THE DAILY CLIPS

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Three more robbed

Man shot during second series of armed robberies.

By Michael Abramowitz
The Daily Reflector

A series of three armed robberies reported in Greenville on Wednesday morning was followed by three more between Wednesday night and Thursday morning, including one in which a person was shot, police reported.

A 19-year-old man was shot in the left leg during a robbery involving two suspects. The incident occurred at 9:45 p.m. Wednesday in the 2300 block of May Street.

The victim was treated and released from Pitt County Memorial Hospital, an official there said.

At 11 p.m., two male suspects entered a residence in the 100 block of Stratford Road and robbed two 18-year-olds of belongings valued at more than $5,000, police said.

Then, at 4:20 a.m. Thursday, two suspects kicked in a door at the Red Carpet Inn at 2710 S. Memorial Drive and robbed the inn’s security guard and his wife of cash and a cell phone, Cpl. Kip Gaskins said.

Both suspects had handguns. They were described as black males wearing black hooded sweatshirts, Gaskins said.

No shots were fired during the three earlier robberies on Wednesday, and no injuries were reported, police said.

Those robberies occurred in the Tar River neighborhood on Brownlea, Jarvis and Eastern streets north of the East Carolina University campus. They were within a mile of each other, and some of the victims were ECU students.

Police approached the first three incidents with the belief that they were linked by some of those similarities, Gaskins said.

“We knew the first three were the same guys,” Gaskins said, but saw nothing to indicate a connection among the next night’s robberies.

There were no real indications of a gang connection, either, Gaskins said.

“Nothing specific points to it. There are gang activities and criminal activities. Sometimes they intertwine, but this just seems like criminals being criminals,” Gaskins said.

Gaskins said that police commanders, led by Chief William Anderson, have been meeting to plan several actions that officers will employ to deal with the occurrence of six armed robberies in Greenville in little more than a day.

“One armed robbery is one too many,” Gaskins said about the six incidents. He pointed to the strategies that were implemented when there was an outbreak of convenience store robberies earlier in the year.

“I wouldn’t want to tip our hand to criminals, but after we put those strategies into place, convenience store robberies dropped dramatically. We’ll take the same approach with this problem,” Gaskins said.

Gaskins said he doesn’t believe people need to stay indoors late at night, but offered some safety advice to community residents that police believe are sensible behaviors to minimize the likelihood of being victimized by criminals.

“When you choose to be out at late hours, especially when you’re walking, you really need to pay attention to who is out and about around you. Let somebody close to you know where you’re going, for how long and when you plan to return. Also, the more people with you, the less likelihood that someone will try to rob you,” Gaskins said.

He advised residents to pay attention to where the robberies are occurring and the times they occur, then take appropriate precautions.

Gaskins said police officials plan to speak publicly early next week about the crimes and plans to deal with them.

Michael Abramowitz can be contacted at mabramowitz@coxnc.com and 329-9571.
New spider takes after Neil Young

Canadian rock singer-songwriter Neil Young is well known for his distinctive guitar work and tenor voice. However, Young is also an outspoken advocate for environmental issues, and one East Carolina University professor has paid tribute to Young in a way that will endure for perpetuity.

Jason E. Bond, associate professor of biology in the Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences, recently discovered and named a new species of arachnid after the famous singer.

While conducting research in late 2007, Bond discovered a new species of trapdoor spider and has named it *Mymekiaphila neilyoungi*.

Bond's choice to name the spider after an artistic, cultural icon is distinctive and creates a lasting memory.

"There are rather strict rules about how you name new species, and these rules are outlined in the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature," Bond says. "As long as these rules are followed you can give a new species just about any name you please. With regards to Neil Young, I really enjoy his music and have had a great appreciation of him as an activist for peace and justice."
School struggles with scandal

WVU gave degree to governor's child

BY VICKI SMITH AND TOM BRENN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MORGANTOWN, W.Va. — This is not how West Virginia University wanted to build its national reputation.

Six months after his inauguration, President Mike Garrison is struggling to hold his administration together — and keep his job — amid a scandal that erupted after the school granted Gov. Joe Manchin's daughter a master's degree she didn't earn. The degree has since been rescinded.

Two top university officials resigned last weekend over their part in the episode. Major donors have canceled plans to donate millions. Members of the Faculty Senate are planning a no-confidence vote on Garrison next week. And critics inside and outside the university have demanded the president resign over what appears to be an instance in which political pull influenced the awarding of a degree.

"If you have smart officials, they know this would be one of the quickest ways to ruin the reputation of the university," said Thomas Morawetz, a professor and authority on ethics at the University of Connecticut law school.

"It is a serious violation of norms."

