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East Carolina University News Bureau
E-mail to durhamj@ecu.edu  Web site at http://www.news.ecu.edu
252-328-6481
Health woes persist in East

Growth of ECU's medical school is on hold, but high rates of chronic disease in rural counties are not.

By Sarah Avery, Staff Writer

The troubled economy and health problems that have long rivaled those in Third World countries are straining the capacity of Eastern North Carolina's only medical school to provide care.

Dr. Paul Cunningham, dean of the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University, said Thursday that rates of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, obesity, infant deaths and HIV/AIDS in many of the state's rural counties are among the nation's worst — on a par with the rates in nations where U.S. doctors often volunteer for mission work.

"I wonder why some of our doctors want to serve in Nicaragua, where there is a dire need, but they can drive through it (Eastern North Carolina) today?" and see similar levels of need, Cunningham said. He made his comments while releasing an analysis of the health needs of Eastern North Carolina and the medical school's efforts to meet them.

Cunningham said recruiting and attracting doctors to the rural counties east of I-95 remains difficult. Nearly 19 counties in the region showed a drop in the ratio of doctors to residents between 2003 and 2008.

ECU’s medical school was established in the 1970s to train home-grown doctors who would remain and practice in the state's rural communities. All its students are from North Carolina, and nearly 60 percent of its graduates remain in the state — a rate that far exceeds the state's other medical schools at UNC-Chapel Hill, Duke University and Wake Forest University.

"They are already getting national attention for their emphasis on rural health," said Gordon DeFriese, a professor emeritus at UNC-Chapel Hill and research fellow at the Cecil Sheps Center for Health Services Research. "And they are a model on how to do regional health care."

As the new health care law begins to take effect and 38 million more Americans are covered by insurance, the need for more doctors, nurse practitioners and other health care providers will increase — particularly in family medicine, pediatrics, obstetrics and gynecology.

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HEALTH
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Cunningham said the school would like to add programs for training certain specialists, including OB-GYNs and neurologists. He said those specialists could help treat many of the health problems in the region.

But current economic conditions are hurting that effort, Cunningham said.

Slump stymies growth

Several years ago, the state legislature gave ECU and UNCH the go-ahead to expand their medical school enrollments. Then the recession hit, and neither school has had the money to hire professors, add teaching space and make other adjustments necessary for major expansions. Still, Cunningham said, ECU has increased its enrollment from 72 students to 78.

EASTERN NORTH CAROLINA HEALTH SNAPSHOT

- In Northeastern counties, cardiovascular disease accounts for a state-high 19.3 percent of deaths among people younger than 65.
- Many of those same counties have diabetes rates among adults that exceed 11 percent, compared to the state average of about 9 percent.
- HIV/AIDS is disproportionately high, with upward of 20 cases for every 100,000 people.

SOURCE: N.C. DIVISION OF PUBLIC HEALTH

"We can't go beyond 80," he said, noting that expansion plans called for ECU to have 120 medical students. "We're not going to expand under the current economic circumstances."

Instead, he said, other urgent needs are being pressed. Top among them is a request to the state legislature for a $3 million funding increase to offset losses in revenue from patients' care.

Seventy percent of the school's budget comes from fees patients pay when they visit ECU's network of doctors and clinics.

Because so many of the patients are poor, revenue is falling short.

"We have to work harder to generate those funds than if we lived in a more well-heeled part of the state," Cunningham said.

He said economic recovery has not yet spread to most of Eastern North Carolina, and that translates into worsening health conditions. People are waiting longer to see their doctors, often not showing up until their conditions are serious and much more expensive to treat.

"It's keeping us incredibly busy," he said.

sarah.avery@newsobserver.com or 919-829-4882
Alliance targets drop-out rate

By Jackie Drake
The Daily Reflector
Thursday, April 29, 2010

The high school drop-out rate and keeping youth positively engaged, as well as reducing unemployment, will be the primary targets for a recently formed coalition in Pitt County.

The Pitt County Impact Alliance, a group of local organizations convened by the United Way of Pitt County, met in a summit Thursday morning to prioritize issues facing the community. About 100 alliance and community members met at the East Carolina Heart Institute at East Carolina University and began a discussion with four major issues: high school drop-out rate, lack of jobs and unemployment, gangs, and after-school and summer programs for youth.

