Colleges' shut out illegal aliens

The policy is among America's toughest

By Kristin Collins and Jane Stancell Staff Writers

North Carolina community colleges on Tuesday banned illegal immigrants from seeking degrees, a policy that is among the most restrictive in the nation.

Community College System President Scott Ralls said he based the decision on the advice of the state Attorney General's Office, which said last week that federal law appears to prevent states from enrolling illegal immigrants in state colleges and universities.

"We sought that advice, and we plan to follow that advice until further clarification," Ralls said of the Attorney General's guidance.

The decision takes effect immediately at the system's 58 campuses and reverses a policy that allowed those students to enter and pay out-of-state tuition that more than covers the cost of instruction. It comes despite the federal government's assertion last week that it has no authority over admissions at North Carolina colleges, and despite Gov. Mike Easley's request that the colleges remain open to all.

Ralls said he will continue to seek clarification of federal law regarding the eligibility of illegal immigrants for post-secondary education, and that another policy change is possible. Ralls, who became president of the system this month, said this is the fourth time since 2001 that the system has changed its policy on illegal immigrants.

"It's the issue of the day," Ralls said. "We're trying to navigate our way as best we can."

Toughest restrictions

Several immigration law experts say they know of no state that bars illegal immigrants from public colleges and universities. Officials in Easley's office said last week that, if the state's colleges and universities followed the attorney general's advice, North Carolina would be the only state to restrict admissions based on immigration status. Easley asked the colleges to continue admitting students regardless of their immigration status.

Easley's office released a brief statement about the community college decision Tuesday: "It is odd the community colleges would ask for clarification on the law and then change the policy before they get the clarification."

Undocumented students will still be allowed to enroll in non-degree programs, including GED classes, English-as-a-second-language courses and classes for high school credit. Of the 300,000 students in degree programs at the state's community colleges, 112 are undocumented; those students will be allowed to remain, the statement from the community colleges said.

The advice from the office of Attorney General Roy Cooper came in a May 6 advisory letter, which cited a federal law that deems illegal immigrants ineligible for public benefits, including post-secondary education. It said the Department of Homeland Security was responsible for enforcing the law and described its interpretation as "unsettled." However, the letter recommended that the community colleges return to a 2001 policy that prohibited illegal immigrants.

Campuses had been allowed to set their own policies since 2004, and about a third excluded illegal immigrants. But in November, then-President Martin Lancaster required all schools to admit students regardless of immigration status.

The policy sparked so much controversy that the Community College System asked Cooper's office for an opinion.

The Department of Homeland Security responded to the advice Friday, saying that it had no authority over admissions at North Carolina colleges.

On Tuesday, Cooper's office said in a statement it was seeking more guidance from federal officials. Spokeswoman Noelle Talley said that the community colleges' 2001 policy had never received a legal challenge.

Cooper's office sent its advice only to the community colleges, but it also applied to the state's universities.

On Tuesday, University of North Carolina System President Erskine Bowles sent a letter to the university chancellors and the Board of Governors. It said that the UNC System would not change its policy of admitting illegal immigrants at out-of-state rates until it received further clarification of federal law.

"In this instance, there sure seems to be considerable legal disagreement about what the relevant federal law really says," Bowles wrote.

The UNC System says that only 27 of its approximately 200,000 students are in the country illegally.

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Read more online:
Read UNC President Erskine Bowles' memorandum to the Board of Governors and school chancellors on this issue at news@server.com/news.
Join the discussion on illegal immigrants going to community college at share.triangle.com.
Delight and anger

The community college decision Tuesday drew the eyes of immigration activists around the country. Several local and national groups celebrated the announcement, saying it would discourage illegal immigration.

"We're delighted," said Ron Woodard of Cary, head of the group N.C. Listen, which favors a crackdown on illegal immigration. "If it's illegal to be in the country, why would it be legal to go to college?"

Advocates, however, said they were confused and angry.

More than 80 North Carolina community groups, including Hispanic resource centers, religious groups and unions, announced their support Tuesday for allowing illegal immigrants to attend college.

Tony Asion, director of the statewide Hispanic advocacy group El Pueblo, said he was confused by the decision in light of statements from federal officials.

"We're forgetting that we're talking about people's lives here," Asion said. "Some of these young people, if you picked them up and took them back to their home country, they would be completely out of place. They're steeped in American culture. But we're telling them, 'We don't really want you here.'"

Meanwhile, the campuses were scrambling to change their admissions policies, some of them for the second time in six months.

Jerri Haigler, a spokeswoman for Central Piedmont Community College, said the school was still awaiting guidance on how it should screen new applicants.

Stephen Scott, president at Wake Technical Community College, said another policy change will require another round of staff training.

"There's much controversy around the issue so it's not a surprise," Scott said of the decision. "Our role is to educate students, and we will follow the rules set down for us."

Reactions to the decision

Some snippets from the responses Tuesday to the community college decision to bar illegal immigrants:

"I am glad that the attorney general will now seek further clarification of the federal statutes relating to the admission of undocumented students. We need and would welcome final clarification because we all want to obey the law. Until we receive that clarification, we will continue to operate under our current guidelines."

Erskine Bowles, president of the University of North Carolina System (in a letter to the Board of Governors)

"It is odd the Community Colleges would ask for clarification on the law and then change the policy before they get the clarification."

