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Budget highlights

Gov. Bev Perdue has proposed a $20.9 billion budget that focuses on education. Her plan includes:

• Increasing the K-12 budget by $562 million, bringing the total to about $8 billion. The money would save or create 11,000 school jobs – most of them teachers or teacher assistants – and reduce class sizes in kindergarten through third grades.
• A 1.8 percent raise for teachers and state employees
• A 1.9 percent cost of living increase for state retirees
• An additional $18.2 million for the early childhood program Smart Start, and money for the Governor’s School, an enrichment program for high school students that is running on donations this summer.
• A tax credit for businesses that hire unemployed workers and retain them for at least a year.
• A tax credit for angel investments in certain small businesses.
• Start a film industry workforce training program at community colleges to train up to 400 workers for production crews.
• Fund programs to boost clean energy and ag-biotech research

Gov. Bev Perdue and GOP agree on gas tax

By Lynn Bonner and Bruce Siceloff - lbonner@newsobserver.com


House Republicans said last week they want to cap the state gas tax. Gov. Bev Perdue said Thursday she wants to do the same.

The tax rate is expected to fall July 1 from 38.9 cents to about 37.7 cents, because part of the tax is tied to wholesale fuel prices and fluctuates as they do.

And now that it’s falling anyway, Perdue and the House Republicans say they want to prevent it from rising. They agree on a cap of 37.5 cents. Perdue says this would
save motorists $63 million in gas taxes, a tiny sliver of the $1.88 billion the state expects to rake in. Last fall, the House and Senate could not agree on whether to cap the gas tax, but Senate leader Phil Berger said he wants to freeze the tax during the short session that begins next week.

The gas tax may be one of the few points of agreement in what are expected to be drastically different ideas on what the state should pay for next year.

Perdue’s budget, which she released Thursday, has raises for all state employees, a sales tax increase, and $785 million more for education.

House budget writers are set to release their proposal next week, but it will not include the 3/4-cent sales tax hike fueling much of the increase in Perdue’s proposed $20.9 billion plan.

The tax increase would raise about $760 million over 11 months, or $850 million a year. She proposes to keep the sales tax increase for two years.

Perdue’s proposal is about $1.2 billion more than the current budget.

Legislative Republicans have been clear they will not go for a tax increase. They disregarded Perdue’s last budget proposal, which sought to keep in place a portion of a sales tax set to expire.

“I’m hopeful that they will not consider this budget to be dead on arrival,” Perdue said at a news conference Thursday morning. “I’ve offered up one set of solutions paid for in a certain way. Let them find another revenue source. I’m not beholden to the sales tax, but we have to have revenue to do what we need to do.”

Responses to Perdue’s proposal fell along predictable lines.

Legislative leaders bashed it for the proposed tax increase.

“Gov. Perdue’s budget proposal is, disappointingly, more of the same failed approach that led to the fiscal mess the Republican legislative majority inherited,” House Speaker Thom Tillis said in a statement. “The Governor proposes to raise almost a billion dollars in taxes on every citizen and small business.”

Dr. Olson Huff, chairman of the Smart Start state governing board, praised Perdue for increasing Smart Start and N.C. Pre-K budgets.

“Her budget reflects her ongoing commitment to ensuring that children have the opportunities that they need to succeed in school and in life,” he said in a statement.

Perdue angered legislators in February when she refused to start collecting new tolls on two toll-free ferry routes, and higher rates on three toll routes, as ordered in the state budget last year. She cited economic hardship in ferry-dependent coastal
communities. Republicans sharply criticized Perdue but shied away from fighting her on it. Both budget drafts, theirs and now hers, would put off the new tolls until July 2013.

But there’s a difference here: What to do about the additional $2.5 million in toll collections that had been expected in the budget? Republicans say DOT should make up for it with unspecified spending cuts. Perdue says the legislature should make up for it by giving the ferry division an extra $2.5 million in tax money.

Meanwhile, House Republicans want to eliminate about 100 DOT staff positions – most of them vacant – while Perdue proposes to hire 99 new workers. Most of these new employees would go to the Division of Motor Vehicles to implement a new statewide system linking car registrations with county property taxes, to start in July 2013.
UNC-Chapel Hill might take action against Julius Nyang’oro

By Dan Kane - dkane@newsobserver.com

Last summer, UNC-Chapel Hill professor Julius Nyang’oro received $12,000 to teach AFAM 280 – Blacks in North Carolina. The 19 students enrolled in the course were to learn about the state’s legacy of slavery and racism, and how blacks fought to overcome it.

