Renice Myers gets a kiss from his granddaughter, Elizabeth Ann Finch, after a special hooding ceremony at the Brody School of Medicine on Monday morning. (Rhett Butler)

Ceremony a dose of medicine
“*I cannot believe how hard a lot of these people have worked to make this happen.*”

Betty Jane Myers
wife of Renny Myers

By Kim Grizzard
Tuesday, May 1, 2012

At an early hooding ceremony for medical student Betsy Finch, there was no lecture on learning to listen to patients, no speech about how physicians should treat the whole person rather than just tend to health problems. In fact, there was no speaker at all.

Louder than words was the fact that the ceremony even took place. Twenty days before she was to receive her diploma, Finch stood and read the Hippocratic Oath at a medical school she did not attend.

Though the ceremony for the Eastern Virginia Medical School graduate is not official, it was considered the best medicine for Finch’s grandfather, Renice Myers.

Myers, known to friends as “Renny,” spent most of the last month as a patient at Vidant Medical Center and Vidant Hospice. Brenda Poole, nurse practitioner for palliative care service at Vidant, not only listened to Myers’ heart, she heard his heart’s desire: to see his granddaughter graduate from medical school.

“We have to really talk to patients and know what’s important to them,” Poole said. “Sometimes it’s not that they can be cured from their disease process, but they can do a lot of living before their journey ends.
“He just went on and on about his family, how proud he was, how much he loved them,” she said. “His daughter (Finch’s mother, Deborah) had died, and his granddaughter ... he was so looking forward to seeing her graduate from medical school.”

Poole was concerned that it might be too difficult for Myers, who must now use oxygen and a wheelchair, to attend Finch’s graduation, scheduled for May 19 in Norfolk, Va. She approached Vidant Hospice Medical Director Dr. Dean Patton about trying to have a celebration a little sooner and a bit closer to home.

On Monday, Brody School of Medicine Assistant Vice Dean Nicholas Benson and Assistant Dean for Student Affairs Randall Renegar performed the ceremonial hooding for Finch in a conference room in the Brody building. Finch’s father, Pat, her sister, Katie, and about three dozen members of the Myerses’ friends, neighbors and church members joined in the celebration.

“I cannot believe how hard a lot of these people have worked to make this happen,” said Myers’ wife, Betty Jane. “I just can’t believe, being a newcomer to North Carolina, how many people have done such wonderful things.”

The Myers family moved from Virginia to Greenville to be near their daughter and son-in-law, Renny and Rick Cannon, about a year and a half ago. In that time, the two have joined St. James United Methodist Church, and Myers has become part of University City Kiwanis Club.

“You always hear how good the East Carolina people are,” Myers said. “But believe me, I believe they’re better than that. There’s so many people that got involved in this.”

Renice and Betty Jane are proud of all their grandchildren — Betsy, Kathryn, Christopher, Phillip, Amanda, Austin, Bailey and Cooper. But medical school is a milestone.

There has never been a doctor in the family.

“Since I started medical school he has always said he will be there at my graduation,” Finch, 26, said. “I think he knew the date before I did.”

After her official graduation this month, Finch is scheduled to begin a pediatric residency at Virginia Commonwealth University. She hopes to specialize in hematology and oncology and one day provide her patients with the same compassionate care shown to her grandfather.
Patton believes compassion was the theme of Finch’s hooding ceremony, though no one said a word about it.

“I think that the words that were said today will not be nearly so impactful on her as the actions that were taken today,” he said. “The fact that a medical school was willing to devote the time ... hopefully will be an example to her of how to show compassion.

“Is that really a doctor’s job?” he asked. “I’m going to argue yes.”

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Administrators at East Carolina University continue to be concerned about the loss of quality faculty due to state budget cuts.

The Board of Trustees discussed faculty retention as they approved tenure appointments and conferred student degrees during the last meeting of the school year on April 20.

According to recent reports, ECU has 200-plus fewer faculty positions than last academic year; many of those were unfilled. An additional 87 fixed-term faculty did not have their contracts renewed. As a result, ECU has more than 800 fewer class sections this year.

“The faculty lost are usually our best faculty and are those most sought after by other schools; that loss does not readily show in numbers alone,” Mary Schulken, executive director of communication, said following the meeting.

Since 2008-09, the Division of Academic Affairs was unable to retain 40 faculty who received competitive offers from other institutions (29 since 2009-10). Offers included salary differentials, research support, additional lab space and competitive benefit packages.

Marianna Walker, outgoing chairwoman of the faculty, said many faculty are being recruited away from ECU and North Carolina to institutions providing higher salaries and incentives for research and scholarship.

“As a result, faculty who are left in the departments may be faced with greater teaching loads and more students to mentor in research and creative activities,” Walker said.

In other business, trustees approved the purchase of land for dental service learning centers in Sylva, Lillington and Spruce Pine for $1 each.

The additions will bring the number of clinics to five in the state, with 10 planned.

The first, in Ahoskie, is scheduled to open in June.

The School of Dental Medicine’s permanent home, Ross Hall, is expected to open in August in time for the second class of dental students.

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ECU’s Bowden arrested, suspended
Monday, April 30, 2012

A third member of the East Carolina men’s basketball team was suspended on Monday after guard Shamarr Bowden was arrested on gun charges Monday afternoon.

Earlier Monday, ECU coach Jeff Lebo had announced the indefinite suspensions of Corvonn Gaines and Tylisman Armstrong after the pair was charged with being intoxicated and disruptive, and resisting a public officer early Sunday morning.

