THE DAILY CLIPS

April 27, 2012

News, commentary, and opinion
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New college graduates routinely adjust Facebook pages as part of their to-do list before job hunting.

It is almost a rite of passage separating student life from professional life.

Alex Mills, 23, graduates from East Carolina University next week. He already has suspended his personal Facebook page and plans on beefing up a recently created Facebook page that is for professional use.

Mills said he acted on the suggestion of his adviser.

“She just said, ‘If you have anything unnecessary there, you may want to suspend or filter it out,’” Mills said.

He said he is responding to today’s job market, where employers routinely search social media when screening potential employees. Some background check companies conduct a seven-year search on behalf of employers.

Mills does not agree that this practice is fair.

“I just think it’s kind of being a little prejudicial, judging someone on their past history,” he said. “They could have matured a lot in seven years.”

At ECU’s Career Center, Director Karen Thompson said companies regularly review social media activity.

“It’s all public information that an individual has allowed to be out there or posted,” she said.

Patrick Roberts, a career coach, said access to social media often is discussed with students.
“So students need to be aware of their activity,” he said. “There’s this fine line that’s getting even more blurry between your personal and professional life. Your actions and your behaviors and what you do now and in the future could affect your potential career.”

ECU freshman Meghan Garrett, 18, said her parents talked to her about three years ago on the importance of keeping her Facebook page respectable.

“My parents have always told me to keep a clean image of myself,” she said.

Garrett said information publicly accessible on Facebook is fair game for employers, and that it’s an accurate way for them to “judge your character.”

But she disagrees that potential employers have the right to request Facebook passwords.

Thompson said there has been debate about employers requesting passwords. The Career Center doesn’t recommend sharing passwords.

Facebook issued a news release last month on the topic.

“We don’t think employers should be asking prospective employees to provide their passwords because we don’t think it’s the right thing to do,” the company stated. “But it may also cause problems for the employers that they are not anticipating. For example, if an employer sees on Facebook that someone is a member of a protected group (e.g. over a certain age, etc.), that employer may open itself up to claims of discrimination if they don’t hire that person.”

Facebook further states that in the interests of protecting its users’ privacy, they will lobby policymakers, and if necessary, will take legal action to protect users from password requests.

The Career Center has adopted the stance taken by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, which states, in part: “NACE’s position is that this practice violates ethical standards. Employers should not require or request that job candidates provide password/login information to their personal social network accounts as condition of employment or as a condition of consideration for employment.”

A spokesman for the American Civil Liberties Union of North Carolina said there is concern about this issue.

“Because this is a tremendous invasion of privacy,” spokesman Mike Memo said.
An employer wouldn’t be allowed to read an applicant’s mail, he said, “and it shouldn’t be acceptable for an employer to go through someone’s private social media account.”

He said the ACLU encourages people to use privacy settings correctly to protect their privacy.

The Career Center warns students of the potentially problematic material, including pictures of partying, sexually explicit shots, drug references, gang attire, racist remarks or violent content, Roberts said.

“Students should be more conscious of their behavior online,” he said. “They’re putting off their acting professionally until they look for their career (job), and it needs to start with day one on the social media.”

ECU student Alex Bruc, 23, graduates in December, and he’s anticipating the need to start deleting photos.

“Mainly photos with alcohol in my hand that make me look like I’m drunk,” he said.

He agrees with Mills that today’s Facebook content shouldn’t rule the future.

“I think they should put your past behind you and see how you do later on,” he said of employers.

Both men objected to any password requests as a violation of their privacy.

Other social media that may be monitored includes Twitter, YouTube, Flickr for photo sharing or LinkedIn for making business contacts.

As a result, Career Center staff counsels students to watch all their social media usage.

Roberts said The Career Center also may encourage student use of social media for social or professional development purposes depending on the student’s major, especially for communication majors, with the caveat that they be careful.

“What I say to students is ‘What you say or do on the Internet, it’s written in pen, not pencil,’” Roberts said.

Contact K.J. Williams at kwilliams@reflector.com or 252-329-9588.
UNC dental school expansion to open Friday
Posted: 5:30 p.m. yesterday
Updated: 9:01 p.m. yesterday

Chapel Hill, N.C. — The expansion at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Dentistry is scheduled to open Friday, more than four years after construction began.

The Koury Building, which adjoins Tarrson Hall, Brauer Hall and Old Dental Building at the corner of Manning Drive and South Columbia Street, will officially open its doors in a ribbon-cutting ceremony at 4 p.m. Friday. The $118-million facility will allow UNC to train more dentists while also providing more space for oral health research.

Students will take up shop in the new space May 7, when the summer semester begins.

The added space, all 216,000 square feet, will also allow dental students within the expanding program the chance to spread out.

"Everybody's excited, just to have somewhere to throw our bags and sit next to each other without being on top of each other," dental student Elizabeth Consky said.

Dr. Jane Weintraub, the dean of the UNC School of Dentistry, says the new space will allow professors to promote a different learning environment for current and incoming students.

"The new ways of teaching are in small groups," she said. "We're trying to get away from doing everything in large lecture halls."
Thanks to the addition, the school will be able to accept about 20 more students per year than before. It also includes video conferencing technology, which allows professors to record lectures that can be viewed later. The expansion also includes a new patient stimulation lab with work stations that include everything but patients.

A new research lab will reunite researchers with teaching faculty and students.

"The wow factor is here, and I think this space will only help in recruitment and retention of our faculty and our researchers," said Janet Guthmiller, associate dean for Academic Affairs.

