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ECU provost steps down, plans to resume teaching

By Jimmy Ryals
The Daily Reflector

Jim Smith is giving up the No. 2 position at East Carolina University.

Smith, 63, provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs, plans to return to full-time teaching in the philosophy department. The change is effective June 30.

After four years as ECU’s chief academic officer, Smith said he is ready to go back to the classroom.

Handling “150 e-mails a day and 80 hours a week in this administrative role is pretty challenging,” he said Tuesday. “Fifty hours a week of doing what you want — research, working with students — it’ll seem like being retired because I’ll love every moment of it.”

ECU Chancellor Steve Ballard hasn’t decided what the search for Smith’s replacement may look like, university spokesman John Durham said.

The chancellor’s first priority is selecting an interim provost, Durham added.

Smith was a stabilizing influence during an unsteady time when he became interim provost in 2003, said Glen Gilbert, dean of the College of Health and Human Performance.

His predecessor, William Swart, had been removed after a year in the position. Swart later sued the university for breach of contract; a Pitt County judge awarded him $70,000 earlier this year, and a jury trial is set for another complaint against ECU. Swart’s reassignment came two weeks after the resignation of Chancellor William Muse.

Smith became interim provost in September 2003, taking the position permanently two years later after a national search.

“He was somebody you know always made decisions based on what was best for the university,” Gilbert said.

Over the last four years, Smith has overseen seven colleges and more than 1,000 faculty members. He counts a new strategic planning process, improved teamwork and more transparent budgeting among his chief accomplishments.

Gilbert called Smith an “inspirational leader.”

“It’s been an educational experience for all of us,” said Gilbert, the second-longest-tenured of ECU’s 11 deans. “He’ll step in the middle of a meeting and give us some information on how the classic philosophers would have handled a certain situation.”

After earning advanced and undergraduate philosophy degrees at Pennsylvania State and Tulane universities, Smith took a job at ECU in 1969. He had never seen campus before accepting the job and was intent on leaving his first two years, he said.

But as time passed, his duties expanded and his connection to ECU grew stronger. He led the philosophy department, Faculty Senate and a re-accreditation committee. In the early 1990s, he joined the senior administration as executive assistant to then-Chancellor Richard Eakin.

In a news release, Ballard credited Smith with helping ease his adjustment to the university in 2004.

“His service to the university over the last 38 years is unparalleled,” Ballard said. “His knowledge of the institution is vast, and he commands the respect and admiration of untold numbers of current and former students, faculty members and administrators.”

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Briefly

ECU coach receives honor

East Carolina assistant strength and conditioning coach Michelle Clayton-Boswell was recently selected by a panel of Master Strength and Conditioning Coaches as one of two recipients of the 2007 John Stuckey Award.

The honor is awarded each year for outstanding performance on the practical portion of the Strength and Conditioning Coach Certified (SCCC) certification examination.

Boswell began her second stint as an assistant strength and conditioning coach at ECU in September 2004 and currently works with the men's basketball, track and field, and swimming and diving teams. She is one of only five females in the country to serve as the strength coach for a men's basketball team.

A former All-American track and field performer for the Pirates, Boswell began her career as a graduate assistant at ECU from 1998-2000 before being named coordinator of strength and conditioning for women's Olympic sports at Virginia Tech.
Holland building solid base at East Carolina
AD wants Pirates to define potential

East Carolina athletics director Terry Holland, a Clinton native, has had a distinguished career as a basketball player at Davidson, as a coach at Davidson and Virginia, and as an athletic administrator.

Holland built a winning program at Virginia, compiling a 328-173 record that included two trips to the Final Four.

He later served as an athletics director at Virginia and Davidson and in 2004 became the AD at East Carolina. Holland, 65, whose contract extends through 2011, recently discussed several topics with N&O staff writer A.J. Carr.

Q: What are you most pleased about in three years as AD?
A: We’ve always had here people who have a great passion for the university and athletic program. I think we got somewhat distracted the last five or six years. Part of that was worrying about the BCS.

If East Carolina wants to be successful, we need to define for ourselves what our potential is rather than accepting that someone else can define our success. We’ve felt like not being in a BCS conference was going to limit our chance for success. Well, Utah and Boise State have shown us they didn’t sit on their hands saying woe is me. It can be done.

Q: Are there other conference possibilities for ECU?
A: I think everybody is happy with their conference at the BCS level. There’s always a lot of speculation that the Big East will have to add members. We’ve seen the impact of conference shifts.

We know the next time around, we’d like to at least have the choice to decide whether we stay where we are or be in a different type of league. Right now, I don’t see anything happening the next couple of years.

Q: With the heavy schedule, and the possibility of a down year, do you have concerns about this football season and keeping the Pirates’ faithful enthusiastic?
A: We could be 2-10 easily. A big part of my job has been coaching our fan base and how we have to respond to adversity and prosperity. Eighty-two percent of the Division I-A programs have had a losing season since the year 2000. Everybody is vulnerable to that, particularly playing the kind of schedule we play [and breaking in a new quarterback].

This year, we’re gonna struggle. We’ll be up and down. We may have a winning season. We may go to a good bowl game. We will still have some games when we look bad. But the program is in great shape, and that’s what we have to remain focused on.

Q: What is coach Skip Holtz’ contract arrangement?
A: We’ve got him tied down another five to seven years. We’ve got a bonus structure that gets him up there pretty well. His first one is [after] three years and another one for two more years [later].

His average guaranteed compensation would be in the $850,000 range, and the closer he gets to the bonus payment he would be in the $1.2 million range. His average for the first three years would be $850,000-plus, and the next two after that would be close to the million range. It’s a good contract but requires him to stay to collect a good bit of the money.

