THE DAILY CLIPS

May 13, 2010

News, commentary, and opinion
compiled by the East Carolina University News Bureau from:

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The New York Times
The Wall Street Journal
USA Today
The Charlotte Observer
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Sustained funding brings solid results

By Holden Thorp

CHAPEL HILL

Year in, year out, the greatest contribution of North Carolina’s public universities is sending bright and capable new graduates to communities across the state to become the next generation of leaders.

At UNC-Chapel Hill, we just graduated another 5,360 undergraduate, graduate and professional degree students. Inspired by our faculty, they are ready to help our state and world start tackling the biggest problems of our time.

That’s what society needs most right now – for universities to produce the young people who can help get the economy going again. New graduates fortunate enough to have jobs most likely will not receive a to-do list. Instead, the world is calling them to come up with their own new ideas. That means trial and error – and failure – before success.

I know they are up to the task. Just like the state is in meeting the budget challenges of today and the future.

Fortunately, in good times and bad, North Carolina has made higher education a priority. We are so lucky to benefit from the foresight our state leaders had to establish this university and then to sustain the UNC system for all these years. It has served North Carolina well, and the level of investment that continues to be made is the envy of many a university president across the country.

State support for higher education led to creation of the Research Triangle Park, made possible faculty research that pumps millions of dollars from the federal government and other sources into our economy and led to breakthrough science that has made North Carolinians healthier and helped them lead more productive lives.

Recent state investments in health care have been particularly striking. We opened the new cancer hospital at the same time the General Assembly showed great confidence in our faculty’s ability to innovate by establishing – and sustaining – the University Cancer Research Fund, which supports basic interdisciplinary research through the Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center and the School of Medicine. That research is the key to future cures.

Our faculty have been remarkably successful in attracting federal research investments that benefit Tar Heel citizens. A new initiative brings UNC and East Carolina University researchers together to collaborate with health practitioners and community leaders in Lenoir County to tackle heart disease, the county’s leading cause of death. Lenoir County is considered on the "buckle of the stroke belt" in the southeastern United States. Faculty will explore the reasons for the high rates of hypertension and cardiovascular disease, along with related issues like access to medical care or opportunities that promote good health. This is a great example of how UNC system faculty serve the public good.

As legislators begin this year’s state budget process, they face tough decisions about a lot of competing needs. I hope they will continue to see the wisdom of investing in higher education.

For our part, we’re working hard to do more with less and become more efficient. We’ve streamlined administrative functions and eliminated duplication of support functions like finance, IT and human resources in research centers and institutes. Our IT division is partnering with N.C. State University on central software for human resources and finance. In absorbing our state cuts, we protected the classroom by limiting reductions to instructional units.

But my fellow chancellors and I are concerned about protecting the quality of the education we can provide to students. The truth is a new round of significant cuts would have serious implications.

At Chapel Hill we would lose full-time faculty in positions supported by state funding. We would have fewer fixed-term faculty and graduate teaching assistants. With fewer faculty and more students, classes would grow in size. And it would take our students longer to graduate. We’d have fewer people able to provide student advising, counseling and financial aid assistance. The entire system of how we teach and support students would be affected.

We understand that resources are limited this year, and the needs of North Carolina are great. In this economy, tough choices have to be made. But now is not the time to retreat dramatically from the competitive advantage that higher education brings to North Carolina.

Holden Thorp is chancellor of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
At the heart of rural health care

BY MIKE HUGHES
RALEIGH

In the aftermath of so many devastating global disasters, natural and manmade, we have, sadly, become accustomed to images of abject poverty in far-away places. What’s more difficult to fathom is the fact that so many in our own state live in similar conditions.

We in the affluent Triangle tend to project our standard of living on the rest of the state. Even in a bad economy, we have access to better-than-average job opportunities, good schools and abundant health care. But for many North Carolinians in the rural east, these basics we take for granted are anything but assured.

As The N&O recently reported, Eastern North Carolina continues to exhibit some of the country’s highest rates of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, infant mortality and HIV/AIDS. Dr. Paul Cunningham, dean of the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University, discussed the ongoing issues as part of an analysis of the 29-county region for which East Carolina provides care.

Planning and implementing medical and dental services to the region has been an uphill battle since long before the medical school was established in the 1970s. My late father, a professor of pediatrics in the school’s early years, spent many days with his peers traveling to far-flung clinics in Columbia, Swan Quarter and other rural outposts, to provide basic care to North Carolinians who otherwise had none.