Established in 1954, the UNC School of Dentistry has had a long history of educating and training dentists who practice in North Carolina. Eighty percent of the school's students end up practicing in the state.

The cost of the expansion was paid for by $112 million in state funds and $6 million in UNC money.

Reporter: Allen Mask, M.D.
Producer: Rick Armstrong
Web Editor: Derek Medlin
UNCC student busted for leading $1 million drug ring

By Gary L. Wright

Eric Mark Giles, a UNC Charlotte student accused of leading a marijuana distribution ring that generated more than $1 million in drug proceeds over 2 1/2 years, was sentenced Thursday to 16 years in prison.

More than 220 pounds of marijuana were distributed through the U.S. mail by the UNCC-area drug ring, federal authorities said.

U.S. District Judge Bob Conrad noted during the sentencing that Giles was the leader of what the judge described as a “very sophisticated network of marijuana distribution.”

A federal jury in Charlotte convicted Giles, 40, and Kyle Corsi, 38, in August 2010 for their roles in the drug organization.

Corsi, who was accused of helping sell the marijuana, was sentenced Thursday to 10 years in prison.

When Giles and Corsi were convicted, U.S. Attorney Anne Tompkins said federal authorities had dismantled a major drug trafficking organization that had exploited financial institutions to promote their scheme.

Following Thursday’s sentencings, Tompkins said: “Giles’ and Corsi’s lengthy prison sentences are the final chapter of a complex drug scheme that distributed large amounts of marijuana through the university area of Charlotte and concealed and laundered the profits using our financial institutions.”

The federal prosecutor credited Thursday’s outcome to the effort and cooperation from all law enforcement agencies involved in this case.

“We will use every tool in our arsenal, from drug and firearm laws to money laundering…statutes, to dismantle and defeat these drug schemes,” Tompkins said.

During a three day trial in 2010, federal prosecutors presented evidence that Giles was primarily responsible for the shipment of high-grade marijuana from Santa Cruz, Calif., to distributors based in the university area.
Corsi and others received and then sold the marijuana for about $5,000 a pound, authorities said.

The prosecution evidence showed that members of the drug organization used bank accounts at Bank of America and Fifth Third Bank to launder their drug proceeds by making large cash deposits at banks in North Carolina and cash withdrawals at banks in California.

The evidence at trial included numerous seized packages of marijuana sent by Express Mail through the U.S. Postal Service in the name of Giles’ front company, Norcal Athelectics (sic) Inc., prosecutors said.

Postal surveillance photographs showed Giles shipping the marijuana-laden packages to addresses controlled by the drug ring in the university area, authorities said.

Bank surveillance photos introduced as evidence during the trial showed Corsi depositing drug proceeds at banks in North Carolina and Giles making cash withdrawals at banks in California, prosecutors said.

Giles and Corsi coordinated the shipment and receipt of the marijuana and the financial transactions by text messages, according to prosecutors.

Giles and Corsi were convicted of conspiracy to distribute 220 pounds or more of marijuana and conspiracy to commit money laundering. Giles also was convicted of possession with intent to distribute marijuana, possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime and being a felon in possession of a gun.

Five other members of the drug and money laundering conspiracy had already been sentenced for their roles, authorities said.

Barrett Fischer, 30, of Charlotte, was sentenced to 23 months in prison.

Ryan Grubb, 27, of Charlotte, was sentenced to 18 months in prison.

Joyce Tedder, 26, of Charlotte, was sentenced to time served.

William Skach, 27, of Asheville, was sentenced to 27 months in prison.

Keith Kraszewski, 29, of Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., was sentenced to 41 months in prison.
Two people are dead in an overnight shooting in Charlotte’s University City area, police say.

The shooting happened shortly before 1 a.m. at a townhouse in the 1700 block of Forest Side Lane, off Back Creek Church Road a short distance from University City Boulevard.

Investigators say four people -- three men and a woman -- were at the residence when two other men arrived. The occupants let the two men inside, and a shooting happened a short time later.

“This was not random violence,” one detective at the scene said Friday morning. Police say the occupants knew the two people who were let inside. The other man and woman inside the townhouse were not injured, according to police.

In addition to homicide detectives, members of CMPD’s Narcotics and Gang units also were called to the scene.

Police have not released information on the suspects. There were reports at the scene shortly before 5:30 a.m. Friday that two men had been taken into custody, but police could not confirm that.

The shooting happened less than a mile from UNC Charlotte, in a townhouse community where some students live. But police have not released the identities of the victims, and investigators are the scene would not say if the victims were students.

One neighbor told the Observer that the community is a mix of students, families and younger couples. She said there is rarely any need for police to visit the neighborhood.

Anyone with information in the case is asked to call detectives at 704-432-TIPS, or leave information with Crime Stoppers, 704-334-1600.
MCNC finishes first phase of Golden LEAF Rural Broadband Initiative
press release
April 27, 2012, 9:00 a.m. EDT

RESEARCH TRIANGLE PARK, N.C., April 27, 2012 /PRNewswire via COMTEX/ -- Non-profit operator of NCREN is almost a year ahead of schedule; hosting live Twitter Town Hall today

MCNC today announced the first round of the $144 million Golden LEAF Rural Broadband Initiative (GLRBI) is complete. All broadband fiber associated with this phase of the project is now active and serving Community Anchor Institutions (CAIs) including K-12 schools, universities, community colleges, health care facilities, public health facilities, libraries, research institutions, and other sectors of CAIs in western and southeastern North Carolina. Through first-phase commercial partner FRC LLC, which invested $4 million into the project, fiber is now available to serve commercial businesses and last-mile consumer broadband needs in these same regions.