Those were the top four issues identified through a series of 15 community forums held by the alliance across the county during the past month to gain feedback on the most critical issues facing residents.
The top four issues combined gained more than 50 percent of the votes from the forums. At each forum, participants were given three votes to distribute among 18 issues identified in a previous study. More than 200 residents attended the forums. The drop-out rate got the most votes with 104, followed by unemployment with 84, gangs with 81 and youth programs with 69. The goal of the summit was to further prioritize those top issues.

"I think we can all agree that today we leave this room committed to decreasing the drop-out rate, creating positive connections for youth and reducing unemployment," facilitator Chris Aycock, a consultant from an organizational development firm in Raleigh, said.

"I think the summit went well," Cecelia Scott, executive director of United Waym said. "I’m happy that we’ve picked a focus, but the hard work begins from here. We’ve got to get everyone involved now to solve these problems."

The next step in the process is the formation of volunteer "impact" teams to specifically address the identified issues, organizers said.

The drop-out rate generated the most discussion, though several participants said the issues were interrelated. The dialogue on after-school and summer programs and gangs came down to giving youth a sense of belonging.

"I think it is a positive sign that there was such an overwhelming ‘voice’ on the drop-out issue," Pitt County Schools Superintendent Beverly Reep said. "While the drop-out event is school-based, the solutions will be found by extensive community collaboration. It was very uplifting to witness such community commitment at the summit."

The Pitt County drop-out rate was 6.4 percent for grades 9-12 for the 2008-09 school year, according to Travis Lewis, director of student services for the district. The state drop-out rate for the same year was 4.27 percent.

"The drop-out problem is an epidemic, and Pitt County epitomizes that epidemic; we are losing way too many kids," Lewis said. Exit interviews with students before dropping out show that students stop coming often because they are not on reading level and get frustrated and don’t have support at home.

"You have to start early," Lewis said.

PCS has drop-out prevention efforts in place. Assistant Superintendent for Finance Michael Cowin said more than $4 million in state and local funds go toward at-risk students performing below grade level in the form of after-school tutoring and remediation. The Twilight Academy, an online high school credit recovery system, was started this year by the Drop-Out Prevention Task Force formed in the last two years.

One participant said the small-group discussion at his table became like the chicken-and-the-egg debate — "Do kids drop out and join gangs, or do kids join gangs and drop out?" he asked. Juvencio Peralta, president of the Association of Mexicans in North Carolina, urged the alliance to look at who is dropping out, which he said is mostly minorities.

Peralta is running for the District 3 seat on the Board of Education.

Travis said a disproportionate number of drop-outs are black males. Of the 482 drop-outs in Pitt County last year, 57 percent were males.

By ethnicity, 66 percent were black, 28 percent were white, and 4 percent were Hispanic.

"Today was looking at overall issues; going forward, we will refine this," James Wagner, director of community development and media relations for United Way, said. "We will look at the root causes and the strategies to solve these issues, and look at what is already being done as well. This summit was the conclusion to the community forums but also a kick-off for the impact teams that will be formed to convene everyone who wants to be involved."

"We’re excited," Scott said. "We’re going to bring people to the table who have never been involved before."

About half the attendants signed up to help on impact teams to address the chosen issues.

The first impact team meeting is scheduled for May 26. Anyone wishing to join a team may call 758-1604, Ext. 204, or e-mail info@impactpittcounty.org.

Contact Jackie Drake at jdrake@reflector.com or (252) 329-9567.
Student charged with filing false report
Thursday, April 29, 2010
East Carolina University police on Wednesday arrested student on charges of filing a false report in connection with an alleged strong-arm robbery.
The student, Johnie Graham Morrison, told ECU police that two unidentified males outside robbed him outside Aycock Hall at approximately 1:31 a.m. March 31.

An extensive investigation, including interviews and a review of videotape from cameras located around the exterior of Aycock Hall and surrounding residential halls, found that no robbery had occurred, ECU police said.

Morrison was arrested Wednesday on a misdemeanor charge of filing a false police report. He was released from the Pitt County Detention Center on a $500 unsecured bond.

“Our primary concern is the safety of the ECU community – students, faculty, staff and visitors,” ECU Police Chief Scott Shelton said.
“We take every reported crime seriously, but at the same time, we must be vigilant for false reports that just cause unnecessary concern and worry on the campus.”
Another student was charged in March for filing a false report that he was assaulted outside Mendenhall Student Center.
That student told police he was beaten on Feb. 24 while walking from the downtown area about 1:30 a.m. Follow up interviews and reviews of video tape revealed no assault took place.
Former East Carolina football players and guests stand as Coach Odell Welborn enters a surprise dinner roast in his honor at Brook Valley Country Club. The event was planned by former players Jim Martin, Jerry Tolley, Dink Mills and Skipper Duke and was attended by players from 1960-69.

