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No major changes to ECU structure
“The process was a very positive one for our campus.”

Ron Mitchelson
committee chair

By Jackie Drake
Saturday, April 28, 2012

A committee tasked with leading the reorganization of East Carolina University recommends that all levels of the university make internal administrative reductions but calls for no major changes to the overall college structure.

The Program Prioritization Committee released its final recommendations for academic reorganization on Friday after a year of searching for ways to increase efficiency and save money in the wake of repeated state budget cuts.

The university’s 13 colleges and free-standing schools under three divisions remain intact in the recommendation. A number of departments could be moved or merged for a net reduction of four departments from the existing 72.

The recommendation concludes the second and final phase of the process. The first phase, completed in the fall semester, identified individual programs for increased or reduced funding or elimination.

These along with adjustments to libraries and other entities could lead to a total savings of $4 million annually, according to committee chair and professor Ron Mitchelson.

The recommendation is not final until approved by Chancellor Steve Ballard and his executive committee.

“I think it’s a very reasonable outcome,” Mitchelson said Friday evening. “The process was a very positive one for our campus. This is not a deeply intrusive recommendation but I feel like there are significant savings.”

Previous scenarios suggested larger changes like splitting and merging colleges, which faculty generally were against.

“The PPC finds the existing collegiate structure, which has evolved since ECU’s last major restructuring in 2003, to be relatively efficient and effective,” the document states. “The PPC asserts that the levels of short-
term costs and disruptions that would be experienced (in previous scenarios) are not warranted by estimated academic administrative savings.”

Mitchelson doesn’t believe consideration of more drastic measures caused unnecessary angst.

“We had to go through a discovery phase,” he said.

The recommendation was based on feedback from faculty on 57 individual options released in January that were combined into four scenarios released in March. The committee held an online survey in February and a series of scenario forums earlier this month.

The committee recommends each academic area reach a target goal of $1 million to $2 million in savings during a two to three year period. Plans should be submitted to the chancellor by October.

These adjustments are meant to be in line with the first phase of the process, a prioritization effort that identified which of more than 200 programs should be maintained, reduced, eliminated or increased in terms of funding.

The committee released those recommendations in January.

The department of Nutrition Sciences would be moved from the College of Human Ecology to the College of Health and Human Performance or the College of Allied Health Sciences. The School of Hospitality Leadership would be moved to the College of Business. Other mergers are recommended in the College of Education and the Division of Health Sciences.

The recommendation also calls for relocation of centers and institutes like Sustainable Tourism and Agromedicine to go under related colleges, as well as improved coordination between the health sciences library and academic library services.

“It is important to note that implementation of any recommended structural change will take time and requires careful deliberation,” the document states.

The recommendation also calls for another process seeking increased non-state funding.

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A retiring Pitt County legislator was honored Saturday when she was presented the Order of the Long Leaf Pine.

Rep. Edith Warren, D-Pitt, received the honor during the Pitt County Democratic Party’s Campaign Kick-Off held at City Hotel and Bistro.

The Order of the Long Leaf Pine is the state’s highest civilian honor. The governor gives the award to a resident who has demonstrated a lifetime of service to the state or a state employee with 30 years or more of exemplary service.

Warren was honored for her years of service as a teacher, the first woman to serve as a principal in Pitt County, the first woman elected as a Pitt County commissioner and her seven terms as the state House District 8 representative, serving Pitt and Martin counties.

“It was just so humbling,” Warren said. “This is one of the highest honors the state has, and I am extremely grateful.”

Rep. Marian McLawhorn, a Grifton resident who was elected to the House the same year as Warren, presented the honor.

“Representative Warren has been a strong advocate for the citizens of House District 8 for 14 years,” McLawhorn said. “Her accomplishments are too numerous to mention, but she has been instrumental in working with other
legislators for a heart center, a new family medicine center, and a dental school at East Carolina University.

“She is very proud of helping establish the Bob Martin Equestrian Center in Williamston. Edith Warren is well-respected by other legislators, and she will be greatly missed.”

Pitt County Clerk of Court Sara Beth Fulford Rhodes said Warren has been a role model for women who want to serve their communities and take on leadership positions.

“Her career from educator to legislator is a shining example of dedicated public service and civic responsibility. She has been a role model for many and a trailblazer for women leaders,” Rhodes said. “I have been blessed by her influence in my life from the days she was my elementary school principal to the present.”

Warren was raised on a tenant farm in Edgecombe County. In an oral history, she said she was a child when she became interested in politics because her family was always involved in local elections.

Warren’s son, Steve, said his mother always instilled a sense of right and wrong, of learning and taking responsibility for actions in her three children and four grandchildren.

“She has demonstrated all of these characteristics throughout her public career, first as an educator and then as a public servant in the Pitt County commissioners and most recently in the North Carolina House,” he said. His mother’s touch can be seen throughout the region as she worked to improve education and health and her support of the East Carolina Heart Institute and East Carolina University School of Dental Medicine.

“I am proud to tell her story and to say that she is my mama,” Steve Warren said.

Pitt County Democratic Party Chairwoman Betsy Leech said about 200 people attended Saturday’s event.

Along with Warren’s presentation, Democrats heard from gubernatorial candidates Bob Etheridge and Bill Faison. More than a dozen other party candidates from across the state were given an opportunity to speak as well.

“We heard from about 19 or 20 candidates in all. We really had a good turnout,” Leech said. “I think the mark of a good event is to see people interacting with the candidates and we certainly accomplished that.”
Providers brace for health reform
By K.J. Williams
Sunday, April 29, 2012

The U.S. Supreme Court’s pending ruling on the constitutionality of health care reform law is expected by June.

In the meantime, local health care entities, which already have begun making changes to comply with the 2010 Affordable Care Act, are proceeding as if it were unchallenged.

If upheld, the act would require people to buy insurance if they are not already covered, or pay a fine.

That insurance provision is projected to help some health care providers, struggling to provide services to the uninsured, by allowing them to recoup more of the actual cost of treatment.

It also could result in an “incredible pent-up demand” that could cause problems in places where there are not enough health care providers, said Dr. David Herman, chief operating officer and president of Vidant Health, the not-for-profit health system that includes Vidant Medical Center in Greenville. In addition, the reimbursement amounts for providing care are hard to predict.

Dr. Robert Monteiro, president of the N.C. Medical Society, said doctors are expecting a surge of new patients, mostly with Medicaid.
It’s estimated that Medicaid recipients will increase in number to 2.4 million from 1.8 million statewide, he said, citing federal data.

Doctors will be busier but it’s unclear if adding staff will enable them to meet patient demand.

“There’s concern about being overwhelmed with the sheer numbers,” Monteiro said. He said doctors want to provide care, but they don’t know yet what they will be facing.

“The issue is going to be about access,” he said. “Even though (patients) have insurance, they may not be able to access the system.”

Added to the mix is a state and national shortage of primary care doctors. Eventually, Campbell University’s future medical school will be able to provide more doctors. “So down the line, that’s going to help,” he said.

**Preventive care**

Herman said that increasing the number of insured people is just one aspect of health care reform.

“It will level the playing field as far as insurance goes, but it’s not a panacea,” he said.

Society has to be willing to invest in preventive health care so there is less chronic disease, which is expensive to treat, Herman said.

At the Pitt County Health Department, director Dr. John Morrow said the law’s insurance requirement will reduce the cost paid by the county for uninsured and indigent care.

“We’d have more insured people so that would help pay for their care,” Morrow said. “So it does help fill some of those holes that we have in the system.”

The law also creates funding for public health initiatives such as two grants the department already has received, Morrow said.

And it puts incentives in place to improve health through prevention, cutting long-term costs.

“It helps reform health care in a way that makes it more efficient,” Morrow said.

The law pushes the health care system as a whole “toward more practical, efficient and sustainable health care,” he said.
Herman agrees that emphasizing prevention is a strength of the health-care reform law.

He said that 17.6 percent of the gross domestic product in the United States is designated to health care. The bulk of that cost provides medical care for about 5 percent of the population with serious illnesses, who are responsible for 53 percent of the total spent.

As technology and medicine have progressed, treatment has developed for diseases that used to prove fatal. The result is skyrocketing health-care costs.

“You didn’t have — 20 years ago — the costs associated with diabetes or the costs with heart disease,” Herman said. “So that’s the triumph of medicine, that’s a big part of the jam we’re in right now.”

When hospitals and medical care providers treat uninsured and indigent patients, they pass along the cost through higher charges. And that in turn drives up the cost of insurance, Herman said.

At Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina, the company is looking at ways to stay competitive in a sector that will be seeing more new business, by cutting administrative costs by 20 percent by 2014, said spokesman Lew Borman.

“What we’re seeing and doing, instead of waiting, is really working on new collaborations, working on new models of health care and payments,” Boreman said.

**Effect on Brody**

The prospect of health-care reform is welcomed by Dr. Paul Cunningham, the dean of East Carolina University’s Brody School of Medicine.

But there are costs involved with meeting the reporting and electronic records requirements of the law to receive incentive payments for doctors, including those that practice at ECU Physicians, the medical school’s clinical practice. Failure to meet specific criteria eventually could lead to lower payments.

On the other hand, it’s expected that having more insured patients will help offset the costs of providing care.

“We ultimately believe that it is the mechanism by which we can serve the mission of the school in a more sustainable manner,” Cunningham said. “We recognize that our services both in the outpatient arena and through our
partners at Vidant Medical Center involve safety-net services. And safety-net services are typically provided to individuals who have socioeconomic underpinnings for their disease states, their injuries, their overall lack of health.”

However, there still is the rising cost of practicing medicine to be considered.

“The demand by patients is high and the cost of providing care continues to rise,” he said. “The medical inflation rate is likely to increase by 8.5 percent in 2012-13.

“It’s hard for us to predict the final outcome, if we’ll ever be able to break even or get ahead of the financial curve that we struggle with on a daily basis because the cost of providing health care will need to be controlled as well,” Cunningham said.

ECU Physicians doesn’t turn away any patient due to a lack of insurance. Only recently have officials anticipated not operating at a deficit, due to approval for higher Medicaid payments since it’s a state-sponsored medical school.

