THE DAILY CLIPS

May 29, 2012

News, commentary, and opinion
compiled by East Carolina University News Services:

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With regard to university tuition increases, the General Assembly faces a difficult choice in the coming weeks.

It can reject or limit increases and save money for students and their families. The cost of college is rising far too fast and outpacing the ability of many working-class families to pay. Students are choking on record levels of debt, a burden to shed given the labor market they face upon graduation.

The less popular move would be to allow the proposed increases. But this might be necessary. Budget cuts in the past several years led to class cancellations, larger classes, faculty layoffs and a general deterioration of academic quality. If the Legislature refuses to raise tuition, things will get even worse.

Neither of these choices is good, so we hope the Legislature will take a comprehensive approach to university tuition, especially in three areas.

First, the Legislature must set a course regarding future state financing of the system. Many states, Virginia comes to mind first, have reduced state funding and provided more flexibility to university administrators to run their own ships. There is sentiment for doing the same here, especially with regard to UNC-Chapel Hill and N.C. State. If that is so, then legislative leaders should say so publicly and explain how such a system would work.

Second, the Legislature must get an independent appraisal of how efficiently the universities operate — first as a system and then as individual campuses. Legislators can't rely entirely on any UNC-sponsored study of efficiency. In those studies, academics set the priorities for academic interests. An independent study would consider academic interests as part of a broader public interest.

Finally, for the short term, the Legislature must provide the funds needed to slow the rise of tuition and to maintain at least the current quality of UNC instruction, public service and research. As a more comprehensive policy toward public financing and an independent review of UNC spending both
become available, adjustments to that funding can be made. But for now, UNC needs the state's constitutionally mandated support.
Popularity of 'Lost Colony' could be lost if historians find the answers

By Roy C. Dicks - Correspondent

Recent news that a map in the British Museum offers a tantalizing clue to the location of “The Lost Colony” was a boon for historians, but it may be less welcome for producers of the drama about the 1587 English settlement on Roanoke Island.

That’s because the settlers’ unknown fate is the key attraction in the nation’s longest-running historical outdoor drama, which opens Friday in Manteo for its 75th anniversary season. The mystery of what happened to more than 100 men, women and children, missing when English ships returned in 1590, has captivated audiences since 1937 and has helped cement North Carolina as the capital of outdoor drama. Nine other outdoor dramas ring up a new season in the state this summer, including the 62nd year of Cherokee’s “Unto These Hills” and the 60th of Boone’s “Horn in the West.”

A key draw for these productions is that most are located at or near the spot where the historical events being depicted took place. At “The Lost Colony,” audience members heading to the Waterside Theatre walk through the area
where the missing colonists actually lived. Yet, even with a possible solution pending, the production has many aspects to keep audiences coming.

“My folks brought me and my brother here and it was a life-altering experience, because it was live and it was history,” said Charles Massey, marketing director for “The Lost Colony,” who remembered leaving the show with many more questions than the show answered. “I think if a family sees it together, they are invested in it and it can be a point of departure for other history lessons, as well as family activities such as reading, research and travel.”

After the success of “The Lost Colony,” so many more productions had been created in North Carolina to offer similar historical experiences that the Institute of Outdoor Drama was established at UNC-Chapel Hill in 19643 to provide support and resources. Now housed at East Carolina University, the organization serves outdoor productions nationwide, including Shakespeare festivals and religious dramas.

Its director, Michael C. Hardy, said it’s natural that North Carolina was home to the earliest examples of the genre.

“UNC’s Carolina PlayMakers originally concentrated on folk drama and theatre about rural areas,” he said. “Two of the PlayMakers’ most prolific playwrights were Kermit Hunter, who wrote both ‘Unto These Hills’ and ‘Horn in the West,’ and Paul Green, who wrote ‘The Lost Colony.’ ”

In “The Lost Colony,” more than 100 actors, singers, dancers and technicians stage vivid recreations of Queen Elizabeth I’s court, the Plymouth docks from which the settlers sailed, New World Indian villages and the colony’s isolated encampment. Children are engaged by the tribal ceremonies and battles, while adults respond to the story of Virginia Dare, the first child born to English parents in the New World, and to the settlers’ enduring hardships. The production’s dramatic climax, in which the starving settlers leave in search of food and to avoid the arriving Spanish, is a moving moment for all.