It is a course that typically involved classroom lectures, research papers and exams, according to syllabi from other UNC-CH professors who taught it. Nyang’oro, the department’s chairman, was expected to teach it that way as well, university officials said.

But Nyang’oro did not hold classes or require any exams. His one-page syllabus said that because of the “compact nature” of the summer schedule, the students would spend that time largely on their own to find one or two black leaders in North Carolina to be the subject of a research paper due at the end of the session.

Now, university officials say they may seek action against Nyang’oro for not teaching a class as they had anticipated. The move comes after The News & Observer inquired about summer school payments to Nyang’oro.

“Through our review, we learned that Professor Nyang’oro provided instruction for a course in independent study format that had been approved to be taught in lecture format,” said Nancy Davis, a UNC-CH spokeswoman. “Had the Summer School been aware that he was treating it as independent study, he would not have been paid for the course. We are reviewing appropriate next steps.”

The summer school payment is the latest development in what appears to be the biggest case of academic fraud at UNC-CH in decades. An internal probe released late last week found 54 classes within the African studies department in which there was little or no indication of instruction. The probe also found at least 10 cases of unauthorized grade changes involving students who had not completed their course work or a final exam before the class ended.

Nyang’oro is the instructor of record for 45 of those classes, and university officials say they follow the same pattern: A course typically intended for
classroom instruction was converted into an independent study format, which meant no classes and an expectation that a paper or other project would be produced at the end.

In the other nine classes, university officials could not determine who was supposed to teach them, and found no evidence of classroom instruction. Professors who were listed as instructors said their names were forged on grade rolls for the courses. The unauthorized grade changes also stem from those classes.

“All of that is deeply troubling,” said Wade Hargrove, chairman of UNC-CH’s board of trustees. “My concern at this point is making sure that measures are in place to prevent these things from ever happening again at this university.”

The 45 classes represent nearly two-thirds of the 75 classes that Nyang’oro was listed as teaching from the summer of 2007 through the summer of 2011, the period that UNC academic officials examined.

Nyang’oro could not be reached. He resigned as chairman as the internal probe began, and when it was released, the university announced he was retiring effective July 1.

The summer pay is given to professors for teaching classes outside the normal spring and fall semesters. Professors have to get those courses approved by the university before teaching them. The summer sessions last roughly a month, so classes typically meet more often and for longer periods of time to cover the material.

Nyang’oro received $120,000 in summer school pay during the four-year period that was under review. University officials say the other eight summer school courses he taught were in a classroom setting and are not in question. They were all introductory courses offered by the African studies department. He was paid $8,400 for being a summer school administrator for three sessions, university records said.

The pay was in addition to his annual salary, which reached $171,000 last year before he stepped down as chairman. That knocked his pay down to $159,000.

The internal investigation said the only other person who may have been involved in the academic improprieties is Nyang’oro’s former administrative secretary, Deborah Crowder, who retired in September 2009 after 30 years with the university. She made roughly $36,000 a year. She has not responded to repeated requests for comment.

The AFAM 280 class reopens questions as to whether additional investigation is needed. University officials last fall contacted law enforcement because of the
forgery allegations. Orange County District Attorney Jim Woodall said the evidence in that respect did not appear to be enough to launch a criminal investigation, partly because there did not appear to be a financial motive, and there isn’t much of a paper or electronic trail to follow.

“But,” he said, “if there were some payments for a teacher teaching classes that were not taught, well, that would be a different issue.”

Nyang’oro, 57, was the African studies department’s first chairman, taking over in 1992 after teaching at the university the previous eight years. He has won two notable teaching awards during his tenure as chairman.

But questions regarding his teaching began to surface in July, when a paper written by Michael McAdoo, a football player caught up in a major NCAA probe into impermissible financial and academic benefits, became public. The paper on Swahili culture included numerous passages of plagiarism that weren’t caught until rival N.C. State University fans reviewed it.

Nyang’oro was listed as the professor of that class, which was taught in the summer of 2009. In the internal probe’s report, he said he did not teach the class, and suggested that a former “department manager,” who was not identified, may have helped make that course and others available.

Nyang’oro did not catch the plagiarism, nor did NCAA or UNC officials. The internal probe identifies it as one of the nine in which there’s no evidence of instruction.

Chancellor Holden Thorp initially stood by Nyang’oro after the plagiarism surfaced. But then a partial academic transcript, obtained by The News & Observer, of another football player caught up in the NCAA investigations raised more questions, prompting the internal investigation.

