,000 a year would receive significant aid. For all but the most affluent 3 or 4 percent of the population, Harvard would be roughly as expensive as many state universities.

Harvard being Harvard, the policy received a huge amount of attention, and set in motion a frenzy that made the previous few years of dueling announcements look leisurely by comparison. Within weeks, Yale went as far as Harvard had, while Bowdoin, Colby, Dartmouth, Haverford, Pomona and others came up with their own — usually less generous — policies.

In less than five years, the entire tuition and financial aid system at the nation’s top colleges has been overhauled. Today, it looks a lot like a highly progressive tax code, in which the affluent are bearing an enormous share of the overall tuition burden. No matter how high the published cost — almost $50,000, typically — these top universities have become significantly more affordable for the majority of students.

It may be the first time that has ever happened.

The changes have not been greeted with a chorus of joy, however. At colleges without large endowments, administrators are worried about the pressure they will face. Some have suggested that they may end up reducing aid to low-income students to compete for more affluent students, who typically have higher test scores and thus help an institution’s ranking in U.S. News & World Report. In the past, these colleges were able to woo some students away from the Ivy League with merit scholarships.

Others say the latest round of changes will not solve the larger issue of economic opportunity raised by Mr. Casteen, Mr. Summers and others. “There is a perception that this has gone farther than it really has,” says
Sandy Baum, an economist at Skidmore College who oversees the College Board’s annual report on college costs. “The number of students going to these schools is tiny. It’s not going to make a dent in educational opportunity.” Increases in the federal Pell grant, which typically go to students whose families make less than $40,000, would probably accomplish far more on that front.

Over the last decade, the average net cost of attending a four-year public college — including room and board as well as financial aid, and controlling for inflation — has risen to $9,980 a year, from $7,650, according to the College Board. The average net cost at private colleges has risen to $23,000, from $18,050.

Still, other education experts have pointed out that the new aid policies aren’t always as generous as administrators make them out to be. Some colleges, for instance, have committed to covering only tuition, not room and board, which can be substantial.

All of these concerns may well be valid. Yet it’s still worth taking a minute to consider how quickly — and how much — the recent announcements have actually changed the landscape of higher education.

THIS past November, the admissions deans from Harvard, Princeton and Virginia went on a recruiting tour together. They no longer had to spend the month reading applications, because they had abolished their early-admissions programs. So they hit the road instead, speaking at high schools across Virginia and West Virginia.

One night, they held an information session at a Holiday Inn in the Appalachian town of Bluefield, W.Va. They had sent invitations to about two dozen students and had told guidance counselors to spread the word. William Fitzsimmons, Harvard’s admissions dean, had expected about 45 students and parents to show up, based on previous recruiting trips.

Just three years earlier, John Blackburn, Virginia’s dean, had gone on a similar tour in nearby western Virginia and discovered that few students had heard about the university’s new financial-aid plan. “You can’t just raise the U.Va. flag and expect a lot of low-income kids to come out,” Mr. Blackburn had said after one lackluster night in 2004 at a college fair in Big Stone Gap, Va. Many had assumed U.Va. was simply too expensive, even if financial aid would have made it affordable for them. This assumption, officials say, is one reason the student body at elite colleges has become less economically diverse in recent decades.

But something may be changing. At the Bluefield Holiday Inn, 110 people showed up to listen to Mr. Blackburn, Mr. Fitzsimmons and Janet Lavin Rapelye, Princeton’s dean. “We were blown away,” Mr. Fitzsimmons recalls.

The best explanation seems to be that the flurry of high-profile announcements about financial aid has helped overcome years of headlines about rising tuition. As Ms. Baum of the College Board says, “Low- and
moderate-income kids now know that it’s fine to apply to Harvard and Dartmouth and money won’t be an issue. And that’s good.”

The number of low-income students at top institutions is still fairly low but is growing. The share of Harvard undergraduates receiving Pell grants rose to 13 percent this year, from 10 percent in 2003-4. At Amherst, over the same span, the number has risen to 18 percent from 15 percent.

The purest case study may be Princeton. It took perhaps the first step down this road in 1998, when it replaced loans with grants for low-income students. It expanded the program to all financial-aid students in 2001. But other colleges didn’t follow suit. And the policy had only a modest effect on the makeup of Princeton’s student body. Between 1998 and 2005, the share of undergraduates with Pell grants rose to 7.7 percent, from 6.9 percent, says Robin Moscato, the director of undergraduate financial aid. But over just the last two years, with other colleges trumpeting their new programs, the share of Princeton undergraduates receiving the Pell has increased to almost 10 percent.