The GLRBI is funded through grants from U.S. Department of Commerce's Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) and significant matching funds from private donations and investments including a $24 million investment from the Golden LEAF Foundation. Once complete through two phases, the GLRBI will greatly expand the reach and capacity of the North Carolina Research and Education Network (NCREN) in the state.

"This first phase of the project already is having a positive impact on student learning, patient outcomes in health care, economic outcomes in job creation and community development, and is accelerating innovation and research all across the state," said MCNC President and CEO Joe Freddoso. "Our goal is to continue creating infrastructure that meets the advanced needs of research,
education, and health care while stabilizing costs to consumers and small businesses in areas where affordable broadband currently isn't available."

Since the project began, all North Carolina Community Colleges have been connected to NCREN; the video services infrastructure on the network was upgraded; East Carolina University received a 10gig network upgrade and now serves as a hub for most of eastern North Carolina; the National Climatic Data Center in Asheville now has a 10gig connection, Vidant Medical Center in Pitt County became the first not-for-profit hospital connected to the N.C. Telehealth Network via NCREN, and finally, spending on engineering and construction attributed to the project has created and/or saved hundreds of jobs throughout the state.

To celebrate this achievement, MCNC will host its first online Twitter Town Hall today (Friday, April 27) at 11 a.m. EDT and will answer questions about the GLRBI and expansion of broadband connectivity in North Carolina live at www.mcnc.org/btop/townhall. This online-only event is an invitation from MCNC for anyone to participate in an open exchange about the project, its impacts, and future trends concerning networking and the rising need for bandwidth. Questions will be selected both in advance and in real-time during the event. To have your voice heard, tweet in questions using the hashtag #askMCNC. You can track the conversation three ways by watching the event live, follow live tweets from @MCNC or @GLRBI, or search out #askMCNC on Twitter.

MCNC received federal approval to begin the second phase of the GLRBI in June 2011. Since that time, MCNC has mobilized efforts and made significant progress on this portion of the project, which is three-times the size of the first phase.

The total of new miles spanning both projects is currently 2,604. The routes for Round 1 as engineered represent 904 newly-operational miles of which 414 miles are new construction. All Round 1 fiber is now lit and placed into service. The routes for Round 2 as engineered represent 1,700 total miles, of which 1,338 are new construction and 362 are being obtained and/or leased via indefeasible rights of use (IRU) or existing fiber is being upgraded. As of today, 595 miles of new conduit has been built along the Round 2 project route, 292 miles of fiber has been deployed within that conduit, and nearly 307 miles of dark fiber have been obtained via IRUs.

The participating vendors and contractors who worked on Round 1 include: Fiber Technologies for construction/installation of fiber in western North Carolina; Globe Communications for construction/installation of fiber in the
southeast; Comtech for all the fiber splicing related to this portion of the project; Cisco Systems for providing the Cisco ONS 15454 Optical Design Network Solution; CommScope for supplying all fiber-optic cable and materials; and ONUG Communications for engineering design, project planning, and related services.

All vendors and contractors associated with Round 1 project are either North Carolina-based or have strong N.C. presence. To date, the overall project has been a $73 million infusion of spending with private engineering, materials manufacturing, and optical equipment manufacturers, construction companies in addition to acquiring fiber segments from telecommunications, cable companies, and electric membership cooperatives.

All construction for the GLRBI is to be complete by 2013.

Additional Quotes

"MCNC's goal in seeking private funds and NTIA BTOP matching funds was to provide our Community Anchor Institution users of NCREN a network that would scale to rapidly increasing bandwidth demand at stable costs. Today, with the completion of the first phase of the Golden LEAF Rural Broadband Initiative, we move a significant step closer to that goal."

Mike Murphy
Chairman of the MCNC Board of Directors

"In carrying out its three-part mission of teaching, research and outreach, the University of North Carolina is increasingly reliant on technology and broadband infrastructure. These critical upgrades and the expansion of the North Carolina Research and Education Network will help ensure that our UNC campuses have the digital infrastructure required to scale to our future needs. Every sector of education in the state will benefit from this important investment."

Tom Ross
President of the University of North Carolina

"The future of North Carolina through improved access to education, better healthcare and robust economic development is enhanced with the completion of the first phase of the Golden LEAF Rural Broadband Initiative. We can only imagine today the innovation and economic growth that will occur in the future due to the expansion of this infrastructure that allows the great minds of North Carolina to collaborate with the world."

Governor Bev Perdue
State of North Carolina

"By 2015, Internet video is projected to be 62 percent of consumer Internet traffic and the number of devices connected to IP networks will be twice as
high as the global population. A robust and intelligent network is essential to keeping up with the exponentially increasing demand for access by students, consumers, businesses and organizations in North Carolina and across the world."

Edward D. Paradise
Vice President for Cisco's Global Government Solutions Group and RTP Site Executive
Cisco Systems

"The potential impact of this project on our region's healthcare system can be tremendous. From helping address healthcare disparities in rural areas to addressing the growing physician shortage, this investment comes at a pivotal time in the transformation of our region's and nation's healthcare system. Broadband will serve as the underlying infrastructure for the health information technology that has the potential to improve health care outcomes and control costs."

Edward J. Macko
Director and CTO, Healthcare & Life Sciences Solutions
IBM

"CommScope has been involved in this project since the first shovel went into the ground in two years ago. We are excited that the first phase of this project is completed because it has the potential to provide tremendous, long-lasting benefits to our state's residents. CommScope is proud to be part of several broadband initiatives around the country, bringing high-speed networks to rural and underserved communities. MCNC and its efforts to expand the North Carolina Research and Education Network through the Golden LEAF Rural Broadband Initiative is just one great example."