Marvin Austin’s transcript showed that he took an upper level class taught by Nyang’oro in the summer of 2007. It was the first class Austin, a highly-prized recruit, took at the university. He received a B-plus. The internal probe now identifies it as one of the 45 classes in which Nyang’oro performed little or no instruction.

Football players and basketball players accounted for 39 percent of the 686 enrollments in the 54 suspect classes. Football players alone accounted for 36 percent of the enrollments. Non-student athletes accounted for 42 percent of the enrollments; the rest are student athletes in non-revenue-producing sports.

But university officials say student athletes and non-student athletes were treated equally when it came to the no-show classes and unauthorized grade changes.
Figures released Thursday show four non-student athletes received them along with three football players and three other student athletes who are not in revenue-generating sports.

The investigation showed no motive for the improprieties, but did say the department was poorly run, which made it difficult to piece together what had happened. The university has set new policies and procedures to provide better oversight and record-keeping, as well as tougher academic standards for independent study classes.

University officials say there is no evidence of a concerted effort to help student athletes with easy grades so they could remain eligible to play. But Hargrove said there are legitimate concerns about the lack of recognition of a problem among athletic officials who are supposed to closely monitor student-athletes’ academic progress.

“There is going to be a heightened level of oversight to the integrity of the academic requirements throughout the university and the academic performance of students, including athletes,” he said.
Athlete-friendly

Officials of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill doubtless wish the issues which disgraced the football program would just disappear so that everyone could become excited about new Coach Larry Fedora and the upcoming season. But that won’t be happening anytime soon.

As The News & Observer’s Dan Kane reported earlier, an academic fraud investigation seems to have shown that many courses (most of them summer school) offered in the African and Afro-American Studies department apparently had the now-resigned Julius Nyang’oro, department chair, as the instructor, but little instruction was given. And the internal investigation produced evidence of unauthorized grade changes. Nyang’oro resigned as department chair and now has announced his retirement.

Oh, and about that football program. What prompted this investigation was an earlier N&O report that Marvin Austin, a star football player, had been enrolled in an upper-level African studies class under Nyang’oro in the summer of 2007.

But at that point, Austin had yet to begin his first semester at UNC-CH and had not completed a required remedial reading course. He got a B-plus in the African studies course. If his name sounds familiar, Austin was kicked off the team after the NCAA, oversight body for college sports, found he had received improper benefits from a sports agent.

And all that was part of the scandal that led to the dismissal of football coach Butch Davis and NCAA penalties against the university.

Now, it turns out that football and basketball players made up 39 percent of the students in 54 classes that were at the heart of that internal investigation which basically questioned whether these were classes at all.

Questions arise: Were the athletes guided to these courses by advisers who felt they’d perhaps get a break and some help in remaining eligible for sports? Former state Supreme Court Justice Robert Orr, now an attorney (who helped get a
player’s eligibility restored in the middle of the NCAA investigation last year) believes so. “But,” Orr says, “nobody wants to rock the boat because it’s big money.”

About the big money there can be no dispute. If the university does well in football and basketball, its two marquee sports, it stands to make millions, and then to spend those millions helping out other sports. And then there are the millions that have to be spent on facilities from time to time, and of course, the coaches.

UNC’s new football coaching staff, for example, will cost the university more than $4 million next season, and if anyone wishes to question the university’s priorities, that provides evidence.

Head Coach Fedora will get more than $2 million (including a one-time $400,000 due before his first game), while three assistants draw $250,000 apiece, substantially more than a top-ranking professor makes, and three others will get $185,000, also more than a top professor.

The money, the pressure to win to make the money, the need for top players to get the wins to make the money to build the stadiums to pay the coaches to please the boosters – it’s all part of a cycle that too often leads, as it did with Chapel Hill’s program, to scandal. That’s a risk and an occasional problem some alumni apparently are willing to live with if they can keep the lid on most of the time.

Is that an excessively cynical view? Perhaps, but given the scandals of the last couple of years, from West to East (Southern California, Ohio State, UNC-CH) it’s hard to argue that a big-money college athletics program is worth the cost and the risk.

But academic leaders are wary to mess around with it. Tom Ross, the president of the UNC system, said of the academic fraud investigation at Chapel Hill that it represented an “isolated incident” and that the university had “taken appropriate steps to correct problems.” Thus, he didn’t see the need for further investigation. It is hard to share his confidence.
ECU student honored for special needs work

An East Carolina University junior has earned a national award for her work with school-age students who have special needs.