In many cases, Dad was the first and only doctor those children had ever seen.

Thirty-plus years later, this remains the mission of the Brody School of Medicine: serve the rural poor, improve the region’s quality of life and train the next generation of doctors and health care providers to stay in North Carolina and ply that mission in the years ahead.

Today, the Brody School of Medicine is the second-ranked medical school in the country for sending graduates into family medicine, according to the American Academy of Family Physicians (announced April 29). Not as flashy, perhaps, as some higher-profile specialties, residency programs and accolades, but a true affirmation of the school’s success in slowly, steadily breaking the vicious cycle of poor health and poverty in the rural East.

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And it is a vicious cycle. Our eastern counties are no strangers to double-digit unemployment, but the lingering effects of recession have compounded an already bad situation, leaving some of the highest jobless rates in decades. As opportunities erode, the region’s poor are increasingly unable to pay for basic health care services.

And to a regional health care provider such as the Brody School of Medicine, which relies on patient fees for 70 percent of its budget, that means revenues are not keeping up with expenses.

Unresolved, that will lead to two things: poor people postponing or ignoring dire health care service needs or a reduced capacity to help those who need it most. Here in 2010, either outcome should be unacceptable. Dr. Cunningham has asked the General Assembly for an additional $3 million in funding to help offset the shortfall. To say the least, it’s a tough year to be asking for money. Maybe the toughest year ever.

But it is vital, because without it, the cycle gets a little more vicious. And the prognosis for Eastern North Carolina just a little more grim.

Mike Hughes of Raleigh is a member of the East Carolina University Board of Visitors.
Stroke research grant targets Lenoir County

Joel Gerber
2010-05-11 19:23:40

A new $10 million grant will help researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and East Carolina University collaborate with health-care practitioners and community leaders in Lenoir County to tackle heart disease, the county's leading cause of death.

According to the Department of Health and Human Services, stroke death rates in Lenoir County are among the highest in the country. For people over the age of 35 in the county, between 140 and 160 deaths per 100,000 are stroke-related.

"I would say yes, strokes are a pretty big problem in the county," said Sherry Smith, who has worked at Lenoir Memorial Hospital for the last 28 years. "I usually see someone weekly that has been affected by a stroke. The effects of stroke, and the disability it causes to patients are devastating."

As Smith sees a stroke victim a week, she said many of the patients she sees are at risk because of hypertension, or high blood pressure, and heart disease, the leading causes of strokes.

"Around here, we are all buffets and barbeque and high fat, and the majority of my day is talking about diet and exercise," Smith said. "We talk to a lot of people about lifestyle changes, including diet and exercise. It is also important to be in control of blood pressure and making sure they know their cholesterol numbers."

The project will be based at the UNC Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention. The center's director, Alice Ammerman, a professor of nutrition at the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health, will be leading the project along with Dr. Cam Patterson, Chief of the Division of Cardiology at UNC School of Medicine and director of the UNC McAllister Heart Institute.

The ECU team is led by Doyle M. Cummings, a pharmacist and professor of family medicine, and Stephanie Jilcott, Ph.D., assistant professor of public health.

"This project gives us the opportunity to bring together a multidisciplinary research team with a wide variety of community partners in Lenoir County to tackle hypertension and heart disease from prevention to treatment," Ammerman said.

The research will help determine genetic factors associated with cardiovascular disease risk and how clinical and public health communities can more effectively work together to reduce people's risk of heart disease through medication, diet and physical activity. The project will also offer an intensive weight loss intervention for participants who are overweight.

"Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in America, and our goal at UNC is to change that statistic by finding ways to prevent it and treat it," Patterson said. "This project allows us to demonstrate our dedication to that goal, and we are especially grateful to the people of Lenoir County for helping us lead the way."

You can reach Joel Gerber at 252-559-1076 or jgerber@freedomenc.com.
COLLEGE VOLLEYBALL

ECU team nets academic honor

The East Carolina volleyball squad was one of 17 athletic teams from Conference USA to earn the NCAA Public Recognition Award, based on the release of NCAA Division I 2009-10 Academic Progress Rate (APR) scores that ranked among the top 10 percent Wednesday.