The elimination of loans is a crucial part of the changes. From a straight economic perspective, this doesn’t entirely make sense: because people with a bachelor’s degree make so much more on average than people without one, college loans are usually well worth their cost. But these benefits come years later, while the costs come immediately — and intimidate many families.

“A lot of students from smaller towns look at the university and they’re like, ‘No,’” says Carla Rojas, a senior at North Carolina whose father is a construction worker near Lincoln, N.C., and whose mother does alterations there. Many students know there are scholarships, Ms. Rojas says, but they figure, “Oh, I won’t get one.”

Replacing loans with grants changes the calculation. Rather than having to persuade would-be applicants that loans are a good investment, recruiters can say the students will graduate debt-free. If anything, Ms. Rojas adds, she wishes North Carolina were doing more to publicize its policy.

Mr. Summers says the ultimate goal should be to repeat the success of affirmative-action policies. Affirmative action has become so ingrained that black students with a given SAT score are more likely to apply to Harvard than white students with the same score, according to a university analysis. High-achieving poor students, however, are much less likely to apply to elite colleges than their affluent counterparts.

Closing that gap will require more than just money. “Increasing financial aid is terrific,” as Mr. Summers says. “But as important or more important is recruitment and the way students are admitted.”

If admissions officers were to give poor students more credit for what they had overcome, colleges would become considerably more diverse. But they would risk angering alumni, whose children would face tougher
competition to be admitted. Recruiting more low-income students would also bring a big price tag, because the newly expansive aid policies would then apply to many more students.

It’s easier for college administrators to be generous with financial aid when their campuses don’t have very many poor students to begin with.

THERE are several arguments for increasing economic diversity at elite colleges. For one thing, it makes the universities more consistent with their self-image as meritocracies. In recent decades, as colleges have become more diverse geographically, racially and religiously — changes they regularly celebrate — they have also become less so economically, according to the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles.

At the same time that their campuses were becoming more affluent, the colleges have come to play arguably a larger role in American society.

George H.W. Bush, George W. Bush and Bill Clinton all graduated from elite colleges (Yale, Yale and Georgetown). So did Barack Obama (Columbia) and Hillary Rodham Clinton (Wellesley). The number of United States senators and Supreme Court justices with Ivy League degrees has risen in recent years.

Recent research also suggests that lower-income students benefit more from an elite education than other students do. Two economists, Alan B. Krueger and Stacy Berg Dale, studied the earnings of college graduates and found that for most, the selectivity of their alma maters had little effect on their incomes once other factors, like SAT scores, were taken into account. To use a hypothetical example, a graduate of North Carolina State who scored a 1200 on the SAT makes as much, on average, as a Duke graduate with a 1200. But there was an exception: poor students. Even controlling for test scores, they made more money if they went to elite colleges. They evidently gained something like closer contact with professors, exposure to new kinds of jobs or connections that they couldn’t get elsewhere.

“Low-income children,” says Mr. Krueger, a Princeton professor, “gain the most from going to an elite school.”

Given all this, some have argued that Harvard, Yale and other universities are mistaken in giving financial aid to upper-middle-class students rather than using the money to recruit more low-income students. Awarding a $30,000 scholarship to someone whose parents make $180,000 a year doesn’t exactly reduce economic inequality. But it does have two other benefits.

For one, it gives the new financial aid a more solid base of support among alumni. Anthony W. Marx, the president of Amherst, has been talking about the importance of making the college more economically diverse since his inauguration address in 2003. But he says he received more congratulatory e-mail messages after announcing last summer that Amherst would eliminate loans for all students than after any of his
announcements about recruiting poorer students.

Expanding the pool of aid recipients may also make the policies more popular among students. It would be rather counterproductive if the children of midlevel corporate executives, who were paying $50,000 in tuition and fees, ended up resenting the children of police officers, who were paying nothing.

The most important issues facing higher education still have relatively little to do with this small group of colleges. Those issues involve preparing more low- and middle-income children to attend college, lifting the graduation rates at community colleges and at four-year colleges that educate large numbers of these students, and simplifying and expanding federal financial aid.