Ric Johnsen
Senior Vice President of Broadband
CommScope (CommScope, based in Hickory, N.C., was selected by MCNC to provide materials for both project phases)

"From the beginning, the MCNC team knew we needed great collaborators to successfully implement the BTOP project. CommScope, ONUG, Cisco, K&L Gates, FiberTech, Comtech, Globe Communications, the Office of Governor Bev Perdue, the North Carolina General Assembly, the North Carolina Congressional Delegation, the N.C. Institute for Minority Economic Development, NCDOT, and NCDENR are just a few of the key organizations that joined the MCNC staff in leading this phase of the project to a successful completion."

Tommy Jacobson
MCNC Vice President of Network Initiatives and Chief NCREN Architect
MCNC & NCREN Community

MCNC is an independent, non-profit corporation. MCNC's main focus is to operate the North Carolina Research and Education Network (NCREN). For more than a quarter century, NCREN continues to provide advanced Intranet and Internet connectivity to a constantly expanding number of Community Anchor Institutions throughout North Carolina. Today's users of NCREN include all 17 institutions of the University of North Carolina System, all 58 North Carolina Community Colleges, all 115 K-12 public school districts as well as a growing number of K-12 charter and private schools, the majority of the state's private colleges and universities, several non-profit and public health care facilities, and a number of the state's premier research institutions. NCREN also serves as the Internet gateway network for all state employees. MCNC currently is working on a $144 million expansion of NCREN scheduled to be completed by summer 2013. This initiative has been labeled the Golden LEAF Rural Broadband Initiative. Visit www.mcnc.org or follow @MCNC or @GLRBI.

About Golden LEAF Rural Broadband Initiative

MCNC currently is working on a $144 million expansion of NCREN scheduled to be completed by 2013. This initiative has been labeled the Golden LEAF Rural Broadband Initiative (GLRBI).

To fund this expansion, MCNC applied for and received two U.S. Department of Commerce Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) awards totaling $104 million. In addition, MCNC raised $40 million in private matching funds as required by the BTOP program. MCNC's sources of matching funds included $24 million from the Golden LEAF Foundation, $8 million from the MCNC Endowment, $4 million from private-sector wholesale telecommunications company FRC, and an estimated $4 million through donations of land and existing conduit from individual community colleges, universities, and others including the Albemarle Pamlico Economic Development Corporation. No direct funding from the State of North Carolina was required. MCNC estimates this project will create or save 2,500 engineering, construction, and manufacturing jobs in the state.

Both MCNC awards are a part of a coordinated strategy developed by the Office of North Carolina Governor Bev Perdue, the N.C. Office of Economic Recovery & Investment, and e-NC Authority to improve broadband access for businesses and residents in underserved areas. Once all work is complete, the two rounds of BTOP infrastructure have the potential to serve directly, or through MCNC partnerships with private-sector service providers...
providers, more than 1,500 community anchor institutions, 180,000 businesses, and reach more than 300,000 underserved families.

About The Golden LEAF Foundation
The Golden LEAF Foundation is a nonprofit organization established in 1999 to help transform North Carolina's economy. The foundation receives one-half of North Carolina's funds from the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement with cigarette manufacturers and places special emphasis on assisting tobacco-dependent, economically distressed and/or rural communities across the state. The Golden LEAF Foundation works in partnership with governmental entities, educational institutions, economic development organizations and nonprofits to achieve its mission. The foundation has awarded 1,096 grants worth over $490 million since its inception. To learn more about applying for a grant, visit www.goldenleaf.org or call (888) 684.8404.

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SOURCE MCNC
More universities charging more tuition for harder majors  
By Alicia McCarty, USA TODAY  
Updated April 25, 2012

Having a hard major is getting more expensive.

A growing number of public universities are charging higher tuition for math, science and business programs, which they argue cost more to teach — and can earn grads higher-paying jobs.

More than 140 public universities now use "differential tuition" plans, up 19% since 2006, according to research from Cornell's Higher Education Research Institute. That number is increasing as states cut higher-education spending and schools try to pay for expensive technical programs.

"It's been a lifesaver," said Donde Plowman, College of Business Administration dean at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, which charges business and engineering majors $50 more a credit. "We can be excited for the future."

The money at Nebraska paid to create a career center, renovate a student lounge and hire an additional academic adviser. The college is also hiring new faculty.

Some worry that higher tuition will put off low-income students.

"The fear in all of this is will it lead to people being rationed out of classes?" said Ronald Ehrenberg, the Cornell researcher behind the tuition study.

Last month South Dakota's Board of Regents voted to bring back differential tuition for the first time in 15 years. Students at the state's research universities — South Dakota State University, University of South Dakota and South Dakota School of Mines and Technology — will pay $5 more per credit than they would at the other state schools.

In Florida, if Republican Gov. Rick Scott signs a bill approved by the Legislature, certain universities will get to charge tuition at their own rates rather than what's mandated by the state.

"The key is we want to have highly ranked universities … you're going to have to have a way to fund" them, Florida State University President Eric
Barron said. "Would you decide not to follow what you're most interested in if it cost $500 more?"