The APR provides a real-time look at a team's academic success each semester by tracking the academic progress of each student-athlete.
Barrick, McConaughey are two of a kind at ECU

Originally published May 12, 2010

By Stan Goldberg

Middletown's Matt McConaughey went to freshman orientation at East Carolina University over the summer looking to join a fraternity.

Instead, he met former Tuscarora student Spencer Barrick, who convinced him to join the school's track and field team, starting a turn of events that led to him becoming one of the NCAA's best javelin throwers.

The freshman is ranked 32nd in the country and has qualified for the NCAA Regionals. He holds the school record with a throw of 68.01 meters.

McConaughey and Barrick have similar stories. In high school, both played baseball instead of running track. But they have become successful javelin throwers in college.

Barrick is ranked 60th in the nation. He won the javelin event in the college division of the Penn Relays this season and in 2008, and has also qualified for the NCAA regionals.

The two train together and have become friendly rivals. But until freshman orientation last summer at East Carolina, they had never met.

"It was just a freak meeting," McConaughey said. "I came down for freshman orientation and talked to Spencer about joining a fraternity. He said I should come out for the track team."

Barrick remembers seeing McConaughey at orientation and reading on his name tag that he was from Frederick. He introduced himself and the two started to talk. They found out they knew some of the same teachers.

They also talked sports. McConaughey played baseball and football at Middletown. He considered going to Frostburg University or McDaniel College to play football.

"We started throwing a baseball and I saw he had a pretty good arm, a cannon," Barrick said. "I said, 'You should try to throw the javelin.'"

McConaughey knew nothing about the javelin, so he went on YouTube to see what it was about.

"I thought I would try something new," he said. "But I had no idea I would ever do anything in track and field. I'm not fast or strong."

Barrick approached the East Carolina coaches and told them to give McConaughey a tryout.

"I pretty much had to beg the coaches to take him," Barrick said.

Assistant track coach David Price said the problem was the team had already reached its limit and had no more room for athletes. But he gave McConaughey a tryout, liked what he saw, and convinced the administration to let him on the team.

But learning to throw the javelin did not come easy for McConaughey.

"I was uncoordinated," he said. "I fell, tripped and stumbled a lot."

It took him awhile to catch on.

"One day he just started throwing bombs," Barrick said.

McConaughey set a school record with a throw of 67.89 meters in the UNCW Invitational in March, his first meet.
"I had no idea I would throw that far; I was thinking I might throw around 55 meters," he said.

The next week at the Shamrock Invitational, he broke that record with a throw of 68.01 meters.

He has continued to do well, although he was disappointed with a sixth-place finish in the Penn Relays.

This weekend he will take part in the Conference USA meet. He has the second-best throw in the conference.

THINGS HAVEN'T GONE as smoothly for Barrick, who went out for the East Carolina baseball team as a freshman. He didn't make the team, but Price was at the practice and saw he had a good arm. He talked him into trying the javelin, and he set a school record with a throw of 59.31 meters. The next year, he won at the Penn Relays.

But toward the end of his sophomore year he tore the labrum in his throwing shoulder and had surgery. He was out for the 16 months.

"I'm just starting to come back to where I was," said Barrick, who threw 65.39 at the Penn Relays.

Like McConaughey, he will take part in the conference meet this week and then the NCAA Regionals. He qualified for the NCAA Regionals two years ago, but said his arm felt like it was going to all off with each throw because of his injury.

A senior, he was redshirted last year and plans to return again next year to form a strong duo with McConaughey.

Said Barrick, "It's kind of cool how things turned out."

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Colleges Seeing No Downturn in Freshman Acceptances

By JACQUES STEINBERG

One measurement that selective colleges use to compare themselves is their respective admissions yields: the percentage of applicants offered acceptance who ultimately decide to enroll. A few institutions — including Harvard, Dartmouth, Cornell and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill — have begun to report those figures for the freshman class that will take its seats next fall, and so far none have experienced any downturn in the midst of the sluggish economy. At Harvard, for example, more than three of every four applicants who received an acceptance letter had committed by the May 1 deadline to enroll, a slight increase over last year. (The university said it still expected to offer acceptance to as many as 75 applicants on its waiting list.) At Dartmouth, the yield for the new freshman class was 55 percent, an increase of seven percentage points; the increase was so large that the college said it might not have room for anyone on its waiting list. North Carolina said its yield was 53.3 percent (compared with 53.9 percent at this time last year). But that figure is likely to rise, as it does not include all responses to the nearly 350 wait-list offers the university made and whose replies are due next week. Cornell said its yield rate was relatively flat, 49 percent, as was that of the University of Pennsylvania, at 63 percent. Neither institution said it had decided its waiting-list offers.
Grads: Success is based on substance, not sums

By Peter Buffett

This month, thousands of young, bright, ambitious students will hear words of wisdom from politicians, economists and celebrities. No doubt some commencement speakers will reflect on the uncertain times in which we live and the importance of solid values in a world that too often honors the payoff more than the process. So I would like to focus on a question that graduates may be asking themselves. How does one define success?

