A new summer camp meant to get female students interested in STEM subjects — science, technology, engineering and math — is taking root in Pitt County.

The Center for STEM Education at East Carolina University is offering its first weeklong day camp for rising ninth-grade girls interested in traditionally male-dominated subjects like science and technology. The free STEM Girls camp will be held June 18-22 from 8:30 a.m. to noon at C.M. Eppes Middle School. Lunch will be provided each day.

The theme of the camp, building an amusement park, will showcase how each field has hands-on applications.

With no charge for students, the camp is funded by a grant from the Mathematics Association of America. About 40 of the 80 available slots remain open, according to the center’s interim director, Margaret Wirth.

“We want any female with an interest in math and science to come,” Wirth said. “We know we have to get local girls interested in STEM careers at an early age. We have a dedicated team of female STEM faculty serving as role models and teaching the sessions.”

A majority of pre-teen girls are interested in STEM subjects, but research states that interest often does not result in taking STEM courses in high school and entering STEM careers, according to Wirth.

A group of ECU female STEM faculty have been working together to provide eastern North Carolina girls an opportunity to discover the possibilities available to them in STEM careers, particularly in fields non-traditional for women such as engineering, the physical sciences, mathematics, computer science, and surgery.

A number of researchers have found that girls and women have less confidence in their mathematics abilities than males do, and that from early adolescence girls show less interest in mathematics or science careers.

The STEM Girls faculty team believes that participation in the program activities can improve girls’ understanding of, and appreciation for, basic mathematics and science skills and knowledge. This, in turn, may improve
their confidence and willingness to pursue higher-level mathematics and science courses in high school, thus making them better prepared for the STEM workforce.

For more information or an application, call the Center for STEM Education at 328-6885.

Contact Jackie Drake at jdrake@reflector.com or 252-329-9567 or follow her on Twitter @JackieDrakeGDR.
Pirates prep for regional, visit hospital
By Tony Castleberry
Thursday, May 31, 2012

Jeff Hoffman’s noteworthy freshman season has at least one more highlight. Hoffman, a right-handed pitcher, will start East Carolina’s opening game against St. John’s when the Pirates begin play at the NCAA baseball Chapel Hill Regional on Friday. First pitch between No. 2 seed ECU (35-22-1) and the No. 3 Red Storm (37-21) is scheduled for 1 p.m.

In 18 appearances, nine of them starting nods, Hoffman, from Latham, N.Y., has compiled a 3-1 record and a save with a 3.37 earned run average. Those aren’t dazzling numbers, but Hoffman has proven himself to be a steady midweek arm while occasionally putting together sensational performances, like the seven shutout innings he tossed in a 1-0 loss at North Carolina on April 25.

Hoffman said he’s thrilled to get to toe the rubber again at UNC’s Boshamer Stadium, but hinted there might be some nerves involved too.

“You want to say no to that (question),” Hoffman said when asked if he was nervous heading into Friday’s game. “There is definitely going to be some adrenaline going. I know a couple of guys on St. John’s (team), so it’s going to be fun to go out there and play against them. I just want to try to go out there and compete.”
Vidant visit

ECU coach Billy Godwin and his players took a break from preparing for regional play to visit Vidant’s children’s hospital Wednesday afternoon.

Without being asked by any of the media members at Clark-LeClair Stadium on Wednesday, the Pirate skipper spoke about the importance of his team being active in the Greenville community, and not just when the Pirates are on the diamond.

“The message there is to get our kids to understand that they can make an impact,” Godwin said. “They can affect other people’s lives just by their presence. That’s an important thing (we) do as a sidebar to baseball.”

No fleeting feeling

After sweating out Monday’s selection show to see if they’d even make the postseason, then discovering they’d gotten the second seed, the Pirates almost immediately turned their attention to getting back to work and preparing for St. John’s.

That didn’t mean the elation of hearing ECU’s name called on ESPNU dissipated right away.

“I don’t really think it can be said that we forgot (the anxious anticipation) because I know 30 or 45 minutes after we found out we were in, I was still jumping for joy,” senior catcher Zach Wright said. “I wasn’t ready to play my last game yet. We did practice after (the selection show) and it was a good, crisp practice and we were just excited to be out there on the field being able to practice again, knowing that we had at least one game left.”

