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The success that East Carolina University’s medical school has enjoyed as a contributor to this state’s health is well-known. Within its region, the university’s medical complex, centered on the school and Pitt Memorial Hospital, is an indispensable resource as well as an economic engine.

What ECU’s Brody School of Medicine does especially well is train physicians who go on to accept the challenges of providing primary care and working in underserved areas. That role is vital in a state where rural poverty retains a cruel grip and where remote small towns have difficulty attracting doctors to live and work there.

Now comes a study from George Washington University in Washington that ranks ECU’s medical school as sixth out of 141 med schools nationwide in their fulfillment of a “social mission.” No coincidence there: Bringing primary care to North Carolinians who otherwise might have to do without was central to ECU’s intended mission when it was founded some 35 years ago. The school in Greenville concentrates on training North Carolina natives who are enthused about grass-roots medicine.

That task is likely to become even more pivotal as national health care reform draws more people into the system at the primary level, where routine ailments and conditions can be treated before they become serious. At least, that’s the goal — but one that hinges on the availability of doctors.

Many medical schools, especially private, research-oriented ones, tend to produce more physicians who go into lucrative specialties instead of primary care. Their graduates often have large education loans to pay off; many are influenced by the specialty-dominated culture of their institutions.

To its credit, Duke University’s medical school, which has fit the research-oriented profile, is revamping its family practice program with an eye toward contributing more graduates in that field.

ECU, however, can be expected to set the social mission pace among North Carolina’s four medical schools. That reflects the foresight of ECU’s leaders and of legislators who have nurtured the school with funding. As strained as the state budget is, allowing the Brody School of Medicine to grow would pay even more dividends in better health for many residents.
Brody School's success threatened without new funding
Friday, June 18, 2010
The residents of eastern North Carolina already knew the effectiveness of East Carolina University’s Brody School of Medicine in meeting its goal to provide medical care for those in rural and poor communities. Now a report by George Washington University, released this week, ensures that knowledge will be spread far and wide.
The distinction reflects the energy and commitment shown by all those associated with East Carolina’s medical school in making it a light in North Carolina. A comparable level of commitment is needed from the Legislature this year, which should make sure the school has the funding needed to continue the successful fulfillment of its stated mission.
When leaders with East Carolina, Greenville and Pitt County first argued for establishing a medical school here, the need was evident in communities throughout the East. A region with high levels of unemployment, low levels of education and high rates of poverty also had uneven access to medical care. That led to shorter life expectancy, high infant mortality and the proliferation of chronic diseases like diabetes and heart disease.
The Brody School of Medicine has not eradicated those problems, but it has dramatically improved the quality of life in eastern North Carolina. Its mission of serving rural communities is unique in this state and its medical professionals invaluable to the residents they serve.
Improvements of many health measures should be directly credited to the work of the school, its faculty and graduates, as well as to Pitt County Memorial Hospital, which plays a key role in that mission.
The school’s effectiveness was emphasized in a recent report by George Washington University and published in the Annals of Internal Medicine. That study ranks East Carolina’s medical school seventh in the country for the number of primary care physicians produced, the number of doctors serving rural and poor patients and the number of underrepresented minorities who earn degrees.
While that is cause for great pride among all associated with the school, there are concerns that its effectiveness could be diminished without some additional funding by the Legislature. The school’s high number of indigent patients saddles the Brody School with considerable costs, and it needs, at minimum, an additional $5 million in funding over the next two years.
In a tight budget year, lawmakers may consider other needs more pressing. However, the Brody School is one area of investment that is clearly meeting its stated mission and warrants strong consideration as the budget process unfolds.
Pacaya volcano in Guatemala erupts on May 27. Larger eruptions spread ash over much of the country and airports closed.
Contributed photo

Guatemalans work to clean the streets following mud slides brought on by Tropical Storm Agatha on May 29.
Contributed photo

ECU students help people of Guatemala

By JOSH HUMPHRIES
The Daily Reflector
Thursday, June 17, 2010

A group of North Carolina students in Guatemala for a summer course chipped in with disaster relief efforts when their trip was interrupted by a volcanic eruption and a tropical storm in late May.

