THE DAILY CLIPS

June 16, 2010

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

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Journal gives top 10 ranking to medical school high
By JOSH HUMPHRIES
The Daily Reflector
Tuesday, June 15, 2010

East Carolina University's Brody School of Medicine ranks in the top 10 nationally for its mission of educating doctors for rural and poor communities.
A social mission score ranking by George Washington University published this week in the Annals of Internal Medicine journal ranks the Brody School of Medicine seventh in the country based on the number of primary care physicians it produces, the number of those doctors that serve rural and poor areas in need of caregivers and the number of under-represented minorities that graduate from the school.
“We are certainly first in the nation as far as East Carolina University is concerned,” said Dr. Paul Cunningham, dean of the school. “Really, to be ranked with other schools is a nice recognition for the mission of our school.”
The school was formed at ECU in the 1970s by the General Assembly with a mission to train primary care doctors for the state’s under-served areas.
“Our school is mission driven and the only reason we were created in the first place,” Cunningham said. “We are service oriented and we respond to the needs of our region. We create access for minority students — more doctors that want to live in North Carolina and improving the health of our region — this is right up our street.”
Cunningham said it is valuable to be able to benchmark the medical school against other schools based on real data.
“We want to be No. 1 and certainly for eastern North Carolina we are No. 1,” he said.
The school is the only one in North Carolina to be ranked in the top 20. ECU was second in the national rankings for producing primary-care doctors.
ECU graduates about 70 doctors a year and more than half of them stay in North Carolina. Many work in the rural regions of the state.
About 20 percent of the graduates are minorities.
Duke University’s medical school was ranked in the bottom 20 of 141 medical schools. The University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill ranked near the middle, and Wake Forest University was in the lower third.
The study analyzed the percentage of medical school graduates who practice primary care, work in health professional shortage areas and are under-represented minorities. It analyzed 60,043 doctors who graduated between 1999 and 2001.
Rural communities have a chronic shortage of physicians and federally supported community health centers report major deficits in physician recruitment, the study said.
Black, Hispanic, and Native-American physicians are severely under-represented in the U.S. work force, the study said. Those minorities make up 28 percent of the general population in 2006 but account for only 15 percent of medical students and 8 percent of physicians in practice.
Three historically black colleges and universities with medical schools — Morehouse College, Meharry Medical College and Howard University — score at the top of the social mission rankings due to the fact that 70 percent to 85 percent of graduates are under-represented minorities. But all three schools score in the top half of the primary care and under-served output measures as well.
According to the study, public schools scored higher on the composite social mission score and in all three component measures, but the difference between public and private schools is not statistically significant for the under-served area and under-represented minority components.
Contact Josh Humphries at jhumphries@reflector.com or (252) 329-9565.
Editorial: Hospital keeps focus on future with recent purchase
Wednesday, June 16, 2010

In a time of economic uncertainty and high unemployment, investment is best directed toward resources with proven value and long-term benefit. In Pitt County, that means education, from the earliest grades of public school to Pitt Community College and East Carolina University, and in the health care sector, which is growing to dominate the local economy.

Toward that end, local residents and officials should cheer the purchase of land to expand Pitt County Memorial Hospital made by University Health Systems, which owns the facility. It, and a generous donation that accompanied the sale, represent a worthwhile investment in the continued development of a crucial resource, one that serves the public as it provides reliable employment and economic growth.

Last week, PCMH officials announced the purchase of land near the intersection of West Fifth Street and Memorial Drive, a location now occupied by a medical office and the former location of Physicians East. Jim Ward, a well known developer in Greenville, was the seller and, though the price was not disclosed, ensured that this land adjacent to the city’s medical district would be devoted toward that end. Ward and his wife Katie also provided a contribution to the hospital in excess of $1 million, a generous sum.

Hospital officials touted the purchase as a boon to residents of this community, since the additional space can be used to provide more services and better care to the public. Phil Flowers, chairman of the PCMH Board of Directors, cited the unmet needs of health care in this region and contends that the property will help “make our hospital the best in the nation.”