Click here for a photo gallery of the event
Bill Hudson/The Daily Reflector

Odell Welborn gets a hug from his daughter, Jane Welborn Hudson, at a roast at Brook Valley Country Club.

Finally, for this ECU coach, hugs for a job well done
By Jane Welborn Hudson
The Daily Reflector
Thursday, April 29, 2010

We go to work each day and put in our time. We check off the items on our to-do lists. We clock in and clock out. We collect our paychecks and save for our retirement. We do our jobs, and we hope that we do them well enough to be allowed to keep doing them.
We sometimes get raises, rarer now in these difficult economic times. Maybe we'll get an award along the way or a token of gratitude upon retirement, but it's not usually adequate. Every now and then, however, someone tells you that you made a difference in his life. You may get a thank-you note, a complimentary e-mail, a tip, a pat on the back, or even a hug. If you've really done your job well, you may even get roasted.

My father, Odell Welborn, coached football at East Carolina between 1960-69, most of those years under legendary head coach and Athletics Director Clarence Stasavich. Dad was an assistant coach, in charge of both the offensive and defensive lines, helping lead East Carolina to three consecutive 9-1 football seasons during his tenure. He also served as team trainer and traveled the Eastern Seaboard recruiting high school players to come play for East Carolina. And when Coach Stas had a massive heart attack in October 1963, four games into the football season, my father was asked to strap on Stas' huge cleats and become head coach and athletics director until he recovered.

So Dad rolled up his sleeves, studied the opponents' films, collaborated with the two other coaches, and worked on the defensive assignments with the players. He gave pep talks and worked the sidelines.

And the team responded. They beat Dad's alma mater, Elon, 6-0. They creamed Western Carolina at home, 50-0. They won at The Citadel by a 20-6 score. They took on Stas' former team, Lenoir-Rhyne, a powerhouse that had beaten East Carolina eight consecutive years, and triumphed, 28-0. Then they beat Tampa 14-8, earning a spot in the Eastern Bowl in Allentown, Pa. On Dec. 14, 1963, Dad led the Pirates to a 27-6 win for East Carolina's first-ever victory in a bowl game — and a perfect 6-0 record for Dad as a head coach.

By the 1964 season, Coach Stas was back at the helm, and Dad went back to coaching the lines. That January, Dad sat beside Stas at The Commodore Hotel in New York City as he was named 1963 Division 3 Small College Coach of the Year by the American Football Coaches Association. Stas also was named National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) Coach of the Year in 1964. He's enshrined in the North Carolina Sports Hall of Fame and East Carolina's Hall of Fame, among other awards he accumulated.

Dad received few accolades for his contributions, though he remains today East Carolina's only undefeated head football coach. He didn't get a plaque or a trophy, and he's not in any Hall of Fame.

But last week, 40 of the football players my father coached between 1960-69 at East Carolina surprised him with a dinner and roast at Brook Valley Country Club.

Dad thought he was having a low-key dinner with friends. He was stunned to walk in and see table after table of former players. Even then, he couldn't comprehend that they were there to honor him.

One by one, players Dad hasn't seen in years came up to shake his hand. Dad immediately recognized some of them. He had to take a quick glance at their name tags to identify others. After all, he hadn't seen some of them in nearly 50 years, and they certainly didn't look the way they had in their college days.

There was at least one player there from each of the 10 teams Dad coached in his career at East Carolina.

After dinner, speaker after speaker came up to the podium and told stories about their playing days and the role Dad had filled at such a formative time in their lives. Many of them credited him with teaching them vital life lessons, including the importance of hard work and fair play. They all expressed their fondness for the man who helped bring them together as a team, pushed them to excel and led them to victory — while at the same time treating them with respect, responding to their individual needs and encouraging them to be the best they could be.

Dad stopped coaching football 40 years ago, but on that Saturday night, his players honored him for the good job he did. And it meant the world to him.
Today, he says it is the highlight of his coaching career.

For me, taking part in this special night taught two important lessons:

First, it’s never too late to thank someone for the job they have done, the role they have filled in your life, the values they have impressed upon you or the time they have taken to help you. You owe it to them — and to yourself — to give them credit for what they have contributed to your life.

Also, we never know the impact that our words and deeds may have on someone else. If we take the time to show interest in someone, help guide them through a tricky time, assist them with a project, or perhaps even write something that touches them, we may change a life.

And that’s a job well done.