Contact Tony Castleberry at tcastleberry@reflector.com, 252-329-9591 or follow @tcastleberrygdr on Twitter.
Lebo ready for Minges makeover
By Tony Castleberry
Thursday, May 31, 2012

Although it’s in an embryonic stage, the renovation and expansion of East Carolina’s Minges Coliseum has begun and the simple groundbreaking that has taken place has ECU men’s basketball coach Jeff Lebo excited.

On Wednesday, the only visual signs of the construction were some broken slabs of concrete, a tall fence bordering the parking lot and some machinery idly sitting in the rains produced by Tropical Storm Beryl. But the fact that the project, which will cost around $15 million and take more than a year to complete, is under way is confirmation for Lebo, his players and Pirate fans that the new and improved Minges will be a reality.

“When you start to see the fences up and some of the preliminary stuff getting done here in the parking lot, it’s exciting for our program,” Lebo said in a wide-ranging interview that touched on everything from the status of Corvonn Gaines, Tyuisan Armstrong and Shamarr Bowden — three players who were arrested after last season — to ECU’s upcoming father-son camp. “Our players start to think that it’s actually going to happen. It moves from a thought and a drawing to something that they can actually see.”
The new 48,000-square foot facility will feature separate practice courts for the men’s and women’s basketball teams along with office suites, locker rooms and meeting rooms.

**Player update**

Lebo said there is no new word on the status of Gaines, Armstrong and Bowden, who were all arrested in late April and indefinitely suspended from the team. Gaines and Armstrong were charged with being intoxicated and disruptive and resisting a public officer after an incident outside Greenville’s Still Life nightclub while Bowden faces illegal possession of a firearm and prohibited use of a firearm charges. Bowden was arrested by U.S. Marshals in Greensboro on April 30.

It’s the first time Lebo has had to deal with this kind of off-court trouble during his two seasons in Greenville, but the former North Carolina player, who has been a Division I head coach since 1998, isn’t going to rush to judgement in any of the three cases.

“I’ve been (coaching) for a long time and you deal with all kinds of different issues,” Lebo said. “You listen to both sides of the story and in some cases, you have to let the legal process work through things. ... Some of theses cases, we just have to wait and see what happens.”

**Going camping**

Don’t mistake Lebo for one of those coaches who finds summer camps tedious or a waste of time.

In fact, Lebo cites going to camps as a youngster with his dad Dave — even before Jeff met the age requirement for participation — for sparking his love of basketball. The passion a young Lebo had for learning the game has not diminished now that the 46-year-old Lebo is teaching it, both to the Pirates and to the kids who attend ECU’s summer camps.

The father-son camp, which Lebo started during his coaching tenure at Auburn in the mid-2000s, is scheduled for June 15-16 and holds a special place in Lebo’s heart. Dave Lebo, who compiled a 108-9 record while coaching Jeff at Carlisle (Pa.) High, and Jeff’s son, Creighton, will both attend the camp, which caters to fathers of all ages and eighth grade and younger sons.

“I love it,” Jeff Lebo said. “It’s one of my favorite things to do.”
Visit ecupirates.com for more information on all of ECU’s summer camps.

Contact Tony Castleberry at tcastleberry@reflector.com, 252-329-9591 or follow @tcastleberrygdr on Twitter.
ECU falls to 23rd at NCAAs
Thursday, May 31, 2012

PACIFIC PALISADES, Calif. — The East Carolina men’s golf team will need a strong round today at the NCAA Championship to avoid having its season come to an end.

The top eight teams at the end of today’s round at Riviera Country Club advance to the match play portion of the tourney, which begins Friday, and East Carolina is tied for 23rd out of 30 teams after shooting a 19-over 303 on Wednesday.

The Pirates are 30-over after two rounds.

ECU senior Harold Varner is tied for 16th on the individual leaderboard after firing a team-best 2-over 73 on Wednesday. Varner is 2-over for the tourney, seven strokes behind leader Thomas Pieters from Illinois.

An individual champion will be crowned at the conclusion of today’s action.

The Pirates’ Zach Edmondson shot a 3-over 74 on Wednesday. Adam Stephenson (75), David Watkins (81) and Ryan Eibner (82) rounded out the scoring for ECU.

East Carolina, which started on the 10th hole, was inside the top 10 early in its round thanks to a hot start.

All but one of the Pirates’ golfers recorded at least one birdie during their first three holes and the team had nine birdies at the end of nine holes.