Bowden was arrested Monday afternoon in Greensboro by the U.S. Marshals Service. He faces illegal possession of a firearm and prohibited use of a firearm charges.

“We have just been made aware of the alleged incident involving Shamarr, and at this point, we have to let the judicial system take its course,” Lebo said in a statement. “Any charge filed against an ECU basketball player is something we take very seriously, but since this is an ongoing legal matter, any further comment on our part would be premature and inappropriate.

“Due to the nature of the charges however, Shamarr has been indefinitely suspended from all team activities. Once the issue has been resolved, his status with the team will be re-evaluated.”

Bowden started 23 of the Pirates 28 games last season and averaged 8.3 points per game.

“Our coaches have high expectations that our student-athletes will always represent themselves, their families and East Carolina University in an appropriate manner,” ECU Director of Athletics Terry Holland said in a release. “The athletic department works closely with the Office of Student Affairs to ensure that student-athletes are disciplined in a fair and consistent manner within the expectations for all ECU students when there are charges filed and until those charges are resolved. I have every confidence that Coach Lebo will handle this and all such matters properly for the student-athlete involved and for East Carolina University.”
Players suspended from team
Monday, April 30, 2012

Two East Carolina men’s basketball players were suspended indefinitely from all team activities on Monday, stemming from arrests early Sunday morning.

Corvonn Gaines and Tylisman Armstrong, both 21, are charged with being intoxicated and disruptive, and resisting a public officer, the Greenville Police Department reported.

The two were “verbally abusive to the police and resisted repeated attempts by the police officers to convince them to go on their way,” a department news release said.

The incident occurred near the Still Life Nightclub in downtown Greenville.

“We are aware of the incident involving our student-athletes and are in the process of gathering all of the facts,” ECU coach Jeff Lebo said Monday in a statement announcing their suspension. “We have a set of conduct standards in place that we expect our players to abide by.”

Officers were called to the club about 1 a.m. because patrons were refusing to leave the club when asked to do so. Gaines and Armstrong were escorted from the business, the release said.

Armstrong attempted to re-enter the club and, when officers tried to stop him, he directed profanity toward them, the release said. When the officers tried to arrest Armstrong, Gaines tried to grab an officer in an attempt to free Armstrong.

All charges are misdemeanors.

Gaines played in all 31 of the Pirates’ games last season and is a rising senior point guard. Armstrong, a 6-foot-9 transfer from Auburn, sat out last season per NCAA transfer rules and was expected to be eligible to play next season.
UNC health insurance costs to rise for students

By Jane Stancill - jstancill@newsobserver.com

On top of rising tuition and fees, those UNC system students who buy the university-sponsored health insurance plan will face steep premium increases in the next academic year.

The cost of health insurance will climb from a range of $61 to $77 monthly to a range of $118 to $133 monthly, according to a memo sent from UNC President Tom Ross to the UNC Board of Governors. On an annual basis, most students will pay about $500 to $700 more in 2012-13, depending on the campus.

The percentage increases aren’t yet known for all campuses, because some have not chosen the level of coverage they will offer, said Bruce Mallette, UNC vice president for academic and student affairs. The annual student cost will climb 66 percent at N.C. Central University and 60 percent at UNC-Chapel Hill; the cost at N.C. State has not been finalized, Mallette said.

Notification of the rate increases will go out this week, just as students finish exams and leave campus for the summer. The news will sting.

“A lot of students are going to be very surprised by this and at a loss for what to do, especially on such short notice for the next semester,” said Kate Davis Jones, a UNC-CH junior from Raleigh who is still on her parents’ insurance. “I think it’s going to cause a lot of students to be boxed out of their education if they’re not able to afford the mandated health insurance.”

Jones said plenty of her classmates will feel blindsided, months after the UNC board set tuition and fee rates for next year, with average price increases of 8.8 percent for in-state undergraduates across the UNC system. The tuition and fee hikes are 8.5 percent at NCCU, 9.8 percent at NCSU and 9.9 percent at UNC-CH for the coming academic year.

Claims drive up costs

Mallette said the insurance increases are due to the health care usage of UNC system students during the past couple of years, plus federal regulations on preventive care and pharmacy services issued in March. The process is complicated, he said, by the new provisions of the Affordable Care Act.

“Part of the story here is our own claims by students within the UNC system have driven up costs,” Mallette said.
The cost at UNC is still below that of many other universities across the nation, UNC officials stressed.

“Although these projected increases are substantial,” Ross wrote in his memo, “the plan would continue to provide quality coverage at comparatively low rates.”

The idea with the systemwide policy was to leverage the buying power of 220,000 students statewide to offer reasonable premiums and better coverage. That apparently worked well during the years since it was mandated in 2010.

“We had a tremendously good value in the first two years of the plan, and now claims and the cost of the industry have caught up to us,” Mallette said. “When you see U-Mass-Amherst at $2,776, it gives you a reality check.”

About 64,000 UNC system students buy the UNC plan, which is offered through a company called Pearce & Pearce Inc. The highest cost next year will be $1,470. This will be the third one-year contract under Pearce & Pearce. Mallette said UNC had the option to rebid the contract, but given UNC students’ claim history and the big changes driven by the federal health care law, it didn’t make sense to go through the bid process two years in a row.

A major rebid will happen next year, when thresholds of required coverage will change dramatically because of the federal law.