There is no argument that the growth of PCMH and the founding of the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina forever altered the trajectory of Greenville and Pitt County. Providing health care to a region with a large concentration of low-income residents living with minimal access to medical professionals is invaluable. The high percentage of indigent care is a testament to the challenge faced by that institution.

However, the medical complex is also an employment anchor, an area of growth at a time when so many parts of the economy are contracting. Investing in that promise is all but certain to reap continued benefits, especially at this time of high unemployment and low job growth. With their donation, the Wards have offered a welcome measure of generosity to the community. And with this purchase, the hospital has positioned itself for the future.
Construction work continues on Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium at East Carolina University on Monday afternoon. 
Justin Falls/The Daily Reflector

Stadium expansion remains on schedule

By Nathan Summers
The Daily Reflector
Tuesday, June 15, 2010

Last Dec. 5 in Greenville, Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium rocked with delight after its primary occupant finished off Houston to win the first-ever Conference USA championship game staged at East Carolina University. The Pirates’ win that day marked their second straight C-USA football title and served as a prelude to the team’s fourth straight bowl trip last January. It also put ECU athletics in the most desirable position imaginable in terms of potentially selling itself to a different conference in the future. Exactly 10 days later, in the chill of pre-Christmas, crane operators began plucking away pieces of the stadium’s long-standing scoreboard behind the east end zone, and so began an effort to launch ECU even further into the NCAA mainstream. Now in the heat of summer, the view of Elmhurst Elementary School from inside the football stadium is completely obscured by 7,000 new seats which unify Dowdy-Ficklen’s north and south grandstands.

“There has rarely been any time, day or night, that someone was not on site keeping the project moving forward,” ECU director of athletics Terry Holland said of the expansion project being completed by T.A. Loving Construction, part of a university-wide athletic facility makeover. For much of the winter, Dowdy-Ficklen’s lights were ablaze well into the night as the crews from T.A. Loving completed the early phases of the project.

“The crews would start working early in the morning and a lot of times would work until 9 or 10 o’clock at night,” ECU senior associate AD for external operations Jimmy Bass said of the new stadium, which will be unveiled Sept. 5 when the Pirates kick off the 2010 season against conference rival Tulsa. “They turned on one bank of lights in the stadium to provide enough light to continue working. T.A. Loving has done a masterful job of keeping the project on schedule.”

Even though the expected conference expansion boom seemed to peter out on Monday when Texas announced it was staying in the Big 12 and turning down the chance to be the catalyst for the creation a 16-team Pac-10, ECU knows it can still boast some of C-USA’s biggest crowds. Now they’ll be even bigger.

“I think the message from Texas came out loud and clear (Monday) — football is the most important sport,” Bass said. “(The stadium upgrade) is going to make East Carolina more competitive, more attractive for every sport that is going to recruit young people to come to East Carolina, and if there is an opportunity down the road that is appealing, and East Carolina fits, I think this construction process will have been very worthwhile.”
Dowdy-Ficklen has grown with the times many times, but never quite like it is now. The original stadium was the vision of chancellor Dr. Leo Jenkins and was unveiled at a meeting of the Society of Buccaneers back in 1961. Over the years — from its inception as James Skinner Ficklen Memorial Stadium (in honor of the well-known Greenville tobacco contractor) in 1963 into the era of Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium beginning in 1994 — the stadium has seen numerous growth spurts.

The last expansion, in 1999, grew the capacity to 43,000 after club level seating was added to the stadium’s north grandstand.

The current expansion project, however, is the one that puts ECU into the big time, at least in traditional college football stadium thinking.

“For some reason, in terms of big-time stadiums, when you have 50,000 seats you qualify,” Bass said. “We will have 50,000 seats from here on out.”

Thanks to the addition of temporary bleachers, a school-record crowd of 50,092 watched the Pirates beat N.C. State in 1999, so this year’s crowds won’t technically be the first of that size at ECU.

But the new Dowdy-Ficklen has an aim to be noisier and more intimidating than ever. With that in mind, it will be students filling the stadium’s newest addition.

