THE DAILY CLIPS

April 30, 2008

News, commentary, and opinion
compiled by the East Carolina University News Bureau from:

The Greenville Daily Reflector
The Raleigh News & Observer
The New York Times
The Wall Street Journal
USA Today
The Charlotte Observer
The Fayetteville Observer
The Greensboro News & Record
Newsweek
U.S. News & World Report
Business Week
Time

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ECU, PCC seeing growth

By Josh Humphries
The Daily Reflector

The state of North Carolina is expecting 80,000 extra college students in the next 10 years, and many of them will end up going to college in Pitt County.

Both Pitt Community College and East Carolina University are seeing large increases in the number of student applications, and officials are gearing up for the growth projected over the next decade.

ECU recently conducted a 10-year growth projection for the University of North Carolina system. The projection indicates that the university will grow to almost 37,000 students by 2027.

The university has about 26,000 students enrolled today. While ECU is expected to grow by about 10,000 students in less than 10 years, it also grew by that margin over the past 10 years.

ECU has received 15,800 applications for its 2008-09 freshman class so far this year, about 1,200 more than last year, said Judi Bailey, senior executive director of enrollment management at ECU.

PCC is seeing a similar jump.

There is a correlation between the growth at the two schools, said Joanne Ceres, director of enrollment management and registrar at PCC.

"As ECU grows, we are bound to grow too," Ceres said.

PCC's full enrollment grew by 3.74 percent from 2006 to 2007. PCC has seen 1,976 applications for this fall, compared to 1,581 last year.

"It is our goal each year to increase enrollment up to what our capacity will allow," Ceres said.

As of fall 2007, PCC ranks eighth among the state's 58 community colleges for curriculum student enrollment. The school is ranked 21st in continuing education students.

Central Piedmont Community College in Charlotte has the largest curriculum student enrollment at 18,500. Wake Technical Community College in Raleigh has the highest number of continuing education students at 20,500.

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ECU uses a projected grade-point-average formula to admit students.

Bailey said the standards ECU uses are higher than the UNC system minimums for four-year colleges.

The minimum predicted GPA for students admitted to ECU is 2.35.

"We want to see ours be better than that, but we are admitting at that level," Bailey said. "We are definitely seeing higher SAT scores and predicted GPA than last year."

ECU does not track which programs freshmen may be interested in because students often change majors before they graduate, so it is difficult to determine which programs are attracting students, Bailey said.

"Word is out that ECU is a great university," she said.

"We offer quality educations and we offer it at a great price. We are a good value."

Bailey said she is seeing growth for graduate level online classes.

"We are growing, but we keep a small university feel," she said. "We are very personalized, and we do not have very many really large classes."

The number of students applying straight out of high school to attend PCC is growing but officials also are seeing a jump in the numbers for concurrent enrollment students — those who attend classes at PCC while still in high school.

Weekend college classes also are drawing a lot of attention at PCC.

The economy has something to do with that, Ceres said.

"When the economy goes down, community college enrollment usually goes up," Ceres said.

More students consider going to community college for two years and transferring to a four-year university to save money when times are tight, Ceres said.

Also, more people go to community college for retraining to advance in their jobs, she said.

Growth at PCC also can be attributed to enhanced recruiting efforts, including a recently formed recruitment committee, an annual parent informational session and the annual PCC open house.

ECU also is stressing recruitment by offering financial aid help to students and adding an extra orientation session this summer to address growth.

Josh Humphries can be contacted at jhumphries@coxnc.com and 323-9565.
Task force concludes forum on homelessness

By Brock Letchworth
The Daily Reflector

Pitt County's task force aimed at ending chronic homelessness concluded its series of public forums Tuesday by focusing on the education, employment and training of the homeless.

Nearly 20 people attended the last of four forums the Pitt County Blue Ribbon Task Force has hosted to address the issue. Task force members will use the information they obtained to develop a 10-year plan to end chronic homelessness, Bob Thompson, task force co-chairman, said.

Thompson said the latest topic was critical to ending the problem. "It is hard to have a home without a job, and it is hard to have a job without a home," Thompson said. "There is a reciprocal relationship there."