With more than 27,000 students, West Virginia is the pride of a state where people say they "bleed blue and gold."

The university has helped generations of West Virginians — many the sons and daughters of coal miners and steelworkers — lift themselves up in a poor state. But it also perennially ranks among the nation's top party schools.

Now some fear the scandal threatens the university's effort to improve its academic reputation. Garrison himself has made high-tech research a priority, successfully lobbying the state Legislature for a multimillion-dollar "bucks for brains" program.

The scandal broke last week after an investigative panel issued a report saying the university showed "seriously flawed" judgment last fall in retroactively awarding an executive master's of business administration degree to Heather Bresch, who attended the school in 1996 but did not earn enough credits.
Tables turn when college students grade their professors

BY JUSTIN POPE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Kristi Upson-Saia is known as a tough grader. So she's entitled to feel a little nervous this time of year, when the tables are turned and her religion students at Occidental College in Los Angeles are the ones grading her.

"Personally, it can be devastating when you have the student who doesn't appreciate what you've done," said Upson-Saia, an assistant professor whose college looks carefully at student evaluations when considering promotions.

For most of higher education's history, colleges couldn't have cared less what students thought of their teachers' performance. The Puritan ministers who ran America's earliest colleges never asked students whether their instructors were "accessible enough."

But times have changed, and the result is a debate with a twist of role reversal, as some academics argue that students' often-whimsical comments can carry too much weight.

Student evaluations picked up steam in the 1960s as students demanded more of a say in the academic life of their schools. More recently, the inexorable rise in college costs has students, families and legislators demanding more accountability and value.

Some form of end-of-semester evaluation by students is now almost universal, and that doesn't take into account the Internet, where RateMyProfessors.com and other Web sites have created a far more public process that parallels colleges' evaluations. The sites are popular but annoy teachers with their snippy comments and influence over which classes students choose.

The whole trend, along with a seemingly endless stream of studies on how to conduct and use student evaluations, has fed a broader debate about how much "customer satisfaction" should count in education. Sometimes making customers uncomfortable is good for them, teachers say.

"Faculty should know how the students have responded to their class," said Lee Shulman, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. But he notes that students get no guidance on how to critique teachers, often get one-size-fits-all questions, and too often are asked for comments only at the end of the course. By then, it's too late to change anything.

Some comments are thoughtful and useful. But others are capricious. That sometimes worries young teachers, for whom evaluations can play a significant role in whether they get tenure.

Professors who give good grades get better reviews, studies have shown. It isn't clear whether that means teachers can "buy" affection with grade inflation, or the good grades and reviews both reflect genuinely better teaching.

There's a similar effect for physically attractive professors, according to a much-discussed 2003 study by two University of Texas researchers. One possible explanation was that better-looking teachers simply hold students' attention longer, so they are actually more effective.

"If you're in class because a professor is good looking, you're still paying more attention," co-author Daniel Hamermesh said.

Other studies have documented how students respond differently to men and women. Female professors are more likely to be called "accessible," "enthusiastic" and "caring." Men are more likely to be described as "brilliant."

Such research troubled Upson-Saia so much that she tells her students about it to make them aware of their potential biases before they fill out their forms.

One study even found students who were given chocolate gave their instructors higher marks.

Upson-Saia says she often finds her students' comments helpful — and tries to brush off the occasional negative ones.

"I'm willing for them not to like me in order to teach them something," she said.
Tuition's worth called in question

Study: Results haven't kept pace at colleges

By Mary Beth Marklein
USA TODAY

As college tuitions continue to climb, a study released today fuels concerns about whether the investment in higher education by families and taxpayers translates into better results.

Students are a growing source of revenue for colleges, but little of that money is going into classroom instruction, says the report by the Delta Cost Project, a Washington-based non-profit.

The study also finds that the percentage of students who complete a degree hasn't kept pace with increases in enrollments, revenue and total spending.

Leaders in higher education typically argue that spending increases are necessary to maintain educational quality, but "what we see across a broad range of indicators is that states and institutions are spending money in areas that may not be in line with the public priority of preparing more graduates," report author Jane Wellman says. The report is based on Department of Education data across 18 years from nearly 2,000 institutions representing 90% of students.

The study examined only operating expenses, which include instructional costs — primarily faculty salaries and benefits. The fastest-growing operating expenses are related to research, public outreach and financial aid, the report says. Other examples are student services, maintenance and academic support.

Bill Troutt, president of Rhodes College in Memphis and chairman of a congressional college cost commission a decade ago, suggests classroom instruction shouldn't be the only focus. "We are making a very significant investment here in affordability," he says.

Troutt also says the study should have included capital costs, such as construction and technology — factors he says influence student learning.

