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252-328-6481
ECU may see tuition increase

- The ECU Board of Trustees holds a special meeting to discuss state budget proposals and what they could mean for the university system.

BY JOSH HUMPHRIES
The Daily Reflector

East Carolina University students could face a significant tuition hike next year.

The ECU Board of Trustees held a special meeting Tuesday to discuss state budget proposals and what they could mean for the state's university system.

Ongoing state budget negotiations in Raleigh may lead to an 8 percent cut in funding for ECU if the House budget is approved.

The Senate's budget includes a proposal to allow universities the ability to raise tuition by $750 to make up the difference.

Tuition increases ultimately would need to be approved by the University of North Carolina Board of Governors, and the state budget process still has a long way to go, ECU Chancellor Steve Ballard said.

Ballard proposed an increase of $300 for in-state undergraduate students, $750 for out-of-state undergraduate students and $27 for graduate students.

Ballard said the graduate tuition needs to remain low if ECU wants to compete for the best students, so he

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is only proposing a $27 increase.

The ECU Board of Trustees already approved a $90 tuition increase and an $80 fee increase for the coming academic year.

Any increase beyond that is subject to the state budget and Board of Governors approval, Ballard said.

If the proposal goes into effect, the annual tuition for ECU would increase from $4,477 for 2009-10 to $4,947 for the 2010-11 school year.

Ballard said the university has cut everything possible in the past three years without injuring the academic core of the university, and any further reductions would result in faculty job loss without a tuition increase.

"I think we have done almost all we can to cut anything not related to the academic core," Ballard said. "I don't like the philosophy that students should pay more, but I don't see any other option."

The board did not take action on the tuition increase because it is subject to change.

Board Chairman David Brody referred to the state's suggestion to increase tuition to make up for lost revenue as a "user tax."

"It is unfortunate that we are in a reactive mode, but it's between the economy and the Legislature that we have been placed," Brody said.

Ballard's plan includes using half of the proposed increase for financial aid to help the university's poorest students.

"I worry daily about what any increase would mean for our students' ability to come to ECU," Ballard said.

The only campuses in the system that are considering the full allowable increase of $750 for in-state students are the N.C. School of the Arts and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The UNC Board of Governors is expected to vote on tuition increases at its June meeting before the final state budget is passed.

Contact Josh Humphries at jhumphries@reflector.com or (252) 329-9565.
The ECU Chancellor's House is seen at 605 East Fifth Street on Tuesday.
Justin D. Falls/The Daily Reflector

**Trustees debate options for ECU's chancellor's home**

By Josh Humphries
The Daily Reflector
Tuesday, June 1, 2010

The East Carolina University Board of Trustees is again taking a look at upgrading the chancellor’s residence.

A special committee formed to investigate adding onto the house, building a new one or purchasing an existing house for the chancellor met Tuesday to discuss the options.

The 5,000-square-foot Dail House at 605 E. Fifth St. was purchased by the university in 1948 and has served as the residence for every chancellor since.

The house is inadequate as a living space for the chancellor, and should a future chancellor have children, there would not be enough room for a large family and events, board chairman David Brody said.

The chancellor hosts a variety of social and fund-raising events at the house, and several problems have been encountered through the years including inadequate closet and kitchen space and parking issues.

Brody formed the special committee to investigate the university’s options for a better facility at the last full board of trustees meeting.

“We need to define the scope of the work and what kind of work we are going to do,” Brody said. “This project is going to have to be done with private funds.”

The board does not want to use state or university funds to upgrade the chancellor’s residence at the same time that it is considering another tuition hike.

Two sub-committees with specific assignments were formed Tuesday.

One committee will investigate the options for expanding or upgrading the chancellor’s residence with work confined to the block the house sits on. ECU owns an adjacent house that could be used for guest rooms or other functions.
Brody said he wants the committee to consider keeping the social and entertainment functions of the chancellor’s house at the Dail House and moving the residence to another location. The second sub-committee will investigate possibilities for purchasing or building a new house in the range of $1 million-$2 million. The sub-committees will make preliminary reports to the facilities and resources committee at the July meeting of the full board of trustees.