Guest speakers at Tuesday's forum were Joyce Jones, executive director of the county's STRIVE program, and Carson Dean, who coordinated Orange County's partnership to end homelessness.

They also addressed some of the barriers Dean mentioned with transportation among the common themes.

"One thing that stands out in my mind is transportation in Pitt County," Winterville Town Alderman Veronica Roberson said. "If you live in Greenville, you can get around. But when you go to some of the smaller towns around the county, transportation presents a problem."

Other topics included having mentors work with the homeless on the job to ensure progression and providing incentives for businesses who choose to hire the homeless.

"When you're talking about a business, you've got to look at what is in the businesses' best interest, and try to market to them," Dean said. "You need to keep that in mind when you're developing your plan."

Previous forum topics were improving mental and physical health of the chronically homeless; effective community re-entry and transition planning, and building affordable housing.

The task force will present its plan to county and city officials in October.

The task force still is accepting ideas by e-mail at end-homelessness@pittcountync.gov.

Brock Letchworth can be contacted at 329-9574 or bletchworth@coxnc.com.
Public Forum

Thanks to ECU for special prom night

I would like to thank ECU Ambassadors and all the volunteers for the Special Populations Prom, which was such a wonderful event. Our daughter was at this prom and she had such a great time. There are a lot of people in this world with special needs, and our daughter is among that population. She is our blessing and miracle, so we would like to thank everyone involved for giving our daughter a night to remember.

I hope that everyone with a special needs child or adult realize how special their child or siblings are. We are truly blessed to have our child in our lives. She is a joy to have around.

So thank you ECU for giving our daughter a night just for her to dance and have a great time.

TERESA & CRAIG CANNON
Greenville
Boosters group organizing to support Laupus Library

By Tom Marine
The Daily Reflector

The Laupus Library at the Brody School of Medicine took its first step Tuesday toward creating its friends group with an afternoon social in the Evelyn Fike Laupus Exhibit Gallery.

The social, aimed at establishing a volunteer organization dedicated to library needs and donor opportunities, played host to many in the local medical field.

Dorothy Spencer, director of Laupus Library, said a dedicated group of volunteers is essential to the success of the library. Not only will such a group promote awareness, it also will increase interest in the library’s programs and services, she said.

"This organization will do many things that an alumni association would do for a school that grants degrees," Spencer said. "We’re asking for a serious gift of time and attention during this inaugural year."

Spencer said the board will help structure the group and launch its first year.

During the event Tuesday, Spencer presented a brief history of the library and listed some of the new technologies available.

"The friends group will help more than just the library," Spencer said. "The projects that we will seek support for will benefit the whole division of health sciences."

Kelly Rogers, public communications specialist for the Laupus Library, said she received 81 RSVPs for the event.

"We have a very intellectually rich, eclectic mix of people coming," Rogers said before the event. "These people are ambassadors to the community and have shown leadership qualities in the past."

Dr. Walter Pories, chief of the Metabolic Institute at the Brody School and honorary chair of the inaugural friends board, said he was delighted to see some of the major leaders in Greenville attending.

"Why am I a friend of the library? Because it has been a good friend to me, and I am here to repay that friendship," Pories said.

N.C. Rep. Marian McLawhorn, D-Pitt, said the library is overlooked as part of the health sciences division. She said many do not realize

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its importance, until a library is not there.

"If you have a library that doesn’t have adequate resources, the work of the entire institution is not able to be done," said McLawhorn, the other co-chair. "We are a great medical school and this is part of what makes it great."

According to Spencer’s presentation, Laupus Library represents the resource library for four major entities in eastern North Carolina, including ECU’s Division of Health Sciences, University Health Systems, Eastern Area Health Education Center and the National Network of Libraries of Medicine.

"Laupus is more than a library," Spencer said. "We are the heart of it all."