Varner birdied his first two holes and finished with five on the day. Edmondson birdied No. 1 to move to 2-under, but a triple bogey on No. 2 cost him.

Eibner began his final nine with an eagle on the par-5 1st, but he also triple-bogeyed No. 2.

Second-ranked Alabama leads the field at 4-over. UCLA trails by four strokes, followed by Florida State (12-over), Oklahoma (13-over) and North Florida (13-over).
Rubio making the most of moment in veepstakes spotlight

By Rebecca Kaplan

(CBS News) The search for a vice president, as Democratic strategist Chris Lehane describes it, "is the original American Idol/Dancing With The Stars, with some candidates auditioning for the part and others leveraging the stage to launch their own national careers."

Marco Rubio is doing both -- and wiping the floor with his competition -- even if it's unclear whether he's really interested in being Romney's vice president, or if Romney's all that interested in him.

Rubio, the 41-year old senator from Florida and the country's most prominent Hispanic Republican, is mentioned in every discussion of potential vice presidents even though he's held federal office for less than two years. He has been busy this spring deepening his policy credentials and beginning to court the voters and politicians who will be crucial if he makes a run for the presidency in 2016 or 2020.

In the last two months alone, Rubio has laid out his vision for American foreign policy; traveled to Guantanamo Bay; begun work on a Republican alternative to the DREAM Act (to give some sort of legal status to the children of illegal immigrants who have attended college or served in the military); addressed residents of two early primary states, Iowa and South Carolina; and used his political action committee to help support two promising Republicans running for Senate: Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel and Indiana Treasurer Richard Mourdock.
And Rubio's not done yet. On Thursday, he will give another foreign-policy speech to the Council on Foreign Relations in New York. In the coming months, he will campaign with Mourdock in Indiana and release his memoir, "An American Son," complete with a July book tour that includes stops in Florida, his home state, South Carolina, an early primary state, and Virginia, a swing state. Yes, the tour - a bus tour - was dictated by geography. But it's some pretty politically convenient geography.

"What Rubio's doing isn't novel although he's certainly doing it in a more conspicuous way than just about anybody else I can remember," said Joel Goldstein, a Saint Louis University School of Law professor who has written extensively about the vice presidency.

The spotlight is nothing new for Rubio, whose staff says he has always kept a full schedule to help other candidates and rally Republican voters. "The difference now is that because of all the speculation around the vice presidency, things that were long planned are suddenly getting a lot of attention, which is welcome," said spokesman Alex Conant.

But Rubio has been unique in the sheer number of high-profile appearances, which are now well documented by the media because of his presence on the short list of potential vice presidential candidates.

"Rubio is clearly leveraging the VP process to project himself into a national player," Lehane, who served as press secretary to vice president Al Gore during the 2000 campaign, wrote in an email. "Rubio, because he is from Florida and has already been in the conversation, is really using the process to not just raise his stature but to raise his influence and wield the power of such heightened influence," he added.

Rubio's actions in some ways suggest he is trying to shape his party rather than position himself to be number two on the national ticket. And that can put Rubio at odds with Romney, the new head of his party.

Rubio's vision for the DREAM Act, for instance, would grant a non-immigrant visa to the children of illegal immigrants who were brought to the U.S. at a young age and attended college here. It's a stark contrast to the hardline position Romney took during the GOP primary season, when he pledged to veto the Democratic version of the bill. During an April campaign stop in Pennsylvania with the young senator, Romney declined to weigh in on Rubio's idea.

Rubio also broke with Romney on the issue of foreign aid during his policy speech to the Brookings Institute in April. Whereas Romney has questioned
the wisdom of humanitarian spending while the United States is so deeply in
debt, Rubio endorsed a robust foreign aid budget as a means of
strengthening American influence and ideals abroad.

In this vein, Rubio is not behaving like a prospective ticket-mate. "It's the
job of the vice president to work for, to promote, to back up, to act as a first
lieutenant for the president. That's what the job is," said Jody Baumgartner,
an associate professor and scholar of the vice presidency East Carolina
University. "As a modern vice president, you do not have an identity."

Rubio has been far more effective as a critic of President Obama, whom he
painted as the most "divisive figure in modern American history" at a recent
address to South Carolina Republicans.

While Rubio has defended Romney's policies when asked - as he was in a
recent Fox News Sunday interview - he often omits Romney's name when
he's delivering a speech. That was the case in the South Carolina speech and
remarks to a Des Moines business group earlier this month.