Contact Josh Humphries at jhumphries@reflector.com or 252-329-9565.
Greenville’s VA clinic is expanding

BY GINGER LIVINGSTON
The Daily Reflector

North Carolina’s senior U.S. senator came to Greenville on Tuesday searching for better ways to deliver medical and mental health care to the nation’s military veterans.

Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C., spent 90 minutes talking with doctors and administrators at the Veterans Affairs Community-Based Outpatient Clinic in Greenville about the facility’s future and its role in offering cost-effective and timely medical and mental health services.

The VA has operated the Greenville clinic for three years. Plans are under way to build a 100,000-square-foot clinic that will partner with the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University to provide a greater amount of outpatient services in the region. The new facility should be operational by 2013. “North Carolina is in a challenging situation,” Burr, the ranking Republican on the Senate Veterans Affairs committee, said. “With an increase in our military retiree population, we don’t have the facilities to treat all of them. What I’ve tried to do over the past two years is to accelerate the (VA medical) infrastructure in North Carolina so we can truly meet the needs of veterans in this state.”

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Just less than 1 billion square feet of medical space will be added in the state by 2013, Burr said, with expansion of the Greenville facility and other projects undergoing planning or under construction in Fayetteville, Winston-Salem and Charlotte.

Burr asked the local doctors if more focus should be given to utilizing local medical centers such as Pitt County Memorial Hospital and the medical school to provide patient care.

While the VA still wants its patients treated at its Durham hospital, partnering with the Brody School of Medicine and PCMH has made it easier for patients to receive immediate services, said Dr. Jim Byrd, a primary care provider with the Greenville facility.

The facility serves about 6,500 patients, including nearly 300 who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Byrd said with the expansion of the Greenville clinic, he hopes to see hospitalizations reduced. “A lot of being in the hospital is observation,” he said.

Individuals with stable medical conditions needing treatments could commute to the new facility daily to see if the treatment is working versus spending days in a hospital bed, he said.

Burr asked if it is more expensive to treat a patient in Durham or in Pitt County. The question of treatment costs is being studied, said Jim Gelkowski, administrative officer for ambulatory care with the VA’s Durham facility, which oversees Greenville’s operations.

Veterans Affairs has paid more than $2.5 million to PCMH for veterans’ care, Gelkowski said. Another $3 million went to community care providers in east-
ern North Carolina.

Burr also discussed mental health treatment within the VA system.

Byrd said the VA is seeing 30 percent to 40 percent of Iraq and Afghan war veterans seeking VA treatment, versus the 20 percent of World War II veterans who sought help. He and other doctors attribute the increase to better education about available services.

Burr asked about the length of treatment time for a veteran seeking help immediately for stress disorders versus one who waits. Burr said he believed the system should be changed to give veterans immediate payment if they seek mental health treatment instead of requiring them to be certified as disabled before funding their treatment.

Burr said he also believes the Department of Defense could be doing more to offer intensive treatment while people are in service.

Dr. Gary Bawtinhiner, a psychiatrist at the Greenville clinic, said individuals he works with complain that military men and women are stigmatized for seeking mental health treatment.

Burr and the staff also discussed how the Greenville clinic is pioneering the VA's switch to a model of service called "medical home" where a patient is assigned to a single doctor and his support staff who oversee every aspect of the individual's care. Gelkowski likened it to a person being assigned a doctor at a private medical practice.

Contact Ginger Livingston at glivingston@reflector.com or (252) 329-9570.
FOOTBALL

Former ECU player arrested, Tasered

The Daily Reflector

Matthew Martin Pick, 23, has been charged with indecent exposure and resisting and obstructing a public officer. According to an East Carolina spokesman, Pick left the school's football team after spring practice in April.