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Joseph M. Ellis

RALEIGH — Joseph Michael Ellis, 21, went to be with his Savior, after a tragic auto accident early Sunday, April 27, 2008. Joseph was born July 15, 1986, a native of Garner, and was the youngest son of Sam and Cindy Ellis of Raleigh. Joseph was best friends with his brothers, Jason and Joshua, and roomed with Joshua for the past 2 1/2 years in Greenville, where they both attended East Carolina University. Joseph was finishing his junior year studying Construction Management. He was a member of the ECU water skiing team as was his brother Josh. He had accepted an internship for this summer at Edwards, Inc. in Greenville as a requirement for his degree.

He attended Wake Christian Academy, Rand Road Elementary, Carnage Middle School, William G. Enloe High School, and East Carolina University.

Joseph is survived by his parents, Sam and Cindy Ellis; and his brothers, Jason, 26, and Joshua, 23, who remember him as a strong and caring friend, brother, and son.

On his father's side, Joseph is survived by his grandparents, Betty and Hank Hickman of Sanford, and Vivian Smith of Long Beach, Calif.

Visitation is tonight from 6-8 at Bryan-Lee Funeral Home, 1200 Benson Rd., Garner.

Funeral service will be held at 2 p.m. Thursday at Raleigh Christian Community Church, 7000 Destiny Dr., Raleigh. Graveside service will follow at Maplewood Cemetery, Clayton.

Condolences may be made to the family at bryan-lee@funeralhomes.com.
Loan crisis hits campuses

Students at small schools see money sources shrink as more lenders retreat

By Tim Simmons
Staff Writer

Lacey Mogy didn't know much about student loans when she enrolled this year at the School of Communication Arts in Raleigh — except that she needed several if she was going to study digital film production.

Then her mother received a letter telling her that one of those loans won't be renewed next year. The lender is getting out of the student loan market.

Now Mogy is quickly learning about the link between the national credit crunch and the availability of student loans for all.

The first lesson she learned is one that higher education leaders want to stress: The vast majority of students will be able to get the student loans they need before classes start in the fall.

But decisions by more than 50 lenders to scale back participation or drop out of the federally guaranteed student loan program has rattled Congress and triggered proposals to make sure student loan money keeps flowing.

The problem isn't the effect of losing 50 lenders: There are at least 2,000 that still participate in the government-backed loan program. The problem is no one can say for certain how lenders will respond to protracted problems in the credit markets.

"This is an issue today for students who rely heavily on private loans, which is a very small part

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THE ISSUE

More than 50 lenders have dropped out of or scaled back participation in the federal government's guaranteed student loan program, known as the Federal Family Education Loan Program. The government pays subsidies to private lenders and banks to encourage their participation in distributing more than $83 billion in student loans each year. The program also guarantees that the government will cover most of the banks' losses if a student defaults. The decision by some lenders to leave the program is causing concern about loan availability in the fall.

THE EFFECT

More than 2,000 lenders participate in the federal loan program, meaning students still have a large number of choices when they look for loans.

WHY IT MATTERS

Government-backed student loans are critical for many college students, so any disruption draws attention.

The decision by lenders to scale back comes as private loans, which have covered an increasing amount of college debt in the past decade, have become harder to obtain.
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of the market," said Steve Brooks, director of the state Education Assistance Authority, which oversees most of the loans made in North Carolina. "But there is clearly a liquidity crisis that is making it more expensive for all lenders to do business. That could be a big problem if it persists."

Big Triangle universities would be the last to see disruptions in student loans, because their default rates are low and ties are strong between lenders and their financial aid offices, Brooks said.

But smaller, for-profit schools will be among the first to spot problems if the market tightens significantly.

"People are paying close attention, but it has not been an issue at this point," said Jack Henderson, president of the N.C. Association of Career Colleges and Schools. "We aren't seeing students who can't find the loans."

Most students are unaware of administrators' financial aid concerns, said Debra Hooper, head of the School of Communication Arts in Raleigh. "As long as we can put together a financial aid package for them — and we can — the details of the national market aren't that important," she said.

But the importance of the loans is obvious to Mogy and her classmates. Depending on the program students choose, tuition and fees over two years can cost $15,000 to $40,000 at the School of Communication Arts.