Ira David Wood III, artistic director of Raleigh’s Theatre in the Park and an actor in “The Lost Colony” for four seasons, considers that finale one of American theater’s finest moments.

“For a couple of hours you get really attached to the characters,” Wood said, “and then all of a sudden, they march out and you know what the end is going to be. You want to say ‘don’t go’ or ‘take me with you.’ ” Wood credits N.C. native and Pulitzer Prize winner, Paul Green, for writing a
richly layered script. “The characters are Shakespearean, undergoing
tremendous growth. They are trying to survive and the audience is struggling
along with them.”

Haskell Fitz-Simons, artistic director of Raleigh Little Theater and a veteran
of seven years in the production’s choir, said the music is a big draw.

“It was styled as a ‘symphonic drama’ from the get-go, and the choral music
has always played a tremendous part in it,” said Fitz-Simons, adding that
spectacle of the show has great appeal. “The costumes, even in earlier times,
would knock your eyes out. Now, Billy Long’s costumes are drop-dead
gorgeous,” he said, referring to five-time Tony Award-winning designer
William Ivey Long, who’s also responsible for the overall production
design.

Despite the ongoing pull “The Lost Colony” exerts on visitors, it has
experienced attendance fluctuations over the last 20 years, as have most of
North Carolina’s other historical outdoor dramas.

Hardy acknowledges that electronic distractions of TV and computers have
had an effect. Unpredictable weather and events like last year’s wildfires
also can keep people away. But additional tourist attractions have played a
major role.

“In 1937, ‘The Lost Colony’ was the only game in town,” he said. “Now
there’s so much to do in the area that some tourists never even get onto the
island. The same is true for ‘Unto These Hills,’ now that there is a casino in
the area.”

Still, most long-running outdoor dramas survive because of what Hardy
terms “the legacy effect.” When Hardy was general manager of “The Lost
Colony” last year, he spoke to a number of people who had seen the
production as children and who now wanted their own children to have the
experience.

“One couple, who had their latest grandchild with them, told me that as each
grandchild reaches the fourth-grade study of N.C. history, the couple bring
them to see the production,” he recalled.

Another way “The Lost Colony” and other outdoor dramas maintain their
longevity is with changes to script and production style. “The Lost Colony”
has seen its share of revisions and re-thinkings.

“There’s always an attempt to understand the expectations of the audience in
relation to what’s happening culturally in the country,” Massey said. “At one
time the show was almost melodramatic, then it tried relating to pop culture, then went for Broadway showmanship, and now we are more into naturalism and historical accuracy.”

To that end, Long has used period portraits of Queen Elizabeth I to create her costumes as well as those of her courtiers. He also studied the drawings that John White made while on Roanoke Island in 1585 to create the Indian costumes. New choreographer Jimmie Lee Brooks is working to bring back more of the ritualistic nature of the Indian dances for more authentic-looking movements.

Director Robert C. Richmond, back for a fifth season, has put an Elizabethan stamp on the show, drawing on his extensive staging of Shakespeare. He also is adding back a character from Green’s original script that has been absent since the earliest days. The character is only identified as “A Young Man at Court,” but through the dialog, it is readily apparent that the character is William Shakespeare.

Such changes will continue over the years, a process that Hardy calls appropriate.

“When shows get stuck in a rut and don’t change at all, that’s when interest starts to dwindle,” he said. “I think the ‘Lost Colony’ has done an exceptional job of avoiding that trap.”

Dicks: music_theater@lycos.com
Tudor: Pirate golfers overcome long odds, begin NCAA tournament

By Caulston Tudor - staff columnist - ctudor@newsobserver.com

Thirty schools begin a chase Tuesday for the NCAA men’s golf championship at Riviera Country Club in Pacific Palisades, Calif., and the most surprising qualifier in the field could well be East Carolina.

Not only have the Pirates never before reached an NCAA national golf tournament, they’re there with a group of players so lightly recruited out of high school that coach Press McPhaul chuckles when asked how he pieced the team together.

