THE DAILY CLIPS

June 14, 2010

News, commentary, and opinion
compiled by the East Carolina University News Bureau from:

The Greenville Daily Reflector
The Raleigh News & Observer
   The New York Times
   The Wall Street Journal
   USA Today
   The Charlotte Observer
   The Fayetteville Observer
   The Greensboro News & Record
   Newsweek
   U.S. News & World Report
   Business Week
   Time

East Carolina University News Bureau
E-mail to durhamj@ecu.edu  Web site at http://www.news.ecu.edu
252-328-6481
Janice K. Tovey

WASHINGTON, N.C. — Mrs. Janice Kaye Barger Tovey, age 64, a resident of 117 Forecastle Court, died Saturday, June 12, 2010.

Memorial services will be at 7 p.m. Tuesday at the Yankee Hall Plantation, 3332 Yankee Hall Road, Greenville, and will be conducted by the Rev. A. Donald Weisner.

Jan was born in Cook County, Ill., on Oct. 24, 1945, to the late Douglas and Faye Dudgeon Barger. On May 7, 1994, she married Donald Arthur Buck, who survives. She was a 1963 graduate of Fenton High School, received her bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Illinois State University, her doctorate from Purdue University and was a professor of English with East Carolina University for 17 years.

Dr. Tovey was the chairwoman of the Faculty Senate at East Carolina University for 2008 and 2009. She also was an active member in the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing (ATTW), Society for Technical Communication (STC), and was serving as president of the Council for Programs for Technical and Scientific Communication (CPTSC).

Survivors include her husband, Donald A. Buck, of the home; two sons, Mark Tovey and Crystal of Tompkinsville, Ky., and Kevin Tovey and wife, Tanya, of Hendersonville; two sisters, Wendy Johnson and husband, Bruce, of Chatham, Ill., and Darlene Barger of Lisle, Ill.; one brother, Douglas Lee Barger Jr. of Bensenville, Ill.; and three grandchildren, Zachary Tovey, Abigail Tovey and Caden Tovey.

Memorials may be made to the Department of English, ECU Foundations Inc., c/o Department of English — Jan Tovey, Greenville Centre, 2200 S. Charles Blvd. Greenville, NC 27858.

You may address condolences to the Tovey family by visiting www.paulfuneralhome.com.
Cunningham accepts honorary chairmanship

Dr. Paul R.G. Cunningham, dean of the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University, has accepted an honorary chairmanship of the Inner Banks' Project of the Outer Banks Relief Foundation Inc. (OBRF)/The Surf Club.

"I am pleased to be a part of this Inner Banks' Project," Cunningham said. "Together we can make a difference. I thank my OBRF/The Surf Club friends for thinking of me."

State Sen. Marc Basnight said the Inner Banks' Project will benefit from Cunningham's input. Basnight represents Beaufort, Camden, Currituck, Dare, Hyde, Pasquotank, Tyrrell and Washington counties.

"As dean of the Brody Medical School, he is a leader in eastern North Carolina, and I am confident will serve the organization well," Basnight said. "I salute the work of the Outer Banks Relief Foundation/The Surf Club in helping those in need. The hard work of volunteers is a testament to the generosity and compassion of the people of northeastern North Carolina."

The mission of the Outer Banks Relief Foundation Inc. is to assist citizens in the community who are burdened with financial difficulties due to a debilitating illness or personal tragedy to themselves and/or their families. In 2009 in OBRF's effort to prepare for its future, The Surf Club, an ambitious effort to involve the next generation of those wanting to continue fulfill OBRF's mission was formed.

The origin in naming The Surf Club comes from the "su" in supporting and the "rf" in relief.

"As a part of OBRF/The Surf Club's Inner Banks' Project, Dr. Cunningham will assist us in spreading the word of OBRF/The Surf Club," OBRF Executive Director P. Christopher Kelley said. "In 2011 we are planning an Inner Banks Summit where we will invite community, religious, civic, political, business and government leaders to learn more about the mission of our foundation.

"What OBRF/The Surf Club does not want to do is to complicate or duplicate fundraising efforts and community services in the Inner Banks," Kelley said. "Our intent is to share our foundation's mission with the Inner Banks. By doing so and if our assistance is needed and if we are invited, we want to do what we can to assist our inland neighbors."