You may think that question is pretty ironic coming from the son of one of the richest people in the world. But, actually, it might just make me an expert on the subject. You see, my dad, Warren Buffett, is the poster person for the question. He has all the money anyone could ever want. But buying more objects wouldn't make him happier than he is already — doing what he loves. If success is defined by material possessions or one's bank statement, success then is fleeting.

Personal passions

But if success is measured in personal accomplishments — Are you living up to your unique potential? Is there passion and originality in your life and work? Is there fundamental value in what you're trying to achieve? — it can never be taken away. In short, success should be defined by the substance of what you're doing. To paraphrase my father, "Do you tap dance to work?"

And if one is fortunate enough to achieve substantial financial success, how much is enough? What are today's Wall Street titans and CEOs spending their bonus money on and, more importantly, why are they spending it the way they do? Their need to line their pockets speaks to the larger issues of personal responsibility, moral bankruptcy and the need to fill some bottomless hole in their personal psyches.

Martin Luther King Jr. was right when he said, "America has been a schizophrenic personal-

ity." This country was largely built on dominating and exploiting, so it is no wonder that this behavior is now in the fabric of our banks and corporations.

Listen to inner voice

I hope the message students hear this year is attuned to their own inner voice. It's the voice that tells us the world is made up of relationships, which, if nurtured and respected, leave everyone better off.

My parents instilled in me the belief that I could be anything, but not that I could do anything I pleased. They showed me that I lived in an interconnected world in which everyone has something to teach everyone else and that my actions mattered because they had an impact, often in ways I might not see or understand. By listening to the voices of others, I would learn more about myself.

We are indeed living in times in which too many people have erroneously decided that their only interest is financial gain and material accumulation, and that it is acceptable to leave nothing of social value in their wake.

Albert Einstein is quoted as saying, "You can't solve a problem from the same consciousness that created it. You must learn to see the world anew." All graduates have the ability to see the world anew, to place their best values at the forefront of their lives and create a more just and equitable world in which success is measured by what we create for each other.

This generation has the opportunity to create families and build communities that are founded on real trust and can support business leaders and politicians who look them in the eye and say, "We are here because of you, so we will honor your needs and protect what you hold most dear. And, most important, we will make sure future generations are left with a better world." That is success. And that is enough.

Peter Buffett, a composer, is author of Life Is What You Make It.
Speeding College to Save $10,000

By SUE SHELLENBARGER

When Samantha Chapman chose to go to Manchester College last year, there was one big deciding factor: The Indiana school had a new program that would let her speed to a bachelor’s degree in just three years, saving her family about $10,000.

For years, the amount of time it takes to earn a bachelor’s degree has been going up: less than one-third of students at four-year colleges graduate within four years, Education Department data show. But now, a growing number of residential colleges and universities have begun offering accelerated three-year degrees. In the past 15 months alone, at least a dozen schools have rolled out three-year programs including the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, and Hartwick College in Oneonta, N.Y.

The programs are a drawing card for the driven, high-achieving students every college wants. Most screen out applicants unlikely to succeed on a fast track and dangle carrots to lure those who can, offering not only cost savings but coveted priority-registration privileges and special advisors.

The programs can be arduous. Some require a heavy workload or year-round studies. They also often require students to choose a major during their freshman year and then stick to it—something many 18-year-olds may find difficult. Many programs reduce the time students have to dabble in extracurricular activities or explore subjects unrelated to their majors. At Bates College, Lewiston, Maine, which has offered a three-year degree program since 1965, the 1968 campus yearbook labeled it "an academic endurance race."

And many kids end up slowing down. At Florida State University, which launched a three-year program in 2000, about 40% of three-year enrollees wind up staying four years, to add another major, study abroad or take part in student government, says Linda Mahler, the program’s director. After arriving on campus, "they decided they weren’t in a big hurry" after all, she says.