The eruption of the Pacaya volcano and the landfall of Tropical Storm Agatha led to the students, the majority of whom are East Carolina University nursing students, working with relief agencies to dig out roads to remote villages and entertain children who had been displaced by disaster.

“It is strangely lucky that we were there because we were able to help,” said Erin Trowbridge, a senior ECU nursing major. “We got to come together as a village and as a community to help. That is an experience that not everyone gets when they travel.”

Kim Larson, a professor at ECU’s College of Nursing, takes a group of students to Guatemala every year for three weeks as an elective course. The students study Spanish in the mornings and work at local clinics and provide health education in rural areas in the afternoon.

The group this year included eight nursing students from ECU, two ECU students from other health care fields, a student from N.C. State University and a student from UNC-Chapel Hill. The students stayed with Guatemalan families in the small village of San Miguel Escobar, about 15 miles from the city of Antigua.
The group arrived in Guatemala on May 23. On May 27, they were planning to hike the in the Volcan De Pacaya national park but were turned back because the volcano was showing signs of erupting.

The park features lava rivers that flow down from the Pacaya volcano. But the rumbling mountain was about to violently erupt just as the group was arriving at the park.

“We were able to drive down a cow path to see what was happening,” Larson said. “We were about five miles from the volcano and we watched the initial eruption and took pictures.”

The volcano erupted later that evening and rained ash down over a large area surrounding it. The ash forced airports to close across the country and forced 2,000 people to evacuate.

“This is a volcano that we have climbed for the last two years,” Larson said.

But an even bigger danger was brewing in the Pacific Ocean in the form of Tropical Storm Agatha which would bring heavy rain and mud slides to Guatemala two days later.

Being relatively cut off from outside news, the group of students did not know that Agatha was about to strike the country and were on the way across Lake Atitlan, Guatemala’s largest lake, to a remote hospital when heavy wind and rains reached them.

Mud slides from the storm forced the group to stay in a hotel near the lake for two days before they were able to return to their village to help their host families in San Miguel Escobar. The group heard that several children had died in the village during the storm.

“It hit our village very hard and by chance we weren’t there,” Trowbridge said. “We were very concerned about our families in the village because there was no way to communicate with them.”

Two students in the group moved in with Trowbridge and her host family because the storm damaged the houses they were staying in.

Trowbridge said her father was frantically trying to reach her after news of the storm reached the United States.

“I got to talk to him for about two minutes just to say that I was OK,” she said.

The group made it back to San Miguel Escobar after two days where they joined forces with relief efforts to clear roads from mud slide debris. The group worked for two days digging out roads and spending time with about 100 children who were living in a refuge camp nearby.

Trowbridge, who is from Kent, Ohio, hopes to work at Charlotte’s Levine Children’s Hospital after she graduates in December. She said the experience was great preparation for the nursing field.

“You can’t plan for everything,” she said. “You always need to be thinking on your toes and doing whatever you feel is right for the people that you need to take care of.”

By the end of the trip, the group was back to educating children in remote villages on nutrition, sanitation and dental care. The group also worked in a center for undernourished children for four days before returning to the United States this week.

The effort to clean up ash from the volcano eruption continues as most of the work is being done by hand, Larson said.

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Brody dean accepts honorary chairmanship
Sunday, June 13, 2010

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 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.
Wooded area by Elmhurst will lose few trees, officials say

By Ginger Livingston
The Daily Reflector
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Underbrush has been cleared from a 4-6 acre wooded area next to Elmhurst Elementary School in an attempt to provide additional outdoor space for the students and possible parking for East Carolina University Pirate Club members, a school administrator said.

A private contractor spent Tuesday and Wednesday clearing the wooded area located between the school and the Forest Hills neighborhood, Aaron Beaulieu, associate superintendent of operational services, said. The contractor will return next week to clear out fallen logs and to cut down several dead trees, he said, but the majority of the trees will remain untouched.

Beaulieu said he fielded calls from about a half-dozen Forest Hills residents who are worried the wooded area is being cut down to make a parking lot.