New Hanover County Sheriff Ed McMahon told the Star News that Cpl. Eric Brown told Pick to stop streaking. When Pick didn't comply, Brown Tasered him.

The event was filmed by a bystander and posted on YouTube.

Pick, who transferred to ECU in 2007 after a season as a walk-on at Georgia, suffered a knee injury during the 2008 season and didn't see any field action last season.

The Oakton, Va., native played in two games in 2008 and compiled three total tackles.

An East Carolina University student — and former Pirate football player — was Tasered and arrested after running naked down a Wrightsville Beach street early Sunday morning, according to a Wilmington Star News report.
Democrats talk of jobs, but GOP may seek budget cuts

By Benjamín Niólet, Staff Writer

Democrats in the state House have started putting their best spin on the state budget, which is expected to come to the full chamber for a vote this week.

Democrats, who control the chamber and write the budget, incorporated a $25 million jobs package into the budget Tuesday night, which will surely be part of how they try to sell the document. Another key point: Money taken from the state lottery would save about 1,600 teacher jobs from the chopping block.

Republicans are so far focusing on a key number: $18.9 billion. That's the size of the House budget proposal, and the GOP is likely to attack the document because it doesn't cut enough as the state struggles with the effects of the recession.

Other interest groups have found lots to dislike. The UNC system would take deep cuts that system leaders say would affect the classroom. On Tuesday, advocates for people with mental illness and developmental disabilities packed the halls of the legislature because they think the budget doesn't do enough to protect services for them. The budget also banks on nearly $500 million in federal Medicaid funds that may or may not get an extension.

The debate is likely to run long this week, but Democrats think they can get the budget passed by Friday. House members and senators would then try to iron out a compromise.

Mental health money sought

About 200 advocates for people with mental illness and developmental disabilities roamed the halls of the General Assembly on Tuesday to urge legislators to restore $40 million in service cuts that were imposed last year. Many wore red T-shirts with "I survived the budget cuts of 2009" printed across the back.

In its new budget, the state Senate fully restored the funding, which pays for treatment and care for people who don't qualify for federal assistance through Medicare and Medicaid.

In the budget under consideration in the House, only $18 million of the money is restored.

Rep. Verla Insko, the co-chairwoman of the legislative oversight committee for mental health, said she is not optimistic that another $22 million will be found in the House budget to fully restore the funding.

"I don't anticipate any major changes," said Insko, a Democrat from Chapel Hill. "There just aren't any major dollars left out there."

Insko said she hopes for a conference committee compromise between the House and Senate budgets that can find more support for the services, which she said are needed.

"We saw a lot of repercussions from the cuts last year," Insko said.

Staff writer Michael Biesecker

Bonds for Universities

Inside: Senate to look at a $450 million bond package for higher education projects.

Transportation fees could rise

The House budget proposal would hike tolls on the state's ferries. The budget directs the Ferry Division to develop a new fee schedule so that tolls collected from ferry riders would cover ferry operating costs, which increased by $11 million this year.

That could mean stiff toll hikes on the Ocracoke-Cedar Island, Ocracoke-Swan Quarter and Southport-Fort Fisher ferries -- and perhaps an end to free rides on the busy Ocracoke-Hatteras ferry and the shorter river ferries.

The transportation budget also launches the N.C. Mobility Fund, which Democratic Gov. Bev Perdue proposed to pay for major statewide transportation needs. The House plan ignores Perdue's proposal for DMV fee hikes and her attempt to divert money from the Highway Trust Fund to the General Fund. Instead, it earmarks just $39 million in unspent turnpike money to start the Mobility Fund.

First priority for the fund: Widening Interstate 85 near the Yadkin River Bridge.

The budget also halves the 2011 appropriation for Global TransPark, the state-owned industrial park in Lenoir County. House leaders are angry at GTP because it missed a spring reporting deadline.

Staff writer Bruce Siceloff

Other cuts in the House budget

$11.9 million cut from the state's school bus replacement program. The provision was also included in the Senate's budget.