Cunningham agrees that prevention and wellness programs will begin to hold down the costs of medical care in the long term, but he said the cost of providing preventive care is unknown.

It will be an experiment, he said of health reform.

“I think there’s some positive elements associated with it,” Cunningham said. “It’s going to be devilishly complicated to implement though.”

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Tour gives a taste of history
By SHANNON KEITH
Monday, April 30, 2012

More than 30 people got a free history lesson Sunday during the annual Pitt County Historical Society Uptown Walking Tour.

The tour was led by local historian Roger Kammerer.

“I like all of this old stuff, and I have tried to learn about the town’s history and get the flavor of what Greenville used to be,” Kammerer said. “You would be amazed at the changes. One thing that always gets people is that many of the town’s parking lots were built on top of old cemeteries.”

Kammerer said that Pitt County was formed in 1760 from Beaufort County, and Greenville was founded in 1771 as “Martinsborough,” after the Royal Gov. Josiah Martin. In 1786, the name was changed to Greenesville in honor of Gen. Nathanael Greene, an American Revolutionary War hero.

“Nathanael Greene was a much-loved figure in the South, and Greene County, Greensboro and Greenville were all named after him,” Kammerer said. “The name was shortened sometime later.”

From the time of its founding in 1771 until the early 20th century, Greenville did not extend much farther than Fifth Street from the banks of the Tar River, Kammerer said.

“The town grew very slow,” he said. “In fact, the area around Fifth Street was considered so far out of town that it was the industrial area.”
Kammerer pointed out several different buildings in the area of historical significance. The building which holds Winslow’s Tavern on Fifth Street started out as a stable and was later one of the town’s first automobile dealerships before being turned into a hardware store and later into a restaurant. The Starlight Café on Fifth Street sits on the site of the town’s first hotel, The Hotel Bertha. The Park Theatre was the town’s entertainment center for many years.

“It was founded by Sam White, who brought the best of New York theater to Greenville,” Kammerer said. “William Jennings Bryan spoke there once and, during World War II, many actors and actresses spoke there selling war bonds.”

In 1919, the Atlanta Constitution voted Greenville one of the 10 most beautiful towns in the South.

“They did a 34-page layout of the Greenville,” Kammerer said. “People look at those pictures and wonder how the town changed so much. But like so many old towns, it started to grow and did away with everything ‘old’ and tried to make everything modern.”

Kammerer also took the group by the campus of East Carolina University, which was founded as East Carolina Teachers Training School in 1907, was renamed East Carolina Teachers College in 1932, East Carolina College in 1951 and became a university in 1967.

“Something many people don’t know is that the school is built on top of quicksand,” Kammerer said. “I always alarm people when I tell them about all of the earthquakes in Greenville’s history and what could happen in an earthquake to some of these taller buildings that are built on top of quicksand.”

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Cello school sets tone
By Kristin Zachary
Sunday, April 29, 2012

A boy Chris Nunnally met 10 years ago pushed him to return to Greenville to assist in revitalization efforts by way of a cello school.

Nunnally, 32, began studying at East Carolina University in 1998. It was during his time at ECU that the Greenville native moved near the west side of town.

“What was striking to me was the richness of that community, how in touch everyone was with one another and how I felt included in that front-porch type of community,” Nunnally said.

He was teaching cello out of the house and said he interacted with several neighborhood children interested in the music.

His time with the children ultimately formed the idea for The West Side Cello School, a fledgling program today he hopes will encourage kids from varied living circumstances to come together and learn in harmony.

Memories of his interactions with one child, in particular, propelled the dream forward.

“We met when he came around and asked if he could cut the grass,” he said. “The grass didn’t really need cutting, but I let him cut it for five bucks.”

The lawn mower broke at some point, but the boy, who was 10 or 11, continued his visits.
Nunnally learned the boy’s older brother was involved in a gang and his mother had a substance abuse problem. He shared a one-bedroom house with several siblings, cousins and others, he said.

Concerned whether the child was eating, Nunnally on occasion took him to restaurants.

“He’d never eat everything because he was going to take home half of it to his siblings,” he said. “It was heartbreaking.”

Gradually, he saw less of his friend. “I found out through the grapevine that he was pedaling drugs for an older group of guys,” he said.

“I knew this kid,” Nunnally said. “I had started to get to know his life, what he had to deal with and how hard it was. I felt like I never had an opportunity to teach him or be someone that could have helped him.

“I felt powerless,” he said.

Nunnally graduated in 2002 and moved to New York.

After three years as a performing cellist and freelance instructor he entered law school. Nunnally wrote about the boy for his New York Law School essay.

“The whole trajectory was to go to law school, learn about policy and to come back and help these kids that are getting involved in crime,” he said.

“They’re all over the place, and I wanted to do something about it in my hometown.”

Nunnally passed the bar exam in 2008 and began practicing with Gaylord, McNally, Strickland & Snyder, L.L.P., a firm in Greenville.

About the same time, he began teaching cello lessons out of his Farmville home.

“A few years ago, I hit a wall and had a moment of reflection,” he said. “I had just turned 30 years old and asked myself if I was doing what I really wanted to be doing.”

Nunnally said he loved his job at the law firm, but many of the clients he represented had an extensive list of crimes committed prior to his representation.

“A lot of times you feel hamstrung about what you can do to make the situation better,” he said. “It’s a frustrating position to be in, especially as a teacher. There is only so much you can do.”
He left the firm last year and began Nunnally Law Offices, PLLC, where he focuses primarily on dental and medical cases.

A few months later, he began teaching in the afternoons as a strings instructor at The Oakwood School.

He also continued private cello lessons in the evenings, and in 2010 moved West Side Cello School to a space above Gawlick Violin Shop on South Evans Street.

Two months ago, he opened in west Greenville at a home on Manhattan Avenue.

“One of the reasons I moved back to Greenville is selfishness,” Nunnally said. “There are few places I can practice law, be a musician, run a school and still feel like I’m having a good time.”

Nunnally, while enjoying his varied careers, also is working to revitalize the city, he said.

“I have big dreams about what I’d like the school to do for Greenville,” he said.

It’s not just what the school does for the neighborhood where it is located, but the city as a whole, he said.

“I want it to be a part of what I feel like Greenville is becoming, which is a really good place to raise a family and an improving place to be a young professional,” he said.

“It’s fun to be downtown, and it’s fun to be able to walk and talk to neighbors and sit on the front porch,” Nunnally said. “Dickinson Avenue, Chestnut Street and Myrtle Avenue, all of those places — I want everyone that currently lives here to feel good about it.

“I want the kids that grow up here to not feel like they’ve got to leave the neighborhood to make it,” he said. “If people are doing rather than going, I think Greenville really could be the center of eastern North Carolina and a center that we can be proud of and should be proud of.”

Nunnally’s three-phase project was set in motion with the purchase of the home at 104 Manhattan Ave., a bright place with its green exterior and musical interior.

As the project grows, Nunnally plans to work with lower-income students citywide, providing them the opportunity to play cello, violin and viola and study classical strings. This is phase two, he said.
“Phase three would be a full-fledged school with academics where students from all over the city from all different backgrounds can come, interact and participate in the same sorts of activities and really be proud of something,” he said.

Also among his plans is an art gallery that houses exhibits, social events and chamber music concerts, set to open at 108 Paris Ave., a property he has been renovating since its purchase last year.

For now, though, Nunnally hopes having his 13 private students and their families come to lessons in the west Greenville neighborhood will begin to break down preconceived notions.

“I think there’s a perception that there’s a whole lot of crime, a lot of drug dealing on the street corners and gun matches, but it’s just not that way,” he said.

“The first phase is to show this side of town is just not a war zone,” Nunnally said.

“He’s got a great vision,” said Kirsti Bertrand, whose 6-year-old son, Liam, has been taking private lessons with Nunnally for two years. “It’s fun to be a part of it.”

“The push to change the perception of this neighborhood — my dream is that it happens in a way that it’s diverse revitalization where folks feel like it’s OK to own their own home in this neighborhood, feel safe in and be proud of their neighborhood,” Nunnally said.

“It’s easy to do something like this here because there’s no resistance to it,” he said. “No one hates music.

“I’ll teach a student that wants to be taught for next to nothing because it’s a gain for me,” Nunnally said. “It’s not really about the money. It’s about the relationship. It’s about the community.”

He doesn’t want to give anything for free, though, as he wants to instill in his students that education should not be taken for granted.

Nunnally hopes to secure a nearby lot to develop a community garden and said children unable to afford lessons could work in the garden to cover costs.

Many children grow up in environments like the boy he knew 10 years ago, Nunnally said.
“I can’t pretend to be able to influence kids to not do whatever they want to do,” he said. “But if that kid were to find himself on my front stoop now, I’d put an instrument in his hands.

“Reaching just one kid is worth it,” Nunnally said. “That’s why I came back to Greenville.”

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ECU students learn through public service

East Carolina University leaders celebrated a new model for student learning and public service on April 25 by recognizing Student Engagement and Outreach Scholars Academy participants.

ECU’s program is believed to be the first of its kind and a national model in pairing graduate students, undergraduate East Carolina Scholars and faculty mentors across disciplines at ECU to work with community partners on a semester-long spring project, said Beth Velde, academy coordinator and director of public service and community relations at ECU.

Ten teams were honored Wednesday in a ceremony at Willis Building Auditorium.

Hannah Potter, an international studies and religious studies Honors College student from Marshville, said she enjoyed experiencing research, especially a type that could have an immediate impact on the community. She worked with Samantha Fuerderer of Greenville, a graduate student in the School of Communication, at the Building Hope Community Life Center in Greenville.

“Before I became involved in the Student Engagement and Outreach Scholars Academy, I never realized how involved my university is with the community,” Fuerderer said. “Working with a local organization enabled me to see firsthand the value of forming outreach partnerships.”

The center is a faith-based organization designed to help at-risk youth from local schools stay on track academically while giving them social and spiritual support. The ECU team, with faculty mentor Robbie Quinn in the College of Fine Arts & Communication, sought to address whether the involvement of students in weekly art activities influenced their resilience traits, or traits that help students overcome changes or hardships.