“We anticipate filling that end zone up with fans, particularly our students,” Bass said of the new seats. “We’re going to work really hard to enhance our home field advantage in Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium, and I think having 7,000 screaming Student Pirate Club members and the East Carolina marching band down in that end zone is going to make it a tremendous atmosphere. That’s what we’ve got to cultivate, an atmosphere of our fans cheering for the Pirates.”

Contact Nathan Summers at nsummers@reflector.com or
Perdue asks for backup budget

Congress could blow a $500 million hole in the $18.9 billion state budget that legislators have worked on for months, adding more uncertainty to funding plans for public agencies and schools.

The $500 million question mark - beefed-up federal Medicaid payments that could stop by the year's end - may lead to more state budget cuts in a year that started with budget writers working to compensate for an $800 million revenue shortfall.

The state has a few ways it can plan for less.

Gov. Bev Perdue wants the legislature to prepare a supplemental budget in case the $500 million does not arrive.

"I have got to have a way to pay the bills," Perdue said Tuesday.

Senate leaders are considering another option: passing a smaller budget and deciding what the $500 million should pay for if it comes. Senate Majority Leader Martin Nesbitt said he wouldn't wait too long to see what actions Congress will take. Legislators aim to finish the budget before the next budget year starts July 1.

"We will balance the budget with the money we have in hand, give or take 24 hours," said Nesbitt, an Asheville Democrat.

A national problem

North Carolina and most other states were counting on the additional federal money to support their budgets.

As part of the national stimulus law passed last year, the federal government is picking up a bigger share of the cost of Medicaid, the state and federal health insurance program for the poor and disabled. State officials expected to keep getting the extra money through July 2011. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, 30 states have proposed or passed budgets assuming they would get it.

But members of Congress, worried about increased federal deficits, started objecting. There's a chance the fattened Medicaid payments will stop at the end of this year.

That has unnerved the states and led to a full-on push from governors for the money. Perdue participated in a telephone news conference on the extra Medicaid money Tuesday with Gov. Ed Rendell of Pennsylvania and two U.S. senators.

Calculations in N.C.
State House leaders have talked of preparing a contingency plan with the extra $500 million in cuts.

State Rep. Thom Tillis, a Cornelius Republican, said the state should not pass a budget that includes money it may not get.

"It's a dereliction of duty," he said. "If we were a governing body of a corporation, we'd be eliminated."

Passing a budget with the cuts may prod Congress to approve the Medicaid spending, he said.

"I think we've got to be honest with people," Tillis said. "If you want to get popular support for actually going to Washington and trying to get the money restored, what better way to do it than show what is at risk?"

Staff writer Benjamin Niolet contributed to this report.

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Easy street

Consider the mythical, typical North Carolina state employee. He or she may work somewhere in the bureaucracy as, say, an auditor or a highway engineer. Perhaps the person shows up to work as a mental hospital nurse, a correction officer or a park ranger.

Whatever the duties, this is for sure: For the vast majority of the state's public employees, there are no pots of gold - either in their monthly paychecks or in the pensions that await them if they stick it out until retirement.

There aren't many private sector workers who can count on a job-related pension that might be as much as 55 percent of what they'd been earning. Still, especially with state employees contributing 6 percent of their salaries as they go along, the upshot is that "typical" pensions, while decent, aren't in the mind-blowing range.

Ah, but what about the exceptions?

The poster person for wretched pension excess turns out to be Charles R. Franklin Jr. of Greenville, who draws down a nice round $211,373 per year as retired director of the Albemarle Mental Health Center.

The N&O's Dan Kane had the story on Sunday. Franklin, who returned to work as a lavishly compensated contractor after his nominal retirement in 2005, made far more than anyone else in a similar position was making.

Golden touch

The deal finally imploded and by early 2009 he was ousted. The center was forced to close. But the state's pension formula, which takes into account an employee's four consecutive highest-paid years, has treated Charles Franklin like King Midas.