The trees will remain, he said.

“I’ve tried to tell everyone today that in the next three-to-four, three-to-five years there’s no plan for anyone to work on this property,” Beaulieu said.

School officials have wanted to clear out the brush for several years. When the school system started discussions with the Pirate Club, a fundraising organization for the university’s athletics program, the school system went forward with the plan.

The Pirate Club pays the school system $90,000 annually to rent Elmhurst property for parking during ECU home games. However, the district is limiting parking on the school’s front lawn this year after the lawn was damaged during heavy rains at last year’s Conference USA championship game.

The wooded area was suggested as an alternative parking site, Beaulieu said. A Pirate Club official was on site Wednesday trying to determine if vehicles can be parked in the area.

“If this creates a nice area for some tailgating, we don’t have any problem with that,” Beaulieu said. “We don’t plan to clear out massive (numbers) of trees so they’ll have a massive parking area.”

Pirate Club officials haven’t made a decision about the location, Executive Director Mark Wharton said.

“I haven’t even seen that area,” Wharton said. “We do want to work with the school system to limit damage. We are really trying to not overpopulate any one area because that is what causes the damage,” he said.
Beaulieu said he envisions the wooded area mainly being used by teachers for science classes and a play area. Clearing out the underbrush revealed several trails, some with gravel, have been laid out on the property.

Kitty and Max Joyner Sr. have lived in Forest Hills for 48 years. Until the underbrush became too dense, the wooded area was a play area for neighborhood children, Kitty Joyner said.

“It’s wonderful to have a natural area, to have a place where the children would play when they were growing up,” she said.

The neighborhood also has held a picnic in the woods for about 40 years, clearing out just enough brush to set up a picnic area, she said.

“This is probably one of the most natural areas beside any of our schools,” Beaulieu said. “We spend thousands of taxpayers dollars putting in trees to meet the (city of Greenville) vegetation plans, so we are not going to cut down a natural area.”

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ECU unveils new master's degree in sustainable tourism

East Carolina University has created the nation's first interdisciplinary master's degree in sustainable tourism.

The university says the new degree reflects a growing concern about balancing the economic, ecological and social impacts of tourism on the world's vacation destinations.

"There is a close link and relationship between good science and good business," said Patrick Long, director of ECU's Center for Sustainable Tourism, in a news release. "We need to train and educate our future leaders in this industry on how to best integrate those two major components."

The UNC system's Board of Governors approved the degree on Jan. 8, and the full program is already in motion.

As the Center defines it, sustainable tourism "contributes to a balanced and healthy economy by generating tourism-related jobs, revenues and taxes while protecting and enhancing the destination’s social, cultural, historical, natural and built resources for the enjoyment and well-being of both residents and visitors," according to the news release.

Students in the program will study under faculty with expertise in business, arts and sciences, human ecology, and health and human performance.
Campuses might not get to use shiny new facilities

State funded construction, but there may not be money for operation

BY BENJAMIN NIOLET, ERIC FERRERI AND JAY PRICE
STAFF WRITERS

RALEIGH — At UNC-Chapel Hill, workers are putting the final touches on a 160,000-square-foot monument to scientific exploration.

The $92 million New Venable Hall building will offer Carolina scientists expanded, high-tech classrooms, offices and labs.

That's assuming the state can afford to open it. The $92 million price tag doesn't pay the electric bill or take care of maintenance.

According to university records, the science building is one of 17 new state university facilities across North Carolina that may not open as expected this year or next if the state can't provide the money to operate them.

"We'll either have to mothball these new science buildings or we'll have to pull the money out of the academic side," UNC System President Erskine Bowles told reporters last week. "It's crazy not to give us the funds to operate them."

The system has asked for about $25 million, a small part of what's expected to be a $19 billion state budget, but with the state facing an $800 million revenue shortfall, something has to give.

The state House's budget proposal included about $12 million for operating the new buildings; the Senate's didn't include any money for it.

Sen. Richard Stevens, a Cary Republican involved in budget negotiations, said he anticipates at least some will be included. "We should have put that money in," Stevens said.