“The health insurance market will find some sort of equilibrium, because it’s the free market,” Mallette said. “This is an adjustment year in the industry.”

**Loans in the future**

Increases for next year will be built into financial aid formulas, so needy students may be eligible for additional loans to cover the cost.

There’s no question, though, that the rising insurance cost is adding to the tab for higher education in North Carolina.

“[I] find it very disturbing,” said Hannah Gage, chairwoman of the UNC Board of Governors. “I think that we’ve just got to understand better how we can provide what we’d like to provide at a lower cost, because it is all part of the same package for a family. ... It’s just one more thing that you add on top of tuition, with books and fees.”

**UNC system insurance**

The UNC system began requiring students to be covered by health insurance in the fall of 2010. Students must either prove that they have their own insurance or buy a plan offered by the UNC system. Before that, 11 campuses required insurance; rates and coverage varied significantly among the schools.
UNCG may cut 42 programs
By Jonnelle Davis

GREENSBORO — UNCG’s provost is recommending the university eliminate 42 academic programs as part of a review designed to free up resources.

Among the bachelor’s degree programs on that list are environmental biology, applied math, financial economics, and community youth sport development.

Provost David Perrin said no tenured faculty would lose their jobs. The university instead would try to reassign them.

But it’s unclear how many adjunct teachers would be let go. The university has not said how many personnel overall would be let go.

Chancellor Linda Brady will make the final program recommendations. The UNC Board of Governors must approve them.

The move to cut programs is in response to legislative cuts that have been made to the university system over the past few years.

The money UNCG saves from cutting programs would be reinvested in high-demand programs, such as nursing.

Perrin made the recommendations at a faculty meeting Wednesday afternoon in Jackson Library, capping an 18-month process that some faculty said was flawed from the beginning and has damaged faculty and staff morale.

Faculty had concerns about their level of involvement in the review, the criteria used to evaluate programs, the accuracy of the data used to conduct the evaluation and whether they would lose their jobs.

“We spent a lot of time worrying that we’d be on the list (of programs to eliminate), and there was a lot of uncertainty in a lot of departments across the campus,” said Derek Krueger, a religious studies professor, after the meeting.

“And the morale at UNCG is considerably worse than it had been.”

UNCG is one of four UNC schools that has undertaken an extensive review of its programs. The others are N.C. State, N.C. Central University and East Carolina University.

UNC President Tom Ross said during a meeting earlier this month that outcomes from the reviews would be controversial.
“There will be consequences, and there will be some pain,” he said. “But this is what we have to do if we’re going to best utilize our resources and direct the university for the future in a way that provides the best opportunities for our students.”

Perrin said 468 students are enrolled in the programs proposed for elimination. The university is working with the admissions office to inform prospective students about the proposed changes, he told the faculty.

As the university trims programs, some faculty are concerned about what they called administrative bloat at UNCG.

Deborah Bell, a professor in the School of Music, Theatre and Dance, asked whether UNCG has fewer administrators now than it did in 2008.

Brady said UNCG has cut 65 midlevel administrators over the past couple of years but could not give an exact answer to Bell’s question.

Bell also questioned why more UNC schools have not conducted reviews on their campuses.

“Are the others perfect or just lost in the wilderness?” Bell asked.

Brady said she couldn’t speak for the other schools, but she guessed that some of the smaller ones might not have the capacity to undertake such an extensive task.

“I think others will probably follow,” she said.
UNCG won’t make cuts until fall
By Jonnelle Davis

GREENSBORO — It’ll likely be the fall before UNCG cuts the more than 40 programs the university’s provost recommended last week as part of an extensive academic review.

Chancellor Linda Brady said she’ll spend this week getting feedback from department leaders before approving recommendations for program cuts that UNCG’s provost presented to the faculty.

The university has to develop plans to transfer students now enrolled in those programs. Its accrediting body, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, must approve those plans. The UNC Board of Governors must also approve the proposal.

The process, which began in fall 2010, required UNCG administrators, faculty and staff to take a hard look at 254 undergraduate and graduate programs.

The review recommended 42 programs to be eliminated. But it also listed 44 that are “exceptionally strong” and 16 that need to be strengthened. The university will use the money and other resources it saves from cutting some programs to enhance the others.

Faculty teaching in programs that may be cut could be moved to other areas within their field that need the extra support.
Part of the plan for preparing students for the changes involves ensuring that courses in programs targeted for elimination continue to be offered for students who are formally enrolled in those majors.

While UNCG won’t be accepting any new students in those programs, Provost David Perrin said last week that there are opportunities for students to study in related programs.

For example, multiple math programs are on the cut list, including bachelor’s programs in applied and pure mathematics. The two are being combined to create a new bachelor’s degree in math.

Among the undergraduate and graduate programs considered to be strong are psychology, nursing education, creative writing, music education, accounting and dance choreography.

Some of those programs have historically been considered among UNCG’s strongest offerings.

“But I think what the program review has done for us is that it has provided data and specifics to back up those claims,” Brady said. That will help deans and department heads make better decisions about where to invest resources, she said.

The resources invested will vary with the programs, Brady said, but could involve adding more faculty or graduate assistantships, which could help the university entice the best graduate students.

UNCG embarked on its review during a time when state legislators have consistently cut back on the money they give to universities, as with other state-funded bodies.