The OBRF/The Surf Club will serve as event and race directors for the Good Shepherd Food Pantry of Bertie County Inc.'s first Spooktacular 5K Race, Family Fun Run and Walk on Oct. 30 in Windsor. An anonymous donor is giving $2,000 for the race purse, and all proceeds will benefit the food pantry in Bertie County will stay in Bertie County.
PEOPLE IN THE NEWS SPOTLIGHT

Susan DeAntonio receives honor as 2010 ECU Physicians Nurse of the Year

Susan DeAntonio, a nurse manager in the Department of Cardiovascular Sciences at the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University, has been named the 2010 ECU Physicians Nurse of the Year. She has worked at ECU since 2003.

A native of Williamston and a graduate of Bear Grass High School, DeAntonio described her job as “kind of like air traffic control for the day” — getting patients where they need to go, making sure physician orders are handled correctly and helping where help is needed.

Six other nurses also were finalists, including two of DeAntonio’s cardiovascular co-workers. The award was presented June 3.

“I was pulling for them, hoping they would win,” she said. “It’s quite an honor to be chosen.”

DeAntonio routinely asks patients what the staff can do to improve patient visits. She takes this information and works with other clinical and administrative managers to incorporate new customer service strategies.

“One of Susan’s primary goals for her staff is to provide outstanding quality patient care and be proud of the fact that patients we treat are getting the best nursing care possible,” Drillious Gay, nursing administrator in the Department of Cardiovascular Sciences, said. “It is not uncommon to find Susan working side by side with her staff assisting and teaching them on a daily basis. She rolls her sleeves up and jumps in, especially when her staff is dealing with difficult situations.”

In addition to her nursing duties, DeAntonio helped organize this year’s Wear Red for Women event — an effort that won her and her team a 2010 ECU Centennial Award for Excellence.

“I work with such great people every day and learn something new every day,” she said.

DeAntonio is the daughter of Betsy and Ralph Holliday of Williamston and Aubrey and Myra Gibbs of Washington. She is a graduate of Pitt Community College and ECU.
Russo joins faculty of medical school

Dr. Dennis C. Russo, a psychologist, has joined the faculty of the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University and its group practice, ECU Physicians.

Russo joined the school’s Department of Family Medicine as a clinical professor and head of the behavioral medicine section.

Before coming to ECU, Russo was chief clinical officer at The May Institute in Massachusetts and a lecturer in the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at Tufts University School of Medicine in Boston. He also has been a faculty member at Harvard University and Johns Hopkins University.

In 2008, he was named a Fellow of the Association for Behavior Analysis International (ABAI), one of 56 honored worldwide.

Russo has a bachelor’s degree in psychology and a doctorate in educational psychology from the University of California at Santa Barbara. He is certified by the American Board of Behavioral Psychology and the American Board of Professional Psychology.

Russo’s clinical and research interests are helping patients manage their chronic illness; behavioral medicine; treatment of headache and psychophysiological disorders; cognitive behavior therapy for stress, anxiety and depression, and therapeutic adherence.

Russo sees patients at the Family Medicine Center at the Brody School of Medicine.
Aphasia support group offers stroke patients way to connect
Saturday, June 12, 2010
ECU News Services

Jackie Mills couldn’t say a word the first two months after her stroke in October. But now, she talks on the phone and has made great progress, said her husband, Harold Mills. They both attend the Aphasia Support Group at ECU. Aphasia is difficulty or loss in communication often caused by a stroke or brain injury. June is National Aphasia Awareness Month. The support group has been meeting for more than a year, but for six weeks this spring it has expanded to three-hour sessions each Tuesday in the College of Allied Health Sciences. Graduate students in communication sciences and disorders lead discussions and activities under the direction of clinical supervisor Sherri Winslow and professor Monica Hough. Participants practice communication skills while playing computer games and painting. Attending the group gives caregivers and spouses of those who live with aphasia a way to connect as well. “I’m learning something from it,” Harold Mills of Kinston said. “I see different people who are all stroke victims but it affects you all in different ways. We’re all in this thing together, and we try to help one another.” Harold Roeder suffered a stroke in 2002, a day after quadruple bypass surgery. He lost his ability to read, speak or write, and could only say “no” for the first year and a half after the stroke. “I really think this has helped us quite a bit,” his wife, Marcia Roeder, said. “The group dynamic is terrific. I know he likes the group. They help each other.” Through small and large group activities, stroke survivors can participate at their own speed and ability. “They are successful in their own group,” she said. “To people who have had a stroke, it’s a benefit.” Aphasia affects people differently. Some people may be able to speak clearly but have trouble understanding conversation. Others may comprehend everything but may only be able to speak a few words. The disorder does not affect a person’s intelligence, although it can affect reading and writing. “To me, aphasia is so confusing. They know what the words are, but they can’t come out,” Marcia Roeder said. Her husband’s comprehension and memory is very good, and he maintains his sense of humor, wearing his name tag sideways during a recent session. “For a man of few words, he makes himself understood.” Mills is practicing patience with his wife.
“The doctor said it will be a slow process,” he said. “I’m in it for the duration. I’m behind her all the way.”

