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ECU notes: Three grads receive ’09 Robert H. Wright awards

ECU News Services

Saturday, May 16, 2009

Three graduating seniors at East Carolina University received the 2009 Robert H. Wright Alumni Leadership Award, which recognizes academic achievement, service and leadership qualities, during spring commencement May 8.

This year's recipients are Joel Funmilola Banjo-Johnson of Winterville, Dianna Andreea Gliga of Jacksonville and Stefanie Marie Wethington of Greenville.

"These three students have distinguished themselves with their exceptional academic and leadership performance," Paul J. Clifford, president of the East Carolina Alumni Association, said. "We are proud to highlight their accomplishments and hold them up as examples to the Pirate Nation."

Banjo-Johnson, originally of London, graduated with a double major in broadcast journalism and German. She has been recognized as an Emerging Leader of the Year, an Outstanding Student Leader of the Year, a lifetime member of Phi Kappa Phi and an Outstanding German student. She has received an American Legion Award for Scholastic Excellence, an Academic Excellence Award and Meritorious Service Award through the Air Force ROTC program.

Banjo-Johnson served in leadership roles for a number of campus organizations, including Legacy Endeavors, Student Government Association, Delta Phi Alpha National German Honor Society, African Student Organization and the National Broadcasting Society. She has also been featured as a soloist in St. Cecilie's Choir. She volunteered for March of Dimes, Adopt-a-Highway, as a "Big Sister," and as a tutor. She plans to attend graduate school at ECU.

Gliga graduated with a major in biology and minor in Spanish. She is a two-time recipient of the following scholarships and awards: East Carolina Alumni Association Scholarship, ECU's Mary Caughey Helms Scholarship, the President's Volunteer Service Award from ECU's National Society of Collegiate Scholars chapter, and the Scholar Promise Award, in addition to other honors.

Gliga participated in a number of campus organizations, including Phi Kappa Phi National Honor Society, Golden Key International Honor Society, the National Society of Collegiate Scholars, the American Medical Student Association, the Pre-Pharmacy Organization and the N.C. Rural Health Student Coalition. Her volunteer efforts helped the Tar River Clean-Up, the Primary Care Physician Shadowing Program, St. Jude Children's Hospital, the Grimesland Clinic and American Red Cross Blood Drives. She plans to enroll in UNC-Chapel Hill's Eshelman School of Pharmacy.

Wethington, originally of Corinth, Maine, graduated with a double major in communication and English. During her time at East Carolina, Wethington balanced the responsibilities of a full-time student and part-time employee with married life.

She received the Golden LEAF Scholarship and interned for the United Way of Pitt County. She participated in Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, Golden Key International Honor Society, and Phi Kappa Phi honor Society. She also participated in a Leadership Reading Circle that focused on leadership in literature. Prior to becoming an ECU student, Wethington was a teller, then relationship banker with BB&T. She plans to attend graduate school at ECU.

The Robert H. Wright Alumni Leadership Award recipients were selected based on academic performance, service to the university and community and recommendations. The recipients were recognized May 8 at a tribute lunch for graduating seniors and their families, in addition to the commencement ceremonies.
Chitwood wins Ellis Island Medal of Honor

Dr. W. Randolph Chitwood Jr., director of the East Carolina Heart Institute, has received an Ellis Island Medal of Honor.

The award, presented May 9, recognizes people who have made enduring contributions to the nation and world, according to the National Ethnic Coalition of Organizations, which presents the award. Approximately 100 others also received awards during the 23rd annual event held at Ellis Island in New York City.

Chitwood received the award for his national and international contributions in the field of cardiac surgery and minimally invasive mitral valve surgery. He is professor of cardiovascular sciences at the Brody School of Medicine at ECU and senior associate vice chancellor for health sciences at ECU.

Chitwood was nominated by Peter Romary, director of student legal services at ECU and previous recipient of this medal.

Since 1986, more than 1,500 people have received the award, including political figures, military leaders, athletes and entertainers.

NECO was created in 1984 by William Denis Fugazy with a mission to honor the United States’ diverse past, advocate for positive change and build strong leaders. More information is available online at http://www.neco.org.