"He is fundamentally a figure of the future. And I don't think that future is
2012, or I think it's likely not to be 2012 on a national ticket," said Steve
Schmidt, the Republican strategist who advised John McCain's 2008
presidential bid. "The magnitude of his political talent and star power
suggests...he's a guy who's not in the understudy role. You know that he will
be a serious candidate for the presidency in his own right if he chooses to do
it."

That's why Schmidt predicted that Rubio is actually trying to cement a
prime-time speaking slot at the Republican convention in Tampa this
August, a role that would parallel Obama's rise.

And it may be that Rubio -- young, eloquent, tea party-backed, conservative
and Latino, but new to national issues and policy -- could be more helpful to
Romney off the ticket than on it.

"Every day that Marco Rubio's giving a speech in a swing state is a good day
for Mitt Romney," as Schmidt put it.

It just so happens that would be a good day for Marco Rubio, too.
Attorney Kieran Shanahan (at left) is surrounded by the media outside the Federal courthouse in Greensboro, N.C. Wednesday May 30, 2012. Shanahan is the principal partner in the Shanahan Law Group, Shanahan has become a regular at the federal courthouse where the former U.S. senator and presidential candidate is on trial for alleged campaign finance law violations. Shanahan is one of a handful of attorneys the media have come to rely on for quick commentary on the case against Edwards, and he's the most ubiquitous.

**Raleigh’s Shanahan becomes go-to analyst for Edwards trial**
By Martha Quillin - mquillin@newsobserver.com

GREENSBORO–The one place Kieran Shanahan’s face has not been seen much since the start of the John Edwards trial is in his Raleigh law office. Seems as though it’s been everywhere else, though: on NBC TV’s Today Show and Nightly News, on ABC’s Good Morning America, FOX News and The O’Reilly Factor. He’s been quoted in People magazine and the Boston Globe.

Instead of reporting every day to his job as a principal in the Shanahan Law Group, Shanahan has become a regular at the federal courthouse where
Edwards, the former Democratic U.S. senator and presidential candidate, is on trial for alleged campaign finance law violations.

Shanahan is one of a handful of attorneys the media have come to rely on for quick commentary on the case against Edwards, and he’s the most ubiquitous.

That’s partly because he’s well-informed about the case and partly because he gives his opinions for free.

“He’s in a unique position to comment,” says Andy Lancaster, marketing coordinator for the private law firm that Shanahan started after serving five years as a federal prosecutor. Shanahan is also a former member of the Raleigh City Council, where he served four terms.

Shanahan, 56, is a lifelong Republican who served as a delegate to the party’s national convention in 2004. He’s particularly proud of his appearances on the Fox network shows, but talks with anyone who asks.

While Shanahan has posted links to some of his television appearances through his Facebook and Twitter accounts, it’s been Lancaster’s job to archive clips of those media moments for a web page the firm will use to showcase Shanahan’s skills as a media commentator.

“It’s great exposure for the law firm,” Lancaster said.

What has become a temporary full-time job for Shanahan started out with a request from WRAL-TV, which had asked him to comment on federal cases in the past. Shortly after, Shanahan said, the Today Show asked for his help, and other media outlets followed.

Just as he would prepare for a legal case, Shanahan immersed himself in all things John Edwards. He read Andrew Young’s insider account of the Edwards’ political campaign and plowed through both of the memoirs by Edwards’ late wife, Elizabeth. He pored over all the legal filings at the courthouse.

He came to court, he said, at the start of the trial to get a feel for the proceedings: whether it would be possible to come and go while court was in session, how hard it would be to get a seat, the styles of the different lawyers. He planned to listen to opening arguments, then go back to work and return to Greensboro periodically for critical testimony and evidence.

Jury selection started in mid-April, and testimony on April 23. Since then, Shanahan said, “I’ve been here every day but one.”
He uses the time driving to and from Greensboro to talk with clients and catch up on work as much as he can.

“The people in my office are taking bets on how many speeding tickets I’m going to get,” he said. So far, none.

Shanahan is so invested in the case he changed months-old travel arrangements to meet family in Florida over Memorial Day weekend. He went down later and came back earlier so he wouldn’t miss anything.