While the research work has ended, Quinn and undergraduate art students will be working with the center to design and paint a mural this summer.

In some instances, the ECU teams included people from different departments, which Deirdre Mageean, vice chancellor of research and graduate studies, described as a “rare, interesting mix.”
Velde partnered with Katie O’Connor, director of E.C. Scholars, to develop the project, which builds on an existing student outreach academy that started in 2009.

Chancellor Steve Ballard congratulated the scholars on the difference they are making in their communities.

“This is at the heart of ECU,” he said. He challenged participants to spread the word about the good work that is being done to highlight the university’s role in public service and to help stem cynicism about investing in education.

“There is nothing more important than having an impact on our communities, region and state,” he said. “We are making a difference for people.”

A complete list of participants and their projects is online at http://bit.ly/IbnBay.

**ECU recognizes achievement**

A business professor received the top teaching award at ECU during the annual Founders Day and University Awards Celebration on Wednesday.

Ravi Paul received the University of North Carolina Board of Governors Award for Excellence in Teaching. Paul is an associate professor in the Department of Management Information Systems in the ECU College of Business.

“I have high expectations for learning, and I believe students rise to the expectations we set for them,” he said after receiving the award.

Also recognized was Dr. Tom Irons, associate vice chancellor for health sciences and professor of pediatrics at the Brody School of Medicine at ECU. Last fall, he received the UNC Board of Governors Award for Excellence in Public Service.

“We’ve got to keep the focus on service above self,” Irons said.

Dr. Susan McCammon received the James R. Talton Jr. Leadership Award. She is professor and director of clinical training in the Department of Psychology.

A complete list of award recipients is online at http://bit.ly/IsdR9N.
Nobel Laureate visits ECU

Nobel Prize recipient Dr. Peter Agre said much of what he does now is “science diplomacy” during a Monday visit to East Carolina University.

Agre, who shared the 2003 Nobel Prize for Chemistry with Roderick Mac-Kinnon, had a wide-ranging discussion during a lunch break with students at the Brody Medical Sciences Building.

“Science is a way we can bring the world together,” Agre said while discussing his worldwide travels and meetings with scientific and political leaders in various countries. He and students talked about the state of science and scientific career opportunities, health care financing, the national debt and Agre’s near-run for Minnesota’s U.S. Senate seat in 2008.

Of all topics, however, it was Agre’s 2006 appearance on the television show “The Colbert Report” that drew the most response from students. He appeared as a representative of the group Scientists and Engineers for America, which advocates sound science in government.

“You can work for five decades in a lab and nobody cares, and you’re on ‘The Colbert Report’ for five minutes, and people are, ‘Wow!’” he said, drawing laughter.

Agre is a physician, molecular biologist and professor at Johns Hopkins University. He received the Nobel Prize for his discovery of aquaporins, waterchannel proteins that move water molecules through the cell membrane. He has since turned his focus to the study of malaria.

While at ECU, Agre also gave a lecture on aquaporins and visited with medical faculty members and administrators. He was in Greenville as a guest of the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology at the Brody School of Medicine.

Medical faculty members publish book

“The PICU Book: A Primer for Medical Students, Residents and Acute Care Practitioners,” edited by Drs. Ronald Perkin, William Novotny and Irma Fiordalisi, has been published by World Scientific Press.

Perkin is professor and chair of pediatrics at the Brody School of Medicine at ECU and co-medical director of Vidant Children’s Hospital. Fiordalisi is professor and chief of pediatric critical care. Novotny is professor and critical care specialist.
Coming events

Thursday: Lecture: “The Next Great Artist” winner and ECU alumna Kymia Nawabi will speak about her art and life, 5-7 p.m. at Speight Auditorium. For more information, email Scott Eagle at eagles@ecu.edu.

Friday: ECU Spring Commencement, 9-11 a.m. at Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium. More information is available online at http://www.ecu.edu/commencement or by calling 737-1016.
UPDATE: Two ECU Basketball Players Arrested, Suspended From Team
Posted: Sun 7:49 PM, Apr 29, 2012

Two ECU basketball players were arrested early Sunday morning on misdemeanor charges of intoxicated and disruptive behavior and resisting a public officer.

According to officials at the Pitt County Detention Center 21-year-old Corvonn Gaines and 21-year-old Tylisman Armstrong were brought to the jail around 1:30 a.m. Both were released on a $1,000 secured bond each around 4 a.m.

ECU head coach Jeff Lebo released a statement regarding the arrests saying, "We are aware of the incident involving our student-athletes and are in the process of gathering all of the facts. They have been suspended indefinitely from all team activities. We have a set of conduct standards in place that we expect our players to abide by."

Gaines is a junior at ECU and plays guard on the basketball team.

Armstrong is also a junior. He transferred from Auburn to ECU this year. He had to sit out a year after transferring. He will officially be added to the roster this Fall. Armstrong plays forward and center.

Jail officials say both men were arrested by Greenville police. We have called police to request more information.

We will bring you more details as soon as they become available.
District rolls out graduation rules
By Jackie Drake
Monday, April 30, 2012

Pitt County Schools leaders are taking a pro-active approach to handle increasing disruptions at graduation to ensure that everyone enjoys a dignified ceremony in June.

District staff have put the finishing touches on a new set of procedures that outline audience expectations for commencement ceremonies, including entry regulations and proper conduct for celebrating.

A task force was formed last year to guide the process after concerns were raised about the distraction of late arrivals and excessive cheering drowning out the calling of graduates’ names.

“Historically, there hasn’t been much of a problem with student behavior; the distractions have come from the public,” Board of Education member and task force leader Sean Kenny said.

“The whole idea is to get everyone to come to agreeable terms as to what is acceptable behavior,” public information officer Heather Mayo said.

Under the new procedures, no applauding, shouting, whistling or noisemakers will be allowed. Attendees must be on time and remain seated for the duration of the ceremony. New this year, families will not receive their tickets unless they return a signed pledge saying they understand and will follow the rules.

“Our goal is to provide an environment where every parent can hear their child’s name being called,” D.H. Conley High School Principal and task force member Mary Carter said. “Every parent has that right, and every student has that right.”

Letters have gone out to families with graduating students at all six public high schools, and the pledges are starting to come in.

Most students at D.H. Conley already have returned signed pledges, according to Carter.

“We have faith that our public will come in a spirit of celebration that will not embarrass students or others in the audience,” Kenny said.
Officials recognize that people want to celebrate but are trying to keep the demonstrations within reason.

“We technically are asking that people don’t applaud, but we know most people will stop by the time anyone gets there,” Mayo said. “The factor in being approached is when it becomes excessive.”

More staff members will be on hand in Minges Coliseum this year to enforce the procedures and have received training from East Carolina University officers who also will be present. But task force members say the goal is not to have law enforcement eject anyone if possible; the first plan of action is for staff members to remind attendees of the procedures so officers don’t have to intervene.

“We hope it doesn’t get to that point,” Lt. Chris Sutton of the ECU Police Department said. “It is my hope that everyone will comply, within reason, in a way that doesn’t prohibit others’ enjoyment of the ceremony. We understand that if we have to confront someone that would also distract from what’s happening on stage.”

Staff and officers will handle serious disruptions case by case, Sutton said. Also new this year will be metal detectors at the entrance to catch whistles, noisemakers, Silly String cans and other items.

“Our hope is that because families have received this information ahead of time that people won’t be coming to the door with that stuff,” Mayo said.

“We’ve not had a safety concern, but this is an added precaution to have that extra layer of protection to maintain the dignity of the ceremony,” Sutton said.

Two metal detectors will be at each of the three open coliseum gates.

“This will create longer lines and more delays than people are used to,” Sutton said.

Attendees are encouraged to arrive 30-45 minutes early. Those who arrive late but before diplomas are handed out will be allowed to enter but must sit in a designated area to reduce traffic. Those who arrive after diploma handout begins, or about 20 minutes into the ceremony, will not be allowed entry.

Students are key in getting a positive message to their parents and family members ahead of time to avoid problems, Mayo said.
“We’ve worked for four years to get our name called — everyone should have equal opportunity to be heard,” Conley student Miles Wobbleton said. “If every student told their parents and families that this is our time, that’s the best way to do it.”

Mayo’s office produced a districtwide promotional video about the new procedures that will air on the public access channel until graduation. Each of the six school ceremonies will show a video featuring their graduates asking the audience to be respectful.

“We didn’t want to go the negative route,” Board of Education and task force member Barbara Owens said. “This has been the most positive process I’ve been involved in. This is a positive approach to making a wonderful ceremony even better.”

Contact Jackie Drake at jdrake@reflector.com or 252-329-9567 or follow her on Twitter @JackieDrakeGDR.

**Graduation**

Highlights of the new procedure:
- All attendees must pass through a metal detector.
- Arrive early to leave enough time to get through the line.
- Gates open one hour and 15 minutes prior to the ceremony.
- Must have original perforated ticket; no photocopies.
- Those who arrive less than 20 minutes late must sit in a special section.
- No entry will be granted 20 minutes after ceremony start time when diploma handout begins.
- No bags larger than 10x10x10 inches.
- No whistles, air horns or other noisemakers.
- No beach balls or balloons or other throwing objects.
- No posters, signs or banners.
- No confetti or silly string.
- No flash photography or tripods.
- Remain seated until graduates leave the arena.
- Meet-up arrangements should be made ahead of time; cellphones are recommended to be left in vehicles.

Full procedure available from Pitt County Schools
Former East Carolina football players Steven Baker, Dominique Davis and Lance Lewis each signed with NFL teams Saturday following the league’s draft.

Baker (Indianapolis Colts), Davis (Atlanta Falcons) and Lewis (Washington Redskins) all signed as undrafted free agents. The players, and ECU offensive coordinator Lincoln Riley, announced the signings via Twitter.
Dentists on guard against competition
By Scott Mooneyham

A lot of dentists in North Carolina seem to believe that allowing corporate profit to be taken out of dental practices would be bad for their bottom line and for their patients’ health.

Some companies allied with other dentists see it differently. They believe that they can help dentists set up practices more cheaply if the dentists farm out to them administrative tasks like billing and payroll.