“It’s not too very far from what you’d have to describe as divine intervention,” said McPhaul, a Sanford native and former N.C. State player and assistant coach.

“These guys have probably surprised everyone except themselves and their families. They defy the odds just about every day, but that’s what makes them so special, too. I doubt if ECU was the first choice in high school for any of them, but they wouldn’t trade places now with any team in the country. I certainly wouldn’t trade ‘em for anybody anywhere.”

Seeded 23rd in the NCAA field, the Pirates are led by 5-foot-9, 165-pound Harold Varner, a 21-year-old product of Gastonia Forestview High School. Varner tackled an extraordinary 18-hour academic course load in his final semester and still managed to get selected as Conference USA player of the year.

“It was a real learning experience in every sense of the word,” Varner said of spring semester. “I wouldn’t recommend it to anyone.

“But the only way I could graduate in May was to load up all of those hours and just go for it. Somehow I made it.”

A marketing major, Varner said a course in operations management almost made him double-bogey the mission.

“It came down to the final exam, and I was nervous. I mean really nervous, but golf can make you nervous, too. So maybe that sort of helped me with that exam,” he said. “It was all worth it, though, on graduation day.”
Although he’s not blessed with great size, Varner is deceptively strong according to his coach.

“Harold’s like a lot of our guys. You might see him around the clubhouse, and he doesn’t strike you as a big hitter. But on the course, he can really move the ball,” McPhaul said.

Last summer in Greensboro, Varner became the first African-American to win the N.C. Amateur and the first player in history to win both the State Amateur and the State Amateur Match Play titles.

“Those were both huge thrills obviously,” Varner said. “But qualifying for the NCAA was just as thrilling because this was something we accomplished as a team.

“Just about every guy on our team is from North Carolina. We weren’t big deals in high school, but we’ve become a great team. We all care for each other. Coming here to school has turned out to be the greatest thing I could have ever hoped for. I’ll always love this place.”

In the NCAA lineup with Varner are fellow seniors David Watkins of Hamlet (Richmond County High) and Adam Stephenson (Greenville Rose), junior Zach Edmondson (Morrisville, Cary Christian) and sophomore Ryan Eibner of Cary, who went to high school in Texas.

“This is a group of terrific youngsters,” McPhaul said. “When we qualified in the regionals at Georgia, the guys who weren’t in the lineup packed up their cars, drove down there, slept on the floor and were out at the course every day to support their teammates. There’s a really strong bond.”

In the NCAA, the first challenge for the Pirates will be to survive the 54-hole stroke play cut after Friday’s round. Only eight teams will advance to the match play final segment, which will end Sunday. For the first two rounds -- Tuesday and Wednesday -- ECU is in a pod with Oklahoma and Illinois. Third-round tee times will be based on 36-hole scores.

The top five seeds are Texas, Alabama, California, Auburn and UCLA. Three ACC teams qualified -- Virginia (13th seed), Florida State (18) and Virginia Tech (28). In addition to the Pirates, four other C-USA reached -- Central Florida (19), Alabama-Birmingham (25), Memphis (27) and Tulsa (30).

After the final NCAA round, Varner is scheduled to play in a U.S. Open Sectional qualifying tournament on Monday in Rockville, Md.
“It’s going to be a busy summer, hopefully,” Varner said. “I would love to get to the Open (June 14-17, San Francisco Olympic Club), but I know that’s a long shot.

“Long-range, I’ll turn pro at some point this summer and then try for the tour in PGA qualifying school (Nov. 28 -Dec. 3, La Quinta, Calif.). But right now, all that matters is this one last tournament with my teammates. It’s going to be exciting, but at the same time it’s going to be a little sad, too.”

Tudor: 919-829-8946
Even during a brief interview, Harold Varner brings up the process more than once.

It seems everything Varner, a senior on the East Carolina men’s golf team, does is part of, pertains to or revolves around the process. Varner doesn’t break the process down step by step, but he doesn’t have to since what matters most — the results — speak for themselves.