"Loans play a huge role in my being here," Mogy said. "I just wouldn't be here without them."

The concerns about the student loan market were triggered by a one-two punch that no one saw coming last year. The first hit came in the fall, when Congress cut subsidies to the private lenders that handle student loans.

The decision was little more than the culmination of a political fight over how to cut the federal budget. The government gives private banks and lenders billions in subsidies a year to encourage them to offer student loans. Many in Congress felt the subsidies were too large and an easy cost to cut.

But when the credit markets started freezing up late last year, lenders complained that the reduced subsidies made the loans unprofitable. Some lenders scaled back. Others got out entirely.

The loss of lenders in a market that is historically stable and lucrative has triggered questions about how many more might leave.

That has left Congress scrambling to create other options, such as having the government buy loans from private lenders to guarantee a steady supply of cash.

"Should a collapse occur in the student loan market, which doesn't seem likely at this point, it would be a catastrophe if we didn't have an alternative system in place," said Molly-Broad, former UNC system president and incoming president of the American Council on Education.

Loan problems in the state should be muted, because the Education Assistance Authority, which makes loans through the College Foundation of North Carolina, doesn't sell loans to others.

It raises money by issuing bonds and collecting loan payments.

That makes a big difference in today's market, because lenders that sell loans rely on those sales to generate money needed for additional loans and profits. But today's credit markets have few buyers for loans of any kind.

"That doesn't mean we are making any profit in today's markets," Brooks said. "It's a bad year for us, too. It's a bad year for many lenders. But from a student's perspective, you can call it a crisis. There are still a lot of lenders out there."

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For N.C. voters, higher ed is a hot issue

This is the second in a four-part series looking at the presidential candidates' positions on issues that affect North Carolina.

BY TIM SIMMONS
STAFF WRITER

In a region where higher education is a meal ticket for thousands of faculty and students, it doesn't take long before political debates here take an academic bent. Presidential candidates find voters who parse proposals involving student loans, Pell Grants and the graduation rates at community colleges.

"Higher education won't be the only issue that determines my vote, but there is no doubt it is the one that most directly affects me," said Nick Tosco, a senior at NCSU and a volunteer for Sen. Barack Obama's campaign.

Detailed proposals belong almost exclusively to Obama and Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, his rival for the Democratic party's presidential nomination. College affordability is at the top of the list for both, although neither suggests affordable means cheap.

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The issue is pressing because average student debt has more than doubled nationally since the mid-1990s. And it is a particularly sensitive topic in North Carolina, where the state constitution guarantees citizens a free university education "as far as practicable."

It is not close to free anymore. North Carolina seniors who graduated in 2006 owed an average of about $18,000 in student loans, according to the Project On Student Debt, a nonprofit group that provides research and analysis on college costs.

That figure has increased because of trends away from grants and scholarships, which do not need to be repaid, in favor of student loans.

"Getting a loan isn't the problem," said Amanda Vaughan, a junior at UNC-Chapel Hill who belongs to Heels for Hillary. "The problem is getting so much you don't know how you will pay it all back."

Clinton and Obama are both proposing tax credits to help reduce those costs.

Obama's American Opportunity Tax Credit would guarantee that the first $4,000 of a college education is free for most Americans. Clinton's approach is similar, but uses a sliding scale for a tax credit that tops out at $3,000.

Both proposals would make the credit available when college expenses are paid, which is different than the current approach. The existing Hope tax credit, for example, is used to reduce taxes by as much as $1,650 when federal returns are filed.

Either approach would significantly expand the current credit, which supporters say is the most pragmatic way to make college more affordable.

The bulk of the money would come from eliminating subsidies now paid to private lenders in favor of a program that allows colleges to obtain loans directly from the Education Department. The direct lending program currently handles only a small percentage of student loans.

**Credit:**

Molly Broad, former UNC system president and incoming president of the American Council on Education, applauds efforts to make college more affordable. But she warned that the proposals face obvious hurdles.

There is no system in place that allows families to apply tax credits when college bills are due. Such an approach would probably require vouchers of some sort, but trying to build that kind of program from scratch would be daunting for financial aid offices, Broad said.