"I think it's fair to calculate those in giving families a picture of what the true cost of education is," he says.

For the current school year, sticker price increases ranged from 4.2% at community colleges to 6.6% at public four-year institutions, College Board data show.

The report does not address the quality of the education a student receives, but completion rates are drawing more attention in a competitive global economy. The United States spends more per student than any other industrialized nation, yet it ranks at the bottom in degree completion (54%), says a 2007 report by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. The organization average is 71%; the high is 91% in Japan.

"We absolutely must talk about productivity — the linkage between resources and results — if our country is serious about competing globally and maintaining our quality of life," says Travis Reindl of Jobs for the Future, a Boston-based non-profit group.

Richard Vedder of the Center for College Affordability and Productivity says findings support calls by a federally appointed commission on which he sat to hold colleges more accountable for student achievement. "I'm hoping the policymaking public will say we've got to do something about this," such as making funding contingent on academic performance.

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Tuition increases vs. spending

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution Type</th>
<th>Net Tuition Revenue</th>
<th>Direct Instructional Spending</th>
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<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
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<td>Private</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
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1 — Full-time equivalent
2 — Doctorate-granting universities only
Source: Delta Cost Project, based on U.S. Education Department data.
10 Things Your Airline Won't Tell You
by Jim Rendon
Monday, April 28, 2008

provided by SmartMoney.com

1. "Welcome to the crowded skies."

If you've flown lately you've probably noticed that air travel feels like rush hour on the subway. Indeed, as airlines get more efficient, they're squeezing more people onto fewer planes. But that's had an unintended consequence: More fliers get left behind. Airlines have always overbooked flights to compensate for last-minute cancellations. But they don't always get the numbers right. And with so few seats open on later flights, fewer folks are volunteering to get bumped. As a result, the number of involuntarily bumped passengers is up, having grown 44 percent between the first nine months of 2005 and the same period in 2007, according to the Department of Transportation.

More from SmartMoney.com:

- Government Revisits Air Passengers' Rights
- Hotels Offering Gas Incentives to Lure Guests
- Airlines Tack on Even More Fees

The silver lining for travelers is that airlines must get involuntarily bumped fliers to their destination within four hours of the expected arrival time or refund them up to $400. The bad news is, the problem isn't going away — airlines are busy developing computer systems to help them rebook bumped passengers. "Instead of fixing the problem," says Tony Polito, an associate professor at East Carolina University who has published several studies on the airline industry, "they are institutionalizing it."

2. "Your hard-won air miles are worth less all the time."

Air miles are easy to accrue. You can earn them using your credit card, getting a mortgage, "for anything short of breathing," says Tim Winship, editor at large of SmarterTravel.com. American Airlines, for example, has thousands of "mileage partners" to whom it sells air miles, making its frequent-flier program an important revenue center. And United Airlines' Mileage Plus plan brought in $600 million for the company in 2006.

But as miles flood the market, they're getting harder to use. Joe Lopez, a publications manager in Phoenix, wanted to redeem the 70,000 miles he earned on Northwest — but couldn't find a flight he liked. "It was ridiculous," he says. (A Northwest spokesperson says 50,000 miles will get you a seat on almost any domestic flight the airline offers.) What's worse, some airlines have reduced the shelf life of air miles, while others increased the amount required for an upgrade. Winship says customers can keep their account current by using a credit card affiliated with the program, which will build miles as they make purchases. You can also redeem a small amount of miles, to keep your account active, on things like magazine subscriptions.
3. "We'll give you a good deal — if we can get something out of it."

Once in a while airlines do offer serious bargains. Currently, they're doing so in an effort to steer you away from the Expeddias and Travelocitys of the world. Why? Airlines pay these online booking sites a fee for every ticket they sell — something they'd rather not do. The upshot: If you're looking for the best deals — anywhere from a few dollars off to savings of 25 percent or more — your first stop should be the airlines' own Web sites.

The industry is following the lead of Southwest, which long ago pulled its tickets from travel sites. In 2005 it introduced Ding, a computer application that scans for the best fares and regularly updates you on deals. What does Southwest get in return? Loyalty and repeat fliers. "Subscribers to Ding are highly engaged customers," says Anne Murray, senior director of marketing communication with Southwest. "They fly a lot." American recently launched a similar application called DealFinder, which offers big discounts on flights, and other airlines may follow. But there's a limit, says George Hobica, creator of Airfarewatchdog.com. "If every airline does this, how many of these things can you run on your computer?"

4. "We love hidden fees."

The inflation-adjusted price of an airline ticket has actually fallen since the airlines were deregulated in 1978. But at the same time, fuel costs have skyrocketed. How do airlines make up the difference? In part through special fees. These fees keep the listed ticket price competitive but boost the total cost to travelers, often at the end of the booking process, when buyers are less likely to change their mind.