Varner will conclude one of the most decorated careers in ECU golf history this week when he and the Pirates play in their first-ever NCAA Championship at the Riviera Country Club in Pacific Palisades, Calif. It’s a fitting end to Varner’s stellar collegiate career, which features a Conference USA Player of the Year honor this season, two consecutive all-conference first-team nods and the distinction of becoming the first ECU golfer to qualify for the U.S. Amateur Championship through a top-50 national exemption.

The usual suspects — hard work, dedication, being in good physical condition and staying mentally sharp — certainly are all part of Varner’s process. Focusing on personal achievements isn’t.
“I feel like, when I first got here, playing good golf was my role. That’s what I was supposed to do,” Varner said during a recent practice at Ironwood Country Club. “Now, it’s giving back. ECU’s given so much to me, so I just try to do my best to give back to people because that’s what’s going to lead the program forward.”

While Varner, a Gastonia native who became the first black male to win the state Amateur Championship last summer, hesitates tooting his own horn, East Carolina coach Press McPhaul does not.

The sixth-year ECU skipper speaks in glowing terms when asked about what Varner has meant to the Pirate program. McPhaul’s praise of Varner carries added weight considering McPhaul took two Vanderbilt teams to the NCAA finals before coming to Greenville.

“He’s possibly the most exuberant and fearless player that I’ve ever been around,” McPhaul said. “He plays the game with abandon that is sometimes a stress-inducer for me. There are times when he needs to be reigned in a little bit, and he would be the first one to tell you that, but he’s incredibly athletic and has an incredible amount of God-given ability.”

Varner hasn’t relied solely on his natural talent though and he cites becoming mentally stronger as one of the most important reasons for his success. Fans and fellow players only may see the low scores and trophies, but Varner admits to having dealt with adversity throughout his college years.

The maturation process — that word again — has helped Varner learn valuable lessons on and off the course, and he’ll no doubt impart some of that wisdom during the Pirates’ time at the NCAAs. But make no mistake — playing their best golf is the part of the process that supersedes all others.

“We need to just stay on the grind and do what we did leading up to regionals,” Varner said. “It’s pretty simple. Just stick to our process.”

Contact Tony Castleberry at tcastleberry@reflector.com, 252-329-9591 or follow @tcastleberrygdr on Twitter.
East Carolina baseball rode the bubble into the NCAA postseason on Monday with a roar of delight in the team’s lounge that carried with it an uncommon measure of relief.

The Pirates, who stumbled to the finish line this season, including a 1-2 showing at the Conference USA tournament, managed to become the No. 2 seed at this weekend’s Chapel Hill Regional at UNC’s Boshamer Stadium.

ECU (35-22-1) will clash with No. 3 seed St. John’s (37-21) at 1 p.m. in the opener Friday, while the No. 1 seed Tar Heels (44-14) will square off with No. 4 seed Cornell (31-15-1) in the second game at 6 p.m.

“Certainly we were concerned down the stretch when we didn’t play like we all wanted to or were capable of, but now we get another chance,” said ECU head coach Billy Godwin, who estimated he’s gotten about seven hours sleep combined the last two nights due to the team’s long bus ride home from the C-USA tournament in Pearl, Miss., and his fretting over whether his club would get to the postseason at all.

The Pirates, who won just three of their last nine games, will make the fifth regional appearance of the Godwin coaching era and eighth in the last decade.
ECU being such a familiar name to the selection committee could not have hurt, but Godwin said it ultimately comes to down to what the team does on the field from February to May.

“I don’t think (recognition) hurts, but I do think you have to stand on your work that you do,” he said. “I talk in our program all the time about there’s no entitlement. I don’t feel like we’re entitled to anything from year to year. We have to earn it, and certainly being a top 30 RPI team and playing a top 30 schedule is what it all comes down to.

“I think we earned our way into this.”

Regardless, there was an obvious tension in the room as other desirable regional sites were announced on ESPNU without an ECU mention, like Raleigh, Charlottesville, Va., (where ECU went last season), Columbia, S.C., and even Baton Rouge, La., and Miami.

But just like that, the announcement came, the room exploded in celebration and 45 minutes later the Pirates had games to practice for again.

