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UNC system cuts are relatively light

But jobs likely still will be lost

BY ERIC FERRERI
STAFF WRITER

Public university students may be looking at a tuition hike this fall as each campus grapples with its share of a $70 million cut to the UNC system's budget.

That cut, while far smaller than university officials feared, still will likely force the elimination of jobs. The legislature also gave campuses the option of raising tuition as much as $750 for the 2010-11 academic year, which could help stave off some job losses.

Tuition hikes may be necessary at UNC-Chapel Hill and N.C. State University, where basic academic services are already suffering, officials said Tuesday.

"We're already struggling to deliver the classes the students need to graduate," said N.C. State Chancellor Randy Woodson. "Class sizes are already a challenge, so it's something we have to consider."

A tuition hike is likely at UNC-Chapel Hill, which is trying to keep enough class sections open for students, stave off faculty raids and continue to bring in top junior faculty, said Chancellor Holden Thorp.

"We're hesitant to do it" Thorp said. "But given where Carolina stands, with our tuition as low as it is compared to our peers, and the struggle we're in to preserve what we have, it may be the best of the options available to us."

In-state undergrads at UNC-CH will pay about $19,000 in tuition, fees, room, board and other costs this fall.

UNC-Chapel Hill student body president Hogan Medlin said the budget cuts should not be viewed in a vacuum. The $70 million reduction is the latest in a string of cuts to universities that will eventually force larger class sizes and fewer sections. A year ago, the UNC system eliminated more than 900 positions.

"It's a constant fear among students that as budget cuts do become cumulative, they will hit the academic core," Medlin said. "Now, you can still meet with your professor and get to know them. That's something we want to preserve. Eventually, we might have to expand classes so everyone can get in."

Even with the $70 million cut, UNC system officials largely consider the final state budget a win for higher education. The reduction is far less than the $175 million cut recommended by the state House, and the budget fully funds three priorities: enrollment growth, need-based financial aid and money needed to open 19 buildings.

Meanwhile, community colleges fared well, said Scott Ralls, president of the N.C. Community College system.

The key: $81 million to full fund massive enrollment growth over the last year. Th system's 58 colleges grew collectively by 30,000 students a 15 percent increase that had some instructors to teach as many as eight courses a semester.

The $81 million "lets us keep our nose above water," Ralls said.

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GREENVILLE

ECU grant to fight tobacco use

East Carolina University will receive a $200,000 grant from the N.C. Health and Wellness Trust Fund beginning Thursday. It's a portion of $1.2 million in grant funding awarded for the third phase of its Tobacco-Free Colleges Initiative to combat tobacco use and prevent exposure to secondhand smoke among students in the state's colleges, universities and community colleges.

The money also will fund efforts at the following nearby campuses: Beaufort, Edgecombe, Halifax, Johnston, Nash, Pitt and Wilson community colleges, as well as Miller-Motte College and Mount Olive College.

North Carolina leads the nation in the number of tobacco-free colleges with about one-third of the state's colleges and universities — or 37 of 110 — having adopted the tobacco-free policy. The latest phase includes full-time grant coordinators that will serve a minimum of 12 campuses each.
Nearly a year after James Earl Richardson was charged with a double homicide in downtown Greenville, a trial seems distant as the defendant works on legal representation and advocates seek fair treatment.

Richardson, a J.H. Rose High School graduate and former pro basketball player in Europe and Australia, was quickly named the lone suspect in the June 30, 2009, shooting deaths of Charles Andrew “Drew” Kirby, 29, manager of Michaelangelo’s Pizza, and Edgar Landon Blackley, 21, an East Carolina University student.

In December prosecutors announced they would pursue the death penalty.

An administrative hearing set on June 8 to track the case’s progress was postponed until Aug. 3. Prosecutors were told Richardson wanted to retain additional counsel to represent him with his court-appointed attorneys, Thomas J. Moore and Damian L. Tucker of Rocky Mount.

Moore said at the time he didn’t know if the new attorney would be in addition to the defense team or in place of it.

Contacted last week, Tucker wouldn’t discuss the issue, saying it was a matter of attorney-client privilege.
The first attorney assigned to Richardson’s case, Greenville lawyer Ernest L. Connor Jr., was replaced at Richardson’s request.