About 40 percent of people with stroke and about one-third of people who suffer severe head injuries will get aphasia.

“I would sure recommend this type of group to anyone, even if they think it won’t help,” Roeder said. “They’ve really structured it well.”

The group gives participants time to communicate in their own way, Winslow said.

“We emphasize that you can write it, you can speak it, you can use your gestures. We are there to help you get it out.”

For more information on ECU’s Aphasia Support Group, call Sherri Winslow at 744-6142 or e-mail winslowsh@ecu.edu.

**Arachnological Society meets**

The 34th annual meeting of the American Arachnological Society, co-hosted by the ECU Department of Biology and the N.C. Center for Biodiversity, continues on campus through Tuesday.

The five-day meeting includes presentations by researchers, poster sessions, a business meeting, a student awards banquet, and a field trip to Cape Lookout National Seashore. About 110 society members will be on campus.

“It’s an honor for East Carolina University, the Department of Biology, and the North Carolina Center for Biodiversity to host the 34th annual meeting of the American Arachnological Society,” said Jason Bond, director of the biodiversity center and a biology faculty member in the Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences. “It’s a great opportunity for people to visit ECU and to see what the community of Greenville has to offer.”

The AAS was founded in 1972 to facilitate and promote the study of arachnids — spiders, scorpions, mites, ticks and the like. The society has a few hundred members worldwide.

**Scholars Academy graduates class**

Thirteen Student Engagement and Outreach Scholars Academy participants received certificates of graduation during a recent ceremony held by ECU’s Office of Engagement, Innovation and Economic Development.

Chancellor Steve Ballard and senior academic administrators recognized the student scholars for their research projects, which were performed with guidance from Engagement and Outreach Scholars Academy faculty and with support from community partners.

“These students shared interdisciplinary knowledge and applied it to real community issues,” Beth Velde, director of the Student Engagement and Outreach Scholars Academy, said. “With their faculty mentors, they worked with communities in four counties, eastern Maine and Denmark. They have a greater understanding of the challenges and benefits of community engagement.”

**Upcoming event:**

Monday: “Oilpocalypse Now: Protecting Our Nation’s Coastlines and Understanding Petroleum,” a presentation by J.P. Walsh, an ECU geological oceanographer, who will discuss the unique geological nature of the Gulf of Mexico spill and how we can protect our coastlines, 6-8 p.m., The Tipsy Teapot, 409 S. Evans St., Greenville. For more information, e-mail info@go-science.org.
Editorial

Consider graduates when completing state budget

Saturday, June 12, 2010

Pitt County Schools celebrated the graduation of 1,260 students over the weekend, conferring diplomas on these promising teenagers who have the world at their feet. For most, the next step in their educational journey will be at a state university or community college. However, the quality of those institutions is now threatened by the General Assembly given the budget proposals now before lawmakers and college presidents fear the worse. The Legislature must understand the damage it would inflict by imposing deep cuts on higher education, decisions that would affect those young people receiving diplomas.

University of North Carolina system President Erskine Bowles may be making preparations for his departure from that post, but he remains committed to making sure his successor does not inherit an organization stripped to its core. He continues to lobby lawmakers to avoid the slashing the budget to such a degree that it would harm the academic ability of the UNC member institutions.

His concern is shared by both East Carolina University Chancellor Steve Ballard and Pitt Community College President Dennis Massey. Both should be wary of the budget bills passed by the House and Senate that respond to a dismal economic landscape and sluggish revenue collections with deep cuts to universities and community colleges.