As Mark Binker of Raleigh TV station WRAL recently reported, the two sides are now engaged in a lobbying and televised ad war to try to influence state lawmakers.

Those lawmakers are considering legislation that would give the North Carolina Dental Board more power to regulate agreements between dentists and for-profit management companies.

The N.C. Dental Society is pushing legislation, already approved in the state Senate, so that the board can enforce a longstanding state law prohibiting dental practices from being owned and operated by anyone other than practicing dentists.

Critics of the management companies say that some have skirted the law with aggressive arrangements that give the firms a larger say over operations. The arrangements end up looking a lot like partnerships.

Dental Society officials say those kinds of arrangements have the potential to make corporate profits a higher priority than patient care.

Maybe so.

But it’s not clear that either side really has patients as their primary concern.

The longstanding law that requires dental practices to be owned by dentists exists, in part, to ensure that professional standards aren’t undermined by other concerns. The dental board has a legitimate worry that the most aggressive forms of management agreements could make investor return more important than patient care.
Of course, more outside arrangements might mean more competition. Some North Carolina dentists have never been real keen on trends that might create more competition.

In 2006, as the legislature began funding a new dental school at East Carolina University, feuding among dentists over the proposal caused a rift within the state Dental Society. Five years later, North Carolina still ranks only 47th among the 50 states in terms of the number of dentists available per 10,000 people.

The legislation that moved through the state Senate gives the state Dental Board nearly unfettered authority to block the management arrangements.

It would allow the board to review each arrangement, which could be stopped on such vague grounds as having “a potential negative impact on patient care.” The bill includes a long list of no-nos intended to prevent arrangements in which a for-profit company becomes a de facto partner, but then states that the list isn’t “exhaustive” of the things that the board can ban.

Tom Fetzer, the former state Republican Party head who is lobbying for the companies, told WRAL the proposal was “a tremendous regulatory over-reach.” He might have come up with a different term if not for fear of alienating some of the Republicans whom he helped bring to power at the legislature: ideological confusion.

Scott Mooneyham writes a syndicated column for the Capital Press Association.
Peter Burian began teaching Duke students Greek drama and Latin more than four decades ago, before students had computers in their pockets and earbuds dangling from their necks. The classics professor challenges today's undergraduate to slow down, dig deep and think before they communicate. In an era when students are obsessed with technology and instant everything, Burian leads them on a journey to the ancient world, where they find surprisingly relevant messages. After 44 years, he will teach his last class on Wednesday.

**Duke professor leaves classroom, hopes to restore importance of language, history, literature**

By Jane Stancill - jstancill@newsobserver.com Published April 29, 2012

**DURHAM** In a narrow seminar room at Duke University, Peter Burian leads 14 students through ancient Rome to the palatial Baths of Caracalla, where 1,600 Romans at a time could soak in pools of cool, warm and hot water.

His mellifluous voice narrates the slideshow from his laptop. The imperial baths, he said, were a place where all of society gathered, where any Roman could rub shoulders with another. “There’s nothing like taking all of your clothes off to level the playing field,” Burian told the students.

It’s the end of the semester, and that means the students are witnessing the decline of the Roman Empire, with parallels to the modern economic meltdown in Greece and other parts of Europe.

For 44 years, Burian, a professor of classical studies, has transported his students to the ancient world, a place inhabited by emperors and slaves, gods and heroes. And along the way, he has taught them about their own time and place, and maybe a bit about themselves.

Burian’s last class at Duke was Wednesday. At 68, he’s retiring from the classroom, but will spend a year as dean of humanities at Duke, where he will put his wisdom to work on larger questions about the study of languages, literature, history, philosophy, religion.
It’s a point of critical tension for American higher education. For decades, students have been turning away from those subjects in favor of social sciences, business and science. In 1967, nearly 18 percent of all U.S. undergraduate degrees awarded were in the humanities; in 2009, the share had dropped to about 8 percent, according to data from the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

It’s no wonder. Any conversation about education these days seems to revolve around “STEM,” the acronym for science, technology, engineering and mathematics. People talk about higher education as job preparation, and parents who pay hefty tuition bills get antsy if their children aren’t acquiring marketable skills.

Amid the rush to math and science, though, there is a growing chorus of those who say the humanities may actually be great preparation for a complex world. Earlier this month, about 250 higher education leaders from across the country gathered at Wake Forest University for a conference called “Rethinking Success: From the Liberal Arts to Careers in the 21st Century.” There, a CEO, an economist and former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice talked about the value of a broad education that challenges students to be critical thinkers and creative problem solvers.

Burian, too, believes there is lifelong value to understanding what happened 2,000 years ago, to digging into the difficult works of Virgil, Homer and Euripides.

“There’s a place for stuff that really does kind of make you slow down and think, make you question whether you understand what’s going on, make you wonder about your own beliefs,” Burian said. “The greater value is discovering yourself in some way.”

**Slow down, think**

In his calm, gentle way, Burian urges his students to reflect. He requires them to bring a question to class each day, which provides a launch pad for discussion.

Burian arrived at Duke in 1968, long before laptops and iPads, Facebook and Twitter. Students are as smart and accomplished as ever, he said, though they don’t seem to read as much as they used to.

“People are flooded with information,” he said. “Sometimes I think that we should just stop using the word information for a decade or so until we can figure it out exactly what we mean by it. Everything is information. It’s all out there and the idea is to get as much of it as quickly as you can. That sort of leaves open the
question of what you do with it. I guess that that’s my feeling about where the humanities ought to come in.”

Duke is taking a new look at how these subjects fit into the university’s curriculum. Last year, the university received a five-year, $6 million grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to revitalize undergraduate humanities.

Part of the effort will look at how the traditional fields fit in with vast changes in society. So, for example, studying the Arab Spring revolutions requires understanding technology and social networks; it also must include questions about language, culture and history.

“We want to be with it, we want to be modern, we want not to seem tedious and old-fashioned and frumpy,” Burian said in his office, surrounded by floor-to-ceiling shelves crammed with books. “But really, a lot of what the traditional humanities have been good for is not speeding up and creating all the information that you can, but in slowing down, reflecting, developing the imagination, taking the long view and thinking about how to think. And if we don’t have that role, I’m not sure where it’s going to come from.”

So there is work to do, and that’s what Burian will sink his teeth into next year as dean.

It shouldn’t be a problem for the scholar in Greek drama and literary translation who has written five books, numerous articles and taught more than 50 different courses during his years at Duke. Even in his last semester in the classroom, he took on a new course and taught every weekday – unusual for a senior faculty member.

He takes on demanding translations, speaks beautiful Italian and he lends his ear to students, said Tolly Boatwright, a professor in classical studies.

“He offers students a way to connect with humanities and being human,” Boatwright said. “He listens to students and draws them out and encourages them to develop in that way.”

Haun Saussy enrolled at Duke in 1977, and decided to try Burian’s course in beginning Greek. By Christmas, he was reading Plato.

“Right away I decided that being a Greek major was the most interesting thing I could do,” said Saussy, now a professor of Chinese and comparative literature at the University of Chicago. “He was just a terrific teacher ... He was just a great observer and commentator and made it come alive.”

Adapting at Duke
Burian was raised around Boston and in Iowa City, where his father was an ophthalmologist at the University of Iowa. His family was dominated by science and medical types, and he tried it himself, working at a hospital kidney lab for two summers.

It wasn’t for him. A bookish youngster, he enrolled at the University of Michigan, where his freshman adviser encouraged him to try Greek. He was hooked, and went on to write his Princeton dissertation on Greek tragedy.

After he took a job at Duke, Burian had to overcome his anxiety about standing up in front of a classroom. Short and just 25, he wore a tie to class every day so the students knew he was the professor.

“I’d never taught anybody anything,” he said. “My greatest fear was that 40 or 45 minutes in I’d run out of things to say and everybody would see me for the fraud that I was.”

So he over-prepared, every night writing and refining his lectures. “Once I relaxed a little bit,” he said, “I realized I loved teaching.”

Then, of course, he had to learn about the South. When he tried to start a chapter of Faculty Against the Vietnam War, he was called on the carpet by an administrator who told him campus mail could not be used for private activities. And crossing the parking lot on the way from a protest in Army surplus gear, the scruffy-bearded Burian encountered the Duke president.

“Terry Sanford emerges and looks at me with this obvious what-the-hell-is-this-person-doing-on-my-campus look and said, ‘Howdy.’ And I said, ‘Howdy.’”

Though he may have started as an outsider, Burian would become something of an institution at Duke. He chaired his department and served on dozens of university committees; he led the main faculty governance body, the Academic Council, in 2000-2002.

Along the way, he got a front-row seat as Duke blossomed from a good regional campus to a national player and a top-10 university. Duke’s rise was partly due to its investment in humanities, Burian said, when a provost realized he could build a first-rate English department for the price of a few chemists with their labs and graduate students.

Back at the classroom, Burian fumbles a bit with a cord that doesn’t work with his laptop. During the slideshow, he clicks on the wrong spot, and the slides disappear. A student helps him get back on track with his mouse.
Burian may not be completely comfortable with the latest technology. But when he assigns his students “The Iliad,” he knows that they gain something from the difficult epic poem.

They ride the emotional journey of Achilles, the fierce warrior who is ultimately a fragile character.

“In the end, the kinds of human issues that we all face are identifiable,” Burian said. “There’s something important about recognizing that people have been worrying about the same things, arguing about them, desperately trying to understand them, forever.”

**He was ‘the one’**

Did Peter Burian stop the Nixon library at Duke?

In a way, yes. In 1981, Duke was in the throes of a scorching debate about whether to allow a library on campus for the papers of former president Richard Nixon, a Duke law alumnus.

The university’s faculty body, the Academic Council, was scheduled for a vote at the beginning of the fall semester.

Burian, who opposed the library, was nowhere near Durham. On a trip to visit his brother in Philadelphia, the professor had suffered a ruptured appendix and was rushed into emergency surgery.

Back in Durham, history professor Syd Nathans had done a head count of the council. The vote would be a tie, Nathans concluded.

“He called me up and said, ‘You have to be back here for the vote, it’s going to be that close.’ ” Burian recalled. “And I said, ‘I’m not supposed to get out of bed.’”