“Going in, we didn’t know,” Godwin said, though he noted that he’d planned as though his team would get a bid. “We felt good about it, but you didn’t know if you were going to be taking up uniforms or whether you were going onto the field. We’re ready to go on the field in 45 minutes, so that tells you where my mindset was.”

The Pirates’ players seemed like they couldn’t get out of the team lounge fast enough to start gearing up for a practice they were hoping to have, perhaps a reflection on how tense they were minutes earlier.

“Extremely nervous,” ECU senior pitcher Kevin Brandt said of the 24 hours leading up to Monday’s noon show. “Sitting there in the room, I guess it only took 30 minutes for us to find out, but those 30 minutes felt like a lifetime. In the four years I’ve been here, we’ve not really had to sit on the bubble like that, and not knowing stinks.”

Contact Nathan Summers at nsummers@rfeflector.com or 252-329-9595.
East Carolina University has been named a charter member of the National Academy of Inventors.

The academy, founded at the University of South Florida in 2010, recognizes investigators at universities and nonprofit institutes who translate their research findings into inventions that may benefit society.

The group aims to “push forward this idea of invention and innovation and translating our research to new products and new ideas for our communities,” said Paul Sanberg, president of the academy and senior associate vice president for research and innovation at USF.

A ceremony honoring ECU’s induction and its faculty inventors was held April 25, when the university celebrated its 105th anniversary and Founder’s Day.

Twenty ECU faculty members were inducted including Gregg Givens, chairman of the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders in the College of Allied Health Sciences and a clinical audiologist. Givens has received three patents relating to remote hearing assessment, and two more patents are pending.

“Hearing health care or the lack of is a global need for millions of people,” said Givens, who began working on the project in the early 1990s. “The system developed at ECU is Internet-based to allow for the testing of
hearing, which will hopefully provide unserved individuals the care they need.”

With Givens’ creation, clinicians can remotely test patients through local or area networks and the Web. Assessments can be performed using smart phones or tablet computers. The first commercial version of the diagnostic system debuted in March under the name RemotEar by Otovation, a leading provider of audiometer products for hearing professionals and care providers.

ECU’s ceremony featured keynote speaker John J. Kopchick, Goll-Ohio Eminent Scholar and professor of molecular biology at Ohio University, who spoke about growth hormone therapy.

The national academy has grown to more than 1,000 individual members and 33 institutions, Sanberg said.

Eligible individuals must be a faculty or staff member, student, graduate or affiliate of a member institution and named as an inventor on at least one issued U.S. patent.

More information is online at http://academyofinventors.org.

**Bioengineered blood vessels studied**

Physicians at ECU and Yale University are working together to engineer blood vessels to be used in coronary artery bypass surgery.

Dr. Alan P. Kypson, a surgeon and associate professor of cardiovascular sciences at ECU, and Dr. Laura Niklason, a professor of anesthesiology and biomedical engineering, vascular biology and therapeutics at Yale, are working to expand previous research they have done on tissue-engineered blood vessels.

Their research is funded by a four-year, $2.34 million grant from the National Institutes of Health.

In their previous research, scientists generated bioengineered veins in a bioreactor — a device designed to support a biological environment — and then stored them up to 12 months in refrigerated conditions. The bioengineered veins, 3 millimeters to 6 millimeters in diameter, demonstrated excellent blood flow and resistance to blockage in large animal models for up to a year.
The American Heart Association Update on Heart Disease Statistics reports that in 2007 in the United States, surgeons performed more than 400,000 coronary bypass procedures. Patients requiring bypass surgery may not have suitable veins or arteries available and are not candidates for synthetic grafts because of the size needed for grafting.

Kypson said bioengineered veins could be a useful, potentially life-saving tool for people who need a coronary bypass but don’t have suitable veins of their own. It also avoids possible complications from harvesting a vein from a patient’s leg.

**ECU earns regional outreach award**

ECU is among four universities in the nation to earn a regional award recognizing significant engagement within the community.

The Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities today announced ECU’s selection as the South region winner of the 2012 Outreach Scholarship W.K. Kellogg Foundation Engagement Award, which honors the university’s work with the Lucille W. Gorham Intergenerational Community Center in Greenville.