But Brady said saving money wasn’t the primary reason for launching the review. “The savings, if you will, occur to the extent that we are able to be more focused on truly distinctive programs,” she said.
UNCW hunts for new provost to serve as COO
By Pressley Baird

The provost position at the University of North Carolina Wilmington will look different when the next person takes the helm, according to Chancellor Gary Miller's vision for the job.

UNCW's provost search, which included on Monday the first of three open forums for the three finalists, will produce a candidate who will still be second-in-command under Miller.

But the ideal new provost will be a chief operating officer, Miller said. He's looking for "someone who can run the university – that is, all aspects of it," he told the college's board of trustees at a recent meeting.

The new provost, who will likely be selected from this field of finalists Timothy Chandler, senior associate provost at Kent State University; Cameron Hackney, special assistant to the provost at West Virginia University; and Denise Battles, geology professor at the University of Northern Colorado, will be expected to organize the activities of the school's chancellors, Miller said. The candidate will "be able to move the university along and get things done," he said.

During finalist Chandler's on-campus presentation Monday to faculty and staff, which all three candidate finalists will have, campus budget director Bob Russell cited Miller's chief operating officer vision in a question to Chandler. Russell asked Chandler about his management style, wanting to know how Chandler, if selected, would involve non-academic departments like finance in managing the university.

Russell said that the idea of provost as chief operating officer wasn't new at UNCW, noting that it had been part of the job description for several years. But he said that Miller had made a point to emphasize it in this search.

A university's primary mission and a good chunk of a provost's job should deal with academics, Russell said. But hiring a provost who understands "how other aspects of the university intertwine" with academics, he said, would ensure that the new leader saw the big picture of UNCW.
"It'll help the university in the long run," he said.

The position came open after Provost Cathy Barlow announced in January that she would retire in June. Barlow came to UNCW in 2000 as the dean of the Watson School of Education. She served as interim provost in 2009, a position that became permanent in 2010.

Vice Chancellor Pat Leonard, who headed up the provost search committee, said the candidates were chosen from a pool of 97 applicants. Her 21-person search committee whittled that down to 10 people to interview, picking the three finalists from those.

The other two finalists will make their presentations in the next two weeks, with Hackney speaking on Thursday and Battles giving her talk on May 7. Both speeches will be at 2 p.m. in the Lumina Theater.

Leonard said she hoped the new provost would be selected by late May.
Protect private aid, Greensboro College chief urges

By Jonnelle Davis

GREENSBORO — Greensboro College’s president asked legislators Monday to protect state financial aid for students who attend private colleges during the legislative session that starts this month.

Lawrence Czarda was among residents who spoke to Guilford County legislators at a forum in the City Council chambers.

The issues residents addressed will be discussed at the General Assembly’s short session, which begins May 16.

Czarda asked that legislators treat private schools the same as public ones when considering student aid allotments.

If financial aid is reduced again this year, Czarda wants the private and public systems to equally share the pain.

But, if legislators are able to spend more on the public system, Czarda hopes “some proportional increase will be made in the private funds available” for North Carolina students attending those schools.
The state for years offered two financial aid programs for state residents attending a North Carolina private college: the N.C. Legislative Tuition Grants and the need-based N.C. Contractual Scholarship Fund.

The idea was that helping students attend private schools cuts down on the number of students on the public campuses, giving taxpayers some relief. Students could get tuition grants of up to $1,850 per year. In the need-based program, students could get up to $1,350. But legislators last year axed the tuition grants and instead have created a single program for private college students that is need-based. That pool of money has been cut by 21.5 percent over two years, Czarda said. He said 598 of Greensboro College’s 1,065 full-time students benefit from this aid.

Rep. Maggie Jeffus, a Greensboro Democrat, told Czarda that legislators will at least try to keep funding at the current level.

Legislators also heard from supporters of the Governor’s School, a residential summer program for gifted high school students that is held at Meredith College in Raleigh and Salem College in Winston-Salem. Alumni raised nearly $700,000 to pay for the program this summer after legislators cut its $850,000 in funding last year.

Scott Gayle and Ed Galloway, Greensboro attorneys and Governor’s School alumni, asked that funding be restored at $973,000, which would lower the tuition students have to pay from $500 to $333. But education wasn’t the only issue residents spoke about.

City Council member Nancy Vaughan asked legislators to review the statute that speaks to the privacy of employee personnel records. Vaughan argued that the current law is not specific enough. “For a long time I have been concerned that municipalities are interpreting this statute too narrowly,” said Vaughan, who was speaking for herself and not the council.

Instead of listing which files are public — as the law does now — those documents that should remain confidential need to be listed in the legislation, Vaughan suggested. She pointed out the irony in the current law that does not allow the disclosure of an employee’s commendation but does say disciplinary actions are a public record.
Vaughan didn’t speak specifically to this at the forum, but in March she questioned a possible conflict regarding police Capt. James Hinson’s job as leader of the eastern patrol division and director of two group homes in that area. Citing state law, the city’s interim attorney said records for an employees’ outside work usually can’t be released.

Council member Marikay Abuzuaiter spoke in support of a bill that would impose stricter penalties for people who steal copper, saying she knew of families and businesses that had been victimized.

“The copper theft has gotten out of control in our city and all across the state, I believe,” she said.
California Chosen as Home for Computing Institute

By JOHN MARKOFF

BERKELEY, Calif. — The Simons Foundation, which specializes in science and math research, has chosen the University of California, Berkeley, as host for an ambitious new center for computer science, the university plans to announce on Tuesday.