Differential Tuition

Some schools that have proposed differential tuition:
- University of Florida
- Florida State University
- University of Maryland – College Park
- Santa Monica College
- University of Minnesota
- University of Buffalo
- Stony Brook University
- Binghamton University
- University at Albany
- University of California – Berkeley
- University of California – Los Angeles

Some schools that have approved differential tuition:
- South Dakota State University
- University of South Dakota
- South Dakota School of Mines and Technology
- University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Student Loan Debate Becomes Election-Year Fight

By JENNIFER STEINHAUER and ANNIE LOWREY

WASHINGTON — The subject of interest rates on subsidized college loans, once reserved for the deep weeds of Congressional committees, has touched off a blazing battle between Democrats and Republicans at a volume usually reserved for debates over tax cuts or immigration.

The election-year fight for the allegiance of college students and their hard-pressed parents grows out of a combination of soaring college costs, mounting student debt and a sluggish job market for graduates. This has made a top-tier issue of preventing the interest rate, now 3.4 percent, from reverting to 6.8 percent.

Under attack from President Obama, House Republicans have hurriedly set a vote for Friday on legislation that would prevent the July 1 rate increase. Senate Democrats have their own competing proposal that they intend to consider in early May.

The Republicans moved after President Obama spent the last week attacking them for failing to introduce legislation to stop the increase — resulting from a bill pushed by Democrats years ago to lower the rate — as he went from college campuses to late night talk shows to hammer away at the issue. House Republicans are determined not to allow Mr. Obama to spend the next week, when Congress is in recess, continuing his attacks unanswered.

Encapsulated in this political brawl is the running theme of the partisan fights from the 112th Congress: Both sides agree on a desired result, but they disagree on how to pay for it. Republicans want to offset costs by taking money from a program within the health care law — itself a contentious issue in the Republican-controlled House — while Democrats, as they have with other costly bills this year, want the money to come from taxes on high earners or oil companies.

And as in the fight over a once bipartisan bill to protect women against domestic assault, each side is presenting itself as the voice of sympathy.

“For the president to make a campaign issue out of this and then to travel to three battleground states and go to three large college campuses, on taxpayers’ money, to try to make this a political issue is pathetic,” said Speaker John A. Boehner at a news conference Thursday as he leveled
some of his harshest attacks to date on the president. “This is the biggest job in the world, and I’ve never seen a president make it smaller,” he added.

The debate comes as student-loan debt, like mortgage debt, has become a major burden on households: In 2010, student-loan debt surpassed credit-card debt for the first time.

For the past three decades, increases in college tuition have outpaced the overall rate of inflation, and increases in room and board have risen even faster. That has driven a substantial increase in the volume of student-loan debt. American students took out twice the value of student loans in 2011, about $112 billion, as they did a decade before, after adjusting for inflation. Overall, Americans now owe about $1 trillion in student loans.

“This is different than a number of years ago,” said Senator Ron Wyden, an Oregon Democrat, who said constituents frequently want to discuss these costs. “Ten years ago, 15 years ago, college funding was a significant investment, like buying a car. Today it is the second-largest that you’re making.”

In 2006, as part of their campaign agenda, Democrats promised to cut student loan interest rates in half. After taking a majority in the House, Democrats looked at their fiscal limitations and moved to temporarily reduce interest rates for the low- or middle-income undergraduates who receive subsidized Stafford loans to 3.4 percent from 6.8 percent, with the rate reverting to 6.8 percent in July 2012. (Graduate students with Stafford loans pay the higher rate, as do students with unsubsidized Stafford loans. Most undergraduates take out both unsubsidized and subsidized loans to cover the cost of their education.)

Some Republicans have expressed concerns about allowing the rates to remain low, citing fear of default in a poor economy. The default rate for all federal student loans was 8.8 percent in the 2009 fiscal year, the latest year for which data was available; it was 4.6 percent in 2005, mirroring the rest of the economy.

With the lackluster economy and high rates of unemployment for young workers, Mr. Obama had asked Congress to deal with the impending increase, but until this week no big moves were made. The House budget, known as the Ryan plan, made no effort to block the increase and the Senate has no budget. Democrats did try to amend the Ryan budget in committee to prevent the doubling of rates; Republicans voted it down.
Without legislative action, the rate will snap back to 6.8 percent — acting as a $1,000 tax on new college graduates entering a challenging labor market, President Obama has argued. Indeed, the average student with Stafford loans graduates with about $13,000 in debt. At a fixed 3.4 percent interest rate — one of the lowest in recent decades — a student would spend about $15,350 paying the loan off over 10 years. At a fixed 6.8 interest rate, that student would pay about $17,950 — about $2,600 more.

Representative Fred Upton, Republican of Michigan, said the issue would not go quietly away. “Most families really do rely on student loans,” he said. “I went to a state school; it was $330 a semester.” Then, he said, “You could have a summer job and you could do that. Today you can’t.”
Examinaing the Role of Teachers to Reward Merit and Encourage Long Careers

April 26, 2012, 5:32 p.m.
By Stephen Lazar

In his State of the Union address, President Obama called for resources “to keep good teachers on the job and reward the best ones.” His budget requested $5 billion for a competitive grant program called Project RESPECT.

Arne Duncan, the education secretary, said the goal of the program was “to make teaching not only America’s most important profession, but also America’s most respected profession.”

A few weeks ago, I had the opportunity to meet with one of the Department of Education’s Teaching Ambassador Fellows to give feedback on a not-yet-public draft of the policy proposal before it is offered to schools. While there was much to like about the proposal, it also contained some poorly conceived ideas that would be ineffective at best, and at worst could further damage the nation’s education system.

Project RESPECT calls for a three-pronged reform of the teaching profession. It envisions a reorganization of schools that would use technology and aides to put more effective teachers in front of more students, coupled with a longer school day to give teachers more time for professional growth. To find more effective teachers, it calls for an expansion of entry points into the profession, with a higher bar for earning a permanent position. Finally, it calls for increased compensation for career teachers who both stay in the classroom and take on various teacher-leader roles.