The budget bill passed by the Senate would trim the UNC budget by $54 million, which would be unpalatable but reflects a level of belt-tightening seen throughout state government. The House version would cut $175 million, which Bowles warns would cost about 1,700 jobs and 6,300 class sections. Ballard has said such a heavy handed measure would harm East Carolina’s core mission.

Massey and his colleagues in the community college system should have similar worries over the budget. One plan includes $35 million in cuts across the system, and changes to the distribution of money from the state lottery could also affect how PCC accommodates continued student growth at a time when community colleges are most needed.

The teenagers who received their diplomas at Minges Coliseum over the weekend deserve better from their state. Those headed to a state university should enjoy properly staffed schools offering a full array of classes and programs. Those attending community colleges should have adequate space to pursue a degree or receive job training for gainful employment. Lawmakers should consider these young people and their future as they complete their work on the budget.
Savvy was let out of a car near the entrance of Stratford neighborhood in the mid-1990s.

Savvy poses for a photo, uncharacteristically tethered, three weeks before her death last Monday.
(Contributed photo by Debi Crotts.)

**Savvy of Stratford**
By Mark Rutledge
The Daily Reflector
Saturday, June 12, 2010

An entire Greenville neighborhood is mourning the death of Savvy, a brown-eyed Belgian Shepherd owned by no one but loved by all.
Savvy was a throwback to the pre-leash-law era, when the natural order of things was to meet neighbors after first getting to know their dogs. Almost no one would favor repealing the law, but it can be argued that the circle of neighborly contact was larger when dogs roamed freely.
For more than 15 years, residents of Stratford neighborhood have experienced a return to those bygone days of canine ambassadorship through a mutual love for Savvy. She died Monday after a long and happy life, most of it enjoyed at a comfortable distance.
After four young people were seen letting the dog out of a car near the entrance to the neighborhood in the mid-1990s, Savvy was fed and cared for by a long list of present and former residents. She got her name by shrewdly and consistently avoiding capture, although she had no trouble capturing the hearts of people.
Savvy was gentle and playful with everyone she knew, but allowed only children to pet her. A few adults did win her trust, however, during the last two years of her life, which Savvy spent in the fenced backyard of Ed and Debi Crotts.
“It took me about six weeks before she would let me pet her,” Ed Crotts said. “I think once she realized how good people could be, she wanted to be petted.”
Animal-control workers, who wanted to be good to Savvy and see that she had her required vaccinations, took a liking to her also. Among several legendary failed attempts to catch her were two instances involving cheese and dog tranquilizers.

“She ate the tranquilizers and seemed to sense that something wasn’t right,” Sheldon Downes said. “She’d just run off into the woods. She was a very intelligent dog.”

Savvy would go with Downes on walks around the neighborhood and spent many of her later years sleeping on his front porch. She was a light sleeper, however. When a group of residents and animal-control officers tried converging on her from all sides during a nap, she awoke and bolted.

Downes first captured Savvy in his workshop after she’d produced a litter of puppies. He set a trap by putting some of her pups in the shop and tying a rope to the doorknob.

“We got her spayed and vaccinated,” Downes said. “Then we took her to Hoffman Haus Pet Resort in Winterville.”

Savvy spent six weeks in obedience training before going back to her wild-but-gentle ways in the neighborhood.

“They didn’t even charge us for their services,” Downes said. “They were just so enthralled that we were taking such good care of this wild dog.”

Savvy’s favorite spot was under a dogwood tree at the intersection of Avon Lane and Canterbury Road. “That was her sentry post,” Crotts said. “If any car or truck with a sign on it came up the road — and certainly any police cruiser — she was gone.”

The “sentry post” is at the home of Walt and Diane Strathy. Savvy was there when they visited the house with a realtor eight years ago, and again on the day they moved in.

“We thought the previous owners had left their dog,” Diane Strathy said. “Everyone told us, ‘nope, she comes with the neighborhood.’”

When animal control finally captured Savvy two years ago, the Crotts adopted her. She never roamed free again, but she never longed for visitors either.

“Savvy was incredible,” Debi Crotts said. “Everyone knew she was peaceful and that is what I believe drew people in and unified them to care for her. She had an incredible spirit and much love to give.”

As president of the Stratford Neighborhood Association, Downes delivers a welcome pamphlet to new residents. It includes a lighthearted list called, “The Legends of Stratford.”

With a heavy heart, Downes is working on a new entry.

