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Computer game to be piloted in schools

By Jackie Drake
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A new computer game teaching science concepts will be piloted in rural eastern North Carolina middle schools for the 2011-12 school year.

In development under a partnership between East Carolina and N.C. State universities, Crystal Island is a learning adventure game for middle grades in which students solve a science mystery as they learn about microbiology.

The Center for Science, Mathematics and Technology Education at ECU and the IntelliMedia Group at N.C. State together qualified for a $500,000 grant from Next Generation Learning Challenges, a national program with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The award was announced in June, and work officially began July 1. The grant will cover final development and distribution of the game as well as teacher training and support.

The list of specific schools that will participate in the pilot are not available, but the game is scheduled to be distributed statewide for the 2012-13 school year and to be available nationally for 2013-14, according to Roger Conner, spokesman for the CSMTE, which serves more than 20 eastern North Carolina counties.

The pilot will start with schools represented by the ECU graduate program, which will coordinate training of teachers.

“The graduate program at ECU typically has many teachers from Pitt County and it is our hope that they will consider adoption of the software in their schools,” Conner said. The game focuses on science literacy, or the ability to read and understand scientific and technical language.
“We're focused not only on teaching literacy broadly, but on giving students the tools they'll need to comprehend scientific and technical literature. That's an area that is presenting challenges for students nationally,” said Dr. James Lester, a professor of computer science at N.C. State and primary investigator for the grant. “The trick, of course, is to make a game that is actually fun, as well as educational.”

Initial tests with more than 1,000 students have demonstrated significant learning gains in both science and literacy.

“Our goal is to develop a game that will get kids engaged and make them better readers,” Lester said. “And we want the game to work for students of all backgrounds. This is a tool that will be used in schools with diverse student populations.”

For many students in rural eastern North Carolina, the promise of new learning technologies cannot come too soon, according to Conner.

“We believe learning technologies and next generation models can produce transformative change at a lower cost for both teachers and students,” Conner said.

For more information, call 328-6885 or visit http://www.ecu.edu/educ/csmte or http://nextgenlearning.org.

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Fewer college students to receive NC financial aid

An estimated 6,000 qualified North Carolina college students won't be getting the financial assistance they might have gotten last year as a result of the state's $19.7 billion spending plan.

Steve Brooks, executive director of the North Carolina Education Assistance Authority, which administers tuition assistance to students, said Wednesday that lawmakers reduced need-based financial aid for the University of North Carolina System by 9 percent for 2011-12.

Tuition assistance funding last year was a combination of recurring money and a one-time allocation of $35 million. Lawmakers kept all of the recurring funds in the 2012 fiscal budget but dropped the one-time amount.

About $200 million is still available for need-based grants for approximately 60,000 students, Brooks said.

"The bottom line is that some students are going to get less financial aid than they got in the past, even though their costs are going to go up."

In February, the UNC Board of Governors approved in-state tuition increases on the system's 13 campuses, including a maximum tuition increase of 6.5 percent at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, East Carolina University and Fayetteville State.

"The General Assembly did work hard to protect students," Brooks said. "Unfortunately, because of some quirks in the way it was funded in the past, they were not able to hold the line completely for the UNC students."

North Carolina's private colleges will also see about a 12 percent cut in need-based assistance. Community colleges are not affected.

A rising sophomore studying chemical engineering at North Carolina State University, Liana Lewis, comes from a big family and says her parents could not afford her tuition without financial aid.
"It's kind of scary," she said. "I know I would probably not be able to take as many classes. I'd probably have to be a part-time student."

Situations like Lewis' could put more demand on community colleges, where tuition is less, Brooks said. It could also require students to take out additional loans or look for other grants and scholarships.

Lewis said she is considering other alternatives.

"I will just have to stay more focused and maybe get a job," she said.

But, she said, she hopes she can avoid adding that to her already-hectic schedule, but will do what it takes to stay in school.

