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East Carolina preparing for more spending reductions

By Josh Humphries
The Daily Reflector

Tuesday, May 26, 2009

A deteriorating state budget picture has prompted East Carolina Chancellor Steve Ballard to direct university deans and vice chancellors to prepare for a spending reduction of 15 percent for fiscal year 2009-10, a base budget cut of $43 million.

In a message posted on ECU's Web site last Friday, Ballard wrote: “The budget picture is bleak.” He indicated state funding for education likely would be even lower than earlier estimates.

"The most recent projection from the Fiscal Research Division of the North Carolina General Assembly is for a $4.6 billion gap between revenues and expenditures for the next fiscal year, which begins July 1. The House Subcommittee on Education Appropriations is in the budget development process and will have about $1 billion less to spend on education (universities, community colleges, and K-12) than did their colleagues in the Senate in April.”

Ballard wrote that as a result students could expect to see larger class sizes, difficulty enrolling in elective classes and significantly reduced services outside of the classroom.

"Just a few months ago, we prepared scenarios for a 7 percent cut for the coming year and we considered that the worst case. Today, a 7 percent base budget reduction would be welcome. If we are given a 10 percent reduction for the new fiscal year, that would be a loss of $28.5 million, and some people are predicting it could be twice that much.

"Board policy requires that we reduce expenditures in virtually every other aspect of the university, even for essential support services and functions in which we take great pride," Ballard wrote.

"So, hiring for critical positions, salary increases, the beauty of our campus, purchasing of routine office items, travel of all kinds, campus events, and dozens of additional items have been severely reduced.”

The university is planning to cut administrative expenses by $9 million over a three-year period.

Nine areas of campus, including parking and transportation, information technology and research administration, have been targeted to reduce expenditures by 20 to 30 percent.

Phillip Rogers, legislative liaison for ECU, said it is still too early to know exactly what the cuts from the state will look like, but officials need to prepare for the worst.

"Any reduction in funding to higher education would have serious and long lasting impacts on the university system and especially ECU with the rate in which we are growing," Rogers said.

Contact Josh Humphries at jhumphries@coxnc.com or (252) 329-9565.

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Letter: Who's paying for new trees on highways?

Wednesday, May 27, 2009

This state is in great financial trouble. They have asked school districts to send monies back to the state government; they are needed back for the state budget to fill the gaps for other programs. Why not cut some of the pork projects?

I don’t know how many travelers on N.C. 11 South have noticed the new magnolia, crepe myrtle and various pine/fir trees that have been planted from Davenport Road to N.C. 903 on both sides of the highway. The work to do this project took at least two weeks, digging the holes with a big auger to place the plant, fill in the hole, then mulch. Now I see the green water bags attached to the trees which will require someone to refill them on a regular basis until the plants get established. The cost to do this was above $300,000; it was done by the N.C. Department of Transportation.

Was this one of the shovel-ready projects to use the federal funds that our state received? Were the funds from the state coffers? If it was from the state, it was a pork project that was not needed to be done at this time. Those monies should have stayed in the school systems. Seems no one in Raleigh cares how they spend the monies, just like the federal government. When they need more, they will just add more taxes, and you and I will be footing the bill. The government keeps telling us to reign in our spending. Why can’t it do the same?

JEAN SPONG

Winterville

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COX

WATSON
Tuition hike on table for state schools

Students would pay up to 8 percent more under a proposal to help the state cover its budget gap.

BY MARK JOHNSON AND ANNE BLYTHE, Staff Writers

RALEIGH - Students at state universities in North Carolina would see tuition bills jump by 8 percent or $200, whichever is lower, under a proposal Tuesday by House education budget writers.

Lawmakers, who are trying to patch a budget gap of more than $4 billion, plan to take the unusual step of overriding tuition rates set by the UNC system's Board of Governors in February. The board authorized an average tuition hike of 2.8 percent at the UNC campuses.

The bump in the price of higher learning also would surpass the 6.5 percent cap in increases that UNC system President Erskine Bowles put in place when he took office in 2006.

University leaders mostly described the proposed increase as a harsh reality.

"We had proposed a zero percent increase for our students," said David Dunn, vice chancellor at UNC-Charlotte, "but given the depth of the cuts, it's clear students need to share in the university's support."

Several students said they didn't expect to be shielded from the recession, but the tuition hike looms at the same time that campuses are making cuts, including teaching assistant jobs for graduate students.

"They're cutting some of the income for students, and they're expecting you to pay more. Somewhere the equation does not add up," said Kiano Manavi, a graduate student in food science at N.C. State.