Contact Mark Rutledge at mrutledge@reflector.com or 329-9575.
Large payouts strain state pension system

In 2005, Charles R. Franklin Jr. filed for retirement after running the Albemarle Mental Health Center for 34 years. The first and only director of the public agency serving northeastern North Carolina - one of the state's poorest areas - started collecting an annual pension of $145,000.

But Franklin didn't really retire. He returned to the center as a contract employee, with pay and perks totaling $289,000 one year and $319,000 the next. When the state Treasurer's Office learned of the arrangement, it said the contract violated state law; he was forced to return the pension funds he had received.

The lucrative deal caught the attention of news reporters and the state auditor, and suddenly everyone knew about the free spending and mediocre service of Franklin's center. By early 2009 he had been fired. The center was shuttered, a victim of mismanagement, lavish benefits and financial conflicts of interest.

But for taxpayers, that's not where the story ends. Today, Franklin is receiving an annual pension of $211,373, a 46 percent increase from what he would have gotten if he had really retired five years earlier. State records show he is the top-paid pensioner in all of state and local government, one of just two retirees receiving more than $200,000 a year.

Payouts such as Franklin's come at a difficult time for pension funds, in North Carolina and the nation. Illinois and Louisiana, for example, are struggling to meet obligations, according to a recent study at Northwestern University.

North Carolina's $68 billion pension system is in better shape than most. But state Treasurer Janet Cowell, whose office administers the fund for state and local governments, has notified the agencies that they must soon come up with $440 million to rebuild the fund after investment losses.

Franklin, meanwhile, is collecting an additional $65,000 in pension funds each year because of his work after his first retirement, which ended with the messy closure of the Albemarle center.

Franklin, 68, of Greenville, saw little issue with his pension. "Your point?" he asked a reporter. He declined further comment.

Former State Auditor Les Merritt's 2007 audit helped persuade the center's board to reduce Franklin's salary by nearly $60,000 before he was fired. Merritt said it's an outrage that Franklin's outsize salaries appear to have helped boost his pension.

"It's unconscionable that his pension would be based on his highest years' compensation," Merritt said. "Obviously, something's askew."
Checks until death

State and local governments in North Carolina use pensions as a recruiting tool, sometimes to overcome salaries that don't compete with private jobs. Employees contribute 6 percent of their pay, and the government matches with a percentage that fluctuates depending on the employee's department, investment returns and the condition of the state budget.

Employees are then rewarded until death with guaranteed annual payments of a percentage of their four highest earning consecutive years. An employee with 30 years' service can receive roughly 55 percent of that highest salary average. Judicial employees and state lawmakers can receive as much as 75 percent of their highest salary average.

Those payouts rely heavily on investment gains. Employees provide 29 percent of the pension fund's income, government accounts for 11 percent, and the remainder comes from earnings.

Taxpayers are the guarantors, periodically pumping in money through local and state governments when investments lag, such as during the past decade. Cowell, the state treasurer, told legislators last year that they needed to put in $359 million; she told local governments they needed to provide $82 million.

In this climate - and after recent government scandals - Gov. Bev Perdue and some lawmakers want to make it impossible for state employees convicted of corruption to receive their pensions. That would expand upon a 2007 state law that barred them for elected state and local officials who had not yet vested in the retirement system.

Former House Speaker Jim Black, now serving time in a federal prison, receives an annual pension of $42,860, even though legislating is considered a part-time job.

Former Durham District Attorney Mike Nifong, disbarred after misconduct in the Duke lacrosse case and held in contempt of court, gets $66,800.

Some other pensions attract attention just because of their size. Billy Williams recently retired as New Hanover's Alcoholic Beverage Control administrator after news reports about his $280,000 salary and benefits. Like Franklin, his pay was well beyond his peers'. His pension is the state's fifth-largest at $194,858.

Franklin was in charge of an agency with a $25 million budget that served 10 counties, providing mental health services and paying private contractors to provide care.

His management was so poor that the state Department of Health and Human Services took over the center's operations, which ultimately led to the center's closure. Health department officials were so troubled by what they encountered that they handed their findings to the local district attorney, Frank Parrish. Parrish said last week that he is meeting with an accountant to look through the findings to see if a criminal investigation is warranted.

"We have basically said you have failed in your whole reason for being," said Leza Wainwright, the state director for mental health services.
Joe Sinsheimer, a Democratic consultant turned government watchdog, said cases such as these show the pension system needs to be reformed.