Reporter: Mike Charbonneau
Web Editor: Kelly Gardner
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Connors instills new mindset at ECU
By Nathan Summers
The Daily Reflector
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It's fitting that Jeff Connors uses a phrase popularized by former Green Bay Packers coach Vince Lombardi and former Army General George Patton.

When East Carolina's strength and conditioning coach says, “Fatigue makes cowards of us all,” he's likely got just as much of an informed opinion on the subject as those who have said it before him.

With August football camp at ECU just one month away, Connors — who returned to ECU after a decade-long stint at the University of North Carolina — is in the midst of applying the fatigue theory to the Pirate players, repeatedly and with force.

“It's an ongoing educational process,” said Connors, who is in charge of the players until they report to head coach Ruffin McNeill in August. “We are constantly trying to challenge their mental toughness and raise their conditioning threshold. The thing that we're trying to get everybody to understand right now in the summer program and up until camp is that conditioning has to be the foundational component of the program.”

For now, players are working out mostly in position groups on a set schedule, but soon, the entire cast of characters will be reunited with McNeill to begin preparation for the Pirates’ season opener in Charlotte on Sept. 3 against South Carolina.
For Connors, that means just a few precious weeks remain for him to fully instill a mindset that centers on an uncompromising, relentless approach to the fourth quarter, a time in close football games in which the team in better shape usually wins.

The players' adaptation to the new program is still a work in progress, but the mental and physical anguish the players feel by way of Connors' training must transform quickly into a winning mentality.

“My whole premise in this is I want to see how people respond under duress,” Connors said. “Whatever type of strategy you're going to employ in order to put these young players in a state of duress similar to the fourth quarter of a football game, playing against a major program, you still want to see the same type of result, and that is as many people as possible stepping up and being able to respond. As you achieve that, you push it to another level.”

Right now, Connors estimates the ECU team is grasping his concepts at roughly 75 to 80 percent the level he felt the Pirates had attained in his previous stint in the 1990s, namely in their fourth quarter readiness.

The results are in the players, though most are still in the transition period.

“We find ourselves a lot more tired these days,” sophomore receiver Justin Jones said, noting that the average workout now is two hours, much longer, he said, than what he was used to. “Coach C brings a lot of energy into the weightroom. He prides himself on making us better, and he doesn't have time for guys messing around or guys joking around. He hates negative attitudes and he wants this to be a positive place.”

Players like Jones and linebacker Kyle Tudor, also a sophomore entering this season, are expected to take on much greater roles in 2011, and with Connors pushing them, a new confidence seemed to permeate the group as players pounded weights inside the Murphy Center on Wednesday.

“We're better conditioned, we're stronger and we look better,” said Tudor, who will likely battle fellow sophomore Ty Holmes for a starting role at one of the inside linebacker spots in the team's new 3-4 scheme. “It's going to help us around the ball. We're going to be faster and stronger and much better up front.”

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RALEIGH, N.C.—A former visiting professor at North Carolina State University claims in a lawsuit that she was abruptly dropped from consideration for a permanent post after her comments she made about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Terri Ginsberg said she had been a top tier candidate for a position in the university's film studies department until Oct. 24, 2007, when she gave an introduction to a movie called "Ticket to Jerusalem" at a film screening series on Middle Eastern topics.

Ginsberg said she gave the audience background on the Palestinian filmmaker, and thanked them for attending. "By doing so, I stated, the audience was showing its support for the airing of Palestinian cultural perspectives, especially those which promote Palestinian liberation," she wrote in a sworn statement.

Superior Court Judge Shannon Joseph's dismissed the lawsuit, but Ginsberg's lawyers filed an appeal late last month. No hearing date before the state Court of Appeals has been scheduled yet. If the appeal succeeds, the case would go back to Superior Court, potentially for a jury trial.

University spokesman Keith Nichols said the school doesn't comment on ongoing litigation.

The university gave a variety of reasons for not considering Ginsberg for the post, according to court documents, including a contention that she was overqualified and that her developing interest in Middle Eastern film was a bad fit for the position, which called for a European film specialist. 