Jane Hudson is a writer and editor at The Daily Reflector. Contact her at jhudson@reflector.com or at (252) 329-9577.
Moore steps down as ECU women’s coach

The Daily Reflector
Thursday, April 29, 2010

Two days after being introduced as East Carolina’s head women’s basketball coach, Wes Moore announced Thursday that he’s returning to Tennessee-Chattanooga.

Moore, who coached at UTC for the past 12 seasons, was named the 10th head coach in ECU history on Tuesday, replacing Sharon Baldwin-Tener. Baldwin-Tener, who compiled a 126-115 record in eight seasons in charge of the Pirates, accepted the head coaching job at Georgia State earlier this month.

“This has been a very difficult week,” Moore said at a press conference in Chattanooga. “I am somewhat embarrassed. I am very, very sorry that this situation got as deep and as far as it did.”

“I know (Director of Athletics) Terry Holland at East Carolina University has been unbelievable throughout this whole process. It is a great opportunity over there at a very fine university, but because of that I think that it deserves somebody who has their full heart in the job. A big chunk of my heart was still in Chattanooga.”

After having already hired a football and men’s basketball coach this year, Holland now must restart a search he thought he had completed when Moore accepted the position.

“I am disappointed that coach Moore decided to return to Chattanooga,” Holland said in a statement on the ECU Athletics website. “He put 12 years into making a championship program, and leaving that proved more difficult than he possibly could have imagined. I have already been in contact with Chancellor (Steve) Ballard and members of the Board of Trustees regarding the resumption of the coaching search. I am confident that we will find the right coach for this program.”

Moore led the Mocs to 11 consecutive Southern Conference regular season titles during his 12 years at Chattanooga and Holland admitted after the ECU Board of Trustees approved the hire on Monday that it was difficult to convince Moore to leave.

“The question on him is always, ‘Can you move him?'” Holland said. “He gets very attached to where he is.”

At his introductory press conference on Tuesday, Moore said taking the East Carolina job was not only a good professional opportunity, but also a chance for his wife, Linda, to return closer to her Jamesville home.

“I want to thank my wife Linda for being so understanding,” Moore said Thursday. “I know it has been tough on her and her family because they live in that area. As always, she has been very supportive.

“She too loves Chattanooga, so we were both torn. And like I said, both of us have been through a lot this week.”

Moore has a 290-85 record with the Mocs.
“Even though this program was here long before I was and won championships long before I arrived,” he said Thursday, “in some way, I feel like it is still our baby and it is hard to leave that.”

Moore credited Holland for his patience over the last few days.
“(Holland) has been unbelievable,” Moore said. “I think part of it is that he was a coach and went through some of these situations himself, some gut wrenching situations in his career. Because of that he was very patient, very understanding and just a super person to work with.
“That is what made it so hard. Everyone there bent over backwards to make you feel welcome.”
Moore leaves Pirates, returns to Mocs

Holland ‘disappointed’ in coach’s about-face after taking ECU job

After being introduced as East Carolina head women’s basketball coach Tuesday, Wes Moore announced his intention to remain in the same position at Chattanooga on Thursday afternoon.

Moore was initially tabbed as the 10th head coach in the ECU program’s history and replaced Sharon Baldwin-Tener, who accepted the head coaching position at Georgia State earlier this month.

Moore has been the head coach at Chattanooga for the past 12 seasons.

“I am disappointed that Coach Moore decided to return to Chattanooga,” ECU athletic director Terry Holland said.

“He put 12 years into making a championship program, and leaving that proved more difficult than he possibly could have imagined. I have already been in contact with Chancellor (Steve) Ballard and members of the Board of Trustees regarding the resumption of the coaching search. I am confident that we will find the right coach for this program.”

FROM ECU NEWS RELEASE

MORE BASKETBALL

Duke to host Jimmy V Classic: The women’s Jimmy V Classic will be held at Duke for the first time, with the Blue Devils playing Texas A&M on Dec. 6.

Duke and Texas A&M will play at Cameron Indoor Stadium at 7 p.m. (ESPN2).

The men’s Jimmy V Classic will feature a doubleheader at Madison Square Garden in New York on Dec. 7.

Kansas will face Memphis in the first game, and Syracuse will meet Michigan State in the nightcap.

FOOTBALL

Former Vols star dies: Andy Kozar, the starting fullback on Tennessee’s 1951 national championship team, has died. He was 79.

Kozar died Thursday at his home in Knoxville, where he has lived since returning to Tennessee as a professor in the school’s physical education program in 1966.