"These guys get abusive salaries, and then the taxpayers pay for them, not just until it's uncovered, but until they die," Sinsheimer said.

Looking for spikes

The pension of Franklin - like Williams, a local employee - is No. 1. But there's little that treasurer officials will say about it because of the state's restrictive personnel law.

They did say it has been accurately calculated under state law, using the same formula for any local government retiree.

Michael Williamson, the director of the treasurer's Retirement Systems Division, said staff members look for unusual spikes in compensation to make sure employees about to retire aren't trying to artificially boost their pensions. Last year, state lawmakers, at the treasurer's request, passed a law requiring employers to notify the state treasurer of the pay arrangements for any retirees who return to work. Those employers who fail to do so can be hit with a financial penalty.

A recent three-part series in The News & Observer, "Keeping Secrets," found North Carolina's personnel law to be among the most secretive in the nation, providing little more than a public employee's current salary, position and most recent raise. The law makes it difficult for the public to understand how tax dollars are being spent for one of the biggest expenses in state and local government.

Other public records and news reports of the center's problems suggest that the Treasurer's Office, when it calculated Franklin's pension, factored in the high pay Franklin received as a contract employee. Treasurer officials said someone who was an employee-turned-contractor could have his or her compensation count toward the pension, so long as the employee or employer, or both, reimbursed the retirement system for the contributions that should have been paid during that period, plus interest.

Like nearly all state and local retirees, Franklin was required to put 6 percent of his pay toward his pension. But state and local governments are required to contribute as well. State government contributions are now generally running at 3.57 percent of pay, which Cowell wants boosted to 6.7 percent for the coming fiscal year. Local government contributions are scheduled to go up to 6.35 percent of pay on July 1.

There has been little talk about whether state officials should look at limiting pensions amid the budget tightening. But one legislator, Sen. R.C. Soles, a Columbus County Democrat, has sought to loosen the eligibility requirements further, to allow a local prosecutor who lost his re-election bid to immediately begin collecting his pension.

Big salary, big pension

Franklin's case shows the implications for pensions of abnormally high salaries. Even when the Albemarle center's board cut his pay to $225,000, he was still far and away the best-paid regional or
local mental health director in the state, despite his center having one of the smallest clienteles.

The state audits also exposed that the Albemarle center paid the Social Security and Medicare taxes on behalf of Franklin and the rest of the employees. The center continued to pay the roughly $750,000 annual cost even as its budget woes caused it to turn away patients.

The state health and human services audit found that Franklin received $37,000 over two years as a board member of a bank that also had the center's business. The financial conflict was not disclosed in audits performed for the center.

Wainwright and DHHS, too, were denied an explanation from the Treasurer's Office as to how Franklin is now being rewarded with a $211,000 pension. Even the agency that primarily funded the center and Franklin's salary could not get past North Carolina's personnel law.

News researchers Peggy Neal, David Raynor and Brooke Cain contributed to this report.

dan.kane@newsobserver.com or 919-829-4861
Lobbyists aid for-profit college student group

A few months ago, Dawn Connor was just another college student, attending night courses to become a veterinary technician and practicing her trade by spaying and neutering dogs and cats from a local shelter.

These days, the 33-year-old from Eau Claire, Wis., is shaking hands on Capitol Hill and speaking at news conferences in Las Vegas, the new public face of the satisfied for-profit college student.

Standing closely behind her is the Career College Association, a lobbying group for for-profit schools that provided the organizational muscle to launch the grassroots-sounding Students for Academic Choice at a time when for-profit colleges are under fire.

The Career College Association helped the students establish a website, draft bylaws and set up an online election that resulted in Connor being elected the group's president - all at a time when for-profit colleges are intensifying lobbying efforts against tougher federal regulations expected to be proposed in the coming days.

"I'm skeptical of the organic nature of the group given that it is completely towing the association's line," said Christine Lindstrom, higher education program director at the U.S. Public Interest Research Group.

Harris Miller, president of the Career College Association, said his group extended a helping hand to busy nontraditional students who otherwise wouldn't have a voice - and says the new group stands on its own.

"This will be, I think, as this organization grows and gets legs, an effective antidote to those people who hang on a few disgruntled students or former students and somehow think it's typical of the student reality," Miller said.