The Council for Exceptional Children named Sara Graves its 2012 Outstanding Undergraduate Student Member of the Year.

The Charlotte native studies adapted special education, which focuses on developing curriculum for severe and profoundly disabled students. She plans to teach high school. Sara became interested in the needs of students with disabilities after she was placed as a student assistant in a special education classroom at Independence High.

She is president of the ECU Student Council for Exceptional Children and represents North Carolina on the national student council.
Aquarius is the world's only undersea laboratory dedicated to science and is operated by UNCW for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration near Key Largo, Fla.

**Budget crunch puts UNCW-run undersea lab in jeopardy**

By Pressley Baird

Aquarius, the world's only permanent undersea laboratory and a key component of the University of North Carolina Wilmington's marine science program, could lose its funding next year, school officials say.

A federal budget that's holding up in the U.S. House of Representatives doesn't include money for Aquarius, the federal undersea research program operated by UNCW. School officials say the center will be pulled from its research space in the Florida Keys by 2013 unless funding is found elsewhere.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), which operates the UNCW-based National Undersea Research Center, consolidated programs in its ocean exploration program, which eliminates the undersea research program that included Aquarius, said Bob Wicklund, the school's director of federal programs.
If the cut passes, funding would end at the start of the next federal fiscal year, which begins in October, said Dan Baden director of the Center for Marine Science at UNCW.

If that happened, UNCW would complete two more missions at Aquarius, then dismantle the capsule by December 2012, Baden said. The program's 11 full-time staff members at UNCW would also lose their jobs, said Tom Potts, director of Aquarius.

Baden said that while the funding cut isn't final, it doesn't look good. "More will be known after the federal budget is finalized and we see whether any funding for (the undersea research program) is included," he said. "From what we know at this point, that does not look likely."

When Aquarius' funding has been threatened in years past, North Carolina's members of Congress have put earmarks in the budget to save it. But Congress banned those earmarks, making a Congressional intervention "virtually impossible," Wicklund said.

NOAA offered to keep Aquarius open if the university could find another funding source. Wicklund said he had "no idea" how the school could find that money.

But Potts said a nonprofit foundation that would fund the program through 2013 is in the works. The foundation would be independent of UNCW, but would have NOAA's blessing, Potts said.

Money for Aquarius has been dwindling for years. Last year, the entire undersea research program only got about $4 million in funding. This year's budget crisis stemmed from NOAA's redirection of dollars into its satellite program, he said.

Losing the program "doesn't make any sense," Wicklund said.

"Aquarius has probably been one of the biggest coral reef research tools for the U.S. government for years," he said. "It's been recording one of the great environmental disasters of our time. For it to be shut down, I just don't understand."
Recession still rattling college Class of 2012

By Pressley Baird

Brooke Keller's freshman year of college started with a crash. The now senior at the University of North Carolina Wilmington had watched her dad sell the company he'd started on his own to buy several beach houses near Wilmington.

Her dad bought and built about five homes on Carolina and Kure beaches, Keller said. Each was worth multiple millions of dollars. It seemed foolproof.

But the now infamous housing bubble that burst in 2008 – Keller's first year at UNCW – changed that.

Keller recounts the story in a matter-of-fact manner, recalling how she had to take out student loans and pick up part-time jobs to pay for portion of her the tuition her parents couldn't. But she's not upset, she said. The fallout wasn't something her family could have seen coming.

"It's exciting to be an entrepreneur in that world," she said. "It was just at the wrong time."
Keller's experience isn't unheard of among this year's graduates. A month into their freshmen year, the U.S. economy bottomed out after banks and companies declared bankruptcy in rapid succession. It was an event that would define college for the class of 2012. Keller is one of almost 2,000 students graduating from UNCW on Friday and Saturday.

They're the first class to have the faltering economy hanging over their heads for their entire college careers. Graduates in 2011 had a year of calm before the collapse, and 2013 graduates knew about the problem going in.

The emotions of students like Keller have run the gamut over the past four years. Sophomore year brought panic as they tried to decide which major would be the most lucrative. Junior year was a time of worry after hearing job search horror stories from alumni. Now, as seniors, they're tackling the economy that changed what they would do during school and how they behaved outside of it.

Thom Rakes, director of the university's career center, said this year's graduates all took the news differently.

"Some students responded as freshmen that came in their very first semester saying, 'I want to choose the right major, so that four years from now, I know what I'm going to do with that,'" he said. "Others kind of said, 'I'll think about that tomorrow,' or 'I'm not going to think about that at all.'"