ECU has been engaged with the center since 2007, when a partnership was established among the university, the city of Greenville, Pitt Community College and a number of other community partners.

“We are really proud to be recognized for this vital partnership built on the strengths of this cultural rich community using an intergeneration approach,” said Kerry Littlewood, executive director of the Lucille W. Gorham Intergenerational Community Center and ECU assistant professor of social work.

The award, with support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, recognizes four-year public universities that have become deeply involved in their communities.

ECU students and faculty members from social work, nutrition, public health, criminal justice, business and medicine regularly volunteer at the Gorham center. As part of class projects and field placements, about 50 social work students are there each year, Littlewood said.

“It is a site that brings together a lot of different disciplines at ECU to get them involved with the community,” Littlewood said. The School of Social Work and College of Human Ecology support daily operations at the center.
Partners — including ECU interns — work to promote independence and self-sufficiency for Pitt County residents through assistance and education on issues on health services, legal problems, social services and resume development. Projects aim to enrich living and social conditions, increase economic development and educational opportunities, provide outreach networks and stimulate health awareness.

The center offers youth apprentice, job readiness and tutoring programs, mentorships between elderly women and young pregnant women, and seminars on health, financial wellness and home ownership. A large community garden at the center provides fresh produce and a living lesson for children’s applied math and science programs.

“The Intergenerational Community Center has become a model for engaging university students and faculty in two-way partnerships with the community so that knowledge is mutually shared to the benefit of all partners,” said Judy A. Siguaw, dean of ECU’s College of Human Ecology. “This award broadens awareness of the great work occurring at the center and will help garner even more widespread support.”

More than 16,000 people have visited the center since it opened in the former St. Gabriel’s Catholic Church on West Fifth Street.

ECU will receive $6,000 for the region award and will move on to compete this fall among four finalists for the C. Peter Magrath University Community Engagement Award, which is given annually by the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities.

Winners come from four regions: south, north central, west and the 1890 university community.

N.C. A&T State University in partnership with N.C. State University earned the 1890 university community award for efforts in building a sustainable local food economy while protecting fish and waterways from hog containment facility spills. Miami University and Colorado State were the other regional winners.
Maril’s immigration work honored
Monday, May 28, 2012

Lee Maril, an East Carolina University professor of sociology, recently was honored by two national associations for his research on immigration presented in his 2011 book, “The Fence: National Security, Public Safety, and Illegal Immigration Along the U.S.–Mexico Border.”

“The Fence” was selected by the Popular Culture/American Culture Association to receive the 2012 Ray and Pat Browne Award for the Best Single Work published in 2011.

Maril attended the Popular Culture/American Culture Association’s national conference in Boston, where he received his award.

“I am honored to have received this award, which I hope will bring more attention to immigration policy in the United States and the variety of problems associated with our broken system of immigration policy dating back to the Immigration and Reform Act of 1986,” Maril said. “Among these tragic problems are the hundreds of women, young children and grandparents who needlessly die every year while illegally entering our country to find honest work and/or to rejoin their families.”
Maril’s book also was nominated by the Texas Institute of Letters as one of three finalists for its 2011 award for Best Scholarly Book. The Texas Institute of Letters is a nonprofit organization whose purpose is to stimulate interest in Texas letters and to recognize distinctive literary achievement. The winner was announced during the society’s annual meeting in San Antonio. Although Maril did not win, he said he was honored for his book to be considered in the same category as the other finalists.

Born and raised in Oklahoma, Maril received a bachelor’s degree from Grinnell College, a master’s degree from Indiana University-Bloomington and his Ph.D. from Washington University in St. Louis. Prior to coming to eastern North Carolina, Maril taught at Oklahoma State University for 10 years. He has been at ECU for nine years and serves as the founding director of the Center for Diversity and Inequality Research and professor of sociology in the Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences.

Maril has conducted research on the Mexican border for most of his career. His book, “Patrolling Chaos: The United States Border Patrol in Deep South Texas,” led to his testimony before the U.S. Congress on three occasions, most recently at the immigration field hearings in Dubuque, Iowa. His research has contributed to two bills in the House of Representatives and one in the Senate.