The second-highest paid pensioner has, by comparison, a straightforward situation. Bernadette Gray-Little retired as provost, or the top academic officer, at UNC-Chapel Hill. That's a high-level job with a big salary, and she draws a pension of $209,337. Not that she was likely to go hungry in any case: She also collects an annual salary of $425,000 in her post-retirement gig as chancellor of the University of Kansas.

It's not surprising that several front-runners in the pension derby are highly paid doctors at UNC's medical school. But then up crops the name of James G. Turcotte, retired manager of the two-gate Pitt-Greenville Airport.

Turcotte's pension is $173,654, according to The N&O's report. What sort of salary would translate
into a pension that large? And how could the airport's managers have justified it?

State secrets

This broaches a problem with North Carolina's state personnel law. Officials interpret the law as barring them from releasing details about what a retiree was paid while he or she was working. It's a nonsensical reading, since the information was public before the person retired. But keeping the data under wraps makes it harder to spot unusual pay raises that were designed to inflate someone's pension.

Whether that's what occurred in Turcotte's case is impossible to say. But anybody who doesn't think that kind of manipulation goes on must have just fallen off the turnip truck.

Fortunately, there is talk in the General Assembly about stripping away some of the personnel law's unnecessary secrecy. And the pension formula should receive a close look as well. If a longer period were used as the basis for pension calculations, there would be less incentive to juice up salaries in the last few years.

Even though state employees contribute heavily to the pension fund, state appropriations also are crucial, especially when investment earnings have lagged.

State Treasury Janet Cowell says the state needs to kick in considerably more to keep pace with projected payouts. Keeping the fund on a solid footing is important - but the political support needed to do that is bound to erode if it looks as though the pension system is vulnerable to being milked.
State bonds

JOURNAL EDITORIAL STAFF

The N.C. Senate wants to borrow another $451 million. House leaders should say no.

Under the proposal, the state would sell bonds for two major projects -- new engineering facilities at N.C. State University and N.C. A&T State University. The rest of the bond-sale proceeds would go toward repairs for state buildings and equipment for both the UNC system and the community colleges.

We are not saying that these projects are unnecessary. The engineering-school facilities are needed and will be essential to the state's economy, and the state does not adequately maintain its own facilities, so repair money is always needed.

And when it comes to training equipment for students, the community colleges and the universities always lag behind the fast pace of technological innovation.

Nonetheless, in this economy, the state cannot buy everything it needs. It must set priorities, and it must be willing to wait until the economy improves. Before it spends on even some very high priorities. It's a matter of the money not being there.

The Senate leadership would say that we are missing the point. We can borrow now at low-interest rates and build while costs are competitive.

But we are not missing the point. While it would certainly be nice to have the luxury to borrow at today's interest rates and to build more at today's construction rates, the essential question is whether North Carolina can afford the annual payments.

It was only 20 years ago that North Carolina's entire public debt was less than a billion dollars. Now the state's annual debt service -- in short, its minimum annual credit-card payment -- is fast approaching that mark. About 4 percent of the state's total general-fund budget -- about $20 billion goes toward debt service. That, according to the last three state treasurers, is the upper limit for a well-run state government.

Legislative Republicans rightly oppose the bond sale, arguing that the state will struggle to find the almost $20 million for annual debt service the bonds will require.

When one looks ahead to the 2011-13 biennium and the likely loss of federal stimulus aid, it is hard to see how the state will balance its budget. This is not the time to be adding to that shortfall.

For 10 years now, state legislators have skirted the constitutional requirement of a public
referendum on borrowing. This is exactly the kind of borrowing that, in the spirit of the constitution, should be approved first by voters. The lack of such a referendum is just one more reason to oppose this bond bill.
New rules would protect students

Enrollment, aid practices cited

By Mary Beth Marklein
USA TODAY

The Education Department is proposing a number of rules today designed to protect college students and taxpayers from abusive or fraudulent practices, including aggressive recruitment tactics and allowing ineligible students to enroll and receive aid.

Though all colleges that receive federal aid would be affected by the changes, the most controversial proposals are aimed at for-profit colleges, which have come under more scrutiny as their enrollments have increased.