Any changes to Richardson’s defense must be approved by a judge, said Robert M. Hurley, capital defender for the state.

Under North Carolina statutes, an indigent person facing the death penalty will be appointed two attorneys but will not receive a third unless a judge orders the appointment, Hurley said.

Judge W. Russell “Rusty” Duke Jr., chief resident Superior Court judge for Pitt County, said last week his office has not received a request from Richardson or his attorneys to add another attorney to his team or replace his existing counsel.

Richardson’s attorneys have sought the assistance of the Fair Trial Initiative, based in Durham. The organization says it seeks to guarantee that indigent people facing the death penalty receive a fair trial by addressing inequalities in the justice system.

It provides two-year fellowships allowing new lawyers to work on death penalty trials, internships to law students, social work students and undergraduates interested in death penalty defense. It recruits private lawyers to lend their assistance to capital trials on a pro bono basis.

In Richardson’s case the Initiative has been investigating whether he can receive a fair trial in Pitt County. Earlier this year volunteers conducted man-on-the-street surveys in the downtown Greenville area to determine how much knowledge local people had about the case.

In February, an attorney for the Initiative issued a subpoena seeking all electronic postings on The Daily Reflector’s website that discussed the murder and Richardson’s arrest. The subpoena was quashed.

The case against Richardson is one of two pending death penalty cases being handled by the Pitt County district attorney’s office.

The other involves Shelton Darrel Mills, formerly of Winterville, who was arrested and charged with the August 2007 double homicide of Cylvonna Preddy, 39, of Grifton and Robert Bizzell, 33, of Winterville. Both people were shot numerous times, according to police. Preddy was described as Mills’ former girlfriend. Mills’ trial is scheduled to begin Aug. 6, nearly three years after the shootings.

While no timeline has been established to bring Richardson’s case to trial, attorneys are active. Shortly after the district attorney declared his intention to pursue the death penalty, Richardson’s attorneys filed a motion seeking to extend the time to pursue a hearing to strike the death penalty until August, when a study of North Carolina’s application of the death penalty is suppose to be completed.

The study was required under the Racial Justice Act approved by the General Assembly last year. The act allows defense attorneys to try to disallow the death penalty by proving it is unfairly applied to minorities. There has been no ruling on that motion.

Other actions included:

In January the Pitt County Detention Center was granted a petition to transfer Richardson to a state prison for safekeeping after he reportedly assaulted a detention officer.

On March 1 Richardson sent a hand-written letter to the Pitt County Clerk of Court requesting a speedy trial, citing North Carolina general statutes.

In June, Richardson’s attorneys filed a notice demanding the presence of counsel when prosecutors or law enforcement officers wanted to speak with Richardson. In the filing, the attorneys stated that any waiver “either verbal, nonverbal or written, of his right to counsel prior to questioning is invalid without the countersignature of his attorney or the consent of his attorney in the presence of said attorney or a member of his law firm.”

Greenville police say Richardson and several other men were kicked out of The Other Place night club for disruptive behavior shortly before the shootings. Police Chief William Anderson said a year ago his detectives had developed a strong case against Richardson, a statement he recently reiterated.
"I'm an old homicide detective, and I know the level of work that has to go into solving these types of cases," he said. "If I didn't feel confident with the investigation and the work that was done, maybe I wouldn't be so bold. I'm very proud of the staff's efforts bringing this young man to justice. The evidence will speak for itself."

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Editorial: One year after shooting, evaluating city's response
Wednesday, June 30, 2010

Of the many responses to the shooting deaths of two men in downtown Greenville one year ago, the deployment of police officers on the weekends has emerged as that with the most questions. Following the arrest of a City Council member for trespassing while downtown, new questions have been raised about the tactics employed in the wake of that tragedy.

Greenville officials were asked for swift action in the aftermath of that shooting, and they did well to turn ideas into action over the past year. Now it seems appropriate to honestly evaluate those decisions in an effort to ensure that the goal of reducing crime and bolstering public safety are still being served.