The next thing Burian knew, he was tucked into the reclining passenger seat of his tiny Datsun. The driver was a teacher on strike, a friend of his sister-in-law, and the trip was one painful bump after another.

But Burian made it to the meeting, where he cast a “no” vote. Library opponents won by a single vote.

The trustees aimed to push ahead anyway and the faculty rose up in fury that its vote, even a close vote, would be so disregarded.
Eventually, though, the proposal faded away and the library was built instead in California.
Recent N.C. State graduate, Amber Arrington, 23, cares for corn stalks Friday, April 20, 2012, at Syngenta's greenhouse research facility in Research Triangle Park. Although RTP continues to attract major investments from companies, its sprawling suburban campus lacks many of the amenities and features that companies today say spurs innovation.

RTP seeks to be more inviting for smaller companies, quick innovation

By David Bracken - dbracken@newsobserver.com

RESEARCH TRIANGLE PARK As a 23-year-old contract worker for agribusiness giant Syngenta, Amber Arrington enjoys her job as a greenhouse technician, roaming the aisles of the company’s greenhouses and inspecting supplies of corn. But ask her how she feels about the legendary research park where she works, and a puzzled look comes over her face.

“I don’t hang out here or go out to lunch here,” she said. “... I leave and then come back to work.”

Her complaint is not new.

For decades, Research Triangle Park’s model was simple: sell large chunks of its 7,000 acres to major companies for sprawling campuses. But early in this decade, it became obvious that wasn’t enough. People who worked in RTP wanted more – more places to live, to eat and to go after work. The companies they worked for, concerned about retaining and hiring the best talent, wanted those things, too.
Two years ago, concerned about competition from other research parks within the state and around the globe, RTP hired a New York urban design firm to update its master plan for the first time since the park was formed in 1959.

Since then, the urgency has also heightened as new competitors – Durham’s American Tobacco Campus and N.C. State University’s Centennial Campus, to name two – have attracted numerous start-ups.

The park, meanwhile, has been hurt by appearing to be content to be a suburban, isolated campus environment, said Joel Marcus, CEO of Alexandria Real Estate Equities, a California company that has been in the park since 1998 and today owns nearly a million square feet of lab space in RTP.

“That’s really not today’s world,” he said.

The new master plan is supposed to rectify that, though in typical RTP fashion the park’s leaders are being very deliberate in how they go about making changes. The design firm’s review is now complete and the contents of it are being shared with the park’s various stakeholders, but have yet to be released to the public.

Park officials say they are making sure that all the parties – landowners, local governments and the legislature – are on board before presenting their plan to the world. They also say they have a obligation to do it right given the park’s importance to both the Triangle and the state.

“This is a historic moment,” said Bob Geolas, the new CEO of the Research Triangle Park Foundation, the nonprofit that runs the park. “This park has driven the psychology of this state.”

Geolas, 47, took over from Rick Weddle, who led the foundation from 2004 until early last year. Geolas previously led both Centennial Campus and Clemson’s International Center for Automotive Research, and his arrival has been welcomed by people such as Marcus who are eager to see the park evolve.

“I think the park has lost ground over the last five to 10 years because of a lack of leadership,” Marcus said.

While not disclosing specifics, Geolas describes a future RTP where the phrase, “It’s Friday night, let’s go out to the park,” could be uttered with a straight face. Clearly adding more amenities – restaurants, shops and residential apartments and homes – to certain areas of the park will be part of the new vision.

But Geolas talks less about real estate deals and more about innovation – turning the park into a kind of technology city where researchers from all the Triangle universities will do groundbreaking work and visitors will be able to understand how the research being done there affects their everyday lives.
Economic calling card

To say there’s a lot riding on turning this vision into reality is an understatement. RTP has been the economic engine of the Triangle, so much so that its redevelopment is arguably the most important infill project in the state.

The importance of the park’s continued success has only grown in the wake of the Great Recession. At a time when all states are scrambling to figure out where the jobs of the future will come from, RTP remains North Carolina’s economic calling card to the rest of the world.

About 39,000 employees now work in the park, plus an estimated 10,000 more contractors. RTP has about 600 acres available for sale, plus another roughly 370 acres that are owned by companies but are expected to come on the market in the future.

The updated master plan is likely to revise the zoning restrictions to allow for more high-density development to occur both on corporate campuses and in select development areas that will be sprinkled throughout the park.

The desire for such changes is an acknowledgement that although the park remains a place where many companies do cutting-edge work, its model no longer fits the way the global economy operates.

Advances in technology and science have shortened the life cycle for all kinds of products, putting increased pressure on even the most established companies to constantly innovate or risk becoming obsolete. In the last few years a number of iconic brands – from Sony to Blackberry-maker Research in Motion to Yahoo – have see their businesses erode at stunning speed.

Companies today equate innovation with collaboration – not isolation – and they are seeking places that offer amenities and work environments that will help foster it. For the park, this will mean bringing in developers to create centers – think North Hills or American Tobacco – where workers and visitors alike can eat, shop, stay overnight at a hotel and even live.

“Clearly people are very focused on are there amenities that will keep you in and around locations,” Marcus said. “Science is very collaborative so you want collaborative spaces and you want amenities.”

Geolas believes that while RTP remains among the premier research and development parks in the world, its appeal to younger workers such as Arrington is no longer as secure as it once was.

“If you’re 45 and younger, it’s a much bigger list,” he said. “We may or may not be in the top 15.”
A ‘reaction vessel’

Part of the challenge for RTP is that, unlike research and development hubs in places such as Boston and San Francisco, the park won’t ever be considered an urban environment no matter how much redevelopment occurs. Geolas said the key will be to make improvements while still retaining one of the attributes that makes it unique: large amounts of green space.

He cites the N.C. Museum of Art in Raleigh as an example of a place that has a unique look and feel that also speaks to the identity of the state.

Perhaps the best example of the direction the park is headed in is the partnership announced in February between Alexandria Real Estate Equities and the Hamner Institutes.

Hamner is selling its 56-acre RTP campus to Alexandria for $20 million as part of a sale, lease-back deal, and the two are joining forces to create the Research Triangle Park Collaboration Consortium. It will be a neutral setting where universities, public and private corporations and other institutions can come together to accelerate the development of new medicines.

William Greenlee, Hamner’s CEO, describes the project as North Carolina’s equivalent to what’s going on in Cambridge, Mass., where Harvard University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and numerous life sciences companies are all within a few blocks of each other.

“While we’re not going to create Cambridge in the park, through the master plan we were able to develop on this 56-acre site ... a life sciences cluster that would not be about any one entity,” Greenlee said. “I call it a reaction vessel where the molecules will collide. We think that can be a real hotbed of innovation.”

Geolas said a key component of the master plan revision will be to make the park more accessible to a wider range of companies, possibly by creating “pop-up labs” that will allow for the type of incubators now being operated in downtown Durham and elsewhere.

Today, RTP is filled with a number of aging office buildings designed for a single tenant. Although there is some incubator space, the majority of the park’s more-than-170 companies either bought and developed chunks of land or signed the type of long-term lease that requires an extensive credit history.

Smaller is better?

Particularly in the fields of science and technology, it is often smaller companies with limited access to capital that are doing the most cutting-edge work. Their lack
of a presence in the park is considered a detriment, even by the large, established
companies that the startups are trying to topple.

That’s not to say large companies want to abandon their existing campuses in the
park. Indeed, many continue to spend millions upgrading and expanding them.
They simply want the benefits of being close to their more nimble competitors.

Biogen Idec, for example, which employs 950 people in the park, is in process of
constructing a 190,000-square-foot office building loaded with amenities that will
give the company’s employees little reason to leave its campus. Still, the drug
development company eagerly supports the park’s efforts to bring in more startups
because of the opportunity to share ideas through co-development agreements,
acquisitions or other partnership arrangements.

“Most future innovation is coming from these smaller companies,” said Mike
McBrierty, senior manager of public affairs for Biogen. “... By having more of that
mix and increasing the attractiveness for smaller, entrepreneurial companies, I
think everyone wins.”

Geolas knows this better than most.

At Centennial, Geolas watched as Lucent Technologies announced to great fanfare
its plan to locate a research center on the campus. Two years later, the
telecommunications company shuttered the center. About a year later, a startup
named Red Hat moved in.

As for when RTP will make public its new master plan, which will ultimately
require approval from officials in Durham and Wake counties and the legislature,
Geolas said no timetable has been set. He hopes it will occur this year, but he
reiterated that getting it right is the most important thing.

“What’s important to me is that people see the park as moving forward,” he said.

News researcher Teresa Leonard contributed.
Chris Washburn has opened his own restaurant, Washburn's Wings and More. Washburn, whose NBA career was cut short by drug abuse, has returned home to Hickory. JEFF WILLHELM - jwillhelm@charlotteobserver.com

Ex-NCSU star Washburn tries for one more rebound

By David Scott - dscott@charlotteobserver.com

Published April 30, 2012

HICKORY - Chris Washburn doesn’t have to go far to be reminded of the dark days when he was a 6-foot-11 addict wandering the streets of his hometown looking for drugs.

As Washburn sits in the shade behind his recently opened restaurant on the fringes of downtown Hickory, he is able to briefly flash the gap-toothed grin that was so familiar to fans of Atlantic Coast Conference and N.C. State University basketball 25 years ago.

“I would sit right here and do my drugs,” says Washburn. “This was a good spot for it."

In the mid-1990s, the building that now houses Washburn’s Wings and More offered a hiding place for Washburn to smoke crack cocaine. Washburn, whose promising professional basketball career was short-circuited by drug abuse, had returned to Hickory for a few years, shamelessly bumming money from his parents and others to fund his habit.

Washburn, 45, says he is drug free now; has been for 12 years. This time, he says, his focus is on running a business and helping his community.
That starts at the restaurant he opened in January with co-owner and girlfriend Monique Richardson. Prices are reasonable – mostly under $5 – for the wings, fried chicken and other items. And customers who are unable to pay can work for their meals.

“If somebody doesn’t have a job, I can’t turn him away,” says Washburn. “There’s work to do around here – sweeping the parking lot, dumping trash…”

“A man doesn’t always want a handout. He wants to work for what he can get.”

