THE DAILY CLIPS

May 28, 2008

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

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Duke grad raps NCCU; furor erupts

Accuser's degree faulted in column

By Eric Ferreri
Staff Writer

Durham – A recent opinion piece in the Duke University student newspaper has renewed some of the animosity that bubbled between that institution and N.C. Central University as the Duke lacrosse saga played out. The May 15 column, written by Kristin Butler, who recently graduated, takes NCCU to task for allowing Crystal Mangum to graduate.

Mangum, the NCCU student whose false claims of rape and sexual assault in 2006 led to the arrests of three Duke lacrosse players, graduated in early May. The players were eventually declared innocent.

Butler, who is from Cary and will work as an intern at The News & Observer this summer, began her column by declaring: “It seems anyone can get a college degree these days — especially if they go to North Carolina Central University.”

She posited that Mangum had violated NCCU’s student conduct code with her false allegations and wondered why the university allowed her to graduate. The column spread rapidly across cyberspace; as of Tuesday afternoon, it had attracted more than 400 comments on the Duke Chronicle Web site. Some support Butler’s stance; others are harshly critical.

DIG DEEPER
Read more about Butler's column and the response to it at blogs.newsobserver.com/bullseye/

"People think I'm antagonizing NCCU when in fact I'm critiquing something NCCU did," Butler said Tuesday. "The fact that we can’t have a lucid, temperate conversation illustrates that we can't move on."

It isn’t clear whether Mangum faced any disciplinary hearings on campus; a campus spokesperson could not be reached Tuesday.

At NCCU, student leaders have heard from their constituency and are crafting a response.

"Students are angry," said Kent Williams Jr., NCCU’s student body president. "But instead of writing back with negative stuff, they’re asking the university to be unified and not let stuff like this divide the two campuses."

Williams said he plans to talk with his counterpart in Duke’s student government and hopes to address the issue soon in a joint statement.

Since the lacrosse saga began in 2006, student leaders at the two universities have worked quietly to find common ground with efforts like a joint student leadership dinner that has been held the past two years and will occur again during the 2008-09 school year.

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Childhood obesity rate might be leveling off

BY ROB STEIN
THE WASHINGTON POST

WASHINGTON — The obesity epidemic may have peaked among U.S. children, halting a decades-long trend of inexorably expanding waistlines among the nation’s youngest and most vulnerable, federal health officials reported Tuesday.

A new analysis of the most recent data collected by an ongoing government survey, considered the most authoritative on the subject, detected the first sign since the 1980s that the proportion of 2- to 19-year-olds who are overweight may have stopped rising, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported.

“It looks like it’s leveling off,” said Cynthia Ogden, an epidemiologist whose analysis is being published in today’s issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association. “It could finally be stabilizing.”

More data will be needed, however, to confirm that the data represent a turn-around in the long upward trend and not just a temporary pause, Ogden said. And even if the epidemic has peaked, the pace at which young people are becoming overweight remains alarmingly high. Moreover, those who are already overweight face a future fraught with possible serious health problems.

“It’s too soon to uncork the champagne,” said David Ludwig, an expert on childhood obesity at Children’s Hospital Boston who co-wrote an editorial accompanying the new research.

Still, several experts said the data offer the first glimmer of hope that the country could be starting to push back against a major public health threat.

“We may be turning a corner with respect to obesity,” said William Dietz, director of the Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity at the CDC.

The analysis could not determine why the rate may have stalled, but health experts cited a variety of possible factors, including rising awareness among parents, schools, community groups, and government and private programs.

The proportion of children who are obese has been rising steadily since about 1980, tripling from about 5 percent to more than 15 percent. Overweight children are prone to a host of serious health problems, including asthma, diabetes and heart disease.

Ogden and her colleagues analyzed data collected by the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, a nationally representative database tracking obesity and other major health issues. The study focused on the most recent data — height and weight measurements collected from about 8,165 children and adolescents as part of the 2003-2004 and 2005-2006 surveys. There was no statistically significant change, the researchers found.

Moreover, when the researchers compared the two periods with surveys dating to 1999, they found no significant increase over the entire period, strengthening their confidence that the trend had leveled off.
Post-traumatic stress cases up

Military sees a 50 percent jump

BY PAULINE JELINEK
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — The number of troops with new cases of post-traumatic stress disorder jumped roughly 50 percent in 2007 amid the military buildup in Iraq and increased violence there and in Afghanistan.

Records show roughly 40,000 troops have been diagnosed with the illness, also known as PTSD, since 2003. Officials think that many more are likely keeping their illness a secret.

"I don’t think right now we ... have good numbers," Army Surgeon General Eric Schoomaker said Tuesday.

Defense officials had not previously disclosed the number of PTSD cases from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Army statistics showed there were nearly 14,000 newly diagnosed cases across the services in 2007, compared with more than 9,500 new cases the previous year and 1,632 in 2003.

Schoomaker attributed the big rise over the years partly to the fact that the military started an electronic record system in 2004 that captures more information and to the fact that as time goes on the people keeping records are more knowledgeable about the illness.