When the frivolity of another Greenville summer night was shattered by gunfire on June 30, 2009, simmering discontent over downtown safety turned to full blown outrage. The shooting deaths of Andrew Kirby and Landon Blackley fueled cries for action rather than discussion. The legal system will deal with the cause of justice in the case of James Earl Richardson, who faces murder charges, but municipal government was charged with responding to an atmosphere of fear and anger.

Moving swiftly to spin ideas into policy, the council adopted several measures with the stated intent of addressing safety concerns. Working with the police department, the City Council established a program to train bouncers, and a separation ordinance will limit the number of bars downtown.

However, no action has been more visible than the deployment of additional police downtown from Thursday through Saturday nights. Greenville Police Chief William Anderson tapped an overtime fund of $600,000 to pay for diverting traffic and the dramatic increase in force, but the expense is not sustainable. The council has discussed creating a fund for bar owners to pay for the policing, but has not taken action to answer this unresolved question.

At the same time, more attention is being paid to the resource cost of this additional deployment. Residents in persistently troubled neighborhoods, like some in west Greenville, would love to have such a force for their protection and there is growing concern that focus on one area has diminished attention elsewhere.

While responding to last year’s shooting demanded swift thinking and quick action, the council would do well to evaluate its decisions away from the emotional aftermath of the tragedy. It must make certain they serve the interest of the entire city and that public safety is enjoyed by all who call Greenville home.
State's budget cuts would squeeze UNCW athletes

Loss of scholarship waiver could cost department another $650K

By Brian Mull
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Tuition waivers for out-of-state athletes are on the verge of being rescinded by North Carolina lawmakers this week in the state's annual budget, meaning the UNC-Wilmington athletic department must produce an additional $650,000 to cover the cost of those scholarships for the 2010-11 school year.

Implemented in 2005, the waivers allowed booster clubs in the state's public university system to pay in-state tuition for all athletes but cost taxpayers $9 million annually.

"Obviously, it's disappointing," UNCW athletic director Kelly Mehrtens said. "But with our budget as a state, we're faced with tough cuts all around. It's a larger issue."

UNCW spent $1.8 million, or one-fifth of its $8.7 million athletic budget, on scholarships last year and received waivers for 56 athletes on full scholarships.

"We are committed to those kids," Mehrtens said.

Mehrtens said the department has been preparing for the past year for losing the waivers. She met Monday with some UNCW head coaches to relay the news and told the StarNews later that evening she plans to meet with her staff extensively and have a revised 2010-11 athletic budget in place within 7-10 days.

The changes come at a bad time for the department. UNCW signed new men's basketball coach Buzz Peterson to a contract in April that pays him $435,000 annually for five years and also owes former coach Benny Moss $182,000 annually for three more years.

The Seahawk Club, the athletic department's fundraising arm, has seen revenue and membership numbers decline in recent years. Mehrtens said it wouldn't shoulder the burden alone.

"We're all a group striving for athletic excellence," Mehrtens said. "This is the hand we've been dealt. We've made great strides in the last couple of years with men's soccer and women's soccer and men's tennis making the NCAA Championships for the first time. We have to make sure something like this doesn't make us take steps backward."

Change for coaches

Each of those programs depends on a large number of out-of-state athletes to remain competitive within the Colonial Athletic Association.

"It definitely has an impact," men's soccer coach Aiden Haineys said Tuesday. "Men's soccer not as much as the others, maybe, but when you're trying to attract good quality players you have to," recruit outside North Carolina.
"We do a good job with the resources we have, and to take away that opportunity with the waivers, it will definitely have an impact."

According to an Associated Press report, the state's House of Representatives has been trying to eliminate the breaks since they first appeared in the budget. Smaller campuses, like UNCW, have benefited by attracting female student-athletes to fulfill Title IX requirements.

40 of the 56 UNCW athletes who received waivers in 2009-10 were female. Women's basketball had the most waiver requests, with nine, while volleyball had eight and women's soccer seven.

"A lot of programs are updating, and you always want the best North Carolina kids," said Heaney, in his 10th season as head coach. "But that's why we've had to go out to be competitive. They're going to ACC schools. You've got to do a good job getting out-of-state athletes. And that's where you have to spend money."

While only two of his athletes are currently affected, 14 of his 26 players this fall will be from outside the state, including five from Texas.