But there have been two constants over the past four years, Rakes said. The center saw more students, and it saw them earlier.

"I think a lot of them realized they really need help with the process, that it's a lot more complex and challenging than they'd hoped it was," he said.

The career center helps students with age-old college problems – picking a major, finding an internship, getting a job after graduation. But the down economy has made the center tailor its advice slightly. Rakes and his staff now try to get students to focus on postgraduate life from the first step.

"Think about what's the end game," Rakes said. "Where do you want to end up, what's the industry, what sort of opportunity?"

Keller said she picked her communication studies major because she felt it lent itself to a wide variety of jobs. The range, she said, makes her more versatile.

"The communication studies major here definitely gives you the opportunity rather than if you had, I don't know, an anthropology degree," she said. "That's pretty specific. You can't really go into finance with that."
Asking Keller about her major leads almost instantly into a conversation about her internship at UNCW's marketing and communications office. The experience she gained in her internship makes her major relevant, she said.

"You're graduating with a college degree, someone else is graduating with a college degree and an internship," she said. "They'd be more willing to take the person with the internship."

The example is ubiquitous. But for this class, it's crucial, Rakes said. While the employers he works with are still hiring new college graduates, they won't take a second look at someone without a proven set of skills.

"A few years ago, employers would say (to a new graduate), 'That means you're really trainable. I'm going to bring you into a management development program,'" Rakes said. "Now they're saying, 'Well, that's wonderful that you have a degree – what can you do for me day one?'"

Woody Hall, senior economist at the university, said the messages hitting the class of 2012 as they hit the job market are conflicting.

"One is saying unemployment may be as high as 35, 40 percent. The other one is saying that employers are offering more opportunities to graduates now than they were in the past," he said. "The truth is probably somewhere between the two extremes."

While the job market is slowly improving, he said, it's hard to get a big-picture take on what will define success for 2012 graduates. He breaks it down into short-term versus long-term success. Graduates with more technical degrees, like information systems, have more opportunities in the short run, while students who studied in the college of arts and sciences won't have as much immediate luck.

Keller has set aside her summer to job search. She's looking all over North Carolina and the surrounding states for internships or full-time positions. It's a daunting task, but Keller has a positive outlook.

"I'm not naive. I'm not expecting to get a job easy," she said. "But I'm optimistic in thinking that if I apply to a lot, I will get one."

But Hall said he would advise students not to rush into a job just because it's a job. "You find out you don't have the skills or can't get the job you currently want, go through the decision making process for one to two to maybe three years," he said. "To do that in the long run, you'll be better off."

Bottom line, he said, students should do what makes them happy.
"Pursue your passion," he said. "That's an overworked word, but it's true. Then recognize the real world."
In 2007, 36 high school freshmen accepted the challenge of enrolling in a new program aimed predominately at students who are the first in their families to attend college.

They had five years to earn a high school diploma and an associate’s degree at no cost to their parents. They became the Legacy Class of Scotland Early College High School at Richmond Community College. Although six students finished early, this first class graduates on May 19 at St. Andrews University.

“I applied because I wanted to get ahead with my education,” said Byron Goodwin of Laurinburg. “I felt I immediately received a two-year scholarship because I was getting two years of college for free! I thought my
Goodwin will enter East Carolina University this fall as a junior in the political science department.

Jeremiah Moore of Laurel Hill jumped at the chance to attend high school in a smaller setting.

“I was intrigued with the concept of being on a college campus and in class with adults. My friends applied, too. It is a great opportunity,” said Moore, who enters UNC Pembroke this fall and plans to teach.

Shautel Chavis of Wagram heads to East Carolina University this fall and is majoring in psychology.

“I just wanted to see if I could do it. When I started and several friends said I should have gone to Scotland [High School], something said, ‘Stay where you are.’ I can’t talk about what I missed by not going to the high school, because I didn’t experience it. I’m just glad I stayed. It hasn’t been easy, but it’s been worth it,” she said.

Megan Haywood of Laurinburg was worried the program might close when funding became an issue.

“When the cost of bussing became too much, they arranged to move us to St. Andrews. It proves they do care about us and wanted us to finish what we started. I’d like to say thank you to everyone for that,” said Haywood, who heads to UNC Charlotte this fall.

Stephanie Chavis of Gibson heads back to RCC this fall to pick up a few courses to complete her degree. She said the program was challenging and plans to transfer to UNC Pembroke and major in elementary education. She knows she will be prepared when she gets to the university.