The foundation’s $60 million grant to establish the center, to be called the Simons Institute for the Theory of Computing at U.C. Berkeley, underscores the growing influence of computer science on the physical and social sciences. An interdisciplinary array of scientists will explore the mathematical foundations of computer science and attack problems in fields as diverse as health care, astrophysics, genetics and economics.

“We’ve been talking to astronomers, climate scientists, fluid mechanics people, quantum physicists and cognitive scientists,” said Richard M. Karp, a Berkeley computer scientist who will be the institute’s director.

Part science and part engineering, computer science has long been viewed warily by scientists in other disciplines. But that is changing, not only because the computer has become the standard scientific instrument but also because “computational thinking” offers new ways to analyze the vast amounts of data now accessible to scientists. This new approach — what researchers call the “algorithmic” or “computational” lens — is transforming science in much the way the microscope and telescope did. When computer scientists train their sights on other disciplines, said Christos H. Papadimitriou, a Berkeley computer scientist who will help manage the institute, “truths come out that wouldn’t have come out otherwise.”

Moreover, the flood of experimental results generated by inexpensive sensors, combined with the Internet’s ubiquitous connectivity, is threatening to drown scientists in vast data sets often called “big data.”

“I do think there is this idea that big data is happening,” said Peter Norvig, Google’s director of research. “Now there is more acceptance pencil and paper alone won’t solve all of our problems.”

Tuesday’s announcement is part of a broader trend toward expanding support for research in computational theory. The Rafik B. Hariri Institute
for Computing and Computational Science and Engineering was created last fall at Boston University to turn a computational lens on an array of disciplines. (It is named for the former Lebanese prime minister who was assassinated in 2005; he was also a former trustee of the university.)

“It’s analytics with big data, it’s the ability to compute and analyze in massive parallel architectures,” said Jeannette M. Wing, head of the computer science department at Carnegie Mellon University. “All the science and engineering disciplines realize this is part of the future.”

Dr. Karp, the Simons Institute’s new director, cited the example of the Berkeley cosmologist Joshua Bloom, who has automated the process of identifying interesting events in the night sky. Each evening the system must choose from millions of options.

“What should we track tomorrow?” Dr. Karp said. “There is a continually changing decision process. It’s an online computation process par excellence.”

The institute will not be a scientific computing center, said Alistair Sinclair, a Berkeley computer scientist who will serve as its associate director. “An astronomer won’t come along with data and we all sit down and create algorithms to process his data,” he said. “It goes deeper than that. The astronomer will come and talk about the nature of his problems.”

The institute will have about 70 visiting researchers at any one time, including faculty members, postdoctoral researchers and graduate students. It will begin operating later this year and be fully operational in 2013.

The Simons Foundation, created by the hedge fund billionaire and philanthropist James H. Simons, has given hundreds of millions of dollars for research in autism, math and physical sciences, and life sciences — and, last year, $150 million from both the organization and its founders to the State University at Stony Brook on Long Island.

Dr. Simons, who earned his doctorate in mathematics at Berkeley, was chairman of the math department at Stony Brook before creating Renaissance Technologies, a private investment firm. Forbes magazine estimates his current worth at $10.6 billion.
Colleges hit up graduating seniors for donations

By Jenna Johnson, Published: April 30

As Shenandoah University’s chief fundraisers try to grow their donor pool this year, they are targeting a not-so-wealthy population for the first time: students who are about to graduate.

It’s not an easy pitch. The private university in Winchester, Va., charges more than $35,000 a year for tuition and other expenses, and more than 85 percent of a recent graduating class had student loan debt. But like most universities, Shenandoah relies on donations. It wants to train soon-to-be-alumni to give generously.

“It doesn’t have to be a lot,” senior Katie Brown says she frequently tells her classmates as she hits them up for donations. “Just the act of giving helps.”

Despite the national debate over rising tuition and student loan debt, many private and public schools are asking students for donations. In part these solicitations continue the long tradition of senior-class gifts. But the phenomenon appears to be growing, college officials say, and students are giving at what are described as record rates.

Often these campaigns are led by student leaders who contact classmates via e-mail, text message and Facebook, or through old-fashioned, in-person begging.

Fundraisers say they aren’t necessarily seeking large sums. A popular amount to give this year is $20.12. Students are often encouraged to give to a general university fund, scholarship program or a department or student club that was a major part of their education. Sometimes student gifts are matched by more-established donors, administrators or the university president.

The goal is not only to collect extra funds, but to instill in students a sense of obligation and philanthropy that will make them lifelong donors. Of $30.3 billion donated to colleges and universities in 2011, according to the Council for Aid to Education, $7.8 billion came from alumni and the rest from foundations, corporations and other sources.

There were no national figures available for how much students give. But experts say there has been a push of late to teach students the merits of donating.
Small donations can quickly add up. Last year, George Washington University in the District collected more than $90,000 from the class of 2011. At the University of Virginia, the class of 2011 raised nearly half a million dollars before graduation. A decade ago, the U-Va.class of 2001 raised nearly $60,000.

The concept of a class donating an item such as a park bench or a tree is nearly a thing of the past. Schools are asking for cash instead. But most schools set participation goals instead of dollar targets.

Plus, one of the factors in U.S. News and World Report’s ranking of top colleges is the percentage of living alumni who have donated. (Under this formula, school officials say, gifts from seniors can count after graduation.)