Maril is a columnist for the daily online Homeland Security News Wire.
Big bucks and dentistry’s ownership

By Wilson O. Jewell and Jessica Y. Lee

Who should make decisions about your dental care: you and your dentist – or a big, out-of-state corporation owned by Wall Street private equity funds? That’s the issue in the fight over Senate Bill 655 in the North Carolina legislature.

The N.C. Dental Society, which represents more than 3,600 dentists, supports the bill. It will give the State Board of Dental Examiners the tools it needs to keep “dental management companies” from owning practices and making decisions about patient care.

Here is what has happened in other states when corporate owners gain control: Medicaid fraud, assembly-line dentistry, unnecessary and expensive treatments and even mistreatment of children as young as 4 years old – all in the pursuit of profits. Management companies could bill patients for unneeded care and otherwise operate illegally. Dentists could be pressured to meet quotas and perform more-expensive treatments.

That’s why we support the bill. But we’re up against an opponent that is raising big money from the dental management companies to oppose the legislation. The Alliance for Access to Dental Care political committee is running TV ads attacking the bill.

Watching the ads, you would think the alliance’s members lie awake at night worrying about children’s dental care. Do you believe that Wall Street private-equity funds are spending over $1 million to influence the North Carolina legislature because they care about children? Or do you, like most dentists here, suspect that their real motive is higher profits?

The companies must be profitable. A recent Bloomberg Businessweek investigation found that “at least 25 dental management-services companies (were) bought or backed by private-equity firms in the last decade.” The Bloomberg investigation, by a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter, noted: “Management companies are at the center of a U.S. Senate inquiry, and audits, investigations and civil actions in six states over allegations of unnecessary procedures, low-quality treatment and the unlicensed practice of dentistry.”
The article – headlined: “Dental Abuse Driven by Private Equity Investment” – told of a seizure-prone 4-year-old in Arizona who was subjected to extensive dental work without his mother’s permission. The unauthorized work was done by ReachOut Healthcare America, a dental management services company that’s in the portfolio of Morgan Stanley Private Equity.

Texas cut off Medicaid payments to one company after an audit found that 90 percent of its Medicaid claims for orthodontic braces weren’t medically needed. A Chicago equity firm owned the company.

U.S. Sens. Charles Grassley and Max Baucus wrote in November that one company may be abusing patients, “grossly overcharging the United States government in Medicaid reimbursement claims,” and focusing “more on achieving self-imposed quotas via assembly line service than proper patient care.”

In North Carolina, Bloomberg found: “Private-equity players Leonard Green, Court Square Capital Partners, and Levine Leichtman Capital Partners own or back companies that contribute to Alliance for Access to Dental Care, a political committee that has raised $1.1 million to fight the bill, according to state records.”

You can see why North Carolina dentists are concerned. For more than 70 years, North Carolina law has required that dental practices be owned and controlled by licensed, professional dentists. But now, dental management companies are exploiting loopholes to get around the law. Their ultimate goal may be to repeal it.

These corporations can and do provide valuable management services to dentists, like procurement and accounting. But they shouldn’t be making patient-care decisions.

North Carolina’s dentists hope the legislature will resist the big money flowing in from out-of-state corporations and Wall Street investors. We hope our state will put patient care ahead of corporate profits.

Dr. Wilson O. Jewell is president of the N.C. Dental Society, and Dr. Jessica Y. Lee is president of the N.C. Academy of Pediatric Dentists. More information is at ProtectQualityDentalCare.org.
Men chase success in jobs traditionally held by women

By Shaila Dewan and Robert Gebeloff - New York Times

HOUSTON Wearing brick-red-hued scrubs and chattering in Spanish, Miguel Alquicira settled a tiny girl into an adult-size dental chair and soothed her through a set of X-rays. Then he ushered the dentist, a woman, into the room and stayed on to serve as interpreter.

A male dental assistant, Alquicira is in the minority. But he is also part of a distinctive, if little noticed, shift in workplace gender patterns. Over the last decade, men have begun flocking to fields long the province of women.