That prong shares much with the insightful prescriptions of the book “Teaching 2030,” written by the Center for Teaching Quality’s Barnett Berry and a group of 12 teachers that included my New York colleagues Jose Vilson and Ariel Sacks. Establishing a variety of advanced teacher roles, with appropriately high compensation, is a necessary move toward professionalizing teaching in America, and I applaud this move.

Giving highly effective teachers more time to serve in roles other than classroom teachers is an important step toward improving our system. However, it is imperative to remember that the qualities that make me a highly effective teacher are not necessarily those that would make me an
effective teacher-leader. I know great teachers who were disasters as department chairs. Likewise, I have worked with teachers who were mediocre in their classrooms because of poor classroom management, but thrived as mentors and principals.

For that reason and others, I am most concerned with the assumptions the report makes about evaluating teachers. While the vision for building a teaching profession is a strong one, it is built on the faulty foundation of the naive evaluation systems being implemented across the country. I strongly agree that student learning should be a significant portion of a teacher’s evaluation, but we need to recognize several things.

Most importantly, the standardized exams currently used to evaluate students’ learning, most of which I think do even that extremely poorly, are not precise enough to measure differences in teacher effectiveness. In New York, as Aaron Pallas, a professor at Columbia University, showed, having students answer just one more multiple-choice question correctly would lead to a 20-percentile-point jump in a teacher’s rating. That is insane!

Any teacher knows that an individual student’s test score will vary tremendously based on mood, time of day and what is happening in that student’s personal life. But to think that access to teacher-leadership positions could rest on a one-point swing in test scores makes me gravely concerned for the future of my profession.

But even if we had teacher evaluations developed correctly, we would still need other metrics and qualifications for different teacher-leader roles. I have held more than a half dozen teacher-leader positions in and out of schools. In school, I have been an instructional coach, department chair, grade team leader, union representative and tech guy. Out of school, I have led professional development, developed curriculums and assessments, and facilitated a critical friends group. I excelled in a couple of roles immediately, grew into most once I got the necessary training, and just got by in a couple.

My key takeaway from these experiences was that the skills, knowledge and disposition that made me an effective teacher had little connection to what determined my success in working with adults. In order for teacher-leaders to be effective, they will need significant training and support in their new roles. We also need to make sure teachers who step into these roles can step out of them just as easily without significant financial penalties. Teachers need to be able to replenish themselves through full-time teaching every few years to be able to maintain long-term leadership.
I am excited and energized to see the Department of Education envisioning a truly professional career experience for teachers, with additional monetary compensation attached to different roles. However, money is not the compensation I want most as I advance in my career. While I would love to be paid more for what I do, if I were forced to choose only one form of compensation for being a highly effective teacher, I would ask for trust and autonomy to use my professional judgement to do my job.

Before I would take another $20,000 in salary, I would take a personal waiver from mandated state assessments. I learn exponentially more about my students’ capabilities from the performance assessments they regularly complete in my class than I do from the poorly constructed History Regents. Furthermore, the assessments I give them are authentic intellectual work that actually prepares them for college and citizenship, unlike a multiple-choice exam based on memorizing a wide range of facts. I would say one-third of the time I spend in a regular history class is compromised because of state exams, as well as 100 percent of the time I spend with seniors who have failed the test.

While I would eliminate all standardized testing immediately if it were up to me, I know this is not realistic. At the very least, effective and highly effective teachers who have demonstrated student learning gains on standardized tests should be exempted from having to use them in the future. Giving standardized tests to all of my students every year tells me that I cannot be trusted to assess my students’ learning, and my students are the ones who suffer for it.

*Stephen Lazar is a social studies and English teacher who is now at the Academy for Young Writers in Brooklyn.*
Study Sheds Light on How Birds Navigate by Magnetic Field

By JAMES GORMAN

Birds are famously good navigators. Some migrate thousands of miles, flying day and night, even when the stars are obscured. And for decades, scientists have known that one navigational skill they employ is an ability to detect variations in the earth’s magnetic field.

How this magnetic sense works, however, has been frustratingly difficult to figure out.

Now, two researchers at Baylor College of Medicine, Le-Qing Wu and David Dickman, have solved a central part of that puzzle, identifying cells in a pigeon’s brain that record detailed information on the earth’s magnetic field, a kind of biological compass.

“It’s a stunning piece of work,” David Keays of the Institute of Molecular Pathology in Vienna wrote in an e-mail. “Wu and Dickman have found cells in the pigeon brain that are tuned to specific directions of the magnetic field.”

Their report appeared online in Science Express on Thursday. Kenneth Lohmann at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, who also studies magnetic sensing, said in an e-mail that the study was “very exciting and important.”

Navigating by magnetism includes several steps. Birds have to have a way to detect a magnetic field, and some part of the brain has to register that information; it seems likely that another part of the brain then compares the incoming information to a stored map.

The Baylor researchers have offered a solution to the middle step. They identified a group of cells in the brainstem of pigeons that record both the direction and the strength of the magnetic field. And they have good, but not conclusive, evidence to suggest that the information these cells are recording is coming from the bird’s inner ear. Dr. Dickman said this research “is still something we want to pursue.”

They did not work on the third step, but Dr. Dickman said a good candidate for the location of that map was the hippocampus, the brain region involved in memory of locations in both birds and humans.
A well-known and often-mentioned study of London taxi drivers showed that experienced drivers with a mental map of London had a hippocampus larger in one area than people without their experience. In some birds that hide seeds and return later to their caches with astonishing accuracy, the hippocampus grows and shrinks seasonally, presumably as they map their hiding spots.

