THE DAILY CLIPS

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Consider colleges

When it comes to public education in North Carolina, the state's community college system often seems like the forgotten, ugly step-child. It's not that state legislators and policy-makers haven't poured resources into the system of 59 schools. This coming year, the state is poised to put nearly $900 million into community colleges.

But the figure represents just 8 percent of total state education spending.

A new report from the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research makes a pretty good case that it's not enough. It does so with some rather startling figures that focus not on state funding, but on job needs for the future.

Consider that in 2005-06, North Carolina colleges denied admission to 6,588 qualified applicants to entry level registered nursing programs. Nursing education experts attribute the denials to a shortage of faculty and learning space. Meanwhile, a shortage of better than 5,000 registered nurses this year is expected to grow to between 9,000 and 20,000 by 2013, depending on whose estimates you believe.

The center's report, The Future of Community Colleges in North Carolina, provides a wide-ranging examination of the community college system. On the issue of job shortages, it focuses on nursing.

But it also examines projected job shortages among teachers, truck drivers and other professions, and looks at the community colleges' role in providing the workforce for each.

At the root of these shortages, particular in healthcare fields, are programs that turn away students. In part, students are turned away because there aren't enough faculty, a shortage exacerbated by pay that isn't up to national standards.

According to the report, the average annual salary for community college teachers is $40,989, compared to a national average of $55,405. When it comes to nursing, some other numbers come into play: A community college nursing instructor makes an average of $47,303, while a working registered nurse in North Carolina earns an average of $61,347.

In addition, some programs like nursing simply cost more money to run because of the clinical settings required.

The report concludes that one way to address the community colleges' role in meeting workforce shortages is to provide higher levels of per-student funding for the programs that cost more.

But what's also clear, in this report and others, is how dependent each part of the public education system — whether the secondary schools, community colleges or the 16 campuses of the University of North Carolina — is upon the other.

In recent years, state leaders have begun recognizing that fact with policies that demand cooperation. Gov. Mike Easley's Learn & Earn program, that helps puts high school students on a path to earn a community college degree, is a part of that recognition. So too is a program that allows more community college students to transfer credits to UNC system schools.

Reading between the lines of the center's report, more cooperation and less turf protection will be needed to meet future workforce demands, especially if policymakers want to avoid taxpayer wrath.

Scott Mooneyham writes about North Carolina government and politics for the Capitol Press Association.
ORANGE COUNTY

UNC-CH to assess risks in Emirates

CHAPEL HILL - The United Arab Emirates signed a contract with UNC-Chapel Hill's School of Public Health on Monday to assess environmental health risks in the fast-developing nation.

UNC-CH researchers will partner with the United Arab Emirates University and the RAND Corp., a global public policy research institution, on the two-year, $7.8 million contract.

The United Arab Emirates is a Middle Eastern federation of seven states bordering Saudi Arabia and Oman. The country, with about 4.3 million people, has significant oil and natural gas reserves. Its gross domestic product per capita is fifth in the world and third in the Middle East, after Qatar and Kuwait.
JOHNSTON COUNTY

Audit finds money is missing from college

More than $15,000 was missing from Johnston Community College, according to an audit released Monday by State Auditor Les Merritt.

A college employee stole $1,522 from the cashier's office and $13,605 was lost or taken from bookstore collections, according to a news release from Merritt's office. The college learned of the missing money when customers complained about uncashed checks and students inquired about being double billed.

Merritt's news release said that in response, the college implemented tighter controls and additional campus-wide training.
Fitness goals get a boost

President’s Challenge weighs aerobics, strength, flexibility

Baby-boom fitness icon Denise Austin is not only fitter than I am, she’s nicer: Told that I had failed to touch my toes (by 4 inches) and could manage just five push-ups on my President’s Challenge Adult Fitness Test, Austin could have laughed. Instead, she said: “Ookay... Well, you have a lot of room for improvement.”

That’s true — and I suspect it’s true for many of the more than 70,000 Americans who have taken the new test since it went online (adultfitnessstest.org) less than a month ago. The President’s Council on Physical Fitness, which devised the test, has no way to track scores, says council executive director Melissa Johnson. But its sheer popularity, she says, suggests that a lot of folks are getting a much-needed kick in the ... exercise routine.

The adult version is shorter than the one we all remember taking in gym class. There’s no rope climb or flexed-arm hang. Instead, adults are put through four tasks that measure three elements of fitness: aerobic capacity, strength and flexibility.

The idea is that people will take the test, see where they stand and be reminded that fitness is a many-splendored thing.

“We want people to be aware of all the elements of physical fitness,” says Austin, a council member. Too often, she says, people adopt routines that work their hearts, firm their muscles or stretch their bodies, but don’t do it all.

How many push-ups can you do?

Sure, Denise Austin can do 55 push-ups. The 51-year-old fitness maven is a professional, after all. But I wondered: How many can a typical middle-aged woman do? The website for the President’s Challenge Adult Fitness Test didn’t tell me that detail. (They apparently want people to focus on their own results and not get caught up in competitive stat-gazing.)

So, after managing only five myself, I decided to do my own, highly unscientific survey. I asked 15 women over age 45 to drop and give me as many girl-style (on-the-knees) push-ups as they could.

The result: With the exception of one woman with a bad shoulder who is forbidden to do push-ups, every one of my friends could do at least 10. Several could do 20. And five could do 35 or more.

The champs: My friend Stephanie, a 51-year-old psychologist, who ripped off 55; my editor’s 57-year-old sister, Mary, a teacher, who did 55; and, finally, my very fit friend Susan, a 48-year-old businesswoman, who did an astounding 65.

Take that, Denise.

Case in point: me. For the past two years, I’ve worn a pedometer (step-counter) to nudge myself to be more active. As a result, I now log an average of 10,000 or more steps a day. To accomplish that, I take a brisk 30- to 45-minute walk most days.

But strength training? Flexibility exercises? I don’t do them. I know I should, but I don’t like that kind of exercise. It’s hard for me. I tried a yoga class once: It hurt.

So, did the presidential test have my number? It certainly did. Here’s how I scored, compared with other 48-year-old women:

- **Aerobic fitness:** 90th percentile. I walked a mile in 13 minutes, 59 seconds, ending with a respectively elevated heart rate of 108 beats per minute. As I said, I owe it all to my pedometer.

- **Muscular strength, as measured by half sit-ups:** 50th percentile. I did 34 in a minute. Not bad. Not great.

- **Muscular strength, as measured by push-ups:** 15th percentile. As I’ve admitted, I did just five. And, yes, these were girl-style, with knees on the floor. After five, my knees were on the floor, too.

- **Flexibility:** 10th percentile. For the torturous sit-and-reach test, I sat on the floor with my legs stretched before me and reached for my toes. I made it just past mid shin.

The numbers, by the way, are based on people tested at YMCAs and the non-profit Cooper Institute. A score in the 90th percentile means 90% of women my age did better on that reach test.

So, I asked Austin whether I really had to join a gym or take another (shudder!) yoga class. Nope — she said I could do myself a lot of good just by repeating the push-ups and some stretching exercises every couple of days, trying to go a little farther each time. Daily sit-ups would be nice, she said, and lifting some 5-pound weights wouldn’t hurt.

People who can't do even one standard push-up, she said, could try wall push-ups. "You can't believe what a great wall push-up does for you," she said. "It all helps."

Message received.

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