The proposed credits would also be refundable, meaning they can exceed the amount of federal tax a family owes. That is likely to require changes in federal tax code, which would trigger long and laborious negotiations.

"It requires a whole new administrative apparatus with the Internal Revenue Service," Broad said. "There are many, many details that would need to be addressed. It isn't clear at all how you would administer something like this."

But Broad said proposals by both candidates to increase Pell Grants could be particularly beneficial to North Carolina.
Obama takes on Heels

Presidential candidate scrimmages in pickup game with UNC basketball players.

By Robbi Pickeral
Staff Writer

North Carolina's men's basketball team on Tuesday had what a team official called an extraordinary chance to play basketball with presidential candidate Barack Obama.

So extraordinary that an NCAA rule appears to have been broken — and the NCAA is apparently going to ignore it.

"This was a unique situation and not an NCAA issue," NCAA media relations director Eric Christianson said in an e-mail message to The News & Observer on Tuesday. "It certainly was a great opportunity for the student-athletes to interact with a presidential candidate."

At issue is the timing of the informal scrimmage and the fact that UNC coach Roy Williams watched it from the sideline.

According to NCAA bylaws, coaches are not allowed to watch pickup games at any time during the offseason. Division I basketball teams also are prohibited from any mandatory athletically related offseason activities through final exams.

Exams began Monday at UNC. Team spokesman Steve Kirschner said Williams knew he wasn't supposed to be at the Smith Center practice gym under the letter of the NCAA rules, but that these were "extraordinary circumstances," and with the number of Secret Service personnel on site, the coach wanted to be there to make sure that everything went OK.

Kirschner also said the Tar Heels play voluntary pickup games all the time that are within the rules because they are not mandatory. That's what playing basketball at other campaign stops.

Bitting contacted Williams, who gave his consent as long as no players missed exams. Williams then asked video coordinator Eric Hoots to contact the team members and tell them they could play if they wanted to.

Tuesday morning, Obama toured the UNC locker room with Williams and his wife, Wanda, then played pickup with some team members, including consensus All-America Tyler Hansbrough, Marcus Ginyard, Marc Campbell, Alex Stepheson and Deon Thompson. Former Tar Heels Wes Miller and Sam Perkins also were among those on hand.

Williams, who watched the play from a chair on the sideline, called out at one point: "You've got the future president of the United States with you." And, yes, the Tar Heels started passing to him more.

Even as UNC acknowledged that Williams should not have been present, the NCAA's Christianson would not specifically address whether rules were broken or if UNC asked for permission beforehand. Christianson responded again through e-mail: "This is not an NCAA issue."

Staff writer Anne Blythe contributed to this report.

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Universities faulted

A new report from a nonprofit research center suggests that North Carolinians aren't getting their money's worth from the state's universities.

The Center for College Affordability and Productivity's new report says that although North Carolina spends more than $7,000 per student for higher education, far above the national average, the state lags in several areas. The report's findings include:

■ Despite North Carolina's spending 6.7 percent of the state budget on higher education, the state finds that 18.6 percent of high school freshmen eventually earn a college degree.
■ As of 2006, 25.6 percent of the state's population had obtained a bachelor's degree, falling below the national average of 27.2 percent and the rates of nearby states such as Virginia (32.1 percent) and Georgia (28.1 percent).
■ Despite financial aid, between 2000 and 2004, the average annual financial burden for students increased by $760 at four-year public schools and by $1,364 at four-year private schools.
■ Many schools spend from 20 percent to 40 percent of their revenue on instruction. A few community colleges spend 50 percent.

The study recommends that North Carolina shift some funding from the institutions to the students. One method could be the use of vouchers for low-income students, tied to performance as an incentive to graduate on time.

The study also proposes charging tuition by department, so that courses with less overhead would have lower fees.

The study was at least partly funded by the John William Pope Foundation of Raleigh, which supports the John William Pope Center for Higher Education Policy, a frequent critic of policies and curricula at UNC campuses.