Two named to endowed professorships at ECU

Two faculty members have been named to endowed professorships at the Brody School of Medicine at ECU.

Dr. Theodore Delbridge has been named the first Distinguished Professor in Emergency Medicine. Delbridge, a physician, is professor and chairman of the Department of Emergency Medicine at the medical school. The professorship was created through contributions of $333,000 matched by $167,000 from the state’s Distinguished Professors Endowment Trust Fund. The funds will be used for faculty recruitment and retention and other special projects as determined by Delbridge.

Dr. Charles Hodson, a reproductive physiologist in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, has been named the first D.E. Darnell Jones, MD, Endowed Professor for Residency Education. That chair was also created by $350,000 in contributions matched by $167,000 in state funds. Hodson will use interest generated by the money to further resident physician education in the department. The chair is named for the longtime chairman of OB/GYN, who retired in 2005.

The Distinguished Professors Endowment Trust Fund was established in 1985 by the North Carolina General Assembly to enable each constituent institution of the UNC system to receive and match challenge grants to create endowed chairs for selected distinguished professors. It provides matching grants of $1 in state money for every $2 in private funds.

ECU has 30 professorships endowed through the fund, nine in the Division of Health Sciences, which includes the Brody School of Medicine. The ECU Medical & Health Sciences Foundation is raising funds for three more endowed professorships in the division.

Lesly Mega honored for leadership

Dr. Lesly Mega, a longtime professor of psychiatric medicine at ECU, has received the inaugural Brody Women Faculty Advocacy Award.

The award was announced April 23 at a Brody School of Medicine faculty meeting and April 28 at the annual Women in Medicine Conference at the Brody Medical Sciences Building.

Mega, who joined the faculty in 1982, specializes in child and adolescent psychiatry. She is nationally recognized as a leader in the professional development of women physicians and medical students. She founded the local branch of the American Medical Women’s Association, established and chaired the Women in Medicine Committee at ECU and helped create the National Center of Excellence in Leadership in Academic Medicine at ECU.

She also co-founded the Pitt County domestic violence program and served on its board for many years.

Mega was named a “local legend” by the National Library of Medicine in 2007 for her work in psychiatric medicine and her advocacy for women in medicine and was a recipient of American Medical Women’s Association’s highest honor, the Bertha VanHoosen Award, for her exceptional leadership and service.
The Brody Women Faculty Advocacy Award was established in 2008 and recognizes those who have demonstrated leadership in promoting, encouraging or implementing policies to facilitate the professional development of women faculty and/or students.
PEOPLE IN THE NEWS SPOTLIGHT

Livingston joins Brody School of Medicine, ECU Physicians staff

Dr. Jeffrey Livingston, a maternal-fetal medicine specialist, has joined the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University and its group practice, ECU Physicians.

Livingston is an associate professor and director of the division of maternal-fetal medicine within the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the medical school. He specializes in high-risk pregnancies, and his clinical and research interest is the diagnosis and management of complex fetal conditions.

Before coming to ECU, he worked in the Fetal Care Center at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center.

Livingston has a medical degree from the Medical College of Virginia, completed residency training at ECU and completed a fellowship in maternal-fetal medicine at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center in Memphis.

Livingston is certified by the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology in maternal-fetal medicine and general obstetrics and gynecology. He sees patients at the Brody Outpatient Center and ECU Women's Physicians.
Laurels — To Wednesday’s commencement ceremony for graduates of Pitt Community College. PCC is one of the county’s most critical resources, particularly in poor economic times when skills training and continuing education opportunities are so valuable. Darrell Robinson, a Washington lawyer and PCC graduate, spoke at the event, which drew about 350 of the school's 864 graduates.

Tumbling down

Laurels — To the felling of a Greenville city landmark, the smokestack at the former Imperial Tobacco Co. plant, on Friday. After an unsuccessful attempt to pull it down, the structure was imploded by demolition experts, ending its dominance over the city’s modest skyline. While damage forced the decision, it is another hallmark of Greenville history lost forever.

Laurels — To the decision by Chrysler to sever its ties with a local auto dealer, one of 789 dealerships the company plans to eliminate as part of its bankruptcy proceedings. Brown and Wood sells vehicles from other manufacturers and has been in the community for 73 years. But while the loss of the Jeep line may be difficult, the dealership remains optimistic about its future.