"When you've worked hard to establish those relationships, it's harder when you don't have the resources to attract them," Heaney said of potential changes to future recruiting. "Yeah, it's frustrating."

Sports editor Dan Spears contributed to this report.

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Ousted Pack AD Lee Fowler leaves today

RALEIGH -- During a break from cleaning out his office last week, Lee Fowler thought for a moment about the most precious memento he acquired during his time as athletic director at N.C. State.

Fowler, whose tenure ends today, told a story about a watch his wife Carol bought him as a gift several years ago. Some of his friends had told Carol that she should purchase her husband a Rolex because every man should have one.

On the evening that she gave him the watch, he politely told her he wasn't going to wear it. He explained that the watch was beautiful, but he wanted to wear a watch he received to commemorate N.C. State's trip to the NCAA men's basketball tournament in 2002.

That was the first of former coach Herb Sendek's five straight trips to the tournament at N.C. State following an 11-year absence for the Wolfpack. Fowler had taken some criticism for keeping Sendek after the Wolfpack finished 13-16 in 2000-01, so that accomplishment was especially sweet for Fowler and the entire athletic program.

So he still wears that watch.

"It had been so long since we'd been to the tournament, and then we went five years in a row," Fowler said. "That first year he went to the tournament validated not only N.C. State but him as a coach and myself for standing up for him even though I'd only done it for a year or two.

"That probably was as important a moment [as I've had] here. All the stuff we've done for student-athletes has been great, but that's probably a defining moment."

Fowler plans to conclude his tenure with a cookout today for the staff. He said he doesn't want anybody to give speeches or make grandiose presentations; he would rather just tell his colleagues thank you and farewell.

After that he will visit his daughter and 20-month-old granddaughter in Murfreesboro, Tenn., and spend time with other family members. After 40 or 50 days of re-energizing himself, Fowler said, he will begin examining his options for the future.

His contract with N.C. State will pay him $280,000 a year through Sept. 30, 2013, but he's eager to continue his career in college athletics administration.

"I have a great peace about me," Fowler said. "My wife asked me if it was sad packing up. I said, no, because I'm packing up knowing I'm going to be somewhere else. But I just don't know where it is yet. I'm waiting for that assignment, and I'm excited about it."

Fowler, 58, agreed to step down last month. His greatest accomplishment during his 10 years in office probably is the $120 million in facilities improvements that he spearheaded while keeping the budget balanced during some economically challenging times.
N.C. State's recent struggles in men's basketball (which has missed the last four NCAA tournaments) and football (four straight losing seasons) ultimately led to Fowler's ouster. But a strong men's basketball recruiting class entering school is one of many things that has Fowler enthusiastic about the future for N.C. State as new athletic director Debbie Yow leaves Maryland to lead the Wolfpack athletic department.

Fowler also recently was honored as the athletic director of the year among Southeast Region Football Bowl Subdivision schools by the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics.

"Integrity and that sort of stuff is important to me," Fowler said, "and that says what other athletic directors think about me, and that means a whole lot to me. When you're judged by your peers, people who do the exact same thing as you do, and you get some sort of award, that's kind of special."

After Yow was introduced Friday as his successor, State planned to offer her a temporary workspace through the weekend into this week before she returned to College Park, Md. Fowler said he offered Yow his office, which he had already begun clearing.

"I'd just like to wish Debbie and [her husband] Bill good luck. We worked side by side in league meetings for 10 years," said Fowler, who counts Yow among his closest colleagues.

Perhaps there's a lesson for Fowler in the recent topsy-turvy fortunes of his close friend Dan Beebe, who's commissioner of the Big 12 Conference.

A few weeks ago, when Nebraska was bolting for the Big Ten and Colorado left for the Pac-10, analysts were anticipating the demise of the Big 12. But while talking with some of his athletic director friends, Fowler predicted that the Big 12 would survive because of Beebe's leadership.

"'He's a guy that will stand for the right things,'" Fowler said he told his colleagues. "'There will still be a Big 12, somehow and some way.' And by George, two or three days later, it happened."

Now Fowler says he is leaving his post without bitter feelings and believes there is something wonderful awaiting him in his profession. And by George, he might be right about that, too.

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