While many fundraisers seek to play down the rankings, others use it at the heart of their pitches. At Shenandoah, Brown said she often explains the ranking system to her friends in explaining why they should donate. Shenandoah ranks No. 27 on the U.S. News list of best regional universities in the south.

“The higher the ranking is for the school, the more valuable your degree is,” said Brown, 21, who is majoring in English and mass communications.

The same pitch is used at GWU, which recently broke into the U.S. News national “top 50.” In addition to a YouTube video and social-media campaign, GWU seniors gave their classmates a list of five reasons to give a senior gift, with the No. 1 reason being this: “Give because any gift, regardless of size, counts as alumni participation and elevates GW’s rankings in publications like U.S. News and World Report, raising the value of our degrees.”

Public universities also are hitting up students for donations, driven in part by dwindling state funding. At the University of Maryland, students are asked to donate cash or their leftover dining-hall credits to “Keep Me Maryland,” a hardship fund for students on the brink of dropping out for financial reasons.

At Radford University, a public institution in Virginia, each senior is asked to donate at least $5 (what the school calls “the cost of a Starbucks coffee”) to a general fund.

“The best chance for a gift later in life comes from those who have already given,” said Deborah J. Robinson, Radford’s vice president for university advancement. “We’re state supported, but we’re not 100-percent state funded. And tuition doesn’t cover all of it.”
There is often a reward for donating, beyond the satisfaction of helping future students. Radford donors are entered into a drawing for gift cards to local restaurants. At GWU, names of student donors are published online. At the College of William and Mary, donors are rewarded with a wine-and-cheese social, local restaurant deals and a purple T-shirt.

“They are really popular,” said Elizabeth Keppel, 21, a William and Mary senior who gave $250 and is one of the leaders of this year’s campaign. “Everyone wants one.”

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What makes health-care and education costs similar to each other — and unlike anything else

By Ezra Klein, Published: April 30

Writing in the Daily, Josh Barro notes that “the higher education sector looks a lot like the health care sector”: Costs are up, productivity growth is flat, there’s little evident adoption of technologies that could make the sector cheaper, etc.

There’s another similarity that Barro doesn’t mention: Like the health-care sector, the higher education sector is heavily subsidized by the government. Some take that commonality as a causality: Health-care and college costs are out of control because the government subsidizes them. I think the truth is closer to the reverse: The government subsidizes them because their costs are out of control.

Health-care and higher education are similar in another way, too: People don’t think they can responsibly say no to either expense. Families take out hundreds of thousands of dollars of debt to pay medical bills and tuition costs. The only other cost that’s anything like that is housing — and it’s a much more optional expense. You can buy a house on your schedule. Health-care costs and your child’s 18th birthday tend to be somewhat less cooperative.

This inability to say no removes the ultimate form of market discipline: the consumer’s ability to simply walk out of the store. Oh, you can, at times, walk over to another store and try your luck there — though that’s not true if you’ve been brought into the ER in an ambulance, and it’s not true if your son only got into one decent college — but it tilts the power towards the sellers and away from the buyers.

There’s certainly more we could do to bring market pressures into play in both sectors, but the reason the government ends up involved in health care and education is that a real market would require us telling more people than we’re comfortable with that they can’t have the medical care or education that they need.

In other countries, they deal with this pressure by mainly having one buyer: the government. That’s how single-payer health care holds down costs, for instance. The government says no on behalf of all the people. But in the
United States, we have a mix of public and private options, and so the public options have to compete with the private schools for faculty, doctors, patients, administrators and more — and that makes it harder for them to hold down costs.

I don’t really see a way out aside from technological disruption. It’s a common complaint that neither the health-care nor the higher education business model has been changed substantially by the Internet. But I’m an optimist on this point. The Internet has been with us for only a few decades. We’re just learning what we can do with online streaming video and big-data analytics. Or, to name another industry, we’re just now beginning to topple the fax machine.

Health care and education will be disrupted, too, and once it begins happening, it might happen much faster, and with much farther-reaching consequences, than any of us expects.

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Fewer Americans form households after recession, hampering economic recovery

By Michael A. Fletcher, Published: April 30

It had been a long road, but when Sabrina Torres received her master’s degree in 2010, she was sure it would eventually pay off in a good job that would allow her to afford an apartment.

She is still waiting. The American University graduate’s financial struggles have prevented her from living on her own, making her part of a dramatic slowdown in household formation that is both a consequence of the economic downturn and a continued obstacle to overcoming it.

The recession reduced the rate at which Americans set up new homes or apartments by at least half. Although the number of new households has begun to recover over the past year, its growth rate continues to lag behind its historic pace, according to Census Bureau statistics.

More than one in five adults between ages 25 and 34 live with their parents or in other “multi-generational” living arrangements, the highest level since the 1950s, according to the Pew Research Center.

Analysts estimate that there are more than 2 million fewer occupied homes than there would have been had Americans continued moving into new homes and apartments at the rate they did before the recession. Not only are young people returning to the nest in numbers not seen in generations, but also the weak job market and increased border enforcement have caused a marked decline in immigration, hobbling another major source of new households.

The slowdown has broad implications for the economy. It has trimmed demand for housing, even as the economy struggles to absorb the oversupply of new homes that came with the housing bubble and the millions of foreclosures that continue to weigh on the market.

An estimated two-thirds of the excess vacant housing in the country is the result not of the glut of housing construction that helped cause the downturn but by the drop in demand caused by the recession, according to the National Association of Home Builders. Both are culprits in the continued weakness in housing prices.
As the slump in the number of people finding their own places to live has chilled demand for new housing, it also has reduced sales of furnishings and appliances that typically accompany home sales, creating an additional drag on the recovery.