The most common is the fuel surcharge, which ranges from $5 to $25 or more. (Southwest hedged against rising oil prices before they spiked; it doesn't have a fuel surcharge.) Other examples of fees: Northwest charges $15 for an exit-row seat. United now charges $25 each way for checking a second bag. And Allegiant, a small airline that provides services from cities like Missoula, Mont., to the Sunbelt, charges $9.50 just to book a ticket online — a process that costs the company virtually nothing. Even frequent-flier programs, which are supposed to let you book "free flights," have added fees for things like booking too close to your travel date. "I keep seeing more and more of these hidden fees," says Hobica. "I get complaints from people all the time."

5. "Customer service isn't always our top priority..."

Twice last year, when Larry Meyer tried to fly from the U.S. Virgin Islands to Florida, he arrived at the airport only to find his flight had been canceled and nothing was available until the next day. "It really rubbed me the wrong way," he says. "They have my number in the computer; you'd think they could call me." And some customers, after enough bad experiences, have started fighting back. Kate Hanni, who was delayed on the tarmac for nine hours in 2006, formed a group that pushed New York State to enact a passengers' rights law.

According to Claes Fornell, a professor at the University of Michigan Ross School of Business, the major U.S. airlines currently have their lowest customer-satisfaction ratings in seven years. "There is collusion in dissatisfaction," he says. "They all offer about the same lousy service." But David Castleveter, spokesman for the Air Transport Association, which represents the airlines, sees it differently. He says fliers, upset by delays that are often out of the airlines' control, assume customer service is the problem when other factors are to blame. "This is a customer-service-driven business," Castleveter says.
6. "...unless you have a lot of miles."

They may be making a lot of customers miserable these days, but if airlines could be said to cater to anyone's needs, it's those of the folks in the top tier of their frequent-flier programs — heavy travelers, many of whom fly for business and therefore buy the most expensive tickets. "These people get white-glove service," says Henry Harteveldt, a travel analyst with Forrester Research. "[Airlines] really want to cultivate that relationship." These favored fliers get the first crack at upgrades. The reservation center answers their call on the first ring. They often get special bonus-mile offers and free upgrades. And they can use first-class check-in, meaning shorter lines through security and early boarding.

Chuck Guedelhoefer, president of Raths, Raths and Johnson, a structural-engineering firm in Willowbrook, Ill., cherishes the benefits he gets from United's top-tier membership program. For one, it makes it easier for him to redeem frequent-flier miles. And because he has so many with United, he always gets seated in the exit row, so he doesn't have to pay for upgrades to business class. "I even get treated better at the ticket counter," he says.

7. "Our planes are ancient."

Airline passengers in Europe are accustomed to seat-back entertainment systems with movies on demand and videogames — innovations that seem like space-age fantasies compared with the pull-down screens still so common here. That's because after the industry's near collapse in 2001, most major U.S. airlines decided they couldn't afford new jets and stopped buying them. Now our commercial fleet averages 12 years old. And with so many older jets in the air, airlines feel little pressure to upgrade, says Richard Aboulafia, an aviation analyst with the Teal Group.

"An inordinate number of our planes [in the U.S.] are old and inefficient," says Harteveldt. Among U.S. carriers, Northwest has the oldest planes, with an average age of 17 years. (JetBlue and AirTran, by contrast, have the newest fleets, averaging three years old.) It's not that old aircraft are dangerous; they're maintained to high safety standards. But in addition to being dingy and less comfortable for passengers, old planes cause more delays due to last-minute mechanical problems, and they guzzle fuel, a cost that filters down to customers. The situation is only going to get worse, says CreditSights analyst Roger King, since most U.S. airlines have placed few or no orders for new planes.

8. "Even we don't understand our pricing."

Most flights are divided into first class, business and economy. But when it comes to pricing, there are often up to 200 different price points for seats on each plane. "Ticket pricing is a mix of science, game theory and art — a three-dimensional matrix," Harteveldt says. The biggest factor, beyond basic costs like fuel and labor, is the competition. Airlines track each other's fares, then try to determine how many business travelers, who generally pay a premium for flexible tickets, are likely to book a flight. On routes with lots of business travelers, seat prices can stay high because airlines know they'll book seats at the last minute. As each seat sells, the prices of others fluctuate. "Domestic fares can change up to three times a day," says Hobica.

But prices don't only go up. If demand from business travelers is lagging, prices may fall as the flight time gets closer. If that happens and the fare drops by the time your flight leaves, you can get a voucher from a number of airlines for the difference — United, Southwest and Alaska do this without deducting a fee.
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