Laurels — To the community forum hosted by the Brody School of Medicine to increase awareness about flu preparations and to ease public fears about the illness receiving so much attention of late. Pitt County Health Director John Morrow assured those in attendance that the community was ready in case of an outbreak, but urged simple habits of cleanliness to avoid sickness.

Laurels — To the free film series that began Friday night at Boyd Lee Park, echoing a similar program beginning its third year in Farmville. The third Friday of each month, a family-friend movie will be shown free of charge on a giant screen. There are concessions available, but people are invited to bring food and chairs or blankets to enjoy the show.

Laurels — To the efforts at North Pitt and Farmville Central high schools that seek to reduce the number of student fights. The schools will offer incentives, with North Pitt using early dismissal and Farmville allowing students to wear jeans, if they can remain free from violence. It is unfortunate that such strategies are needed but the ends — ending school violence — justify the means.

Compiled by Brian Colligan, editorial page editor of The Daily Reflector. Contact him at 329-9507 or via e-mail at bcolligan@coxnc.com
ECU students awarded Belle Legacy scholarships

The Daily Reflector

Saturday, May 16, 2009

The Pirate Charter Chapter of the American Business Women's Association recently awarded two $5,000 scholarships from the Nina Belle Legacy Scholarship, a part of the Stephen Bnton Memorial Education Fund.

Belle was a member of the Pirate Charter Chapter and gave a gift in her will to the fund. Scholarship recipients are Logan Monroe and Caitlin Bunn, who are both attending East Carolina University.

The Pirate Charter Chapter meets the second Monday of each month at McAlister's at 6 p.m. Visit pirateabwa.org or call 531-0017 for more information.

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Joe the Plumber, 'tea party' are coming

Conservatives are turning Joe the Plumber on Speaker Joe Hackney and the House Democrats.

Joe Wurzelbacher, the Ohio plumber who became an anti-tax symbol during last year's presidential campaign, will speak at a "tea party" rally June 3.

The rally is being sponsored by Americans for Prosperity, a Raleigh-based conservative group, at 4:30 p.m. on Halifax Mall in the state government complex.

Organizers say the purpose is to persuade members of the state House not to raise taxes as part of the budget plan it is now putting together.

Wurzelbacher gained fame last fall, when he asked Barack Obama about how the Democratic presidential candidate's tax policies might affect his efforts to start his own plumbing business.

Republican presidential candidate John McCain made Wurzelbacher one of his main talking points in the closing days of the campaign.

Wurzelbacher now works as a commentator and motivational speaker, and has addressed anti-tax tea parties in Washington, D.C., and Michigan.

Scholarship funds dwindle

A pool of state money used to help students pay for college will be empty in three years, according to the state treasurer's projections.

State Treasurer Janet Cowell has told legislative and education leaders the escheats fund -- which consists of money collected from sources such as unclaimed bank accounts, forgotten utility deposits and insurance policy proceeds, plus the investment interest -- will be drained by 2012.

The state uses the money for college grants.

In a letter to legislators, Cowell estimates the fund will be $59 million in the red by 2012. "That means money available today for an incoming college freshman for financial aid will not be there by senior year," she wrote.

The fund paid $210 million for scholarships this school year.

Cowell asked legislators not to withdraw $5 million from the fund, as the Senate approved in its budget, and urged legislators to maintain a $200 million minimum balance.

Cowell said the legislature should revisit the structure and sustainability of the fund to ensure access to higher education for all North Carolinians.

State angles for funds

As North Carolina prepares to bid for several hundred million dollars in federal stimulus
grants for fast passenger train improvements, Transportation Secretary Gene Conti is taking a leadership role in a national group of state officials that lobbies the government on rail issues.

Conti is the new chairman of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials' Standing Committee on Rail Transportation. The group makes recommendations on federal passenger and freight rail policies that affect the states.

"Hopefully that will position us to be first in line for some of this money," Conti told Triangle business and government leaders recently in Raleigh. "And I think we're excited about the prospects."