That said, what happens at the country’s best-known universities still matters, both because of their role in society and because of how they shape the discussion about higher education. Yes, the new policies have flaws, and they are likely to make life more difficult for administrators at other colleges. But just imagine if, five years ago, somebody had said that Harvard, Amherst and their peers would soon be using their endowments to reduce costs to almost nothing for most families making less than $60,000 — and to give large scholarships to families making as much as $180,000. Would anyone have argued that this sounded like a bad idea?

David Leonhardt writes the Economic Scene column for The Times.
GLOUCESTER, Mass. (AP) -- Sandra Bullock and her husband were unhurt after a head-on crash with a drunken driver, police said Saturday.

The actress and her husband, Jesse James of TV's "Monster Garage," were being driven in a sport-utility vehicle Friday night when a station wagon crossed the center line and hit them, said Gloucester police Lt. Jerry Cook.

Both vehicles were totaled, but no one was hurt. The vehicles were traveling 15 to 20 mph, Cook said.

The other car was driven by Lucille Gatchell, who registered a blood-alcohol level of 0.20 percent, more than twice the legal limit of 0.08 percent, Cook said.

She was held by Gloucester police overnight and released Saturday on personal recognizance. She is to be arraigned Tuesday in Gloucester District Court.

Gatchell did not immediately return a call seeking comment Saturday. Calls to representatives for Bullock were not immediately returned.

Bullock, 43, was "gracious" and concerned about whether Gatchell was OK, Cook said.

The actress, who starred in such films as "Speed" and "Miss Congeniality," is in Massachusetts filming the romantic comedy "The Proposal." Bullock attended East Carolina University from 1982 to 1986 and later received a Bachelor's Degree after finishing up her coursework.

Copyright 2008 by The Associated Press. All Rights Reserved.
ECU alumni honored for 'outstanding' service to their communities

Four Washington-area alumni awarded for foreign language deeds

By GREG KATSKI
Staff Writer

Four Washington-area residents were among 100 alumni were honored by the East Carolina University Department of Foreign Languages and Literature as alumni of distinction.

The alumni were honored at an awards ceremony held March 27 at the Hendrix Theater on campus, in conjunction with the university's Founder's Day and Centennial celebration.

Bill Gore, Eric Mason, Robin Potts and Cathy Moore, the Washington-area alumni honored, received a plaque with a framed certificate that recognized their "outstanding professional and academic public service" and honored each as a "First Centennial honoree of foreign languages and literature."

Three of the four alumni honored have given back to the Washington community by teaching foreign language in the Beaufort County public school system.

Bill Gore, who has been teaching French at Washington High School since 1992, was honored as the school's "teacher of the year" for the 1997-98 and 2007-08 academic years.

"I have been chosen twice as the Washington High School 'Teacher of the Year,'" Gore said. "I consider this to be one of the greatest honors I have ever received. To be honored by one's peers is often worth more than an honor given by people who don't see you everyday."

Robin Potts, who is retired from teaching, helped implement a foreign language curriculum in Washington-area

See ALUMNI, Page 2A
Alumni from Page 1A

The government was putting foreign languages into the elementary schools and I was already teaching at high school, so I was asked to write up a program and start it in the elementary schools here,” Potts said. “Every 20 minutes I would go to a different classroom and I taught in three different schools, so I taught a lot of children.”

Teaching French was gratifying for Potts because she could see the progress that elementary school students were making in learning the language.

“I saw the foreign language taking root in children,” Potts said. “When they first heard French they would immediately get it. They would tease each other in French and sing it and put it to use.

“It’s just wonderful to watch; seeing all a child needs is a chance and they keep it forever.”

Gore said he finds teaching French to high school students to be rewarding.

“I find it very gratifying to know that I have helped many students begin a journey to becoming bilingual,” Gore said.

Moore, who is retired from teaching Spanish at Washington H.S., said he believes it is important for area students to learn a foreign language.

“When there started to be a large influx of Spanish-speaking people in North Carolina, I tried to encourage students to learn Spanish,” Moore said. “I tried to teach kids to learn to appreciate and tolerate other cultures. ... I hope I made that impression.”

Unlike Gore and Potts, who were both raised in the region, Moore was born and raised in Nicaragua. Moore was brought up in a bilingual house, where her parents spoke both Spanish and English. Moore’s family moved from Nicaragua to Plymouth, N.C. in 1974, when Moore was 17 years old.