While enrollments are small so far, the three-year programs are generating a lot of interest. Hartwick, which announced its program last year, expects to enroll twice as many freshmen as expected, or about 75 to 100 of an incoming class of 450 to 500, says Margaret Drugovich, president. The University of North Carolina, Greensboro, which announced its program in February, has 319 inquiries among an entering freshman class of 2,500, says Steve Roberson, dean of undergraduate studies. Enrollment in Florida State’s program rose 73% to 123 last fall from 71 in 2007.

To Theresa Arnold, Southern Oregon University’s offer of a three-year degree was comparable to an $18,000 scholarship. Her daughter LisaMarie Williams, 20 and in her second year as a criminal-justice major at the Ashland, Ore., university, says the fast track is a good fit. "I was always driven," she says. And with two younger
children to also put through college, Ms. Arnold says, "this is going to help us a lot."

Of course, students have always been able to choose to cram their degrees into three years; less than 3% of students do so, Education Department data show. What is new about the three-year programs is that they offer a structured path, support and trained advisers to help.

State governments are spurring the development of three-year programs, responding to voter frustration over rising college costs. Rhode Island has mandated development of three-year programs by its state universities; lawmakers in Pennsylvania are weighing a related measure. Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels is urging more schools to follow suit, and higher-education officials in California, Arizona and Illinois are studying the idea.

Students in the new programs still must earn the same number of credits for a bachelor's degree as those with a typical four-year schedule. The programs typically cost less partly because they eliminate nine months' room-and-board, plus the cost of some extra courses. (Students usually stick to only the courses they need to graduate.) The summer-school studies required by some of the programs are often cheaper, too.

Many students begin the programs with college credit already, having earned it via advanced-placement classes or other programs in high school. Many of the schools still manage to squeeze internships or study abroad into the three-year programs. But certain majors are usually excluded. Performing arts students, for example, usually must stay at least four years to get studio and performance experience. Engineering students must take courses in sequence, typically requiring them to stay more than three years.

The programs are enabling some students to get a jump on graduate school. Ms. Chapman at Manchester wants to go to law school, and she is eager to get there a year sooner. Even though she will have to take two courses online this summer in addition to working her usual job at a greeting-card shop, "this is where I want to be," she says. The three-year program "is working out perfectly for me."

Others believe finishing a degree in three years will burnish their credentials, making them more competitive when they try to land a job or apply to grad school. Tien Ngo, 18, a student in a three-year program at Lipscomb University, Nashville, says he wants to show medical schools "that I have the self-motivation to succeed." He will, however, have to cut back on the volunteer work he usually does to take summer courses. "I do feel pressured, but that's just the nature of the beast," he says.

One of the benefits of the three-year-programs is that they often offer priority registration, allowing students first crack at signing up for classes. This is a big deal particularly at big public universities, where some students end up staying longer than four years simply because they can't snare slots in the crowded classes they need for graduation. Ms. Williams, for example, believes that if she had attended a public university in her home state of California, it would have taken her five years to get into and complete all the classes she needed to graduate, she says.

The pace of a three-year degree can be demanding. Carmen Lookshire, 19, signed on at Hartwick last year. Her older brother and mother were already enrolled in college and she knew the $17,000 savings—about one year's cost, after financial aid—would help her family. To finish in three years, she must consistently take about 18 credits a semester, above the average of about 15, and she must enroll during Hartwick's additional short January term. Although Ms. Lookshire loves acting and once played Gabriella in "High School Musical," she bypassed auditioning for the campus musical. "I knew it would be very time-consuming, and I need to focus on my schoolwork," she says. She has taken performing arts classes instead, and found time to join a couple of clubs.

Her mother, Noreen Lookshire, in Albany, N.Y., worries about overload. "What if she burns out with all these credits?" she asked a Hartwick adviser, who assured her that Carmen could handle it. She also is concerned that Carmen won't graduate with her entering class.

Carmen acknowledges that getting it all done requires "a lot of time management." She keeps her schedule...
carefully mapped out on a whiteboard. But she is delighted to be leaping from freshman to junior status next fall. "I feel ready," she says. An art history major with hopes of getting a master's degree and becoming a museum curator, she adds, "I hope graduate schools will look at that and say, 'Look, she challenged herself.'"

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