Q: Switching sports, what will it take to establish a solid basketball program?
A: Some stability. We have never had a good plan in place to determine what our recruiting area was.

Q: As a former basketball coach, what are your views on the 3-point line and other possible rule changes?
A: The most frustrating thing for me in watching our game over the last couple of decades is that we have so many different variations. We have high school basketball with its 3-point line and no clock. We’ve got women’s basketball with a whole different set of rules. And we’ve got international basketball. And we’ve got the NBA.

I think we all should all be moving toward the international game. That is the measuring stick for the world.

Q: Are any building plans in place now?
A: We need to add seats [in the football stadium]. First, we need to create a program that will sell those seats. We need to get up around 60,000. We are low 40s. We need to replace our press box, and we need upgraded seating, either suites or club level. We do have very good facilities in most areas. They are very functional.
Still hard to say boat was Blackbeard's

Ten years and $2 million have yet to result in a "smoking blunderbuss" that proves a shipwreck off the coast of Beaufort belonged to the notorious pirate Blackbeard.

But researchers say they haven't found anything among the cannons, coins, anchors, and other artifacts to rule it out, either.

"Ten years of archaeological and historical research all say it's the Queen Anne's Revenge," said Lindley Butler of Wentworth, the historian on the shipwreck project.

Some state officials stop short of confirming the oldest shipwreck ever found in N.C. waters belonged to Blackbeard. They prefer caution, saying the state's reputation is on the line.

"There's a slim possibility that it could be another shipwreck," said Jeffrey Crow, a deputy secretary of the N.C. Department of Cultural Resources.

But even if it turns out not to be the French slave ship many believe Blackbeard captured in 1717 and renamed Queen Anne's Revenge before it ran aground off Atlantic Beach a year later, the decade of research has been worth the effort, said Jerry Cashion, chairman of the N.C. Historical Commission.

"This is the most important maritime wreck in North Carolina regardless of what it is," Cashion said. "It's a treasure trove."

The French frigate measured about 100 feet long with three masts and a crew of 150 to 200. The shipwreck, discovered in late 1996, is within sight of Fort Macon State Park under 23 feet of water.

Florida-based Intersal, a private research firm, received a state permit in 1989 to search for the QAR, the Adventure -- one of Blackbeard's smaller ships -- and the El Salvador, a Spanish treasure ship that sank in the area in 1750.

What's believed to be the QAR was discovered by an Intersal crew Nov. 21, 1996.

The following March, state officials announced the find and said it "may be" Blackbeard's flagship.

Archaeologists thought it would take five to six years to recover all the artifacts when they began the process in 1997. But they say a lack of money has slowed the effort.

The state has spent about $1.2 million on the project with another $600,000-plus coming from grants and other private sources. Further excavation and conservation will likely cost another $1.4 million.

Only about 15 percent of artifacts have been recovered to date, including jewelry, dishes and thousands of other items that are being preserved and studied at a lab at East Carolina University.

Blackbeard, whose real name was widely believed to be Edward Teach or Thatch, was killed by volunteers from the Royal Navy five months after the QAR sank in 1718.

"We haven't found ... the smoking blunderbuss," Crow said. "It's like a crime-scene investigation, just like 'CSI,' just like 'Law & Order.'

"But they might find that indisputable link."

"We are not going to find a license plate on it that says Blackbeard," said Steve Claggett, the state archaeologist. "These guys didn't keep diaries."
FSU reaches settlement with nursing students

By Corey G. Johnson
Staff writer

Fayetteville State University reached an agreement Tuesday with a group of nursing students that will allow them to graduate without passing an exit exam.

A group of students hired a lawyer after 25 out of 32 failed to meet a university-imposed cutoff score on a standardized test from Health Education Systems Inc.

The agreement will allow the students to graduate if they pass a 95-hour, 12-day review course taught by Dr. Frances Eason of East Carolina University. Dr. Eason is a recognized expert on the national nursing licensure exam.

FSU will pay Eason $9,600 for her work, which started Monday, university officials said. The university will also pay $5,500 to the students' lawyer, Luke Largess.

In return, the students promise not to sue FSU or the UNC Board of Governors for the nursing department's imposition of the HESI exit exam requirement during the beginning of their last semester.

"We decided to enter into this agreement because we wanted to allow our nursing students to be able to concentrate on their studies and not have distractions that could hinder their performance," said FSU Chancellor T.J. Bryan in a written statement. "Our goal from the beginning has been to provide them with the assistance they needed that would lead to their graduating, passing the NCLEX-RN and becoming nurses. We will continue to support all of our nursing students in their future endeavors."

Largess was not available for comment Tuesday.

Eason's role in the agreement between FSU and the students may be precedent setting.

She alone will determine whether the students pass her course. If they pass, FSU will grant the students a diploma and recommend to the State Board of Nursing that they be allowed to take the licensure exam.

However, if Eason determines a student fails the course, the student will receive a failing grade in the FSU class that offered the HESI and must retake the course during the fall 2007 semester.

While schools regularly hire other schools' employees for part-time work, UNC General Administration Vice President Harold Martin said Monday that he did not know any other time a professor with another university would be involved in a decision of this magnitude. Martin also said that UNC President Erskine Bowles had approved of FSU's negotiations with students but was not intimately aware of the details.

"We are pleased that the university and the students' lawyer have reached an agreement through these negotiations to support the students," Martin said.

At least three of the 25 students who considered legal options backed away from pursuing their claims.

It is not clear if those students will still have to retake the HESI exam in order to graduate.

FSU Provost, Dr. Juliette Bell, said the university is reviewing the HESI to determine if changes need to be made in how it is used in the future.

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