He also blamed increased exposure of troops to combat.

Factors increasing troop exposure to combat in 2007 included President Bush’s troop buildup and the fact that 2007 was the most violent year in both conflicts.

More troops also were serving their second, third or fourth tours of duty — a factor mental health experts say dramatically increases stress. And in order to supply enough forces for the buildup, officials also extended tour lengths to 15 months from 12, another factor that caused extra emotional strain.

Officials have been encouraging troops to get help even if it means they go to civilian therapists and don’t report it to the military.

"We’re trying very hard to encourage soldiers and families to seek care and to not have them feel in any way, shape or form that we’re looking over their shoulder or that we’re invading their privacy," Schoomaker told a group of defense writers.

Schoomaker said that PTSD is widely misunderstood by the media and the public — and that what is often just normal post-traumatic anxiety and stress is mistaken for full-blown PTSD.

Experts say many troops have symptoms of stress, such as nightmares and flashbacks, and can get better with early treatment.

The Pentagon had previously given only the percentage of troops thought to be affected by depression, anxiety, stress and similar issues — saying up to 20 percent return home with symptoms of mental health problems.
Today's debate: Charitable giving

Honor donors' intent

Our view:

Colleges that take gifts with strings attached can't have it both ways.

When supermarket magnate Charles Robertson and his wife, Marie, gave $35 million in 1961 to Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, the intent of their donation was clear. It was to train students for government service, particularly the foreign service.

And when the institution then known as Randolph-Macon Woman's College embarked on a million-dollar fundraising campaign in 1998, its mission was also clear. It was soliciting funds to support a top-flight education for women who wanted a single-sex setting.

But after having accepted money for specific purposes, both institutions went in different directions. In 2006, just two months after completing its fundraising drive, Randolph-Macon announced it was going co-ed and changing its name to Randolph College. The Woodrow Wilson School has not made quite as dramatic a change, but it has largely ignored the mandate to steer its graduates toward government service.

These are two of the most prominent examples of institutions that have shown a remarkable disregard for the wishes of their donors. Such behavior threatens to discourage wealthy individuals from giving money and complicate the business of philanthropy for generations to come.

It is particularly troubling now, because technological change is creating new generations of wealthy individuals. According to the Council on Foundations, the nation's philanthropic endowments could grow to $6 trillion by midcentury from the current $500 billion. But if donors think their wishes will be ignored, they will be more likely to pass their wealth on to their children or to spend it themselves.

Donors and their heirs have responded to these cases in a variety of fashions. One has been litigation. The Virginia Supreme Court is expected to rule on the Randolph College case next month. A similar case is being heard in Louisiana regarding the dissolution of a woman's college within Tulane University. And a case brought by the Robertsons' children is expected to go to trial in New Jersey this fall.

Anger has been another response. An egregious example of ignoring donor intent came from the American Red Cross, which diverted some of the funds it raised after 9/11 to other purposes. This diversion, combined with poor management in its Hurricane Katrina recovery efforts, has caused serious harm to its reputation.

Still another response has been a trend of donors putting more restrictions on their gifts and demanding a greater say on how the funds are used. In some cases, they have even put time limits on spending the money.

Non-profit groups argue that they need the flexibility to change with society. In some cases, this argument has merit. Donors of prior eras had views about race and gender that are not accepted today. For example, Cecil Rhodes, who created the Rhodes Scholarships in his 1902 will, could never have fathomed scholarships going to women, minorities and citizens of developing countries, as they do today.

In all too many cases, however, the compelling rationale for ignoring donor intentions is lacking. And the more institutions ignore their contributors, the harder time they will have finding new ones.
Graduates Alter Recruiters’ Job

BY ANDREA COOMBES

How many college students pick up a newspaper to scour the classified ads for a job? Probably not many, yet some companies still post job ads there.

Another mistake recruiters make: Relying solely on the big job boards to find college students, who often are looking elsewhere, said Lou Adler, chief executive of the Adler Group, Irvine, Calif., a company that trains corporate recruiters on hiring practices.

“I certainly see many, many companies posting their jobs on job boards...and not getting any results and wondering why,” Mr. Adler said.

While college career centers—and the career fairs they offer—still play a big role in helping students find jobs, students also often go directly to companies’ career sites, where smart employers offer search tools that let students plug in a few words so relevant job postings appear. College grads also tap social-networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace to find more information about specific companies.

There is a disconnect between how some employers recruit and how the newest crop of college grads communicates, some say.

“Many employers are not speaking the language of the students. Very few corporate recruiters are comfortable using cell phone text messaging, Facebook, MySpace,” said Steven Rothberg, founder of CollegeRecruiter.com, a job board for college students.

Perhaps surprisingly, accounting firms are in the lead when it comes to reaching college students. “There are a lot of new techniques out there, sending messages to cellphones, social networking, creating a blog or a page on Facebook, MySpace, and some of the big accounting corporations in particular, Ernst & Young, KPMG, Pricewaterhouse-Coopers, have done a very remarkable job of tapping into the needs of Gen Y,” Mr. Adler said, largely because they hire large numbers of college grads every year. (Gen Y is usually defined as those born after 1980.)