Conti said he is "very optimistic" about North Carolina's hope for winning hundreds of millions of dollars as its part of $8 billion in federal stimulus grants to be awarded for high-speed and intercity passenger rail service.

North Carolina and Virginia have worked to improve travel times on the Southeast High Speed Rail Corridor from Washington, D.C., to Charlotte.

How Perdue gets a lift
At 5-foot-2, Gov. Beverly Perdue is, as she puts it, "vertically challenged."

Because public opinion polls suggest that taller people are viewed as more authoritative, Perdue often used risers behind podiums during her campaign last year.

"It was the best kept secret of the campaign," Perdue said recently at a forum where she stepped up onto a riser. "No one realized how short I was."

This was not the first time that gubernatorial stature has come into play.

During the 2000 governor's race, Republican candidate Richard Vinroot referred to Democrat Mike Easley as the "little fellow." Vinroot is 6 feet 7 inches tall; Easley is 5 feet 10 inches tall.

"At least I act grown up," Easley shot back at a forum.

By staff writers RobChristensen, BruceSiceloff and LynnBonner

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Campbell quits NCSU board

He denies any wrongdoing

BY J. ANDREW CURLISS, Staff writer

McQueen Campbell, a longtime friend of former Gov. Mike Easley, resigned Friday as trustee and chairman of the board at N.C. State University amid new disclosures that he played a role four years ago in the hiring of first lady Mary Easley.

"I am not resigning because I have acted inappropriately," Campbell wrote Gov. Beverly Perdue. "I do not want my continued service to distract in any way from the great work of the university."

Campbell had only six weeks remaining on his second four-year term overseeing the state's largest university.

Perdue accepted his resignation. "It is in the best interest of N.C. State University," she said in a statement.

Campbell also wrote Friday that he believes there was no "improper influence" surrounding the hiring of Easley, who joined the university on a three-year contract overseeing a speakers series at $80,000 a year. Last summer, her role was expanded and her salary increased to $170,000 a year on a five-year contract.

Campbell's removal was sought publicly by University of North Carolina system President Erskine Bowles, who said that Campbell had offered a new version of events about the original hire earlier this week.

Previously, Campbell had said he never discussed Mary Easley's possible employment at N.C. State with her or any university official before her hire.

Bowles said Campbell phoned him on Tuesday to say that he actually had suggested to Chancellor James Oblinger that Mary Easley was looking to change jobs from a teaching post
at N.C. Central University.

Bowles said he immediately suggested Campbell should step down.

Oblinger said he doesn't recall the conversation, but would have passed the information on to Larry Nielsen, who at the time was the interim provost.

While still interim provost, Nielsen created a job in the provost's office, waived a search and hired Easley. Nielsen resigned Thursday, citing stress over news accounts of his actions.

Campbell's friendship with and influence on Mike and Mary Easley were detailed in a two-part series in The News & Observer on Saturday and Sunday. It showed that Campbell flew the governor often in his planes, sometimes for free, and bragged of his influence in getting key development permits.

Mike Easley twice appointed him to the NCSU Board of Trustees, where he rose to the chairmanship. Perdue will choose his replacement on the board.

Campbell, 38, comes from a prominent Bladen County family that is in the bulk oil distribution business. His father, Mac Campbell, abruptly resigned from the state Board of Transportation last month.

McQueen Campbell is involved in a range of businesses, including real estate brokering, owning an oil change and state inspection station, and a pig farm.

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Truth is emerging at NCSU

BY JOHN DRESCHER, Executive Editor

On March 11, in a conference room at The News & Observer, reporter Andy Curliss interviewed McQueen Campbell, chairman of the N.C. State University board, about his friendship with Mike and Mary Easley.

Campbell, a businessman who owns planes, had flown Gov. and Mrs. Easley frequently, often at no charge, and had helped them buy a lot at the coast for a good price. Easley twice had appointed Campbell to the NCSU board.

Curliss asked Campbell whether he had helped Mary Easley get a job at NCSU in 2005. No, he said strongly, he spoke to no one at NCSU about Easley before she was hired. He urged Curliss to talk with Provost Larry Nielsen and Chancellor James Oblinger.