He arrives at the courthouse around 9:30 a.m. most days, dressed in a suit and a colorful tie, and often is met on the sidewalk where the media camps out by a reporter and camera operator needing an early shot. He’s learned the schedules of the different stations and newspapers, and tries to accommodate them. When he needs a microphone, he clips it himself to the lapel of his suit jacket. He’s learned to position himself just so before the camera and look toward it without staring directly into it.

During breaks in the proceedings, Shanahan was often met at the door of the courthouse by a wad of reporters asking for a summary of the previous hours’ testimony. He learned to consider what he could say before he walked out.

“I try to be accurate and careful,” he said, “and still be insightful.”

Rick Gall, news director at WRAL, said Shanahan has gotten better at this as the case has progressed.

“There are a lot of people who can answer questions in a knowledgeable way,” Gall said. “Being able to do it in a way that is succinct and interesting, that is a skill. And he has developed that skill.”

This is the first case Shanahan has watched as a spectator from gavel to gavel, he said, and it will change the way he tries cases. In the future, he said, he won’t let the behavior of other lawyers distract him, or even the mood of the judge.

“I think it will make me a better trial lawyer,” Shanahan said. “In a trial by jury, your audience is the jurors. That’s where you need to focus.”

Quillin: 919-829-8989
Central Piedmont Community College President Tony Zeiss has been honored by another local higher education institution for his work to support education and the region.

UNC Charlotte named Zeiss the 2012 recipient of its Distinguished Service Award praising, in part, his work to boost the ties between the university and community college. He was honored during a luncheon held at the university on Wednesday.

For example, officials cited the two-year-old Passport Program where select students who have applied to UNC Charlotte may be enrolled in a bridge program at Central Piedmont where they receive services such as individual academic advising and career counseling before transferring to the university.

“Tony has been key to making sure that higher education has a central role to play in helping the greater Charlotte region address its most critical issues,” Gene Johnson, chairman of the UNC Charlotte Board of Trustees said in a news release. “He understands that a strong and engaged public research university and leader in workforce development like CPCC can work together to make a profound difference in a community like Charlotte.”
Zeiss also is an author and has worked on other education and community projects like the Little Sugar Creek Greenway.

The university has handed out the Distinguished Service Award since 1987, and said it honors people who have demonstrated “outstanding leadership and exemplary service to the Charlotte community and to the advancement of UNC Charlotte.” Winners receive a statue of a gold miner.
A Gap in College Graduates Leaves Some Cities Behind

By SABRINA TAVERNISE

DAYTON, Ohio — As cities like this one try to reinvent themselves after losing large swaths of their manufacturing sectors, they are discovering that one of the most critical ingredients for a successful transformation — college graduates — is in perilously short supply.

Just 24 percent of the adult residents of metropolitan Dayton have four-year degrees, well below the average of 32 percent for American metro areas, and about half the rate of Washington, the country’s most educated metro area, according to a Brookings Institution analysis. Like many Rust Belt cities, it is a captive of its rich manufacturing past, when well-paying jobs were plentiful and landing one without a college degree was easy.

Educational attainment lagged as a result, even as it became more critical to success in the national economy. “We were so wealthy for so long that we got complacent,” said Jane L. Dockery, associate director of the Center for Urban and Public Affairs at Wright State University here. “We saw the writing on the wall, but we didn’t act.”

Dayton sits on one side of a growing divide among American cities, in which a small number of metro areas vacuum up a large number of college graduates, and the rest struggle to keep those they have.

The winners are metro areas like Raleigh, N.C., San Francisco and Stamford, Conn., where more than 40 percent of the adult residents have
college degrees. The Raleigh area has a booming technology sector and several major research universities; San Francisco has been a magnet for college graduates for decades; and metropolitan Stamford draws highly educated workers from white-collar professions in New York like finance.

Metro areas like Bakersfield, Calif., Lakeland, Fla., and Youngstown, Ohio, where less than a fifth of the adult residents have college degrees, are being left behind. The divide shows signs of widening as college graduates gravitate to places with many other college graduates and the atmosphere that creates.

“This is one of the most important developments in the recent economic history of this country,” said Enrico Moretti, an economist at the University of California, Berkeley, who recently published a book on the topic, “The New Geography of Jobs.”

The recession amplified the trend. Metro areas where more than one in three adults were college-educated had an average unemployment rate of 7.5 percent earlier this year, compared with 10.5 percent for cities where less than one in six adults had a college degree, according to Edward Glaeser, an economist at Harvard and the author of “Triumph of the City.”