Ginsberg's appeal contended those reasons were flimsy excuses.

Her lawsuit said NCSU faculty members had encouraged her to apply for the permanent post before she showed the movie.

"Suddenly, Ginsberg fell out of favor of the committee and was not listed in either the first or the second tier, but moved to the bottom of the 'reject' tier, and was not even granted an interview for the position," her appeal said.

Candidates who were ranked above her included some scholars who aren't even in the field of film studies, the appeal said.
"It is clear that several faculty members involved in the hiring process felt Dr. Ginsberg was too controversial for NCSU," said Rima Kapitan, a Chicago-based lawyer for Ginsberg.

Kapitan said Ginsberg's situation illustrates the risks academics without the protections afforded by tenure face when they speak out even in mild terms on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"There is undoubtedly a risk that professors will see Dr. Ginsberg's case as a warning against engaging students and the public about issues related to Israel and Palestine that are outside of what one hears every day in the mainstream media," Kapitan said.
Gabby McHarg, left, and Anna Rae, right, sing during the rehearsal of Koudjay, an Asian folk song, during their choral music class at Governor's School East at Meredith College in Raleigh, N.C. on Wednesday, July 6, 2011.

Cuts for Governor's School may end summer program for gifted students

BY ROB CHRISTENSEN - Staff writer

RALEIGH–For nearly a half century the Governor's School has been a Tar Heel institution, honing and stretching the minds of some of the brightest high school students in the state.

It is a place where math contests are cool, where clarinet playing is fun, and where conversations on philosophy can last long into the night.

But the Governor's School was placed on political life-support by the legislature last month when it passed a budget that eliminated the $849,000 annual funding for the school, which is actually two academic summer camps - one at Salem College in Winston-Salem and one at Meredith College in Raleigh.
Faced with a $2.5 billion budget shortfall, lawmakers said the Governor's School could continue only if it found alternative funding. But officials say the six-week academic camp, which has historically been free for students, would be put out of reach for many students if the full cost - an estimated $2,100 per student - was charged in fees.

For that reason, June Atkinson, the state schools superintendent, said she will recommend to the State Board of Education today that the Governor's School be discontinued after the current summer session ends.

Atkinson said in an interview Wednesday that she will recommend discontinuing the school "until such point that we can have adequate funds to support its offering to students across the state."

"One major plus for the Governor's School is that it has recognized students with talent without regard to economic status," Atkinson said. "When we move a Governor's School to a fee-based program, it becomes just another program that would be similar to what Duke would offer or what State would offer to students whose parents can pay the fees."

William Harrison, the state board chairman, said he hoped the board could find a way to continue the school "in some form or fashion."

Supporters are discussing whether the program could be rescued by fundraising among alumni or through foundations.

"I think it's important that some of our most able students be able to really extend themselves," Harrison said.

Rep. Bryan Holloway, co-chairman of the education appropriations committee, said the Governor's School is a valuable program, but the legislature faced difficult choices.

"It was not a matter of wanting to cut the Governor's School," said Holloway, a Republican from King. "It was a matter of us wanting to keep teaching and teaching assistant positions."

If the economic climate improves, Holloway said, the legislature possibly could find money during next year's short session to restore funding for the school.

The Governor's School was started in 1963 by then-Gov. Terry Sanford. It was part of a broad range of education initiatives, including the N.C. School of the Arts in Winston-Salem, that gave North Carolina the reputation as "the Dixie Dynamo."
Since its creation, some 31,000 North Carolinians have gone through the program, taking enrichment programs in language, math, the arts, social studies, science and other subjects. In a few instances, three generations of Tar Heels have gone through the program.

Among the second generation students is Sierra Wilson, from rural Fleetwood in Ashe County, who is studying social studies at the Meredith campus this summer. Her mother, Carmen, a schoolteacher, attended in the 1980s and had encouraged her to attend.

The Governor's School was the first of its kind in the country and became a national model, with more than 20 states copying North Carolina. There was initially one Governor's School at Salem College. Eventually a second was added, which is now at Meredith College.