But Nielsen and Oblinger would not talk with us. Nielsen, who hired Mary Easley, sent Curliss an e-mail but would not be interviewed. He said he already spoke to reporters on the matter last year, when Mary Easley's salary was raised from $80,000 a year to $170,000.

Last Sunday, we published an article about Campbell's relationship with the Easleys and its benefits for each. Oblinger and Nielsen were critical of the article -- though each had declined to be interviewed. Nielsen stepped down as provost, citing stress.

Our stories from last weekend, "Executive Privilege: The Perks of Power," were right on target. Neither Oblinger nor Nielsen disputed any facts in the stories.

Over time, the full truth will emerge. It is already doing so.
UNC system President Erskine Bowles revealed that Campbell told him this week he spoke to Oblinger about Mary Easley before she was hired. That conflicts directly with what he told us.

Oblinger said he does not recall such a conversation with Campbell. He said it was years ago, he has many conversations, and he is getting older (he is 63).

In a letter to The N&O, Oblinger wrote, "We have been and will continue to be forthcoming about our actions."

Forthcoming? Hardly. The board chairman has changed his story. Oblinger and Nielsen, given the chance to be interviewed for an important article about their university, declined.

Oblinger could have gotten out front of this crisis by talking with Curliss before the Sunday story. In doing so, he would have learned some information that would have helped him.

Instead, NCSU went into the bunker. We're already answered your questions, they said. But Curliss had more questions.

Now Oblinger has an even bigger mess on his hands. His board chairman has changed his story. Federal investigators, already interested in the Easleys' cars, trips and coastal lot, are circling.

NCSU needs a new communications strategy. Perhaps it has started: Oblinger called a meeting with reporters Thursday. He answered questions, then gave interviews. He talked with Curliss and me for nearly an hour. He was patient and open.

But because they declined to talk before publication last weekend, Oblinger and Nielsen looked like they were hiding something.

When Nielsen declined to be interviewed, he e-mailed, "I do not believe it is in the best interests of the university to continue to devote time to this topic."

How wrong he was.

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Shaw president 'lost his credibility'

President leaves as Shaw University struggles academically, economically

BY JOSH SHAFFER AND ANNE BLYTHE, Staff Writers

RALEIGH - Under President Clarence Newsome, Shaw University saw ballooning debt, decaying dormitories, everyday expenses paid on credit, and a graduation rate that hovers around 36 percent.

Conditions at the private school so disturbed alumni that in March, the Greensboro chapter stopped donating or raising money for their alma mater. This stance stayed in place until Wednesday, when Shaw announced Newsome would leave his post with a paid, one-year sabbatical. On Friday, the agency that accredited Shaw in 2002 said it will demand a plan for paying down the debt once a new president replaces Newsome.

"He lost his credibility with the students, the faculty and staff and the alumni," said Robert
Caple, chairman of the Greensboro alumni group. "We knew something had to happen."

This unsettled environment will vex Newsome's successor and try the nerves of generations of Shaw supporters, who look to the campus as the mother of North Carolina's historically black schools. Shaw is the oldest such college in the South.

As a small institution with 2,750 students, Shaw breeds graduates with fierce loyalty and thanks for the doors it opened. This week, several staff members said they would work for free before leaving Shaw. Board of Trustees Chairman Willie Gary often tells of how he arrived from Florida with a suitcase strung together with rope, told by other institutions that he wasn't college material. Now's he's a lawyer prominent enough to have a private jet.

"Now I have lawyers working for me that graduated from Harvard, Yale and Princeton," he told a crowd Wednesday at Shaw's Spaulding Gymnasium. "Let's hear it for Shaw University!"

Newsome was out of town and could not be reached Friday. Gary, though, blamed Shaw's trouble both on the dire national economy and on low contributions from alumni. He called Shaw's debt reasonable for this economy, adding that all universities are stricken and facing cuts.

"It's not you didn't do so well," he said. "You've got to ask Chapel Hill. You've got to ask N.C. State. You've got to ask any university that. We've all just got to cut our costs. It ain't like the alumni was giving millions of dollars, either."

But the trouble surfaced as early as last fall, Caple recalled.