Although for-profit schools are the fastest growing sector of higher education, there's been little organizing by students themselves. When a voice is heard, it's usually a dissatisfied former student or graduate describing dubious recruitment practices, staggering debt or training that left them ill-prepared to pay it off.

That has long irritated for-profit school officials. But no student counter message has emerged until now, a sensitive time for for-profit colleges.

Last week, Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, announced plans to hold hearings starting June 24 to examine federal education spending at for-profit colleges.
And in the coming days, the Education Department is expected to propose new regulations that could, among other things, cut off federal aid to vocational programs whose graduates don't earn enough to pay of their student loans.

Studies show for-profit students are much more likely than other students to default on their loans, and the government is paying closer attention because of the huge amounts of federal aid students take to the schools.

For-profit schools are lobbying hard against the so-called "gainful employment" proposal, which would also apply to community colleges but don't pose a threat to them because their tuition is low.

Fighting the regulations is the first cause of Students for Academic Choice, which gathered 32,000 signatures on an online petition opposing the rules to Education Secretary Arne Duncan.

Miller said it's been hard for students in the sector to get involved politically because so many of them balance school, work and families. Other college student associations, he said, are funded in large part by their universities and colleges, and their student leaders are given time off by their schools to take part in activities.

Miller said students from the sector have long wanted to get more involved. He said a group of students attending the association's annual Hill Day lobbying event this spring got together and asked whether they could get support from the association to put together a formal student organization.

Connor, however, said the idea originated not with students but representatives of for-profits schools, including faculty, who approached students during the event to gauge their interest.

The Career College Association is "the grandfather for us," Connor said in a phone interview from Las Vegas, where the student group was introduced at the association's annual convention that ended Friday. "They kind of got us going. But now they're taking the training wheels off and saying, 'Go for it and let's see what you guys can do.'"

Connor was a collegiate drifter. She said she graduated early from high school and enrolled at three different nonprofit colleges, changing majors a few times without earning a degree.

Then she found the Eau Claire campus of for-profit Globe University, which offered a flexible schedule that allowed her to attend class at night while she worked full-time in a health care job.

It wasn't cheap. Tuition to complete a two-year associate's degree in veterinary technology at Globe runs $44,820, and lab fees and books are extra. Connor said it cost her less because she had transfer credits.

Even so, she said the state-of-the-art surgical suites and small classes is worth the extra expense.

Her experience was so good, she raised her hand when the university's government affairs liaison sent an e-mail looking for students to represent the school at the Career College Association's Hill Day in March in Washington.

When the new student group began taking shape, she said she became the "annoying girl who was
e-mailing everyone" to win an election determined by the votes of 150 students and alumni.

Connor said that while she understands the government's desire to protect students from being buried in debt, the gainful employment proposal would restrict student choices without data to back it up.

Career college officials argue the proposal would shutter job-training programs while doing nothing to fix the debt problem, and propose giving students more information as an alternative solution.

While longer-term goals are a work in progress, Connor said one is to provide a support system for students. For now, the executive team is Connor and two other students.

Not everyone is impressed. Lauren Asher, president of the Institute for College Access & Success, calls Students for Academic Choice "an industry-sponsored group." Asher criticized its website, which features little more than the petition, "as not giving folks who come to it any information about what's sponsoring it or what's really at stake."

At the same time, for-profit college students don't really have a home in established groups. The United States Student Association, billed as the country's largest student-led organization, has no for-profit college student members.

Legislative director Angela Peoples said the association hopes to change that and will reach out to the new group. She welcomed the new voice, but also said it's needed because for-profit students don't get a say as student trustees or in the tuition-setting process like students at traditional schools do.

Supporters of the gainful employment proposal say for-profit college programs can avoid closure simply by cutting their tuition and improving their product. What student, they wonder, wouldn't go for that?

"The for-profit sector is basically subsidized by federal loans," said Kevin Kinser, an associate professor at the State University of New York at Albany who studies for-profit colleges. "So there's an important interest that we're subsidizing students but not the for-profits themselves."

Connor said lower tuition "would be great. In the real world, that would be great if we could lower the price for everything. But that's just not an option at this point in time. That's not the point we're trying to get to right now."
California universities consider adopting the T-word: tuition

Since 1960's master plan for public higher education, which had the goal of tuition-free schooling for all, the word has been eschewed in favor of "fees." But recent realities argue for a change.