$39.2 million one-time cut from More at Four, a pre-kindergarten program. Going forward, the budget would cut $6 million or 3.7 percent of the program's $165.5 million budget. The program fares better in the House than in the Senate.

$139 million cut ordered to the UNC system.
Bonds would pay for college plans

Senate studies $450 million package

BY BENJAMIN NIOLET
AND JAY PRICE
STAFF WRITERS

RALEIGH — The state Senate is expected to consider today a $450 million bond package that would pay for university and college projects, including a new engineering building at N.C. State University.

A key Senate committee approved the bond package Tuesday. Borrowing the money would not require the approval of voters. The state is facing an $800 million revenue shortfall in its operating budget because of the recession. That same recession means that construction costs could be as much as 30 percent cheaper than they would be during normal times.

The projects would make North Carolina more attractive to the kinds of high-tech businesses the state wants to recruit, said Sen. Tony Foriest, a Graham Democrat.

"This is a pretty bold step for the General Assembly to take," Foriest said. "These mirror the industries that North Carolina would like to engage in the future."

The bond package would borrow $130 million for repairs and renovations, $55 million for equipment purchases, $104 million for an engineering building at N.C. A&T University and $161 million for the engineering building at N.C. State.

The N.C. State building would be on Centennial Campus and would be the fourth engineering building. It would house the university's departments of Industrial and Systems Engineering, the College of Engineering Administration and a data center. The building would replace Page Hall.

"We can't afford not to invest in our future," said Sen. Richard Stevens, a Cary Republican.

The 1,120-acre Centennial Campus has more than 2 million square feet of corporate and government offices, research labs and academic buildings. It is broadly considered a success, though it has something of the impersonal feel of a business park. The engineering buildings are among several that are planned, built or under construction around an open plaza meant to bring more of a campus feel to Centennial.

N.C. State Chancellor Randy Woodson told senators that the new engineering building would help propel the university's engineering program into the top tier nationally. Woodson, who has only been at his job a couple of months, has vowed to lift the university into the ranks of the nation's elites even as the system faces more cuts.

Paying off the debt would require $18 million next year. That figure would grow to $39 million, and paying off all the projects would take 21 years. The state would eventually pay $330 million in interest.

Sen. Phil Berger, an Eden Republican and the chamber's minority leader, said the state may be facing a $3 billion deficit next year because of taxes and federal stimulus dollars that are set to expire. While the projects are worthwhile, another $18 million debt payment now doesn't make any sense, he said.

"Would you do that in your personal life?" he asked.

ben.niolet@newsobserver.com
or 919-829-4521
Unemployment signs look better

By John Henderson
Rocky Mount Telegram

Tuesday, June 1, 2010

The unemployment rate and job market are showing slow signs of improvement in recent months in the Twin Counties.

Unemployment rates decreased in all of North Carolina’s 100 counties in March, according to the latest figures from the Employment Security Commission of North Carolina.

The unemployment rate for the Rocky Mount metropolitan statistical area, which includes Nash and Edgecombe counties, was 13.5 percent in March, down from 14.7 percent in February.

Steve Rogers, manager of the Employment Security Commission office in Rocky Mount, said he’s seen some minor improvements in the job market in recent months.

“I think we are beginning to see some faint signs of some improvement locally,” he said. “But I’m not sure I’d characterize it as turning corner yet at local level. I think we still have a ways to go.”

The signs are clearly headed in the right direction, Rogers said.

“The sectors that have been fairly strong for Rocky Mount, especially in hospitality and agriculture, seem to be at a more normal level, or maybe is headed back to normal levels,” Rogers said. “But other areas are still lagging behind. I don’t think we’re seeing as much construction yet as we’d normally see this time of year. I think still a mixed picture locally.”

Michael Walden, an economics professor with N.C. State University, sees an even rosier outlook for the state.