A native of St. Michael, Pa., Kozar was a three-year starter for the Volunteers, averaging more than five yards per carry. He amassed 27 touchdowns and 1,837 yards rushing on 350 carries between 1950 and 1952.

Despite suffering an injury midway through the 1952 season, he was named a second-team All-American.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
NCSU students engineer houses of paper for emergencies

RALEIGH -- The next time a disaster like the recent earthquake in Haiti leaves thousands of people without shelter, the solution could be paper.

Students in the PaperScience and Engineering Program at N.C. State University have developed four prototypes for emergency humanitarian shelters and tested the main materials for them at an NCSU lab this week.

The aim was to design a shelter light enough to be moved by one person on foot but large and sturdy enough to protect a family of four from the elements and insects for three months. And so that the shelter doesn't create a new problem with piles of waste after the crisis ends, it had to be at least 80 percent compostable.

"This really allowed our imaginations to go wild," said Kristin Grant, 21, a senior from Raleigh. "This project was the first time we've actually been able to apply everything we've learned and pull it all together for something that could actually be sold as a product."

Grant was part of a team that designed a geodesic dome-shaped shelter. It would be skinned in the biodegradable film used for SunChips bags, making it waterproof but also adding another advantage: the ability to print a sponsor's name on the shelter.

"If you could get a logo on this, that's maybe one of the fastest ways of getting people on board to make these things," she said.

The four designs had widely different shapes, but all used some form of cardboard for the walls. One featured an exterior skin made of the same material as paper milk and juice cartons; one would be coated in paraffin-like cardboard boxes used for shipping iced seafood; and another would use a biodegradable coating commonly used inside "green" paper cups.

Haiti was the inspiration, so all four designs featured mosquito netting over windows and doors and evidence of some thinking about heavy rainfall.

One design, a simple box designed to be made easily of two sheets of cardboard, has a harmless-to-humans insecticide mixed with the interior wall coating to kill any mosquitoes that slip past the net.

Each of the four design teams presented scale models Wednesday and submitted a sample of the roof material for durability testing.

All gathered around a machine in the Hodges Wood Products Lab to watch research specialist Tony LaPasha measure the weight each sample would bear. The target was 25 pounds, with points deducted for weakness or because the material was too strong.

Three came close to hitting the target for strength, while the dome exceeded it by nearly 50 percent.
The students chose the project themselves, said Joel J. Pawlak, the associate professor teaching the class.

Pawlak usually has students design a packaging product; the packaging industry is where many students will eventually work. This time, though, the idea of designing shelters, which pose many of the same design challenges as packages, seized their imaginations.

"We talk paper daily," said Zach Putnam, 22, of Kings Mountain. "But we never thought about living in it."

jay.price@newsobserver.com or 919-829-4526
NCSU, UNC dorms face off

N.C. State University and UNC-Chapel Hill are finalists in a national energy conservation competition sponsored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

A dormitory on each campus is among 14 commercial buildings competing to see which one can reduce energy use the most in one year. Morrison Residence Hall at UNC and Tucker Residence Hall at NCSU were picked from nearly 200 applicants for the EPA contest.

The buildings will be judged by their energy use from Sept. 1, 2009, to Aug. 31, 2010. The building that reduces its energy use the most, on a percentage basis, will be declared the winner in late October.

The two Triangle buildings are the only dormitories in the contest. The other buildings include the Virginia Beach Convention Center, the Maplewood Mall in St. Paul, Minn., two hotels, two elementary schools and an office building on Fifth Avenue in New York.
April 29, 2010

**Admitted to College, but Needing a Godmother**

By JACQUES STEINBERG

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — The envelope arrives with good news. The college is pleased to announce that the student has been offered acceptance and, if he or she is fortunate, some scholarship money.

But in this busted economy, more parents are saying they need more money and are filing appeals. Then the waiting starts again, for a phone call.

The job of delivering that news — after weighing hopes and dreams against limited budgets — falls to people like Sandra J. Oliveira, the executive director of the financial aid office at Providence College.

Ms. Oliveira is spending this week plowing through a stack of 100 appeals from high school seniors who have been accepted for the next freshman class but who say they cannot afford to attend. Each packet contains a heartfelt plea for more aid than the college offered initially, to offset the impact of recent job losses, plunges in home values or other financial setbacks.

"In this economy, everyone is feeling it to some extent," Ms. Oliveira said recently, her wood-laminate desk cluttered with medical bills, layoff notices and tax forms sent to her as supporting evidence. "Sometimes we can do a lot," she added. "Sometimes we can’t. But we spend a lot of time listening."