Efforts to understand the magnetic sense in birds have gone in several directions. Some researchers have offered evidence for chemical reactions in the eyes sensitive to magnetic signals, while others have looked at neurons in the beak containing minute amounts of magnetite, a mineral that is affected by magnetic fields.

Just a few weeks ago, Dr. Keays and colleagues reported in the journal Nature that the idea of neurons in the beak was a nonstarter. There were indeed cells with magnetite, but they were not neurons. The magnetic sense remained a mystery.

The Baylor researchers did a kind of step-by-step tracking of what areas in pigeons’ brains were responding to variations in an artificial magnetic field that they created. They focused on activity in the brainstem, one of the most primitive parts of the brain, partly because in earlier work they had shown that this area of the brain received signals from a part of the inner ear.

By looking at specific neurons in this part of the brain, the researchers found that the bird’s orientation determined which neurons were active. Each neuron was tuned to respond to signals from one direction. The neurons also registered the strength of the magnetic field.

Other brain regions are also active in response to magnetic stimulation and may be involved in the magnetic sense, Dr. Dickman said. And although he does not provide an answer to how birds detect magnetism, the research clearly falls on one side of a debate over whether magnetite is involved, or whether chemical reactions in the eye may be the key.

Dr. Keays said the research gave strong support to the magnetite idea and the hypothesis that “a population of undiscovered magnetoreceptive cells reside in the pigeon’s ear.”

As Dr. Lohmann said, the discovery “will no doubt inspire much additional work in the future.”
With G.O.P.’s Ear, Rubio Pushes Dream Act Proposal

By LIZETTE ALVAREZ

MIAMI — When Senator Marco Rubio first floated his compromise version of the Dream Act — the bill, now stalled, that would grant some students in the United States illegally a path to citizenship — the chances of reviving the politically charged issue in Congress seemed as dim as the chances of snuffing out attack ads on the campaign trail.

On Thursday, Speaker John A. Boehner said as much, calling it “difficult at best” to take up the issue in the House, where Republicans are pushing for greater border security, not more forgiving laws. But Mr. Boehner did not close the door, saying “there is always hope” and adding that Mr. Rubio had spoken to him about his proposal.

“I found it of interest,” Mr. Boehner said. “But the problem with this issue is that we are operating in a very hostile political environment.”

Recognizing that his proposal was never going to be an easy sell for either Republicans or Democrats, Mr. Rubio said in an interview this week that he was moving forward with his plan to give students a chance to study and work here legally, albeit temporarily. The senator said he and his staff had been speaking with Democrats, conservative Republicans in and out of Congress, immigration advocates and the students themselves.

The plan seeks to assuage concerns on all sides, Mr. Rubio added; it cannot serve as a lure to illegal immigrants but must offer eligible students genuine relief.

“I don’t want to be unrealistically optimistic about it,” he said, but added, “I have not been discouraged by anybody in my party.”

The compromise would grant students who are the children of illegal immigrants a new kind of nonimmigrant visa that would let them live in this country legally for a period of time. They could work, drive and pay taxes. He would also grant nonimmigrant visas to the graduates of colleges and trade schools, enabling them to stay here and work.

The proposal would not grant them green cards, giving them permanent residency, which sets it apart from the original Dream Act. With their nonimmigrant visas, they could seek green cards in the traditional way,
either through marriage, family or an employer. But they could remain in this country legally during that process.

Left with few options, many students and activists said that they were open to Mr. Rubio’s compromise but that they would wait to see the complete bill. Gaby Pacheco, an immigrant activist for United We Dream, who recently met with Senator Rubio, said the students were tired of waiting for Congress and wanted to break the logjam. She said Mr. Rubio was taking a serious approach to the problem.

“We need a starting point,” she said “Right now with the way the country is so polarized and anti-immigrant, if a Republican starts talking about it and is able to bring his party into the dialogue, we need to listen to that and give them the opportunity.”

Mr. Rubio said that he was still working on the details and that he hoped to introduce a bill once he had lined up enough support.

The Dream Act passed the House in 2010 but failed in the Senate. Last year, Senator Richard J. Durbin, the Illinois Democrat who sponsored the bill, modified it to address some Republican concerns, but it has not attracted much party support.

Most Republicans view the bill as a form of “amnesty” to people who have broken the law and as a lure to undocumented immigrants.

Mr. Rubio, a potential vice-presidential contender and a Florida Cuban-American, said he was working to garner support from fellow conservatives. The issue is important to many Hispanics in the country, a group of swing voters that has largely decried Mitt Romney’s position on how to handle illegal immigrants.

“I am cautiously optimistic that we are going to have very significant support among Republicans,” Mr. Rubio said.

Senator Durbin has expressed a willingness to consider the senator’s proposal. Most Democrats said they were waiting to see the details and whether Republicans would back the plan.

Cheryl Little, a prominent immigration advocate and lawyer in Miami, said she was pleasantly surprised when Mr. Rubio called her a few weeks ago to seek her opinion.

Ms. Little would prefer something permanent for the dreamers, and not a succession of temporary visas, but she said Mr. Rubio was the lone Republican in Congress trying to address the issue.
“It’s hard to believe they will budge,” she said of Republicans, given the election year. “But we are pushing everybody we can to try to do something to move this forward. I don’t care if it’s a Republican, a Democrat or an independent. If they have a good idea, and it’s got legs, we are going to support it.”