“I think we’re going to see an increase in jobs this year,” Walden said. “The rate of unemployment has gone down and is going to improve. My prediction for North Carolina this year is we will add maybe 30,000 nonfarm jobs, primarily in the service sector — professional jobs, administrative jobs,” Walden said.

Walden predicted health care as a growing industry in the Twin Counties.

“There are increasing ties in the labor markets in Nash and Edgecombe counties to the developing pharmaceutical and health-care industry around East Carolina University. I would tell people who are in a situation where perhaps they are switching careers to look into health care."

Tammie Clark, chairwoman of the Health Sciences Department at Nash Community College, said in the last several years, far more people are applying for courses offered by that department.

“I think people are hearing through the media that health care is stable and possibly a growth area,” she said.

She said that’s assuring to people who have been laid off. After graduating from the college’s program, students can land careers in physical therapy, assistant nursing, practical nursing and medical assisting.

She couldn’t say for sure whether there will be more local hiring in these positions.

“The national and state projections are that there is (going to be more hiring in these fields) with baby boomers aging.”

North Carolina’s jobless are having more success looking for work as the unemployment rate dropped for the second straight month in April to 10.8 percent.

The Employment Security Commission reported May 21 that the jobless rate fell from 11.1 percent in March and 11.2 percent in February, the worst since the current calculation method started in 1976.

The improvement pushed North Carolina out of the top 10 states with the worst unemployment. Thirty-four states and the District of Columbia reported lower jobless rates in April, the U.S. Labor Department said.

There were 16,500 fewer people on North Carolina unemployment rolls in April than the previous month. The number of nonfarm jobs increased by 7,500 in April. And evidence continued that people previously discouraged by the lack of work started looking for jobs again. The data also contained the good news that manufacturers added 700 jobs in the month and existing employees worked more hours, a trend that could lead to more hiring. Many economists predict it will take years for the job market to get back to normal.

The overall job market in the state has turned a corner and is headed in the right direction, Walden said.

“This is the fifth straight month by one survey where jobs have increased in North Carolina,” he said.
Study says: casual online games improved thinking

June 1st, 2010

Bejeweled game

By Allan Maurer

GREENVILLE, NC – Casual online games improved the speed and accuracy of decision-making in people who played PopCap Games such as “Bejeweled,” or “Peggle,” according to East Carolina University researchers.

The university’s Psychophysiology Lab researchers used electroencephalography (EEG) brain waves and standardized tests in a six month study that determined that test subjects gained both speed and accuracy after playing the casual online video games for 30 minutes.

Subjects who played the games saw an 87 percent improvement in cognitive response time and a 215 percent increase in accuracy of decision making.

Dr. Carmen Ruscioollo, director of East Carolina University’s Psychophysiology Lab and Biofeedback Clinic, (includes link to Powerpoint presentation on the study) said, “The initial results of the study are very intriguing, in that they suggest that the 'active participation' required while playing a casual video game like Bejeweled provides an opportunity for mental exercise that more passive activities, like watching television, do not.”

We’ve seen recent reports that software programs intended to improve thinking and memory actually only improved the participants ability on the specific exercises themselves and the effects did not seem to transfer to other activities.

This study, however, suggests what other studies have shown, that video games tend to improve cognitive function.

We’ve tested the NeuroActive’s software aimed at improving memory and thinking and found it does improve our concentration and focus, although it doesn’t seem to be a lasting effect.

Tags: casual online video games, cognitive improvement, NC, studies

Leave a Reply
Grads, how do you want your career to end?

By Michael Medved

June grads: Don't believe your parents or grandparents if they tell you that the time you just spent in high school or college represents "the best years of your life." If that were true, then the road ahead could lead only downhill — denying the profoundly desirable possibility that the greatest experiences will come near the end rather than the beginning of your journey.