Historically, most American cities have had relatively similar shares of college graduates, in part because fewer people went to college. In 1970, the difference between the most educated and least educated cities, in terms of the portion of residents with four-year degrees, was 16 percentage points, and nearly all metro areas were within 5 points of the average. Today the spread is double that, and only half of all metro areas are within 5 points of the average, the Brookings research shows.

“There’s a relentless cycle in which knowledge breeds knowledge, but the flip side is that many places are left out,” said Alan Berube, a senior fellow at Brookings who conducted the analysis using census data from the American Community Survey.

Dayton lost about 1 percent of its college-educated 25- to 34-year-olds between 2000 and 2009 at a time when that group grew by 13 percent nationally, said Joe Cortright, senior policy adviser for CEOs for Cities, an economic development group. In Columbus, Ohio, about 70 miles away, the same group grew by 25 percent.

In a pattern that is part education, part family background, college graduates tend to have longer life expectancies, higher household incomes, lower divorce rates and fewer single-parent families than those with less education,
and cities where they cluster tend to exhibit those patterns more strongly. Montgomery County, where Dayton is located, has a premature death rate that is more than double that of Fairfax County, Va., the highly educated Washington suburb, according to Bridget Catlin, a University of Wisconsin researcher.

Now, Dayton is racing to produce, attract and retain college graduates as a badly needed food for its hungry economy. But it is a painstaking process. Kate Geiger, who lost her job at General Motors in 2008, said she would never forget the feeling of sitting in a college classroom for the first time after 24 years on the factory floor.

“I am this 44-year-old, old-school union girl,” she said, “and here I am with all these 18-year-old kids who have grown up with computers.”

Retaining graduates is hard when a city has fewer to begin with, because college graduates, like migratory birds, tend to flock to places with many other college graduates. Kelley Shomaker, 23, who graduated from the University of Dayton this year, said she searched for work in Dayton but ultimately received an offer from Rock Hill, S.C., a suburb of Charlotte, N.C. In August, she and two friends will set off for that city to start teaching careers there.

Charlotte, once a city with very little education, now has a population that is more than a third college graduates. Ms. Shomaker estimated that 60 percent of her friends were moving to other cities.

Dayton’s past was rich, but by the 2000s the city was in trouble. It lost half of its manufacturing jobs in 12 years, according to Richard Stock, an economist at the University of Dayton. When the city’s last Fortune 500 company, National Cash Register, left in 2009, residents were jolted into action.

“Our premise is you have to change people’s mind-set,” said Thomas Lasley, the former dean of education at the University of Dayton, who runs Learn to Earn, the city’s effort to increase its share of college graduates. “We have to go from one where people think of themselves as being in a high-school-attending culture to being in a college-attending culture.”

One effort has shown marked success. The Dayton Early College Academy, which opened in 2003 as a public high school, focuses on preparing low-income students for college. It sends 97 percent of its graduates to college, the vast majority to four-year programs.
One of the graduates, Francei Brown, plans to attend Morehouse College in Atlanta in the fall. His father, who for years cobbled together part-time jobs fixing cars and doing plumbing and roofing, even in the worst weather, was resolute about college for his son.

“He said, ‘I want you to have a job where, if it’s cold outside, you’ll be warm inside,’” Mr. Brown said.

Dayton has used internships as a glue to keep recent graduates, and the city found through a recent survey that graduates were twice as likely to stay if they had done an internship at a local business. One of them, Richard Kaiser, who graduated from Wright State University, stayed in Dayton because it was cheaper and seemed faster to advance in a career, a choice he does not regret. Friends who moved to Chicago, he said, “ended up sitting at home and drinking cheap beer and playing video games every night.”

Dayton may be struggling to find a second act, but it has strengths that many industrial cities lack. Wright-Patterson Air Force Base is a major employer in the area. Lexis-Nexis, the research company, has a large operation here. And the city has an above average share of people with some college — those who have a two-year degree or who have taken some classes but have no degree.

Steven Lee Johnson, president of Sinclair Community College here, argues that the paradigm may be changing to one in which students take bundles of courses instead of spending four years on obscure academic topics. The approach has been popular among students here, who tend to have children and busy lives (about a tenth of students at Sinclair are displaced workers).

“There’s a concern among employers that a degree is not specific enough,” he said. “What will count is competencies — very concrete things that you have achieved.”