**Meteoric rise, hard fall**

Washburn knows what it’s like to be down. One of the most gifted basketball players North Carolina has produced, his demise was well-chronicled.

A highly recruited three-time All-American in high school (at Hickory High, Virginia’s Fork Union Military Academy and Laurinburg Prep), Washburn chose to play at N.C. State in 1984.

Trouble followed Washburn in Raleigh: In his freshman year, he stole a stereo from a dorm, served 46 hours in jail and was suspended from the team seven games into the season.

But as a sophomore in 1985-86, Washburn lived up to his potential. A second-team All-ACC selection, he averaged 17.6 points and 6.7 rebounds while shooting 56.2 percent.

He turned pro after that season and was the third overall pick in the NBA draft, by the Golden State Warriors, in the talent-rich 1986 draft. Only North Carolina’s Brad Daugherty and Maryland’s Len Bias were taken ahead of Washburn.

Washburn, who had begun experimenting with drugs at N.C. State, was close friends with Bias, who died of a cocaine overdose two days after the draft.

Washburn didn’t fit in with his older teammates on the Warriors. He began partying and using drugs and his life and career spiraled downward.

After failing a third drug test in 1989, he was banned from the NBA. He had played 72 games over two seasons for the Warriors and Atlanta Hawks, averaging 3.1 points and 2.4 rebounds.
Washburn would play for a few years in the Continental Basketball Association and the U.S. Basketball League. He also played overseas in Argentina, Puerto Rico, Greece, Spain, Switzerland and Colombia.

“The drugs were really good in Colombia,” he says.

When his playing days ended, Washburn landed in Houston, most of the $1.25 million he earned in the NBA gone. Destitute, he says ate out of trash cans and slept in abandoned buildings and crack houses. He spent time in jail on drug charges.

**False starts**

Washburn returned to Hickory for two or three years in the 1990s. He needed money to supply his habit.

“My dad’s last visions of me were of a (6-foot-11) dope fiend sliding along the floor stealing money from his wallet,” Washburn says. “My mom kept her purse locked up in a filing cabinet at church.”

Washburn returned to Houston, where he lived on the streets. He remembers a man sitting next to him being shot point-blank by a drug dealer.

“I saw people get killed all the time,” he says.

Washburn says he hit bottom one day in 1993 when he asked his mother for money to buy drugs.

Savannah Washburn refused. And she told her son to write her name, address and phone on a piece of paper and put it in his wallet.

“That way, when they found my body, they’d know where to send it,” Washburn says.

**Scraping off rock bottom**

Although he says he was in and out of 14 rehab clinics over the years, he says he kicked the habit himself.

His motivation came when his father died in 2000. “I started thinking that I was the only person that my mom has now,” says Washburn.
“I had all the book knowledge, but I didn’t want to apply it before,” Washburn says. “I’m on a program of ‘self.’ I don’t go to meetings. I don’t read big books. I still go to bars and hang out other places with friends and maybe I see them using drugs.

“But I don’t have that taste in my mouth anymore.”

As Washburn weaned himself off drugs, he moved to Dallas and began working in the collections for mortgage companies. He met Richardson in 2009. Last year, they moved to Hickory to be closer to his mother.

And he wanted to make a positive difference.

Richardson – who has a son and daughter of her own – had longed dreamed of owning her own restaurant.

“She had the idea, I had the money,” says Washburn, who receives a check from an NBA insurance policy to cover old injuries every month.

**Pain of being forgotten**

Washburn’s years on drugs cost him relationships.

He always noticed that he wasn’t mentioned as one of Hickory’s famous athletes on the city’s Wikipedia entry (as former NASCAR driver Dale Jarrett and NFL kicker Ryan Succop were). Washburn’s name is now on the list.

“People are enjoying his restaurant and they’re coming by to support him,” says Mandy Pitts, the City of Hickory’s communications director who knew Washburn as a child. “We’ve always hoped for the best for Chris.”

Washburn gives speeches to youth groups and at drug rehab centers, as well as to NBA rookies. And he wants to help Hickory’s disadvantaged youth this summer by organizing a car wash.

Washburn says he also felt shunned at N.C. State for years. Although he was off drugs and employed by then, Washburn wasn’t listed in a “Where Are They Now?” section of the basketball program’s media guide in 2011.

Washburn says former N.C. State coach Sidney Lowe welcomed him back into the program’s good graces upon his return to Hickory. Washburn stays in touch with
former teammates Cozell McQueen and Chucky Brown and has visited the Wolfpack’s basketball office. He recently attended a Hickory meeting of the Wolfpack Club – the school’s athletic fundraising group – and donated fried chicken for a tailgate.

“I don’t think we’d ever turn our back on one of our former student-athletes,” says Buzzy Correll, the club’s senior associate director. “It’s good to have him back.”

But Washburn says he still has work to do with his sons, Julian and Chris Jr., both excellent basketball players. Julian was a star freshman last season at the University of Texas-El Paso. Chris Jr., a high school senior in Dallas this year, will join his older brother at UTEP next season.

“We don’t have much of a relationship to speak of,” says Chris Washburn. “That came from years of me not being there. But I’ve told them that I could care less about the basketball part with them. My thing with them has been going to school and staying in school.”

Julian Washburn didn’t return calls to The Observer.

**Trying for a do-over**

On a recent weekday, Washburn’s Wings And More bustles with activity. Passing cars honk as Washburn – all 440 pounds of him – stands in the parking lot greeting customers.

He’d like to lose weight. He was a finalist in casting for last season’s “Biggest Loser” reality TV show, but didn’t make the final cut.

For now, he’s still figuring out how to help run the restaurant, with Richardson, 36.

“I keep him grounded,” she says. “He says I’m mean, but I don’t have a lot of tolerance.

“He wants to do the right thing. It’s making sure he doesn’t hang around the wrong people. So I keep him busy.”

Washburn smiles.

“I remember the newspapers said Chris Washburn would be dead at age 25,” Washburn says. “Here it is 20 years later. I feel pretty good.”
Published Saturday, April 28

**UNCC business incubator changes its name, strategy**

The Ben Craig Center, the nonprofit business incubator affiliated with UNC Charlotte, has changed its name to Ventureprise Inc., its board of directors announced Friday.

The change is part of a new strategy to lead the region in developing a "comprehensive innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystem" to influence public policy and encourage innovation, according to the announcement.

"The Charlotte region has many great assets and networks that directly support an entrepreneur’s ability to succeed," Ventureprise President Paul Wetenhall said in a news release. "Our joint planning with groups across the region identified a gap in strategy, coordination and communications leveraging these resources. That is what the relaunch of The Ben Craig Center as Ventureprise is meant to do."

The public-private Ben Craig Center was established 25 years ago as one of the nation’s first university-affiliated business incubators. It is expanding its services as a regional resource to support the success of startups and entrepreneurs through education, networking, access to capital and other services. For details, visit ventureprise.org.
UTSA set to join Conference USA pending approval from UT System board next week

By Associated Press, Published: April 28

SAN ANTONIO — Conference USA is set to bring aboard Texas-San Antonio ahead of a planned merger with the Mountain West that would create a new league with as many as 24 schools.

The University of Texas System Board of Regents has scheduled a vote for Wednesday, and Chancellor Francisco Cigarroa has recommended approving the move only months before UTSA is set to begin its first season in the Western Athletic Conference.

Football coach Larry Coker and UTSA officials apparently began having reservations about the WAC, telling regents that three other WAC members have declared their intentions to defect. The agenda does not reveal which of the remaining football-playing WAC schools — Utah State, Idaho, New Mexico State, Louisiana Tech, Texas State or San Jose State — plan to depart.

“Joining CUSA ... will provide greater national visibility and association with universities of similar enrollment, academic standing and community size,” the agenda item reads.

WAC spokesman Dave Chaffin and UTSA spokesman Brian Hernandez did not immediately return messages Saturday.

UTSA went 4-6 in its inaugural football season as an independent in FCS last year, but the program has sought to accelerate its national profile.

The Roadrunners made a splash by giving Coker his first coaching job since Miami, where he won a national championship in 2001. UTSA then made the 66,000-seat Alamodome their home field and are now transitioning at a pace that is among the fastest ever into playing in college football’s top tier.

C-USA officials contacted UTSA in March, according to the agenda. UTSA will incur no exit fees for leaving the WAC and pay a $2 million initiation fee to C-USA.

C-USA is losing Houston, SMU, Memphis and Central Florida. The remaining schools are Texas-El Paso, Tulane, Alabama-Birmingham, East Carolina, Marshall, Rice, Southern Miss and Tulsa.
Speaking at an Associated Press Sports Editors meeting earlier this month, C-USA commissioner Britton Banowsky said of the planned merger with the Mountain West that the idea of consolidation continues to be getting traction.

“I view these changes as more or less natural changes,” Banowsky said at the April 16 meeting in Birmingham, Ala. “I think it just happens and you can decide how you want to react to it, whether you fear it or embrace it. We’re trying to reposition our universities in the best possible way and move them forward.”

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Governor sheds light on elder abuse issues
Saturday, April 28, 2012

RALEIGH – Gov. Bev Perdue encouraged members of the Senior Tar Heel Legislature to make a difference in North Carolina by becoming familiar with aging issues and advocate for vulnerable individuals.

Perdue specifically identified elder abuse as a topic to keep on the minds of state legislators. Several state leaders addressed the Senior Tar Heels during its first meeting of the year in Raleigh.

Perdue said that while ageism does exist, “we are seeing less of this stereotype in the media and recognizing that older adults are more active, involved, engaged, and ambitious than previous generations.”

She reminded the group that by 2030, more than 80 counties in our state are expected to have more people age 60 and older than 17 and younger. Perdue added that now is the time to educate state legislators about the importance of aging services and the need to maintain funding for vital programs. She specifically identified elder abuse as a developing problem in North Carolina.

Newly appointed Secretary of N.C. Department of Health and Human Services, Al Delia, added to the challenge.

He advised the group to “become familiar with aging policy initiatives in order to effectively advocate to lawmakers about the significance of Adult Protective Services.”