My own thinking has obviously changed on this score. Like many boys of the Baby Boom generation, I grew up with the conviction that a job as a Major League ballplayer provided the most glorious career on earth. More recently, I've become convinced that another of my childhood obsessions (classical music conducting) offers even more wondrous work, and that waving a baton actually beats waving a bat. To understand the contrast, you need only compare the current standing of two contemporary superstar: Seattle Mariners designated hitter Ken Griffey Jr. and a great British conductor, Sir Colin Davis.

Griffey, approaching his 41st birthday, offers a sad shadow of his former excellence, and our Seattle media deliver frequent complaints about his punchless season. In 2010's first 50 games, the once fearsome slugger has watched his average drop below .190, with no home runs, after slapping some 630 dingers in his previous 20-year Hall of Fame-worthy career.

Sir Colin, on the other hand, is batting close to a thousand in the major leagues of international conducting — taking his achievements to unprecedented heights at age 82. In the past decade, he has issued a series of spectacularly fine recordings with the London Symphony, including thrilling versions of the Edward Elgar symphonies and violin concerto, an explosive William Walton First Symphony, an impassioned account of Haydn's The Creation and much more.

Always a solid, capable interpreter, Davis in old age delivers performances that glow with new warmth, intensity and spirituality.

Seasoned conductors

Nor is he the first famous conductor to do his most celebrated work late in life. The Hungarian-born genius Fritz Reiner became music director of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra at age 64 and continued to lead the ensemble for the remaining 10 years of his life, creating a series of epochal recordings that have recently been reissued in Super Audio editions as unrivaled examples of orchestral precision and power. Bruno Walter, another immigrant conductor, worked incessantly till his fatal heart attack at age 85. He had assembled a group of handpicked musicians in the Hollywood American Legion hall near his Beverly Hills home, cranking out acclaimed recordings of Beethoven, Brahms, Mozart and Mahler to provide his final insights on the music he loved. Legendary maestros Leopold Stokowski and Pablo Casals both kept up with demanding schedules through the age of 95; for Casals in particular (who enjoyed previous renown as a cello soloist) all his most famous conducting accomplishments occurred after age 80.

The "sunset glow" suffusing the work of all these great orchestral interpreters also enriched the late creations of celebrated composers. Beethoven (The Late Quartets), Bach (The Art of the Fugue), Mozart (The Requiem), Mahler (The Ninth and Tenth Symphonies), Bruckner (The Ninth Symphony), Bartok (Third Piano Concerto) — all forged eloquently elegiac masterpieces in the shadow of failing health and impending death.

In most fields of endeavor, even geniuses face declining powers in the final phase of existence: Leo Tolstoy wrote no big novels after Anna Karenina (completed 33 years before his death), and the immortal Shakespeare finished The Tempest, the last play definitively acknowledged as his work, at least six years before he died at 52).
Only in music, the most spiritual of all arts, has old age conferred frequent advantages, often bringing new richness, depth and even grandeur to the artistry of both composers and performers. Most of us spend the first third of our lives ignoring death, the second third denying it and the final third struggling against it. That struggle can shine through in musical expression with a nobility that trumps youthful impetuosity. The British novelist E.M. Forster wrote: "Death destroys a man, but knowledge of death saves him."

**Spiritual vs. physical toils**
This year's graduates should take note: The more spiritual the work you choose, the better the chance for rewards that last a lifetime. The more physical your focus, on the other hand, the quicker the decline from your youthful peaks.

In other words, the octogenarian excellence of Colin Davis hardly stands as an anomaly among musical giants; for princes of the podium, advancing age often brings soulful openings and insights, while demigods of the diamond face inevitable declines. The baseball immortals who fired my boyish adulation may have won louder cheers from bigger crowds in their prime, but music makers can make the glory last and regularly leave the scene in an uplifting trumpet blaze of imperishable late-innings glory.

In that regard, I wish this year's graduates an even more meaningful transition some 60 or 70 years from now, into what should be the most fulfilling and productive years of your lives.

*Michael Medved, host of a national radio talk show and author of The 5 Big Lies About American Business, this month attends his son's high school graduation, as well as his middle daughter's university commencement.*