Housing has led the United States out of most of the recessions experienced since 1960, but if that vital industry is to significantly strengthen the current recovery, Americans are going to have to find their own homes at a more vigorous pace.

The question of what will provide that boost quickly leads to a conundrum: As the recovery gains additional momentum, households will resume their previous rate of growth, economists say. That would lower unemployment and promote stronger immigration.

But researchers also acknowledge that the recovery will not reach full steam until new homes are created at a stronger pace.

“It is hard to see what’s going to turn this around without better job and income growth,” said Daniel McCue, research manager at Harvard University’s Joint Center for Housing Studies. “But the way the job market is going, I don’t see any [immediate] change.”

The weak pace of household formation has lasted longer than the lulls caused by previous downturns.

“This time it is going to take longer to catch up,” said Gary Painter, a University of Southern California economist. “The state of the economy is really the prime factor in keeping households from forming.”

Meanwhile, the weak job market has reshaped many American families, with an increasing number of adult children moving in with their parents to make ends meet. A recent Pew survey found that 29 percent of parents with adult children report having a child who has moved back in over the past few years.

Torres has been unable to find a job beyond some part-time work that barely keeps spending money in her pocket.

“It is very, very frustrating,” she said, adding that she has leaned hard on her parents to help remain current with her student loans and other obligations.

She shared a place with her sister in Takoma Park before she moved in with her boyfriend in Silver Spring.

The share of young adults who have not gotten their own homes or apartments has been on the rise for several decades as more Americans have
delayed getting married and having children and many have pursued graduate school to bolster their credentials. The weak economy has accelerated that trend, with people younger than 35 accounting for the largest share of the estimated 5.4 million people that researchers say have chosen not to join the labor force since the downturn.

With so many young people delaying their first forays into careers and the housing market, some researchers wonder whether households in the United States will begin to resemble those in parts of South America or Europe, where it is much more common for young adults to live in their parents’ homes for longer periods of time.

“That light at the end of the tunnel is an onrushing train called falling household formation,” Bentley University economist Scott Sumner wrote on his blog.

But where some see cause for concern, others see a silver lining of pent-up demand that will eventually lead to healthy gains in new household formation. That, in turn, would ignite a strong housing rebound that powers a robust economic rebound.

The jobless rate for people ages 25 to 34 — an age group considered vital to new household formation — has dipped from 9.2 percent to 8.6 percent in the past year, an improvement that coincided with a modest increase in people moving into homes and apartments.

That change has not been sufficient to restore past levels of household formation, although some researchers are hopeful for the future.

“The biggest driver of household formation is really young people coming out of their parents house and young people giving up living with roommates,” said Robert Denk, assistant vice president of forecasting and analysis at the National Association of Home Builders. “This has to happen. You can postpone moving out of your parents’ basement. You can postpone leaving your group house situation. You can postpone proposing to your sweetheart. But you can do these things for only so long.”

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Student loan debt: The overvalue (and underuse) of higher education

Graduates can't pay off their loans because too many take too little of use from their higher education

By Peter Morici

11:24 AM EDT, April 30, 2012

Young people face a cruel irony. Most can't land a decent job without a college education, yet many graduates are locked into poorly paying positions that don't permit repayment of student loans.

For two generations, college price tags have risen much faster than inflation and families' ability to pay. More importantly, costs have leaped faster than what graduates can earn over working lifetimes, and many diplomas do not offer a positive return on investment, as measured by graduates' ability to service their debt.

Working professionals, including some lawyers, are moving in with older relatives — they simply can't pay both rent and student loans.

Many never get out of debt. About 17 percent of delinquent student loans are owed by folks over the age of 50, and Americans over 60 still owe $36 billion in unpaid loans. Too frequently, Social Security checks are garnished, and debt collectors are harassing borrowers in their 80s.

Employers may be partially to blame. It was commonplace in the 1950s and '60s for jobs as diverse as copy editors and reporters at newspapers, retail store buyers and managers, insurance adjusters, and laboratory technicians to have only a high school education and some employer training.

Now, despite the fact that employers must often still train new hires, they require some college or even a diploma. Requiring some higher education may be an easy way of screening an applicant's native intelligence, but many jobs simply don't pay enough for students to repay six figure debts in a decade or so.

K-12 public education is partially to blame. During the late 1960s, a sense emerged that the performance of high schools had declined — judging from the reasoning, English and math skills of college freshman, employers were probably right.
A few years of college became a proxy for employers that young applicants had what a decent high school diploma should have guaranteed but no longer did — the ability to do more than read and add sums, but also reason and string together four grammatically correct sentences into a coherent idea.

With half of the population headed to college, universities churned out too many graduates with little more than a general education — the ability to think critically, write a composition and read poetry. Most college majors don't prepare graduates for much.

In recent decades, states cut aid to higher education when tax revenues dipped during recessions but did not adequately restore those when times got better. Consequently, community colleges, where some of the best, cost-efficient technical training is offered, and some universities cut more-expensive programs in engineering, nursing and the like. Too many students are herded into liberal studies of some kind.

What students do in college really matters. A worker with a bachelor's degree in petroleum engineering earns about $120,000 while a degree in counseling psychology fetches just $29,000. Even business degrees differ dramatically in value — finance, accounting and supply chain majors are worth a lot more than general business and human resources management graduates.