“It took quite a bit of getting used to,” Moore said. “Once adjusted, Moore enrolled at ECU and decided to major in Spanish. Studying Spanish felt like a natural fit for Moore.

“It’s something that came to me naturally,” Moore said. “I’ve always enjoyed language. Passing on information is something that I enjoy.”

With encouragement from her family, Moore decided she wanted to teach Spanish after graduating from ECU.

“My family has always told me I liked to tell people how to do things,” Moore said.

Eric Mason, who was also honored by the department, wants to help people with his knowledge of the German language. Mason is working on his M.S. in Substance Abuse and Clinical Counseling at ECU and received a B.A. in German and Psychology from ECU in 2002.

“I enjoy working in the mental health field. I like helping people,” Mason said.

Mason wants to become a substance-abuse/mental-health counselor with a mental-health agency that serves American military families living in Germany.

Mason was surprised to honored as an outstanding alumni by the department.

“I was surprised; it feels good to be included among the other first centennial honoree Mason said.

Potts shared a similar sentiment in regards to the honor.

“I’ve always thought I was fortunate enough to be part of something huge like being a sign language major because a lifelong learning experience,” Potts said. “To be honored doing what I love to do, it awesome experience.”

Humbled by the award, felt pride for his alma mater.

“I felt so honored, even when I saw the other honoree Gore said. “It was quite of outstanding people. I admit that humility mixen purple and gold pride.”
Global warming threatens eastern North Carolina

Scientific team developing management plan

By DAN PARSONS
Staff Writer

If sea level were to rise one meter, there would be no Hyde or Dare counties and the Outer Banks would all but become part of the sea floor. If it were to rise 20 feet, one-third of North Carolina would be lost to the ocean.

Those are worst-case scenarios in the discussion about global warming, according to Enrique Reyes, an associate professor of biology at East Carolina University. Reyes didn’t preach only doom and gloom during a presentation on climate change Wednesday afternoon at the N.C. Estuarium. His optimistic message was that he and a collection of scientists from the University of North Carolina System are on the case.

“We’re trying to make forecasts of how the North Carolina coast will look in the future,” Reyes said. “But we don’t have enough good numbers to know for sure what it will look like yet.”

Sea level on the North Carolina coast rises about one-quarter of an inch every year, according to Reyes. That rate of sea-level rise is manageable, scientists are finding out, because plants can adapt to the rising water and survive. But, sea level is rising more quickly in recent years, as is the rate at which the planet’s global climate is warming, Reyes said. If the rate reaches half an inch per year, the state’s marshes and wetlands will drown.

While a warming climate is not a new phenomenon — the greenhouse effect was described by a scientist in 1824 — the acceleration of the natural warming of the earth and the human contribution to the process is new, Reyes said. The greenhouse effect is a process by which gasses in the upper atmosphere keep the sun’s heat from escaping.

“The average global temperature has already risen and will continue to rise,” he said. “We have to deal with that fact. Climate change is not a recent phenomenon. What we’re looking at is an acceleration of that process. It is that rapid change that we attribute to the human presence.”

Reyes and the team of scientists he works with are trying to understand how humans have contributed to the acceleration of global warming and the effects climate change will have specifically on North Carolina. Sea-level rise — one of many symptoms scientists associate with global warming — Reyes said would have the most profound effect on eastern North Carolina. It is also one of the most manageable results of a warming planet, he said.

“We live in a coastal plain, which means very few inches of sea-level rise have the potential to inundate a large area,” Reyes said. “But, of all the variables, sea-level rise is perhaps the easiest to handle.”

If it occurs at a slow-enough pace, plants and animals can adapt to the rising water. In eastern North Carolina, rising water is not the only potentially negative impact. The loss of wetlands, marshes and the Outer Banks would represent the toppling of several lines of defense the coast has against hurricane winds and waves. Coupled with a warming ocean, which fuels the intensity of those storms, it could spell disaster for folks living in inland counties.

The scientific team is in the midst of a multi-year field study to inform state agencies about how to manage sea-level rise. The team is hoping the data it collects will help minimize the negative effects of climate change and take advantage of the opportunities the process might bring.

“We are looking at ecosystem-based management,” he said. “The goal is to keep our ecosystems in a healthy, productive and resilient condition so that, if can provide the services humans want and need. We need to be proactive with our approach towards climate change or else we risk suffering all the negative consequences and the opportunity to take advantage of the benefits it can bring.”