Alquicira, 21, graduated from high school in a desolate job market, one in which the traditional opportunities, like construction and manufacturing, for young men without college degrees had dried up. After career counselors told him that medical fields were growing, he borrowed money for an eight-month training course. Since then, he has had no trouble finding jobs that pay $12 to $13 an hour.

He gave little thought to the fact that dental assistants and hygienists are more than 90 percent female. But then, young men like Alquicira have come of age in a world of inverted expectations, where women far outpace men in
earning college degrees and tend to hold jobs that have turned out to be, by and large, more stable, more difficult to outsource, and more likely to grow.

“The way I look at it,” Alquicira explained, without a hint of awareness that he was turning the tables on a time-honored feminist creed, “is that anything, basically, that a woman can do, a guy can do.”

After years of economic pain, Americans remain an optimistic lot, though they define the American dream not in terms of mansions and luxury cars but as something more basic – a home, a college degree, financial security and enough left over for a few extras like dining out, according to a study by the Pew Center on the States’ Economic Mobility Project.

That financial security usually requires a steady full-time job with benefits, something that has become harder to find, particularly for men and for those without college degrees. While women continue to make inroads into prestigious, high-wage professions dominated by men, more men are reaching for the dream in female-dominated occupations that their fathers might never have considered.

**Few choices**

The trend began well before the financial crash, and appears to be driven by a variety of factors, including financial concerns, quality-of-life issues and a gradual erosion of gender stereotypes. An analysis of census data by The New York Times shows that from 2000 to 2010, occupations that are more than 70 percent female accounted for almost a third of all job growth for men – double the share of the previous decade.

That does not mean that men are displacing women; those same occupations accounted for almost two-thirds of women’s job growth. But in Texas, for example, the number of men who are registered nurses nearly doubled in that time period, rising from just over 9 percent of nurses to almost 12 percent. Men make up 23 percent of Texas public schoolteachers, but almost 28 percent of first-year teachers.

The shift includes low-wage jobs as well. Nationally, two-thirds more men were bank tellers, almost twice as many were receptionists, and two-thirds more were waiting tables in 2010 than a decade earlier.

Even more striking is the type of men who are making the shift. From 1970 to 1990, according to a study by Mary Gatta, the senior scholar at Wider Opportunities for Women, and Patricia A. Roos, a sociologist at Rutgers University, men who took so-called pink-collar jobs tended to be foreign-
born non-English speakers with low education levels – men who, in other words, had few choices.

**Stigma fading**

Now, though, the trend has spread among men of nearly all races and ages, more than a third of whom have college degrees. In fact, the shift is most pronounced among young, white, college-educated men like Charles Reed, a sixth-grade math teacher at Patrick Henry Middle School in Houston.

Reed, 25, intended to go to law school after completing a two-year stint with Teach for America, but he fell in love with the job. Though he says the recession had little to do with his career choice, he believes the tough times that have dampened the prospects for new law school graduates have also helped make his father, a lawyer, more accepting.

Still, Reed said of his father, “In his mind, I’m just biding time until I decide to jump into a better profession.”

To the extent that the shift to “women’s work” has been accelerated by the recession, the change may reverse itself when the economy recovers. “Are boys today saying, ‘I want to grow up and be a nurse?’” asked Heather Boushey, senior economist at the Center for American Progress. “Or are they saying, ‘I want a job that’s stable and recession proof?’”

**Glass escalator**

In interviews, however, about two dozen men downplayed the economic considerations, saying that the stigma associated with choosing such jobs had faded, and that the jobs were appealing not just because they offered stable employment, but because they were more satisfying.

More than a few men noted that their new jobs had turned out to be far harder than they imagined.

But these men can expect success: Men earn more than women even in female-dominated jobs. And white men in particular who enter those fields easily move up to supervisory positions, a phenomenon known as the glass escalator, as opposed to the glass ceiling that women encounter in male-dominated professions, said Adia Harvey Wingfield, a sociologist at Georgia State University. More men in an occupation can also raise wages for everyone, though as yet men’s share of these jobs has not grown enough to have an overall effect on pay.

“Simply because higher-educated men are entering these jobs does not mean that it will result in equality in our workplaces,” Gatta said.