Engineering, consulting and tech firms are also on the forefront of tapping the latest technologies, Mr. Adler said. “We have companies pushing RSS feeds to cellphones” listing new job openings. Others offer instant chat with recruiters on their career Web sites.

Meanwhile, some companies are embracing the idea that career-hopping is a more accepted practice among Gen Y graduates. “FedEx has a program that says, ‘Have your eight careers with us,’” Mr. Adler said. “That’s pretty clever. People haven’t fundamentally changed...but now it’s easy for people to change jobs. Companies are giving people a career opportunity within the same company.”

You could argue that in today’s weaker job market, college students should be learning how to appeal to recruiters, rather than the other way around.

Yet, while hiring is off from last year, it is by no means dead. Employers expect to hire 8% more college graduates from this year’s class than from the class of 2007, according to a survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers. That’s a decline from the 16% increase employers projected when surveyed in the fall—but still in positive territory.

Why are employers still hiring? “Demographics,” said Edwin Koc, director of strategic and foundation research at NACE, in Bethlehem, Pa.

“The baby-boom generation is coming to retirement age, and employers have to anticipate those potential retirements and put people into the pipeline in order to replace them,” he said.

That’s good news for college grads. “With the exception of the financial-services sector, we still see significant hiring by employers,” said Tom Devlin, director of the career center at University of California at Berkeley.

While adopting the latest communication techniques is key to finding college grads, it isn’t always enough. Young grads are sometimes particular about how companies interact with them. For instance, jumping on Facebook to scour for potential hires isn’t necessarily the right tactic.

I. Cont...
"The best way to use a social networking Web site is to network," Mr. Rothberg said. "Don't advertise your job opening, don't contact somebody and try to recruit them today." Mr. Rothberg likened that approach to going to a kids' hangout and asking them to do a chore. They won't respond positively.

Instead, he said, companies should offer to help potential job candidates by, say, connecting them with possible mentors.

Ernst & Young agrees. "We purposefully do not use Facebook as a way to look at profiles," said Larry Nash, recruiting director of branding, communications and market leadership at Ernst & Young. "We use it as a way to inform students of what we can offer, what we're about, our values. Students come there to get an idea of what it’s like to work here. They can also ask questions and get answers immediately. There's an active message board, and our staff are all looking at it so people can get very quick responses," he said.

Students, too, can discuss among themselves what they think about the company. "I think that's what they find very real about it. They want real answers. They don't want people to sugarcoat it," he said.

Among employers and marketers, there's a lot of talk about Generation Y and how it differs from the generations preceding it. But some say college students today aren't much different from those in previous generations. What has changed is technology and how students today use it.

Mr. Koc said a new NACE survey, not yet published, has found similarities between college students in the 1980s and today in terms of a desire to balance work with family as well as a willingness to sacrifice personal time when the work load calls for it.

Another change may be employers' awareness now of the need to discuss these issues. "Employers talk about balance, they talk about flexible work schedules," said Steve Schroeder, director of the career center at the Wisconsin School of Business, at the University of Wisconsin in Madison.

"They often talk about vacation as one of the benefits," he said. "Employers, most of them, are pretty cognizant, they're pretty tuned into what students are looking for."

Other things matter too. Zach Malingowski, a senior about to graduate from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, with a degree in industrial and systems engineering, said he accepted his soon-to-start position at Medline Inc., based in the northern suburbs of Chicago, because he was looking for a job "where I could make a difference," he said.

"In this position, I get my own projects, I get to see the results from start to finish. Obviously, the competitive salary, the good benefits are important. It's a good area, too. I'm young. I'm excited to be living in the Chicago area. That played a big part," he said, noting that he turned down a job in a rural area.

And benefits do matter. Matt Thornton, graduating from the same school with a degree in industrial engineering, said he turned down a job offer with a higher salary in a more rural area for one in an urban locale with a "relaxed work atmosphere, flexible hours, good benefits, vacation days, a nice bonus plan."

Even as employers work to attract college grads, students should keep in mind that "their paychecks are being signed by baby boomers," Mr. Rothberg said. Here are three job-hunting tips:

1. Think before you click the send button. "I cringe every time somebody say sends an email to the dean and says, 'Hey, dean,'" Mr. Schroeder said. Students need to realize that, "whether it's an internship or a full-time position, you need to ratchet it up a little bit. This is more formal than communicating with your friends."

2. Have a backup plan. While recruiting trends remain strong, said Mr. Devlin of the University of California at Berkeley, "the general sense is things are tightening, and therefore students are looking at Plan A and Plan B." That might entail targeting a different set of employers, or even a different career field.

3. Rethink expectations. Often, college graduates are "looking for opportunities for advancement...the faster the better," Mr. Devlin said. "That's where there probably might exist the most tension between an employer and the expectations of a new graduate."