Haywood and Moore are not officially members of The Legacy Class. They doubled up on classes and are graduating a year early. They are high school seniors, while the other students are called “Super Seniors.”

“This program is meant to challenge students to go over and beyond what they think they can do,” said Judy Clark, who serves as a liaison between the students and RCC. “These students have met those challenges and sacrificed in many ways to achieve what they have achieved. We’re extremely proud of them and their accomplishment.”

SEarCH Principal Joe Critcher has worked with the students for two years and said the administration is extremely proud of the students.
“Our inaugural class has done a great job of showing the public how valuable the Early College High School program is to our community. One thing that I observed in interacting with this graduation class is that they started to see the light at the end of the tunnel and worked extremely hard to get everything done for graduation. They are a great group of students,” he said.

RCC President Dale McInnis remembers the first days of the program and the challenges associated with it.

“These kids are pioneers who had the courage to be in the first class. I am very proud of them, because they had to adapt to many changes over the past five years. RCC appreciates our partnership with Scotland County Schools and with St. Andrews, which has made it possible for these students to complete their studies,” McInnis said.
Ranking Reveals World's Top Countries for Higher Education

LONDON, May 11, 2012 /PRNewswire via COMTEX/ -- New research into national education systems gives the first ranking of countries which are the 'best' at providing higher education.

The Universitas 21 Ranking was announced today (11 May 2012) at an event at Lund University in Sweden. Universitas 21, a leading global network of research universities, has developed the ranking as a benchmark for governments, education institutions and individuals. It aims to highlight the importance of creating a strong environment for higher education institutions to contribute to economic and cultural development, provide a high-quality experience for students and help institutions compete for overseas applicants.

Research authors at the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, University of Melbourne, looked at the most recent data from 48 countries across 20 different measures. The range of measures is grouped under four headings: resources (investment by government and private sector), output (research and its impact, as well as the production of an educated workforce which meets labour market needs), connectivity (international networks and collaboration which protects a system against insularity) and environment (government policy and regulation, diversity and participation opportunities). Population size is accounted for in the calculations.

Overall, in the Universitas 21 Ranking of higher education systems, the top five were found to be the United States, Sweden, Canada, Finland and Denmark (see full ranking in notes below).

Government funding of higher education as a percentage of GDP is highest in Finland, Norway and Denmark, but when private expenditure is added in, funding is highest in the United States, Korea, Canada and Chile. Investment in Research and Development is highest in Denmark, Sweden and Switzerland. The United States dominates the total output of research journal articles, but Sweden is the biggest producer of articles per head of population. The nations whose research has the greatest impact are
Switzerland, the Netherlands, the United States, United Kingdom and Denmark. While the United States and United Kingdom have the world's top institutions in rankings, the depth of world class higher education institutions per head of population is best in Switzerland, Sweden, Israel and Denmark.

The highest participation rates in higher education are in Korea, Finland, Greece, the United States, Canada and Slovenia. The countries with the largest proportion of workers with a higher level education are Russia, Canada, Israel, United States, Ukraine, Taiwan and Australia. Finland, Denmark, Singapore, Norway and Japan have the highest ratio of researchers in the economy.

International students form the highest proportions of total student numbers in Australia, Singapore, Austria, United Kingdom and Switzerland. International research collaboration is most prominent in Indonesia, Switzerland, Hong Kong SAR, Denmark, Belgium and Austria. China, India, Japan and the United States rank in the bottom 25 percent of countries for international research collaboration. In all but eight countries at least 50 percent of students were female, the lowest being in India and Korea. In only five countries were there at least 50 percent female staff; the lowest being in Japan and Iran.

Lead author, Professor Ross Williams at the University of Melbourne, said: "In a globalised world, a strong higher education system is essential if a nation is to be economically competitive.

"While there are a number of well-regarded global rankings of individual institutions, these don't shed any light on the broader picture of how well a nation's system educates its students, the environment it provides for encouraging and supporting excellence. Students choose countries to study in as much as individual institutions, and the Universitas 21 Ranking offers clear data to support decision-making."

Jane Usherwood, Secretary General of Universitas 21, said: "More transparency and clarity is needed around the comparative strengths and qualities of national education systems around the world in order to encourage knowledge-sharing, collaboration and development of opportunities for students in all countries. We hope the Universitas 21 Ranking will become an established point of reference for policy-makers, education institutions and development bodies globally."
Universitas 21 is an international research network of 24 universities and colleges. Its membership works together to encourage international mobility and engagement between staff and students.