The proposed increases, for example, would bump up tuition for the school year beginning in the fall at N.C. State to $4,060 for in-state students, to $2,396 at N.C. Central, to $3,905 at UNC-Chapel Hill and $2,716 at UNC-Charlotte. Out-of-state students all will see a $200 increase, but they already pay substantially higher tuition, such as $20,803 at UNC-Chapel Hill.

That does not include mandatory fees, which add about $1,500 to $2,000 to the annual bill at the campuses. Tuition and fees combined still cover only a fraction of the students' costs, about 32 percent at UNC-CH, for example. Other costs include housing, food and books.

House leaders eased back from an earlier idea to hike tuition by $256 per student at all of the schools. Bowles successfully argued that such a bump, while a small percentage at some schools, would be dramatic at others -- about 16 percent at Elizabeth City State University.

The new proposal offers flexibility. The smaller schools would see smaller increases, such as $129 at Elizabeth City State, while tuition would jump by the full $200 at UNC School of the Arts and at larger campuses including N.C. State, UNC-Chapel Hill, UNC-Charlotte and
UNC-Greensboro.

"We understand the situation North Carolina is in," said Rob Nelson, vice president for finance at the UNC system. While the administration wants to keep tuition as low as possible, he added, the new proposal "does recognize some of those differences across the campuses."

House leaders are writing a third version of the budget. Gov. Beverly Perdue released her proposal in March, and the Senate put its stamp on it in April. Now it's the House's turn and with each change of hands, the state's revenue forecast has tumbled. Whatever cuts the House makes will have to go back to the Senate for agreement.

Senate budget writers did not offer any immediate objections to the tuition increase idea.

"We're open to anything at this point," said Sen. Linda Garrou, a Winston-Salem Democrat and co-chair of the appropriations committee. "That's not what we would choose, but we'll have to look at a lot of undesirable things."

Jay Ross, an NCSU senior from Wilson, is finishing a degree in fashion and textile management. He had hoped to go to graduate school, but the added cost might make him think twice.

"The worse the economy is, the more you want to stay in school," Ross said. "It's kind of a Catch-22. I guess you either pay more in school or make less in the real world."

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**Tuition hike?**

Students would see a bigger tuition increase under a House budget proposal:*

2008-09 tuition
N.C. Central$2,218
N.C. State$3,860
UNC-Charlotte$2,516
UNC-Chapel Hill$3,705
Proposed 2009-10 tuition
N.C. Central$2,396
N.C. State$4,060
UNC-Charlotte$2,716
UNC-Chapel Hill$3,905

* Annual rates for in-state undergraduates. Does not include mandatory fees, which can add $1,300 to $2,300 a year. Also does not include other student expenses such as room, board and books, which make up the majority of the cost.

Source: UNC System

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"He's so friendly, he doesn't know he's sick," Clayton Veger says of Truman, his 6-year-old bloodhound. Truman is involved in the lymphoma study at NCSU's veterinary hospital.

Ethan Hyman, Staff photo by Ethan Hyman

Dr. Steve Suter, back left, and Dr. Matthew Breen, with N.C. State's College of Veterinary Medicine, work with Dr. Kristy Richards, with UNC-Ch's Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center, on a grant proposal to expand a lymphoma study.

Ethan Hyman, Staff photo by Ethan Hyman

Clayton Veger takes his bloodhound Truman back to his car after one of Truman's biweekly chemotherapy treatments at N.C. State's veterinary hospital. Researchers hope studying lymphoma in dogs will point toward better therapies for people.

Ethan Hyman, Staff photos by Ethan Hyman

Researchers team up to study cancer
BY ERIC FERRERI, Staff Writer

Steven Suter and Kristy Richards want to fight cancer in both man and his best friend.

Suter is a medical oncologist at N.C. State University's veterinary hospital. Richards is a UNC-Chapel Hill cancer researcher. Together, they're leading a joint NCSU/UNC-CH study of dogs with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, cancer common in dogs and humans alike. They hope to develop therapies for canines that could benefit humans.

The study, which includes three other NCSU faculty members and a Duke geneticist, will analyze 100 dogs, all patients at the veterinary hospital. Finding research subjects with lymphoma won't be hard.

"It's super-common," Suter said. "It probably takes up 65 to 70 percent of our cases."

The collaboration is unusual because veterinary schools and academic cancer centers are generally not near enough to each other to work effectively. But in this study, cancer cells from the dogs can easily be analyzed in both Raleigh and Chapel Hill.