When alumni gathered for homecoming, he said, they noticed campus buildings in shabby shape. Then, Gary met with the heads of alumni chapters and explained that the school had fallen $27 million behind, and that monthly expenses were getting paid with credit cards, Caple said.

"This is something that alumni have tried to address with the university for three years," Caple said. "We had gone several times, asked about the financial situation. Dr. Newsome and the board just wouldn't do it. Finally, we got a clearer picture."

Gary said his speech might have happened during the CIAA Tournament in February, but confirmed the substance of Caple's version.

Caple also described an administration under Newsome that kept information close. And when the alumni group cut financial help a few months ago, they posted their grievances online, addressed "to whomever concerned." Chief among them, Caple said, was the school's slack attitude toward fundraising. Newsome would not appear before Baptist State Convention meetings, an affiliate and long a mainstay for donations. A Greensboro minister approached the alumni about starting an endowed chair at Shaw, and when they passed this on to administrators, nobody got back to the minister after a year.

A charge to raise money

Newsome came to Shaw from Howard University in 2003, succeeding President Talbert O. Shaw, who was widely credited with forging the Baptist and Raleigh business connections that kept Shaw from closing its doors in the 1980s.

Part of Newsome's charge was to raise the school's endowment from $15 million to $50 million, and its enrollment from 2,700 to 10,000.

In 2004, Newsome earned $193,000 from Shaw, according to federal tax forms that nonprofits must file. Liabilities for that fiscal year started at $21.9 million. By 2006, Newsome's pay had jumped to $198,400, and included $19,012 in benefits and $45,000 in
expenses. Shaw's obligations for the end of that fiscal year had swollen to $33.9 million.

But records show Shaw struggling in other arenas.

Data from the National Center for Education Statistics in 2007 show Shaw graduated just 36 percent of its full-time students within six years. This is comparable to St. Augustine's College, Raleigh's other historically black institution, which saw 31 percent of its students finish. But Peace College, also small and private, graduated 50 percent of its students, and N.C. State University, 69 percent.

Out of Shaw's student body, 91 percent receive financial aid for the roughly $19,000 in room and board. On average, students receive more than $7,000 in federal and state grants, $3,500 in private money, and nearly $2,000 in student loans.

Rats, ants, duct tape

In December, about 100 students crowded into Newsome's building to protest overcrowding and poor living conditions on campus, some of them wearing duct tape across their mouths with "rats" and "ants" written on the strips. One dorm flooded and displaced students for weeks.

Rising senior Brennan Henderson spent weeks living with a friend, and he and others wanted compensation from Shaw. But he didn't join the protests, even though he sympathized, and he thinks students will be glad to see Newsome replaced.

"He's over on one side of campus, and that's all you know," said Henderson, who lives in Richmond, Va.

On Wednesday, Gary attributed Shaw's troubles to the economic downturn at schools everywhere. Historically black schools tend to have smaller endowments, and enrollment has dropped at many. President Obama's education budget, unveiled this month, did not include an extra $85 million that historically black schools had received for the past two years.

Late last year, Shaw laid off an undisclosed number of staff and suspended the match on retirement benefits -- common solutions in and out of academia.

But faculty who are willing to speak cite problems unique to Shaw. Religion and philosophy professor James Kirkley recently asked faculty to voluntarily disclose their salaries for comparison, and he said about half participated. They discovered a range that seemed unrelated to either rank or experience, Kirkley said.

"There never has been any rhyme or reason to salaries," he said. "I don't think the issue of salaries is connected to the economy."

Kirkley and others hope Shaw will right itself under new leadership. They call the school too important to fail.

"Shaw has a certain charisma," said Henderson, who calls himself a proud Shaw Bear. "To transfer, you'd have to start all over again."

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About black colleges

HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES NATIONWIDE: 101
**SHAW HISTORY:** Founded in 1865, birthplace of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, prominent in the civil rights movement.

**OTHER N.C. HBCUS:** St. Augustine's, Barber-Scotia, Bennett and Livingstone colleges; N.C. Central and Johnson C. Smith universities; N.C. A&T, Elizabeth City, Fayetteville and Winston-Salem state universities

**BUDGET CUT:** President Barack Obama's budget slashed $85million that HBCUs have enjoyed for two years.