Because of previous state budget constraints, the Governor's School budget was cut from $1.35 million to $849,000 two years ago, and the number of students was reduced from 800 to 600. For the first time, a $500 fee was charged - sometimes paid by the school districts and sometimes by parents.

Getting into the Governor's School is competitive, with as many as 1,900 applications for the 600 slots. Most are rising high school seniors.

Students interviewed at the Meredith campus Wednesday said they gave up vacations at the beach to attend the school for a number of reasons.

Corbin Rhoads of Durham came to polish his French. Sammie Rice of Wake Forest is working in new art forms, going beyond acrylic painting to work with cardboard for the first time. Jacob Schimelman of Mooresville has been discussing the meaning of the Holocaust. Sarah Montoya of Cary has been improving her clarinet skills.

Beyond that, the students say they have been energized by an atmosphere that encourages intellectual exchange.

Nick Webb of Mooresville said he felt challenged by being surrounded by high-achieving students in an environment that encourages learning and discussion.

"It is where you know you are going to have an intelligent conversation," said Sterling Logan of Pittsboro, who is studying math. "It is where people are willing to discuss what they are reading or what is in the news."

The students said they are free to be themselves, to avoid cliques, to find people like themselves with intellectual interests, and to experience living away from home.
"I have discovered myself as an individual," said Chaarushi Ahuja of Greensboro. She said she enjoyed the Governor's School so much that it was difficult to go home during the four-day July Fourth break, despite so-so food and hard beds.

Many students said it would be difficult for them to come to the Governor's School if they were required to pay the full tuition.

"I couldn't possibly be here if I had to pay that much," said Derek Nixon of Edenton. "Our money is kind of tight back home."

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NCAA stands pat on its McAdoo ruling

BY EDWARD G. ROBINSON III - Staff Writer

The NCAA responded to the filing of a lawsuit by a former North Carolina football player, saying in a statement released Wednesday that it stands by its actions to declare Michael McAdoo permanently ineligible as a result of academic misconduct.

A former UNC defensive lineman barred from playing last season, McAdoo filed a lawsuit in Durham Superior Court against the university and the NCAA on Friday, seeking to restore his eligibility and a chance to return to the field for the Tar Heels this fall.

A hearing has been set for July 15.

Wednesday, the NCAA responded to McAdoo's suit in an e-mailed statement released by associate director of public and media relations Christopher Radford:

"We are aware of the litigation," the statement said. "Academic integrity is critically important to intercollegiate athletics and something that is expected from all student-athletes. As a result, the NCAA plans to vigorously defend the process by which penalties related to academic misconduct are ultimately determined by the NCAA Student-Athlete Reinstatement Committee, comprised of representatives from member institutions."

McAdoo is one of seven Tar Heels who missed the entire 2010 season as a result of an NCAA investigation into academic misconduct and improper benefits received by UNC players. The NCAA's Notice of Allegations, delivered to UNC last month, cited nine major alleged violations. A hearing for UNC officials to address the allegations has been scheduled for October.

McAdoo's suit seeks unspecified damages against UNC and the NCAA and names UNC chancellor Holden Thorp as a defendant. The suit argues the NCAA ruled McAdoo permanently ineligible based on inaccurate information. According to the suit, the NCAA did not take into account a university report to the NCAA that said UNC was confident McAdoo was not aware that the assistance he received from university tutor Jennifer Wiley was improper.

(The university Honor Court determined that McAdoo had received improper assistance with citations and a "works cited" list for an African
McAdoo is also seeking an injunction that would allow him to play in what would be his senior season.

Lawyer Bob Orr, who worked with UNC and the NCAA to get a permanent ban on UNC fullback Devon Ramsay rescinded, called the NCAA's response to McAdoo's lawsuit "predictable."

"It's predictable, but... In the long run I don't think the NCAA really wants the public to see exactly how their process ignores the basic rights of these young students," Orr said in an e-mail Wednesday.

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