Cancer researchers have traditionally relied on mice, which are plentiful and easily engineered, for their models, injecting them with tumors to study the effects. A mouse's physiology is far different from a human's, so drawing conclusions based on mouse research and connecting them to human cancer treatment has proved difficult, said Richards, a professor of medicine and genetics who works at UNC-CH's Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center.

"The PETA people should be really happy with us," Richards said, referencing the animal rights group People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. "We're not giving cancer to animals so we can study it. That's what's really different about this. So when we learn things, we not only benefit, the dogs benefit, too. It's a win-win situation."

Dogs, by comparison, are far more genetically similar to humans, Suter said. They also are exposed to many of the same environmental factors.

"Dogs drink the same water we do, breathe the same air we do, eat the same food, and they're exposed to the same chemicals as we are," he said. "It's no surprise dogs and people are walking hand in paw."

For now, the study is being funded by a UNC-CH research fund, but one of the advantages that NCSU can reap by teaming with UNC-CH and Duke geneticist Sandeep Dave is the better likelihood of snaring federal funding. It's a long-shot for veterinary researchers to win National Institutes of Health funding, but the potential implications of the research on human cancer patients may help, Suter said. The team is asking NIH for $1.3 million over two years.

Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma ranks fifth among cancer deaths in human patients. Although there are no formal registries to track the data, experts say it occurs even more often in dogs.

It is easily diagnosed in dogs, usually by drawing a tissue sample with a needle and plunking it under a microscope. For this new study, researchers want to remove an entire lymph node in these dogs, a relatively minor surgery that nonetheless carries with it some risk. The surgery, which usually costs about $450, would be free, and the dog owner would receive $1,000 to put toward the dog's treatment at the hospital.

The lymph node, usually about the size of a plum, would be analyzed at both NCSU and UNC CH. Suter hopes to delve deep into this sort of dog lymphoma and find differences and similarities that may lead to variances in care.

"We treat all dogs [with this cancer] the same, which is really stupid," he said. "But we don't
yet have the data."

Better treatment for all

In Chapel Hill, Richards will hope to find similarities between the cancerous dog tissue and cancerous human tissue. If subsequent therapy works on dogs, then who knows what it might mean for humans?

"I'm intrigued by the similarities between human and dog lymphomas," she said. "If you have a better model, you can bring a treatment to the marketplace faster."

That would be a nice bonus for Clayton Veger of Fuquay-Varina. Last year, Veger took his 6-year-old bloodhound, Truman, in for an examination and learned that the excitable hound has cancer. Truman has been receiving chemotherapy treatments at the vet hospital, where, Veger says, "he's one of the favorites. He's so friendly, he doesn't know he's sick."

When vet school officials asked Veger to include Truman in the study, Veger was reluctant to inflict any more pain on his dog, but ultimately decided to get Truman, who has responded well to his chemo treatments, involved in the study.

"We decided that anything we could do to help people down the road, we would do that," Veger said

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ABOUT NON-HODGKIN'S LYMPHOMA

There are many types of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, a large group of cancers of lymphocytes (white blood cells). They can occur at any age and are often marked by lymph nodes that are larger than normal, fever and weight loss. Prognosis and treatment depend on the stage and type of disease. It is estimated there will be 65,980 new cases and 19,500 deaths from non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in the United States in 2009.

Source: National Cancer Institute

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N.C., with 14 cases, misses worst of flu

Two patients visited N.Y.; children exposed at clinic remain symptom-free

BY SARAH AVERY, Staff Writer

Even with two more cases of novel H1N1 flu reported over the holiday weekend, North Carolina continues to have a small number of infections compared with other states.

Fourteen people in North Carolina have confirmed cases of the new flu, including one each in Orange and Durham counties that were reported last weekend.

Most have had mild to moderate sickness, but the person in Durham County has been in the hospital. Dr. Jeffrey Engel, state health director, said the Durham person had a preexisting condition but is expected to recover.

"We don't know what's normal with this virus," Engel said. "It's continuing to be a dynamic story. But I think the disease is here. It's at a low level. And most people probably aren't even going to the doctor."

He said all the cases in North Carolina were among people who had recently traveled. The two from the Triangle had been to New York, where the outbreak has been among the worst in the country. New York has 343 confirmed cases so far.

Other than a coincidental travel history, however, the people from Orange and Durham counties have no links.