Sadly, many incoming students often don't want to take the tough majors — engineering programs are stuffed with foreign students — but that problem goes back to the high schools.

Growing up in the New York State public schools — back before the discovery of the computer chip — I studied Iroquois culture, early 20th Century child labor problems and Governor Al Smith's reforms, but we also wrote essays about Thomas Edison and the Wright Brothers.

Now, students read Maya Angelou, get a steady portion of liberal theology about the exploitative history of white European culture and are encouraged to find themselves, instead of learning something useful.

No surprise that many students come to universities only to enjoy intellectually pleasing but practically useless programs and end up lost in poorly paying jobs and adrift in a sea of debt.

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Essay on reforming remedial education at community colleges
Submitted by Anthony Bryk and Thomas Toch on May 1, 2012 - 3:00am

The Obama administration is right to make community colleges a cornerstone of its plan to close skill gaps and put people back to work. The nation’s 1,200 community colleges enroll 6.7 million students, or nearly half the U.S. undergraduate population. They are key institutions in today’s education-intensive economy.

But there is a gaping hole in the community college pipeline: some 60 percent of incoming community college students must complete one or more remedial courses before working toward degrees, and upwards of 70 percent of students in these "developmental" math courses don’t complete them. As a result, the higher education careers of many students are over before they begin.

Researchers at Teachers College Columbia University have attracted wide coverage for a recent study [1] arguing that as many as one in four community college students placed in remedial courses would pass regular college-level classes if given the chance to enroll in them. But whether that’s true or not, vast numbers of students arrive at community colleges woefully unprepared and there’s little chance of substantially expanding the community college sector’s role in economic development unless we help students catch up.

The solution lies in rethinking remedial education. With the support of five national philanthropies, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has launched a national network of 27 community colleges and three universities dedicated to helping students at the greatest risk of failure in math. The approach uses a comprehensive strategy of support for students and faculty members in a "networked improvement community." It’s early in the life of the project, but the results so far are encouraging.

The strategy starts with dramatically altering the nature of instruction. Teaching students the same content the same way over and over is obviously not working. Those who failed to move beyond arithmetic in middle school,
and who didn’t grasp key concepts any more fully during re-teaching in high school, are unlikely to master them if they are presented in the same abstract and rote fashion once more in community college.

Instead, the Carnegie network’s instruction and online out-of-class resources focus on the statistics and quantitative reasoning that matters most for students’ work, personal and civic lives. There are units on "Seven Billion and Counting," "The Credit Crunch" and "Has the Minimum Wage Kept Up?" Students learn math through themes such as citizenship and personal finance. It's rigorous stuff, but relevant and engaging, requiring students to use the tools of algebra, statistics, data visualizations and analysis to solve meaningful, real-world problems as a way of thinking mathematically.

The network is also using a number of promising psychological and motivational strategies to overcome students' pervasive math anxiety and other debilitating stereotypic beliefs and give them the confidence and drive they need to work hard and be successful. The effort includes helping faculty members create positive and productive learning environments through carefully designed team-building activities, protocols for classroom discussions, "classroom contracts" that foster camaraderie and group responsibility, and other strategies.

To the same end, the network is reconceptualizing students' homework assignments, replacing traditional rote exercises with problem- and scenario-based exercises that extend classroom learning. We're taking the obvious but often-neglected step of helping the many community college students for whom English isn't their first language navigate communication barriers.

And the project has abandoned the traditional model of the independent faculty member working in isolation in favor of a network strategy that allows faculty to work together across campuses to build common instructional systems and improve the program in real time through the network’s ongoing collection of student and faculty feedback (including strategies such as quick surveys delivered via students’ cell phones) and other information on instruction, instructional materials and student performance.

Importantly, community colleges in the project grant college credit toward certificates and degrees to students who complete the new, rigorous yearlong Carnegie “pathways,” saving students the often-demoralizing delay of taking
noncredit classes (the norm for remedial courses in higher education).

Colleges pay just over $20,000 a year, the equivalent of about a half-dozen student tuitions, to participate in the network. Some pay less. By increasing the success rate in developmental courses, the network helps colleges extend student enrollments and increase graduation rates -- giving them a potentially substantial return on their investment.

The network’s early results are promising, even with a largely high-risk student population. Nearly half the students in network colleges are from households with incomes below $40,000 a year. And only 10 percent have mothers with at least a bachelor’s degree. Yet 89 percent remained enrolled for the full fall term (the program rolled out in the network’s colleges at the beginning of the 2011-12 academic year) and 68 percent passed the first semester with a grade of C or better, doing nearly as well on an independent end-of-semester exam as a national sample of community college and university students who had completed college-level statistics coursework.

The passing rate was more than double the 30 percent of students completing less-demanding traditional remedial math courses. And 88 percent of the course-completers moved on to a second semester of math. That's more than triple the proportion of students in the network's colleges who signed up for a second term of math for college credit before the network's creation.

And we know from surveys that students’ interest in math increased the longer they were in the program, and that they became less anxious about the subject and more likely to believe that with hard work they could master it — a complete turnaround from the typical perspectives of students in traditional developmental math classes.

The test of the new network model will be sustaining these early results as we scale from 1,600 students today to our target of 62,000 a year by 2017-18. But the encouraging early evidence suggests that it is possible to reverse the pernicious culture of failure among community college students, that a comprehensive improvement strategy can put them on a surer path to a truly higher education.

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