Ms. Oliveira’s emotional, painstaking task is playing out on hundreds of campuses, in advance of the May 1 deadline for tuition deposits from many incoming freshmen.

At Providence College, a Roman Catholic institution where the dogwood trees are blooming, about as many financial aid appeals have been filed by the families of prospective freshmen this spring as last; those figures, though, represent a nearly 15 percent increase over two years
ago.

At Villanova University in Pennsylvania, which competes with Providence for students, the 350 financial aid appeals filed this spring are down from last year, but are still running 17 percent ahead of those logged in 2008, before the economy turned downward. Financial-aid appeals from prospective freshmen at Lafayette College, also in Pennsylvania, are up more than 40 percent just since last year.

And while Harvard may be the rare university that has managed to hold the line on such appeals — the families of 175 prospective freshmen have asked this spring for more aid than was offered, about the same as in 2008 — it has done so only by raising its financial aid budget by $22 million, or 16 percent, over that period.

Meanwhile, Providence, like other colleges, is under its own financial constraints, as its costs rise and its endowment ebbs. While avoiding the layoffs and furloughs that other universities, both public and private, have done, Providence is raising its full freshman-year tuition, board and other fees by 19 percent this fall, to more than $53,000.

For families and institutions, the process that might ease those tuition expenses can be as daunting as some federal tax forms. Offices like Ms. Oliveira's collect information on a family's wages, savings, home equity and other assets, as well as on how many siblings might be attending college. Then, using a combination of federal formulas and policies unique to its own campus, Providence, like its counterparts, will arrive at an award offer.

At Providence, one of every three dollars in the operating budget, or nearly $50 million, is spent on financial aid, and nearly three of every four students receive some scholarship help.

The average direct scholarship based on need last year was more than $17,000. (Students who also qualified for merit-based aid, which not all colleges offer, received substantially more.)

But for some families, the initial offer, however generous, will not go far enough. Enter Ms. Oliveira, 46, who is equal parts banker, therapist and fairy godmother, and who has the discretion to increase an offer by several thousand dollars a year if she deems the family's circumstances dire enough.

In arguing their case before Ms. Oliveira, families have the ear of someone who was once on their side of the desk. By the time she enrolled in 1981 at North Adams State College (now the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts) near her home in Western Massachusetts, her father had retired as a Navy chief petty officer and her mother was not working.

Two older siblings were in college, and two younger ones would soon be college age. She said
she would have been unable to attend college without substantial scholarships. “Financial-aid discussions were fight night at my house,” she said.

After graduating with a degree in communications, Ms. Oliveira became a financial-aid officer at a community college, largely because “my loans were due, and I had a summer of no jobs.” She has worked in financial aid ever since, including at nearby Brown University.

Among the appeals Ms. Oliveira was considering this week was that of a student accepted for the incoming class whose parents had each lost jobs in recent months; one had worked in construction, the other in an administrative position.

Providence’s initial offer had been about $18,000 in direct aid, Ms. Oliveira said.

“With the change in circumstance, they may get another $1,000, $2,000 in grant,” she said, using shorthand for a direct scholarship, as opposed to loans. Moreover, the precipitous drop in income will most likely qualify the family for a federal Pell grant, perhaps as much as $5,550.

Ms. Oliveira’s eyes filled with tears as she described another parent who had just called — someone whose daughter already attends Providence, and who was struggling to pay the final tuition bill of the year.

“We’ve given them little bits throughout the year,” Ms. Oliveira said. “They’re borrowing from friends and relatives. The daughter is taking money she needed for a computer to make it work.”

Here, too, Ms. Oliveira was hopeful that she could help.

She found herself less moved by the father of an accepted applicant who had lost his job in 2009, but had since found another. The family told her the bank was refusing to allow them to borrow against their home equity.

“This is a bank they have worked with for a very long time, and they were almost stunned,” Ms. Oliveira said. “But they have other real estate worth a half million dollars that’s paid off.”

In light of more pressing appeals, she said there was probably “not a whole lot” she could do for that family.

While that phone call might not be a happy one, she said she would draw strength and satisfaction from other conversations this week that could well change the course of a young life.
One high school senior was so excited to receive good news from Ms. Oliveira this week that she switched her cellphone to speaker mode. She then asked Ms. Oliveira to tell her again that her aid had been granted, so her whole class could hear.

"I could hear them cheering," Ms. Oliveira said.