2. Universitas 21 members are: Australia: University of Melbourne, University of New South Wales, University of Queensland; Canada: McGill University, University of British Columbia; Chile: Pontifical Catholic University of Chile; China: Fudan University, Shanghai Jiao Tong University; Hong Kong SAR: University of Hong Kong; India: University of Delhi; Ireland: University College Dublin; Japan: Waseda University; Mexico: Tecnológico de Monterrey; New Zealand: University of Auckland; Singapore: National University of Singapore; South Korea: Korea University; Sweden: Lund University; The Netherlands: University of Amsterdam; United Kingdom: University of Birmingham, University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, University of Nottingham; United States of America: University of Connecticut, University of Virginia.

3. The research authors for the Universitas 21 Ranking project at the University of Melbourne are: Ross Williams, Gaetan De Rassenfosse, Paul Jensen, Simon Marginson. The steering group is: Dr Ying Cheng, Graduate School of Education, Shanghai Jiao Tong University; Professor David Greenaway, Vice-Chancellor, University of Nottingham; Professor Don Fisher, Department of Educational Studies, University of British Columbia; Professor Simon Marginson, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne; Professor Ross Williams, Melbourne Institute, University of Melbourne.

SOURCE Universitas 21

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National science test shows only slight improvement

By Lyndsey Layton, Published: May 9 | Updated: Thursday, May 10, 10:00 AM

National tests measuring science knowledge among eighth-graders show slight improvement compared with those of two years earlier, but one-third of all students still lack a basic understanding of the physical, life and earth sciences, according to a federal study made public Thursday.

The tests showed that black and Hispanic students had made slightly more progress than white students, making a tiny dent in the persistent achievement gaps between the racial groups.

The gender gap also has proved stubborn, with boys continuing to outperform girls in the science test, a trend consistent with results from 2009, the previous year the test was given.

Despite barely significant increases in performance among most every group, scores remained flat for top-performing students. Just 2 percent of all students tested were considered advanced.

Private school students outpaced public school students nationwide. And students who reported that they regularly performed hands-on science projects in class scored higher than students who less frequently did that kind of class work.

The study is based on the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress. The tests are given in different subjects and periodically to fourth-, eighth- and 12th-graders across the country.

The tests, often called The Nation’s Report Card, are the only continuing and nationally representative assessment of what students know.

Education Secretary Arne Duncan said the slight increase in test scores and narrowing of the achievement gap were promising but that the country has a long way to go. “This tells me that we need to work harder and faster to build capacity in schools and in districts across the country,” Duncan said in a statement. “We have to do things differently; that’s why education reform is so critical.”

Gerry Wheeler, interim executive director of the National Science Teachers Association, was blunt. “This is dreadful,” he said.
Wheeler said No Child Left Behind, the 2002 federal education law, is partly to blame, because it emphasized reading and mathematics at the expense of science. “As a country, we’ve backed off on science,” he said. “We even have members in elementary schools who say, ‘My principal told me to stop teaching science.’”

It is difficult to say how the 2011 results fit into a larger trend line of student performance. The National Assessment Governing Board, which sets policy for the test, changed the framework for the science exam two years ago, making comparisons to tests prior to that impossible.

In Virginia, students scored higher than the national average and posted higher scores in 2011 than they did in 2009. The performance gap between white students and blacks and Hispanics did not change between 2009 and 2011.

In Maryland, students performed the same as the national average for public school students. The average Maryland scores were four points higher in 2011 than in 2009 but the percentage of students performing at the proficient and basic levels did not change over the two years. The performance gap between white students and other racial groups, as well as between poor students and those from more affluent families, did not significantly change between 2009 and 2011.

One bright spot in Maryland is the fact that the gender gap seems to have largely disappeared. On average, boys and girls scored alike on the science test, and the same percentage of males and females were deemed basic or proficient. But a greater percentage of boys than girls were deemed advanced.

Students in the District turned in the worst performance in the region, performing significantly below the national average. The achievement gap between whites and blacks was nearly twice as wide as the national average, and the gap between white students and Hispanics was also wider than the national average. D.C. schools did not participate in the voluntary testing in 2009, so no comparisons to earlier results can be made.

The results come as corporations, the military and the federal government are growing increasingly concerned about U.S. students and their mastery of the STEM subjects — science, technology, engineering and math.

President Obama, who hosted a science fair at the White House in February and spoke about the need to improve science and technology education in his State of the Union address, wants to train 100,000 new math and science
teachers over the next decade. He intends to contribute federal dollars to a $100 million program led by the Carnegie Corporation to create more science teachers.