By Larry Gordon, Los Angeles Times

June 14, 2010

For 50 years, they've avoided it. But California's public universities are now inching closer to using the word they've long viewed as taboo: tuition.

Unlike schools in every other state, California's public campuses in effect have banned official use of the word and what it means — that students pay at least a hefty share, if not most, of their education costs.

The state's renowned master plan for higher education, which in 1960 established separate roles for the University of California, California State University and the community colleges, also declared that the public institutions "shall be tuition free to all residents." Since then, even as the amount students pay for their education has soared, campuses here have stubbornly insisted on using the word "fees" for the instructional charges that other states call tuition.

Now, however, a movement is underway to drop what many education experts consider an outdated, even dishonest term. It's high time, they say, to adopt the "T-word" in registration bills and campus discussions.

For example, with UC's basic undergraduate educational cost now topping $10,000 a year, three times more than a decade ago, "tuition" is the accurate term, they say. They also note that in 2009, California's confusing terminology nearly kept the state's veterans from receiving certain federal education benefits and financial aid.

"Calling it tuition is necessary because that's what it is. It's just truth in advertising really," said UC student regent Jesse Bernal, who is co-chairman of a systemwide study group that recently
recommended the 10-campus university start using the term. UC's Commission on the Future, to
which Bernal's advisory panel belongs, was to meet Monday to discuss the issue and other reforms
designed to chart UC's course through the current budget crunch and beyond.

The wording change, Bernal added, "also signifies that we are steering away from the master plan.
This is what the state is forcing us to do. As an institution, we now have tuition."

The panel's proposal states that the word "fees" incorrectly implies "specialized or optional services,"
while "tuition" more accurately describes the way the money is actually used: to support academic
programs, student services, student financial aid and administrative services.

But owning up to that reality might be difficult, several experts predicted. And approval by the UC
regents, the Cal State Board of Trustees and the Legislature would be required.

"It would have a deep, deep symbolism. I think it would be a philosophical change of how we view
things," said Daniel Alvarez, chief consultant to the state Senate's Education Committee.

Currently — and confusingly, many say — California's public universities and colleges use "tuition"
only for the hefty surcharges that out-of-state students pay to attend schools here.

Otherwise, the state is unique in its avoidance of the term, said Daniel J. Hurley, director of state
relations and policy analysis for the American Assn. of State Colleges and Universities.

He and other experts said the issue was not merely symbolic, noting that last year, it had briefly
threatened to keep military veterans attending private colleges in California from receiving promised
benefits under the new GI Bill.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs had pegged the assistance amounts in the bill to the highest
undergraduate tuition charged by public colleges in each state. But since California public institutions
did not charge "tuition," the level was set at zero for the state. It took several months of protests and
bureaucratic wrangling to straighten out the mess and restore the aid.

That difficulty triggered informal conversations about finally shifting from "fees" to "tuition" on the
23 campuses of the Cal State system, said spokeswoman Claudia Keith. If UC makes such a change,
Cal State will probably follow suit, she said.

UC President Mark G. Yudof said he had to get used to California's "fee" terminology when he
arrived in 2008 after holding top jobs at state universities in Texas and Minnesota. Now, although he
anticipates some disagreement among the university's regents, he would not oppose the proposed
shift, he said. "I always lean toward honesty," Yudof said.

But resistance remains.

Victor Sanchez, president of the UC Student Assn., wants to stick with "fees" for strategic reasons. "It
would leave some hope of returning to some principles of the master plan," said Sanchez, who is
finishing his bachelor's degree at UC Santa Cruz.

In the past, the "tuition" taboo was so strong that politicians would correct themselves if they used the term and university officials would scold newspaper reporters who wrote it. Now, Assemblyman Marty Block, a San Diego-area Democrat who is chairman of the Assembly Higher Education Committee, said in a recent e-mail that he would support the proposal. "It more accurately reflects where the money is going and its purpose of teaching students at our colleges and universities," he wrote.

Daniel Simmons, a UC Davis law professor and vice-chairman of UC's systemwide Faculty Senate, said a switch would undoubtedly ease confusion for students and parents when they see their university bills. Most faculty members also support the change, he said.

Still, Simmons said, for most students, the semantic change is not as important as the steadily rising cost of their education. "That's the real issue," he said. "It doesn't matter a lot if you call it tuition or not."

larry.gordon@latimes.com

Copyright © 2010, The Los Angeles Times