The Orange County patient, a health care worker at a pediatric clinic in Durham, is thought to have exposed at least 17 children to the virus. Engel said no one has yet gotten sick as a result of the exposure, but the incubation period isn't up until the end of the week.

"That was an unfortunate exposure," Engel said, noting that children are among those who have an increased risk of complications from flu.

Public health authorities urged people to isolate themselves if they have flulike symptoms.

"Regardless of how much work they have at the office, they should stay home," said Gayle Harris, Durham County's health director. She also urged people to cover their coughs and wash hands frequently and thoroughly.

When the virus was first reported in the United States, public health authorities required people who had suspicious symptoms to stay home, but that provision was soon eased. Most of the suspicious cases turned out to be something other than H1N1 infections, while those who had the novel flu virus did not suffer a severe illness that warranted drastic measures.

Engel said health officials are continually evaluating how to respond based on the severity and pervasiveness of infections.
"The virus is here, it's circulating, and it's very transmittable," Engel said. "It spreads just like seasonal flu. So people need to keep their guard up and remember all the prevention messages."

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**H1N1 infections**

North Carolina: 14
United States: 6,764; 10 deaths
World: 12,954; 92 deaths

SOURCES: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, World Health Organization

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IBM, UNC join to harness medical data

BY DAVID RANII, Staff Writer

UNC Health Care has teamed up with IBM to improve the treatment of patients with diabetes and other diseases by analyzing a giant database of medical information.

Today the two partners are announcing that UNC's Carolina Data Warehouse for Health, which contains electronic data from 1.7 million patients over the past five years, will be able to churn out critical information in a matter of seconds.

"It will really enhance the time factor for doctors to do not only research, but quality improvements," said Dr. Donald Spencer, associate director of medical informatics at UNC.

The project combines multiple UNC databases and puts them in a data warehouse where they can easily be searched without bogging down UNC's computer system.

Initially, the data warehouse is being used to assess whether patients are receiving quality care by determining whether treatment guidelines have been followed.

"We can tell who hasn't been getting those things and who has, and give doctors and clinics feedback about where they can get more bang for the buck in the care of diabetics," Spencer said.

In the future, it could be used to determine the best potential treatment for individual patients, based on comparisons of patients with similar characteristics, and to boost research.

"There is a lot of potential for these powerful systems," he said.

Spencer said UNC has invested "millions of dollars" in the project. IBM, which was contracted to provide software, services and computers for the project, hopes to clone the system elsewhere.

"We can take this solution to hospitals around the world," said John Soyring, a vice president in IBM's Software Group.

Global technology giant IBM has its largest site in Research Triangle Park, where it had 11,000 workers until recent layoffs trimmed its ranks.

The partnership comes against a backdrop of the stimulus plan signed by President Barack Obama that provides billions for adoption of electronic health-care records. UNC is seeking a two-year, $1 million grant from the federal government to hire three researchers to analyze the data and to expand the data warehouse.

At first, the project will focus primarily on diabetes patients but it will expand to include other diseases, including cancer and cystic fibrosis. The warehouse data do not identify patients by name.

The American Diabetes Association estimates 23.6 million children and adults, or 7.8 percent of the U.S. population, have diabetes.
States consider basing college funding on graduation rates

By Mary Beth Marklein, USA TODAY

States fund public colleges primarily based on how many students are enrolled. But a number of legislatures are considering policies that would link funding to whether students graduate.

Lawmakers in Ohio appear likely to adopt a plan, introduced this year, that would base 100% of higher education spending on course and degree completion. Indiana is considering a similar but more modest proposal. And in Louisiana, the governor and Legislature have called for plans that tie 25% of higher education funding to student success.

JILL BIDEN: Read an interview with the longtime educator

The concept of rewarding institutions that meet certain goals has been around for about 30 years, but the newer proposals focus more on student outcomes and involve more money.

The renewed interest reflects a growing concern that the USA has fallen behind other countries in college completion rates at a time when higher education is more important than ever.

"We as legislatures have been giving higher education a pass on accountability," says Julie Bell of the National Conference of State Legislatures. "With tuition going up ... there's a whole new thinking about productivity."

President Obama, who wants the USA to lead the world in college graduates by 2020, has proposed $2.5 billion over five years to states that seek to boost college completion rates for low-income students. A recent Brookings Institution report urges that half that money target community colleges.

Strategies vary with state priorities, says Brenda Albright, an education consultant in Franklin, Tenn., who studies enrollment-based funding.

- Ohio and Indiana are targeting degrees in science, technology, engineering and math.