Those efforts are not enough, Wheeler said. “The message is getting lost at the local level, and that’s where the change has to happen,” he said. “Otherwise, it’s pretty much a scatter gun thing — there’s no united effort to bring these children forward.”

Compared with 2009, the average science scores in 2011 were one point higher for white students, three points higher for black students and five points higher for Hispanic students. There were no significant changes in scores for Asians.
Here is a guest post by Abir Qasem, director of academic computing at Bridgewater College, and Tanya Gupta, a senior resource management officer at World Bank.

The University of Florida recently decided to drastically shrink its computer science department, a move that will save the university around $1.4 million. At the same time, the university’s athletics budget went up by around $2 million.

Although there has been a strong reaction against this move in the media, there have been those who supported the UF decision, saying that it was an expression of the free market. For instance, an article in The Atlantic noted that UF Athletics, as a nonprofit entity, returns part of its profit to the university and also receives generous contributions from alumni and others. This line of reasoning implies that athletics should not be cut, as they contribute directly to the college’s bottom line.

However the argument being made is seriously flawed. Let’s explore why.
1. If you pay, you play: The root cause ascribed to the increase of the budget for athletics is the ability of athletics to earn money for the university. They are able to do so because they are set up as independent profit centers within the university. Thus, they are allowed to create their own revenue streams.

On the other hand, academic departments cannot act independently and are not set up as independent profit centers. They have to go through the administration. For example, let’s say that the state of Florida makes a law that eliminates all taxes for small high-tech businesses. Suddenly, there is a huge demand for short courses on technology and entrepreneurship. UF has both renowned entrepreneurs who are keen to teach courses on entrepreneurship as well as computer science professors.

Ideally, UF’s business and computer science departments would be well-positioned to contribute to UF’s bottom line. However, the two UF departments cannot do so. They are not able to act as a profit center — whereby they could offer courses, make a profit, and then return some of those profits to UF. Athletics, on the other hand, has more independence and is able to earn profits and return that profit to UF. Therefore, the comparison does not fully work. If departments need to act as profit centers to justify their existence, they should be able to set themselves up as such. But computer science was never given that chance, and hence, the principle should not be applied to them.

The question then arises -- if computer science were indeed set up as an independent profit center within UF, would it be able to make a profit? In short, yes. Computer science can prove its worth in the free market. Let’s look at the data. Enrollments in undergraduate computer science programs rose 9.6 percent in the 2011-12 school year, the fourth straight year of increase, according to the Computing Research Association. Computer science graduates now get more offers of employment than any other major. The offer rate for computer science majors increased 13.8 percent in 2011 from the previous year.

2. Separate and equal: Education and athletics should not be treated as tradable commodities, and most definitely not by institutions of higher learning. Just as NASCAR should retain its focus on racing and the NBA on basketball, an educational institution should be committed to education, as that is the sole reason the institution was established.

Tim Finin, professor of computer science and electrical engineering at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, says, “Some see no problem with the University of Florida saving $1.4 million by cutting its CS program
while increasing its budget for athletics by $2 million. While universities can make a lot of money running entertainment-oriented sports programs, it’s not their primary job.”

Most recently, UF officials have said that because of all the pushback from the public and the students, they will prepare a revised proposal before May 11. [Editor’s note: No sign of that revised proposal as of May 10.] This will help them meet the deadline for budget plans from colleges, following which there will be a final vote by the trustees. In the meanwhile, Gov. Rick Scott has created a “Blue Ribbon Task Force on State Higher Education Reform” panel to help remake Florida’s higher education system. He said, “The state has a vested interest in ensuring its higher education system produces world-class talent to serve as engaged citizens and meet the demands of Florida’s emerging knowledge-based economy”. A win for CS and technology disciplines? We shall have to wait and see.

One area that the panel should focus on is cost savings in higher education. All public universities, and even private ones, are pressed for money (Forbes says that funding for UF alone has been cut 30 percent over the last six years). Cost-efficiency is a must in this financially pressed environment. Innovative application of technology can be an antidote. In our previous blog in the Washington Post, we spoke about how open, online education models can reduce expenses, while increasing revenues. A financial surplus earned through moving to open education models can help the in-demand programs to grow, and even protect the programs that are under-enrolled. The potentially large student body can provide a diversity that stirs innovation and learning.

Ironically enough, in UF, the key enabler to efficiency and cost-cutting is now on the chopping block.

*By Daniel de Vise | 09:30 AM ET, 05/10/2012*