According to Dennis Streets, director of the Division of Aging and Adult Services, the number of Adult Protective Service reports to county departments of social services increased from more than 14,000 in 2006-07 to nearly 20,000 in 2010-11. He added that research shows “victims of even the modest forms of abuse have dramatically higher morbidity and mortality rates than non-abused older people.”

Currently, the Division of Aging and Adult Services is working with the N.C. Conference of District Attorneys to improve access to justice for victims of abuse, neglect and exploitation.

Streets said some barriers to the justice system include a lack of knowledge and understanding of “elder abuse” on the part of the judicial system and a
lack of understanding of the justice system on the part of the victims. Other obstacles include environmental barriers such as building design and long wait periods for the case to be heard, the inability to accept recorded or distance testimony, inadequate transportation resources for older adults, and the difficulty in offering flexible court scheduling times for older adults with disabilities.

An Elder Abuse Awareness Campaign begins on Mother’s Day, May 13th and ends on Father’s Day, June 17th. Everyone is encouraged to wear purple ribbons to offer support for this campaign.

During the two-day meeting, Senior Tar Heels learned about other aging initiatives such as a new project through Community Care of North Carolina. Currently, North Carolina is one of 15 states in the process of developing an Integrated Delivery Model for beneficiaries of both Medicare and Medicaid services or dual eligible’s.

Elise Bolda, Ph.D., Project Director for the Dual Eligible’s Planning Grant, said North Carolina stands to save additional health care dollars when this plan is implemented.

“We believe the Integrated Delivery Model will work in North Carolina because we will work through Community Care of North Carolina, a model that produces improved quality of care and is shown to be a cost effective way to spend Medicaid dollars,” Bolda said. “We plan to expand and build on this statewide model by establishing a medical home, which is a partnership between the primary care physician and beneficiary who will work together as they define and refine goals for the delivery of health services; the medical home supports to assist in the achievement of those goals.”

The three objectives for the Dual Eligible’s project include an effort to be more responsive to the Medicare/Medicaid beneficiary, improve quality of care for the individual, and use public funds more wisely.

The final speaker during the meeting offered an interesting perspective on the course of aging throughout history.

Jim Mitchell, Ph.D., East Carolina University, shared various theories about how the human race survived migrating to new regions and infectious disease such as small pox. This set the stage for chronic illness and degenerative disease.
Presently, individuals are living longer with chronic conditions such as heart disease, stroke, cancer, and diabetes. In addition, the population, in general, is aging because more people live through childbirth due to the decline of infectious disease.

“Access to sugars and fat that make us unhealthy coupled with changes in lifestyle, culture, and environment have led to harmful lifestyle choices regarding our health,” Mitchell said. “We are spending time and resources fixing what are broken, but we must focus more on preventing individuals from being broken.”

The N.C. Senior Tar Heel Legislature promotes citizen involvement and advocacy concerning aging issues before the General Assembly and assesses the legislative needs of older adults by convening a forum modeled after the N.C. General Assembly. It is during these forums that the N.C. Senior Tar Heel Legislature establish priorities for the upcoming years. The 2012 legislative priorities for the N.C. Senior Tar Heel Legislature include: 1) Restore funding to sustain Project C.A.R.E.; 2) Maintain funding for the Home and Community Care Block Grant; 3) Maintain funding for senior centers; 4) Provide Dental Care for North Carolina’s Adult Special Care Population; and 5) Mandate pre-employment and random drug testing for employees of nursing, assisted living facilities and adult care homes.

One delegate and one alternate represent every older adult in the state’s 100-counties. Please feel free to contact your local delegate or the regional Area Agency on Aging.

Also visit the STHL website at http://www.ncdhhs.gov/aging/sthl.htm. The next STHL meeting will be June 2012.
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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At Georgia’s Fort Stewart on Friday, President Obama signed an executive order to help protect military families and veterans from aggressive and deceptive recruiting by higher education institutions — especially for-profit colleges — seeking their military benefits.

The executive order will require colleges to provide more information about their student outcomes and financial aid, create a centralized complaint system and direct the Veterans Administration to trademark the term “G.I. Bill” to make it harder for colleges to create Web sites resembling official government sites or falsely suggest that they offer special access to veterans’ benefits.

“I’ve heard the stories,” the president said. “They harass you into making a quick decision with all those calls and e-mails. And if they can’t get you online, they show up on post. One of the worst examples of this is a college recruiter who had the nerve to visit a barracks at Camp Lejeune and enroll Marines with brain injuries — just for the money. These Marines had injuries so severe some of them couldn’t recall what courses the recruiter had signed them up for.”

Mr. Obama promised to “bring an end to the aggressive — and sometimes dishonest — recruiting” by increasing oversight, strengthening the rules about who can come on post to talk to service members, and making it easier to file complaints.

A loophole in federal law creates a strong incentive for aggressive recruiting of veterans by for-profit colleges. In an effort to ensure that the education provided is valuable enough that some students will pay part of the costs out of pocket, the “90/10 rule” requires that for-profit colleges get at least 10 percent of their revenues from a private source. But veterans’ and military benefits count toward that 10 percent, making service members especially valuable for the publicly traded for-profit college companies that get nearly 90 percent of their revenue from federal student aid.

While the executive order applies to all colleges and universities, the abuses have been concentrated among for-profit schools, which get a
disproportionate share of military-related educational benefits. Of the $4.4-billion in post-9/11 G.I. Bill dollars paid to colleges and universities from 2009 to 2011, more than a third, about $1.65 billion, went to for-profit colleges, according to a Senate committee report released last fall.

Bradley Safalow, an analyst who follows the for-profit sector, said that most of the large publicly traded for-profit college chains — University of Phoenix, Kaplan, Corinthian, ITT, Bridgepoint and the like — would most likely face compliance problems if G.I. Bill and military tuition assistance were considered federal student aid under the 90/10 rule.

But only Congress can change the rule. In a press briefing, senior administration officials said the president was “open to legislation” revising the 90/10 rule. Senator Richard Durbin, an Illinois Democrat, has introduced legislation to change the 90/10 rule, lowering the threshold to 85 percent, and requiring colleges to count G.I. Bill benefits and military tuition assistance as federal student aid for the purposes of the rule. In addition, Senator Tom Carper, Democrat from Delaware, introduced a bill that would include military benefits as federal student aid, while keeping the balance at 90/10, and a companion bill is pending the House. No Republicans are co-sponsoring either bill.

According to a recent study by Senator Tom Harkin, an Iowa Democrat, eight for-profit colleges last year got $636 million in G.I. Bill benefits, a quarter of all such benefits — and dropout rates at most of them were above 50 percent. The study found that for-profit colleges also take in the majority of the tuition assistance available to military spouses. It costs taxpayers more than twice as much to send a veteran to a for-profit school as to a public university, the study found.

The Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities said that it had already been working with veterans service organizations on programs to enhance and develop a vehicle for complaints, and that it was “disappointed that in the midst of these discussions, the president decided to bypass the Congress to address these issues with an executive order.”

Mr. Harkin’s investigation also found that in fiscal 2009, 15 of the largest for-profit education companies spent $3.7 billion — 23 percent of their budgets — on advertising, marketing and recruitment, compared to an average of less than 1 percent of revenues at nonprofit colleges and universities. Those same 15 companies received 86 percent of their revenues from federal student aid programs.
This month, Mr. Harkin introduced legislation that would prohibit for-profit college and universities from using taxpayer dollars to pay for their giant advertising campaigns and other recruiting and marketing efforts. No Republicans are co-sponsoring that legislation either.
April 27, 2012

**House Passes Student Loan Bill Despite Veto Threat**

By JENNIFER STEINHAUER

WASHINGTON — Moments after an unusual fiery appeal from Speaker John A. Boehner, the House ignored a veto threat from President Obama and voted 215 to 195 on Friday to prevent a doubling of student loan rates.

The bill, which would strip $5.9 billion from a program within the health care law to pay to keep rates on subsidized undergraduate loans at 3.4 percent, is all but certain to fail in the Senate, where lawmakers have put together their own measure to keep the rate from reverting to 6.8 percent by closing tax loopholes for some wealthy business owners.

While the House legislation has little chance of becoming law in its current form, the bill — the last piece of legislation considered before a one-week
recess — was an instructive metaphor for the current state of Congressional politics.

As with other measures designed to appeal to middle-class voters, the fight between Democrats and Republicans was less over the substance of the bill than how to pay for it, with Republicans, as they have all year, looking to cut government spending and Democrats, as has been their approach, looking to extract more money from high earners.

Republicans, continuing their yearlong assault on the health care law, proposed it as a source for the money while Democrats, persisting with their accusation that the other party has been waging a “war on women,” pushed that meme further, arguing that the money would reduce spending on preventive health programs.

In an election-year twist, 13 Democrats, largely moderates facing tough re-election fights, actually pushed the bill to passage, because 30 Republicans voted against the measure, either because they did not believe in a subsidized loan program or the short-term nature of the solution. Tellingly, hours before the vote, the Club for Growth, a conservative pro-business group, issued a warning against voting for the bill.

“That’s the work of Congress now,” fumed Representative Peter Welch, Democrat of Vermont. “They go to their trick bag, which is to eviscerate the health care bill. We go to our trick bag, which is to vilify the oil companies, and nobody in the country cares. But what they do care about is getting whacked because they can’t pay college costs.”

Both sides immediately moved to paint the other as anti-college student. “Seven-term Congresswoman Shelley Berkley today chose to allow student loan interest rates to spike rather than eliminate a wasteful ‘Obamacare’ slush fund,” Senator Dean Heller, Republican of Nevada, who faces a challenge from Ms. Berkley, a Democrat, in November, said in a statement.

Mr. Obama has been traversing the country, especially swing states, pushing for the continuation of the current rate, which was set by Democrats in 2007 through legislation that temporarily reduced interest rates for the seven million low- and middle-income undergraduates who receive subsidized Stafford loans. The rate dropped to 3.4 percent from 6.8 percent and is scheduled to revert to the higher figure in July without Congressional intervention. Graduate students with Stafford loans pay the higher rate, as do students with unsubsidized Stafford loans.
With partisan accusations flying on the House floor, Mr. Boehner made an unusual appearance Friday to denounce the other party.