In addition to the relatively small fund to open new buildings, UNC officials are trying to get budget negotiators to roll back other cuts proposed in the House budget, which protected K-12 education at the expense of the UNC System.

To ensure they get money to open the buildings, university officials are stressing the potential economic benefits they could produce.

Of the 17 new facilities, Bowles has cited a classroom building at UNC-Greensboro, a bioinformatics building at UNC-Charlotte, an engineering complex at N.C. State University, a family medicine building at East Carolina University and a pharmacy building at Elizabeth City State University.

"Those are the things that will create jobs in the future," Bowles said.

The university system gets $2.5 billion from the state.

But officials say they would struggle to absorb the operating costs of the new buildings. In recent years, the system has been cut by $570 million and in the last year alone administrative spending was slashed by 23 percent. Bowles said additional cuts would have to come from classroom spending.

The system has recently opened or expects to open soon — 38 buildings by finding money from other sources, a further drain on the system's resources.

The cost to classes

"With all these cuts it's going to mean fewer professors on campus because we'll have to fire a lot of people," Bowles said. "And secondly, it's going to lead to fewer classes and classes will have more people in them so it's going to take longer to graduate, which will cost the state more money."

In Chapel Hill, officials say they need more than $2.5 million in the next year to operate the massive new science building.

"It's like an unseen budget cut," said Carolyn Elfland, UNC-CH's associate vice chancellor for campus services. "We open the building and absorb the utility bill. We have to cut somewhere else to absorb it. If you get a big building, and there's no money, it's pretty hard."

Two buildings, $3M

N.C. State University has several buildings on the list, the largest of them on Centennial Campus for the College of Engineering and a new animal hospital at the veterinary college.

Those two projects alone come to close to half a million square feet of floor space and will require about $3 million for maintenance and utilities annually, said Kevin MacNaughton, the associate vice chancellor for facilities.

The engineering building is expected to be open for the fall semester. The animal hospital will open early next year, MacNaughton said.

The House and Senate are expected to continue negotiations next week.

SEE UNC, PAGE 14A
Commission blasts college sports spending, seeks better academics

More academic emphasis and less spending have become urgent needs in college athletics, according to findings released Thursday by the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics.

On the basis of an 18-month study that focused largely on 94 football-playing colleges, the Knight group, a watchdog group that has been proposing reform measures for more than 18 years, said current financial trends will be unsustainable for many schools.

"The growing emphasis on winning games and pursuing TV contracts feeds the spending escalation," said Knight member Carol Cartwright, Bowling Green president. "To preserve the integrity of college sports, we can no longer base rewards so heavily on winning but instead on maintaining the right balance between athletics and academics."

Knight co-chair William Kirwan, chancellor of University of Maryland system, said the key to achieving that objective rests in developing a more informed public.

"Sports budgets are beginning to have a significant impact on college students, and financial data ought to be transparent and readily available to students, parents, trustees and taxpayers who have a stake in the spending," Kirwan said.

By 2020, Knight findings predicted that 10 schools currently spending the most on athletics will top the $250 million mark annually.

From 2005 through 2008, the study group said spending on athletics increased by 38 percent, almost twice the rate of increase for academic spending.

The commission said action is needed in three specific areas — financial transparency, academic incentives and treating athletes more like the rest of the general student body.

Knight members recommend that teams should not be eligible to compete for championships unless they meet academic requirements that project to at least a 50-percent graduation mark according to the NCAA's Academic Progress Rate.

"Tournament slots, and the financial rewards that accompany them, should be reserved for teams that meet legitimate academic standards," said SMU president R. Gerald Turner.

Under the commission's proposal, money dividends would be linked directly to academic achievement by athletes in those sports. Even off the NCAA basketball tournament, participating schools would have to reach predetermined academic results in order to partake fully of television shares.
There would also be corresponding requirements for teams in the Football Bowl Subdivision.

Additionally, the group suggested a reduction in football scholarships and a cap on sports support staffing.

"We urge our presidential colleagues on the NCAA Board of Directors to adopt this plan," Cartwright said.

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