Gov. Mike Easley (through his press office)

"Today's announcement returns the Community College System to the [2001] policy. ... The policy was based on the federal law identified in our recent advisory letter. We are aware of no legal challenges to the 2001 policy that has been reinstated today. At the Community College System's request, we are seeking guidance from the Department of Homeland Security on this admissions policy as it relates to federal law."

Attorney General Roy Cooper (through his press office)

"We're consistently trying our best to follow the law."

Community College President Scott Ralls (in an interview)

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Active teens less likely to get breast cancer

BY LAURAN NEERGAARD
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Get your daughters off the couch: New research shows exercise during the teen years — starting as young as age 12 — can help protect girls from breast cancer when they're grown.

Middle-age women have long been advised to get active to lower their risk of breast cancer after menopause.

What's new: That starting so young pays off, too.

"This really points to the benefit of sustained physical activity from adolescence through the adult years, to get the maximum benefit," said Dr. Graham Colditz of Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, the study's lead author.

Researchers tracked nearly 65,000 nurses ages 24 to 42 who enrolled in a major health study. They answered detailed questionnaires about their physical activity dating back to age 12. Within six years of enrolling, 550 were diagnosed with breast cancer before menopause. A quarter of all breast cancer is diagnosed at these younger ages, when it's typically more aggressive.

Women who were physically active as teens and young adults were 23 percent less likely to develop premenopausal breast cancer than women who grew up sedentary, researchers report today in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute.

The biggest impact was regular exercise from ages 12 to 22.

"This is not the extreme athlete," Colditz said.

The women at lowest risk reported doing 3 hours and 15 minutes of running or other vigorous activity a week — or, for the less athletic, 13 hours a week of walking.

Why would it help? A big point of exercise in middle age and beyond is to keep off the pounds. After menopause, fat tissue is a chief source of estrogen.

In youth, however, the theory is that physical activity itself lowers estrogen levels. Studies of teen athletes show that very intense exercise can delay onset of menstrual cycles and cause irregular periods.

The moderate exercise reported in this study was nowhere near enough for those big changes. But it probably was enough to cause slight yet still helpful hormone changes, said Dr. Alpa Patel, a cancer prevention specialist at the American Cancer Society, who praised the new research.
Study: Pill-popping is ritual for majority of us

High cholesterol, diabetes, obesity lead to increase in prescriptions

BY LINDA A. JOHNSON
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TRENTON, N.J. — For the first time, it appears that more than half of all insured Americans regularly take prescription medicines for chronic health problems, a study shows. The most widely used drugs are those to lower high blood pressure and cholesterol — problems often related to heart disease, obesity and diabetes. The numbers were gathered last year by Medco Health Solutions, which manages prescription benefits for about one in five Americans. Experts say the data reflect worsening public health, better medicines for chronic conditions and more aggressive treatment by doctors. More people are taking blood pressure and cholesterol-lowering medicines because they need them, said Dr. Daniel W. Jones, president of the American Heart Association. Americans buy more medicine per person than any other country. But it was unclear how their prescriptions compare with those of insured people elsewhere. Comparable data were not available for Europe, for instance. Medco's data show that last year, 51 percent of U.S. children and adults were taking one or more prescription drugs for a chronic condition, up from 50 percent in the previous four years and 47 percent in 2001. Most of the drugs are taken daily, although some are needed less often.

The company examined prescription records from 2001 to 2007 of a representative sample of 2.5 million customers, from newborns to the elderly.

Drug use for chronic problems was seen in all demographic groups:

- Almost two-thirds of women 20 and older.
- One in four children and teens.
- Fifty-two percent of adult men.
- Three of four people 65 or older.

SEE MEDICINES, PAGE 6D
Among seniors, 28 percent of women and nearly 22 percent of men take five or more medicines regularly.

**One couple, many meds**

Karen Walker of Paterson, N.J., takes 18 prescription medicines daily for high blood pressure, diabetes, chronic back and shoulder pain, asthma and the painful muscle disorder fibromyalgia.

“The only way I can do it and keep my sanity ... is I use pill boxes” to organize pills for each morning and night, said Walker, 57, who works full time as a nurse at an HIV clinic.

Walker's 69-year-old husband, Charles, keeps his medicines lined up on his bureau: four pills for arthritis and heart disease, plus two inhalers for lung problems.

Dr. Robert Epstein, chief medical officer at Medco, which is based in Franklin Lakes, N.J., said he sees bad news and good in the findings.

"Honestly, a lot of it is related to obesity," Epstein said. "We've become a couch potato culture, (and) it's a lot easier to pop a pill" than to exercise regularly or watch your diet.

On the good side, he said, researchers have turned what used to be fatal diseases into chronic ones, including AIDS, some cancers, hemophilia and sickle-cell disease.

**TOP PRESCRIPTIONS**

*Top six therapies for chronic medication users, 2007*

- High blood pressure 21.5%
- Cholesterol lowering 14.7%
- Allergy 12.0%
- Antidepressant 11.6%
- Asthma & lung disease 9.0%
- Ulcer & heartburn 7.5%

*Source: Medco Health Solutions Inc.*

**PRESCRIPTIONS UP**

Last year, prescription drug use by adults with chronic conditions rose to 58 percent, up 4 percent since 2001.

**Chronic medication users**

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<th>Adults 20+</th>
<th>Pediatrics 0-19</th>
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*NOTE: Prevalence of use is defined as one or more prescriptions for a chronic maintenance medication during the year.*

*Source: Medco Health Solutions Inc.*

The Associated Press