Even so, those with four-year degrees still tend to have the biggest impact on economic development, Mr. Cortright argues.

Ms. Geiger, the former G.M. employee, graduated with an associate degree in graphic design and is now working on a Web site and planning events for a Harley-Davidson shop.

The job does not pay very well, and she compares it to “new shoes that don’t really fit right yet.” But she loves the freedom of not having to clock in and out. “It’s so strange to find that there is life after G.M.,” she said.
After service, veterans go on to college

Published May 30, 2012

By Mary Beth Marklein, USA TODAY

NEW YORK – If his door is open, you can bet student veterans are spilling out of Eric Glaude's office at Borough of Manhattan Community College. On most days, it's standing-room only because his broom closet of an office has become the de facto command central for student veterans.

Space has been at a premium since Sept. 11, 2001, when the school's Fiterman Hall was destroyed by the collapse of the World Trade Center. Add to that a mushrooming student population. More than 400 veterans were enrolled last year, up from 157 in 2009, when Glaude, a disabled Vietnam War-era veteran, was hired to help former servicemembers make the transition from combat to college.

Their ranks at schools across the nation are likely to continue to climb as the drawdown in Afghanistan continues. The Post-9/11 GI Bill, enacted in 2008, has paved the way for hundreds of thousands of recent veterans to enroll in college. Of 923,836 servicemembers who received federal education
benefits last year, 555,329 served after 9/11, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Although the benefits enable them to go to college, some veterans say it's the camaraderie and support they get on campus that determines whether they finish.

"A lot of us are loners. When you get out of the military, you kind of don't know where you're at," says retired Marine Vincent Acevedo, 26, who is set to receive his associate's degree in criminal justice Friday. "That's what the veterans group is for, to let you know you're not alone."

This year marks a milestone for the school: 26 veterans will graduate, up from six last year. Other schools, too, are reporting their largest graduating classes of veterans in recent history. More than 100 vets were honored at ceremonies this month at Columbia University. Salt Lake Community College conferred degrees on 187 veterans.

Acevedo, who struggles with short-term memory lapses caused by an explosion in 2006 outside Baghdad that slammed him into a wall, is a campus success story, says Glaude, who offers what he calls "little wrinkles and strategies" for navigating the red tape and managing coursework. The road to a college degree is often bumpy. Some veterans may not have cracked a book in years and become overwhelmed by the relatively unstructured rhythm of student life, or they find themselves at odds with faculty or younger classmates.

Glaude estimates that 1% of his veterans each year "just can't seem to make it," often because their emotional wounds are too burdensome. Nationally, no one keeps track of how many drop out. To address that lack of information, President Obama last month ordered the VA, along with the Education and Defense departments, to track college completion data for veterans to provide "a more accurate picture of what success looks like," a White House statement says.

Concerns have centered mostly on for-profit schools. A 2010 Senate analysis found troubling withdrawal rates at eight for-profit colleges that enroll the largest numbers of veterans. Dropout rates for one company were as high as 69%.

Non-profit colleges aren't off the hook. "Many schools will claim to be military-friendly, and almost any veteran will tell you that that is a completely meaningless term," says Gene van den Bosch, president of the
Arizona Veterans' Education Foundation. A few years ago, the group's informal check of colleges in Arizona found as few as 3% of veterans graduating from some public universities and community colleges. A law is poised to go into effect that requires Arizona colleges to collect and report graduation rates if they want to be certified as a "veteran-supportive campus."

Elsewhere, efforts are underway to remove barriers. Some New Jersey colleges are condensing academic programs in teaching and engineering to make it easier for Post-9/11 GI Bill recipients to get their degrees before their benefits run out — in most cases, after 36 months. Texas Gov. Rick Perry, a Republican, announced a program this month that awards vets college credit for some military service, an effort to speed their progress.

Two non-profit groups, the Pat Tillman Foundation and Operation College Promise, plan to launch an initiative this summer that builds on a seven-campus pilot study. It suggests veterans are more likely to progress at a rate similar to those of non-veterans if they attended schools with robust support services tailored to the needs of veterans.

At this community college, that support comes not only from Glaude's office, but also from classmates who served. "We may not all have seen the same things when we served, but we have a common background," says former Navy Seabee Justin Fiorella, 28, who served in Iraq and Afghanistan. "We know what other vets have been through and are going through now."