Meanwhile, Ms. Little and other activists are pressuring President Obama to expand a discretionary provision already granted to the Department of Homeland Security that delays deportation of these students and allows them to work. That permission is currently given on a case by case basis.

“The administration should do what they have the authority to do, and do so now,” Ms. Little said.

A White House official who was not authorized to speak publicly said President Obama “is using all the administrative tools he has” and that he supported the Dream Act.

But the official added, “There is no magic wand. This requires action by Congress.”

Senator Rubio shrugged off criticism that his plan is a political ploy to attract Hispanics and not a serious legislative effort to help students here illegally.

“Taking something like this on politically has just as many pitfalls as it has advantages,” he said.
Is college too much me, too little us?

By Jay Mathews

I went to college all by myself. I took a bus from my Bay Area home to downtown Los Angeles, then a bus to Occidental College. I loved going off on my own.

I was in tune with higher education culture then and now. U.S. colleges and universities emphasize independent thought and action. But a new study suggests that this attitude might be hindering the adjustment of students who are the first in their families to attend four-year schools.

“Universities’ focus on independence does not match the first-generation students’ relatively interdependent motives for attending college,” said the study by the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University. “This cultural mismatch is associated with lower grades.”

Many organizations devoted to preparing low-income students for college find even their star students sometimes struggle when they arrive on campus. They seem to suffer from social isolation, financial troubles and no college-savvy family members to lend support. To that list we might have to add colleges unintentionally making the situation worse by pushing a do-it-yourself philosophy at odds with the equally valid but different values of first-generation students.

“Many students from working-class families are influenced by limited financial resources and lack an economic safety net, and thus must rely on family and friends for support,” Nicole Stephens, lead author of the study and assistant professor of management and organizations at Kellogg, said on the school’s Web site.

“Thus, these students’ expectations for college center around interdependent motives such as working together, connecting to others and giving back,” she said. “Given the largely independent college culture and the ways in which students’ social class backgrounds shape their motives for attending college, we questioned whether universities provide students from these different backgrounds with equal chance of success.”

The researchers verified the universities’ go-it-alone slant by giving a sampling of administrators six pairs of institutional expectations and asking
them to select the ones that reflected their cultures. More than two-thirds valued skills such as “learn to work independently” over “learn to work together with others.”

The researchers experimented with a version of the stereotype threat studies that have shown blacks doing worse on exams preceded by suggestions that their race is a handicap. In their test, first-generation students scored lower than peers from college families when the importance of independence was emphasized but did just as well when interdependency was praised.

What should be done about this? Some colleges have embraced programs such as Posse that admit groups of first-generation students who arrive on campus with other freshmen they already know and who share their cultures.

The Kellogg researchers say colleges could do more. They could mention the virtues of interdependency in admission letters. They could help professors learn to encourage collaboration. They could increase opportunities for study groups and faculty-student chats.

In college, I had little interest in fraternities. But they fill a void on campuses full of strivers who yearn for places they can relax with people who understand them. We are a tribal species, no matter if we are the first in our family to go to college or, like me, had a mother and a grandfather with degrees. My college years had an erratic start, saved only by my joining a student newspaper.

The Kellogg research is just one study. Some parts of it seem iffy to me. But I have known brilliant inner-city kids with full scholarships who chose a local university rather than an Ivy League school because of similar culture clashes.

Colleges should continue to promote individualism. That’s part of our nation. But so is working together to solve our problems.

*By Jay Mathews | 03:46 AM ET, 04/26/2012*
Bank forgives loan of dead student after six years and online petition

By Valerie Strauss

A bank that had refused to forgive the loan of a student who died six years ago has finally decided to do so after an online petition by the student’s brother collected more than 75,000 signatures.

A news release from Change.org, the Web site where the petition was posted several days ago, says that Cleveland-based KeyBank has informed the family of the late Christopher Bryski that it will forgive his loan and review policies about how to proceed in such cases.

Bryski, a student at Rutgers University in New Jersey, suffered a severe brain injury in an accident June 17, 2004, and remained in a persistent vegetative state for two years before dying in 2006, according to the petition.

His father had co-signed his loan, and KeyBank insisted that it be paid off even though, as Ryan Bryski noted in his Change.org petition, other major student loan providers, including Wells Fargo and Sallie Mae, have policies that forgive student loans of people who die. Federally guaranteed loans are discharged when proof of death is provided.

In fact, the Wall Street Journal had reported that the federal government’s $5,000 loan to Bryski had been canceled. About $51,000 was outstanding to KeyBank at the time of Christopher’s death, according to Megan Lubin, communications manager of Change.org, and the family has been making monthly payments of several hundred dollars for the last six years.

The federal government canceled its $5,000 loan to Bryski in accordance with federal policy, the Wall Street Journal reported. But Bryski’s private lender, KeyBank, happens to be one of many private institutions without a clear policy on canceling the student loan debt of a deceased individual.

Just days ago, Ryan Bryski posted a petition on Change.org asking the bank to discharge the loan. After more than 75,000 signatures were quickly collected, the bank got in touch with the family and issued a statement saying it would adopt a “case-by-case” policy for similar situations, according to the release.
“My family tried for years to get KeyBank to forgive my brother Christopher’s loans after he died, and for years they ignored us,” Ryan Bryski was quoted as saying. “Thankfully, they couldn’t ignore the 75,000 people who signed our petition on Change.org.”

After Christopher Bryski died, his family began working with U.S. lawmakers in an effort to pass legislation known as “Christopher’s Law,” which would ensure that lenders tell student borrowers and their families what will happen to their debt load if they die or become disabled.