“Ladies and gentlemen, this is beneath us,” he barked. “This is beneath the dignity of this House and the dignity of the public trust that we enjoy from our constituents!”

After denouncing Democrats for several minutes for not embracing the Republican proposal and saying instead that it would cut off health care services to women and children, Mr. Boehner added, to thunderous applause from his side of the aisle: “To pick this big political fight where there is no fight is just silly. Give me a break!”

Mr. Boehner has spent much of the week sharply criticizing the president in escalating language and tone, setting the stage for a bitter and nasty finish to a deeply divisive legislative session.

Representative Judy Biggert, a moderate Republican from Illinois who had the job of carrying the House bill and is in a tough re-election fight, seemed almost deflated by the challenge to her measure. “It just seems this is so hard to do in this political time,” she said on the floor of the House, adding: “I know that everybody agrees on the program itself and how we have to do it, but we can’t seem to do anything without giving a cynical view. It bothers me.”

Republicans also pointed out that Democrats were willing to raid $5 billion from the Prevention and Public Health Fund, set up as part of the health care law, to help pay for the payroll tax cut extension this year. There is currently $11.9 billion in the fund; under the bill passed by the House, all of those funds would be repealed; the bill directs $5.9 billion to pay for the one-year interest rate freeze and puts the remainder toward deficit reduction. However, the White House has already issued a veto threat that read in part: “This is a politically motivated proposal and not the serious response that the problem facing America’s college students deserves.”
April 27, 2012

**Louisiana: Head of L.S.U. System Fired**

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

John Lombardi, the president of the Louisiana State University System, was fired on Friday by the system’s governing board. His supporters said Gov. Bobby Jindal orchestrated the move after clashes between Dr. Lombardi and the administration.

The Board of Supervisors voted 12 to 4 to remove Dr. Lombardi, putting him on administrative leave until his contract ends at the start of the new year. All of Mr. Jindal’s appointees, along with four other board members, voted for the ouster.

The president’s tenure has included budget struggles and management disputes, and his candor and combativeness rankled some officials. Dr. Lombardi criticized the free college tuition program called TOPS, and he has fought with the Jindal administration over budget plans, the construction of a new public hospital in New Orleans and higher education management.
In Spain, the unemployment rate among workers under 25 is more than 50 percent. In Ireland almost a third of the young are unemployed. Here in America, youth unemployment is “only” 16.5 percent, which is still terrible — but things could be worse.

And sure enough, many politicians are doing all they can to guarantee that things will, in fact, get worse. We’ve been hearing a lot about the war on women, which is real enough. But there’s also a war on the young, which is just as real even if it’s better disguised. And it’s doing immense harm, not just to the young, but to the nation’s future.

Let’s start with some advice Mitt Romney gave to college students during an appearance last week. After denouncing President Obama’s “divisiveness,” the candidate told his audience, “Take a shot, go for it, take a risk, get the education, borrow money if you have to from your parents, start a business.”

The first thing you notice here is, of course, the Romney touch — the distinctive lack of empathy for those who weren’t born into affluent families, who can’t rely on the Bank of Mom and Dad to finance their ambitions. But the rest of the remark is just as bad in its own way.

I mean, “get the education”? And pay for it how? Tuition at public colleges and universities has soared, in part thanks to sharp reductions in state aid. Mr. Romney isn’t proposing anything that would fix that; he is, however, a strong supporter of the Ryan budget plan, which would drastically cut federal student aid, causing roughly a million students to lose their Pell grants.

So how, exactly, are young people from cash-strapped families supposed to “get the education”? Back in March Mr. Romney had the answer: Find the college “that has a little lower price where you can get a good education.” Good luck with that. But I guess it’s divisive to point out that Mr. Romney’s prescriptions are useless for Americans who weren’t born with his advantages.
There is, however, a larger issue: even if students do manage, somehow, to “get the education,” which they do all too often by incurring a lot of debt, they’ll be graduating into an economy that doesn’t seem to want them.

You’ve probably heard lots about how workers with college degrees are faring better in this slump than those with only a high school education, which is true. But the story is far less encouraging if you focus not on middle-aged Americans with degrees but on recent graduates. Unemployment among recent graduates has soared; so has part-time work, presumably reflecting the inability of graduates to find full-time jobs. Perhaps most telling, earnings have plunged even among those graduates working full time — a sign that many have been forced to take jobs that make no use of their education.

College graduates, then, are taking it on the chin thanks to the weak economy. And research tells us that the price isn’t temporary: students who graduate into a bad economy never recover the lost ground. Instead, their earnings are depressed for life.

What the young need most of all, then, is a better job market. People like Mr. Romney claim that they have the recipe for job creation: slash taxes on corporations and the rich, slash spending on public services and the poor. But we now have plenty of evidence on how these policies actually work in a depressed economy — and they clearly destroy jobs rather than create them.

For as you look at the economic devastation in Europe, you should bear in mind that some of the countries experiencing the worst devastation have been doing everything American conservatives say we should do here. Not long ago, conservatives gushed over Ireland’s economic policies, especially its low corporate tax rate; the Heritage Foundation used to give it higher marks for “economic freedom” than any other Western nation. When things went bad, Ireland once again received lavish praise, this time for its harsh spending cuts, which were supposed to inspire confidence and lead to quick recovery.

And now, as I said, almost a third of Ireland’s young can’t find jobs.

What should we do to help America’s young? Basically, the opposite of what Mr. Romney and his friends want. We should be expanding student aid, not slashing it. And we should reverse the de facto austerity policies that are holding back the U.S. economy — the unprecedented cutbacks at the state and local level, which have been hitting education especially hard.
Yes, such a policy reversal would cost money. But refusing to spend that money is foolish and shortsighted even in purely fiscal terms. Remember, the young aren’t just America’s future; they’re the future of the tax base, too.

A mind is a terrible thing to waste; wasting the minds of a whole generation is even more terrible. Let’s stop doing it.
Penn State University hired two new public relations firms this week to navigate “corporate communications, media relations and stakeholder engagement” in the midst of one of the biggest higher education scandals in history.

Penn State has already paid $5.3 million to several firms, including Ketchum and Kekst public relations, to conduct an internal investigation and handle crisis communications, according to the university. Officials announced on Wednesday that they had retained two new firms, Edelman and local shop La Torre Communications, for the next year for $2.5 million.

“Retaining these communications firms puts us more firmly on the path toward accountability, openness and preserving our reputation as one of the world’s leading research universities,” Penn State President Rodney Erickson said in a statement released Wednesday.

Edelman, one of the largest public relations firms in the world, was hired by Duke University in 2006, soon after members of its men’s lacrosse team were indicted on rape charges that were later dropped, according to reports at the time.

Major universities operate much like corporations, and it is common for schools to hire big-name crisis communications firms when tragedy hits, scandal is revealed, or their reputation is at stake. The worry is that if schools don’t properly manage their message and image, they could see fewer applications, a dip in donations or an eventual fall in the rankings.

But calculated strategy when it comes to messaging and branding in a time of tragedy or scandal can rub some students, faculty and alumni — not to mention victims or those closely involved with the situation — the wrong way. That’s especially true at public universities that are partially supported by taxpayers.

Take the example of Virginia Tech in 2007, when a student gunman with a history of mental health problems killed 32 people and then himself. The university has been criticized for waiting about two hours to alert the
campus that morning after two students were found shot in a dorm room. Soon after administrators sent a mass e-mail alerting students to a “shooting incident” on campus, the gunman barricaded himself in an academic hall and fired more than 170 bullets in about 11 minutes.

Shortly after the mass shooting at Virginia Tech, the university hired Burson-Marsteller, a public relations firm that bills itself as helping clients when the stakes are high. Above is a screenshot of a video of President Charles W. Steger doing a mock interview with an executive from the firm to prepare for real media encounters.

Soon after the shootings, Va. Tech hired Burson-Marsteller, a major public relations firm that was retained by Duke during the lacrosse case and has since done work for Facebook. The public relations firm was paid $600,000 to advise the university and coach the president and other officials through how to talk with the media.

Details of that strategy angered the parents of victims, many of whom have argued that the university could have done more to prevent this massacre and protect their children — and officials should take responsibility for what happened and apologize to the families.

“From day one, the most important thing to the university was their brand,” said William O’Neil, whose 22-year-old son Daniel was killed.

O’Neil, who works for a college in Connecticut, said in an interview last week that the university should have spent less time and money on its public relations campaign and more time investigating what happened and communicating with the families of victims. O’Neil was especially angered by a candlelight vigil soon after the shooting five years ago that ended with students chanting together. University officials have pointed to that moment as a sign of unity.

“It was a pep rally,” O’Neil said. “That’s not what we wanted to hear, but they didn’t care what we wanted to hear.”

At Penn State, the board of trustees hired Ketchum on Nov. 6, the day after Sandusky was arrested, according to Ad Age, although top school officials had testified before a grand jury on the subject months earlier and might have known that this news could break.

Days later, Ketchum employees helped the trustees organize a news conference to announce that President Graham Spanier and football coach Joe Paterno had been removed from their positions, according to Ad Age. Neither men have been charged criminally, and Paterno died in January.
Ad Age reported that Ketchum is no longer working for Penn State, although the company would not comment on the matter. In November when Ad Age first reported that Ketchum was working for the university, the firm declined to provide any details about the relationship. Since then, Penn State has confirmed the relationship.

The new agencies are expected to provide “more transparent communications” and assist with assembling information for litigation, according to a university news release. The two groups were selected following a competitive bid process in April, and they will work closely with the university’s communications staff.

Funding for this work, along with legal defense fees and other costs associated with the scandal are paid for by insurance policies and interest the university earned from loans it made to other entities on campus, according to information posted on Penn State’s Web site. (An example is the $100 million stadium expansion by the athletic department, which the university paid for and is now collecting payments and interest from athletics.)

Thus far, Penn State has spent $5.3 million on an internal investigation and crisis communications, $1.5 million on legal defense and services, and more than $685,000 on other expenses. The university said that alumni donations, student tuition and taxpayer money will not be used to pay these bills.