In an effort to rein in student debt and high default rates, for example, one proposal would require colleges to disclose graduation and job placement rates and information about the effectiveness of their career and technical programs. Federal data show that 44% of 2007 graduates who defaulted on loans within three years attended for-profit institutions.

Most of the 14 key issues, outlined in a 503-page document shown to reporters Tuesday, were developed through negotiations over the past year with the higher education community.

Education officials will follow up this summer with details on a proposal that would cut off federal aid to for-profit colleges whose graduates can’t earn enough to repay their loans.

The issues are complicated “and we want to get it right,” Education Secretary Arne Duncan says. “This is about accountability, and protecting students.”

Next week, a Senate education committee will examine federal spending at for-profit schools.

Advocates of stricter regulations are encouraged by a preliminary review of the proposals.

“There’s a real concern that taxpayers are subsidizing programs that are overpromising and under-delivering,” says Pauline Abernathy of the California-based Institute for College Access & Success.

Harris Miller, president of the Career College Association, which represents about 1,450 for-profit institutions, said the group doesn’t agree with all the proposals, but “we agree that students need to be protected at all times from schools that color outside the lines.”

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Percentage who default
Among students scheduled to begin repaying college loans in 2004, those who attended for-profit schools were more likely to default than those who attended public or private non-profit schools:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>2 Years</th>
<th>3 Years</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For-profit</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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After two years
Source: U.S. Government Accountability Office

By Kurt Gelles, USA TODAY

A final version of the rules would take effect in July 2011.
U.S. Education Dept. Delays Rules on For-Profit Colleges

By TAMAR LEWIN

The Education Department said Tuesday that it had split off and delayed a decision on the most controversial part of proposed new student-aid regulations — the treatment of for-profit college programs whose graduates do not earn enough to repay their loans.

While a package of proposed new student-aid regulations was released Tuesday, a department official said no decision had been reached about what debt-to-income ratio would make for-profit programs ineligible for federal aid.

“This is about accountability, and protecting students,” said Education Secretary Arne Duncan. “We have many areas of agreement where we can move forward. But some key issues around gainful employment are complicated, and we want to get it right so we will be coming back with that shortly.”

In the original draft of the gainful employment rules released this year, the department suggested cutting off federal aid to programs whose graduates could not repay their student loans in 10 years with 8 percent of the income.

Consumer advocates and many education groups say that the rules will protect students and taxpayers alike from expensive programs that eat up billions of dollars of federal money, and leave graduates struggling in dead-end jobs.

But the Career College Association, which represents the for-profit institutions, aggressively lobbied against that proposal, saying it would not solve any problem but would lead to the closing of important job-training programs for needy students.
For-profit colleges get the bulk of their revenues from federal aid, and their students are far more likely to default on their loans than those at nonprofit or public colleges. With for-profit colleges booming, and getting $20 billion in federal aid, the government has been taking a closer look at how that money is used. Last week, Tom Harkin, the Iowa Democrat who is chairman of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, announced that he would hold hearings on the issue.

“I am pleased to see the Department of Education releasing proposed regulations around for-profit higher education,” he said on Tuesday. “For-profit colleges must work for students and taxpayers, not just shareholders.”

At a briefing on Tuesday, Deputy Under Secretary Robert Shireman said that the department still intended “to hold programs accountable with some metrics that will come in a proposal later this summer” — but that to avoid delaying the whole regulatory package, it had decided to go ahead with everything but the specific gainful employment measures.

The new regulations, to be published in the Federal Register on Friday, would require for-profit colleges to disclose their programs’ job-placement rates and graduation rates, and provide information that would let the department calculate graduates’ debt load and income.

The new regulations also help protect students from aggressive or misleading recruiting practices and ensure that only eligible students receive aid.

The regulations also tighten the prohibition against paying recruiters by the number of students they enroll — a practice that has sometimes led to boiler-room call centers that pressure those with little chance of academic success to enroll.

While incentive compensation was already illegal, the current rules allowed some exceptions that the department said had been abused. The new rules would eliminate those exceptions.

After a 45-day comment period, the department expects to publish final rules by Nov. 1, to take effect beginning July 2011.