- Missouri's department of higher education has proposed a plan to finance schools based on how students in allied health and other fields fare on state licensing exams.

- Washington state's board of community and technical colleges plans to reward schools when students cross certain hurdles, such as completing 15 credits and passing math, along the way toward earning a credential.

Some early adopters, such as Florida, have seen results. From 1997 to 2007, Florida's community-college completion rates shot up 43% while enrollments rose 18%.

Even so, of 26 states that enacted performance funding since 1979, about a dozen, including Illinois and South Carolina, have abandoned it, says researcher Kevin Dougherty of the Community College Research Center at Teachers College, Columbia University.

Albright predicts the new policies will have staying power. Many older policies "were poorly designed and didn't focus on important state goals," she says. As more states say they want more students to graduate, "it's a natural progression to fund degrees."
Credit card reform swipes easy plastic from college students
By Sandra Block, USA TODAY

Back when dinosaurs roamed the Earth, you actually had to have a job to get a credit card.

All that changed in recent years, when credit card companies determined that issuing credit cards to college students was a great way to nurture long-term brand loyalty. Many resorted to aggressive marketing tactics, offering everything from T-shirts to iPods to students who signed up.

Not surprisingly, some students ran up charges they couldn’t repay, triggering interest rate increases and late fees. Because credit was so easy to get, “A lot of kids got themselves in trouble,” says Adam Levin, founder of Credit.com, a consumer website.

Soon, though, credit won’t be so easy to get. Last week, President Obama signed legislation that restricts a number of controversial credit card practices, including issuing credit cards to college students. The law prohibits lenders from issuing credit cards to individuals younger than 21 unless they can prove they can make payments or get a parent or guardian to co-sign.

Because most college students don’t have much money, the upshot is that most won’t be able to get a credit card without permission from their parents. The bill also requires lenders to get permission from the co-signer before increasing the card’s credit limit.

Students who fall behind on their credit card bills often leave college with blemished credit reports, which makes it more difficult for them to rent an apartment, get a car loan or even find a job.

“This is a mess that stays with you for a long time,” Levin says. “As much as students are obsessed with GPAs, your credit score is the most important number you’re going to have to deal with” after graduation, he says.

Eighty-four percent of undergraduates had a credit card last year, according to a study by student lender Sallie Mae. The average senior graduated with a balance of more than $4,100, up from about $2,900 in 2004.

Even more troubling, only 17% of students surveyed said they regularly paid off their monthly balances, and 60% said they were surprised at the size of their balances.

The Sallie Mae survey also found that a third of students had never or rarely discussed credit cards with their parents. These students were the most likely to be surprised at the size of their balances when they received their credit card bills.

Parents who co-sign for a child’s credit card will be on the hook for any charges the child can’t pay. But in the past, many parents have ended up paying their child’s credit card bills anyway, “because they don’t want Junior to have a terrible credit score;” says Bill Hardekopf, chief executive of LowCards.com.

“If Junior has to come to Mom and Dad and say, ‘Will you co-sign?’ then Mom and Dad can have a talk with Junior about credit cards,” Hardekopf says.

Hardekopf says he co-signed a credit card with a very low limit for each of his three children while they were still in high school. Every month, he sat down with them and reviewed the bills. Two of his children have since graduated from
college, he says, "And they have a much higher credit score than their friends."

**Without credit, students could be at risk**

Karen Gross, president of Southern Vermont College in Bennington, Vt., says the legislation will address some of the more egregious credit card industry practices, but she worries that it could have unintended consequences for low-income students. Many of these students rely on credit cards to pay for expenses that aren't covered by financial aid, she says.

If their parents won't co-sign a credit card, Gross says, these students may turn to even more costly sources of loans, such as payday lenders.

Gross says she'd like to see banks develop a credit card specifically for college students that would have a low credit limit and an even lower spending cap.

For example, Gross says, the card could have a $600 limit and a $250 spending cap. The card "would help students learn to use credit responsibly in ways that would maximize their credit score," Gross says.

In the meantime, supporters of the credit card bill hope it will usher in a new era of financial literacy for college students and their families.

"Even though credit is an individual exercise, when you're a member of a family, it's like a team sport," Levin says.

"We all have a stake in making sure our children start the right way and understand as best they can the system and the way it works."

*Sandra Block covers personal finance for USA TODAY. Her Your Money column appears Tuesdays. Click here for an index of Your Money columns. E-mail her at: sblock@usatoday.com. Follow on Twitter: www.twitter.com/sandyblock*

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