THE DAILY CLIPS

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Cunningham returns to lead Brody School of Medicine

Former ECU faculty member is believed to be state's first African-American medical school leader.

BY TOM MARINE
The Daily Reflector

The Brody School of Medicine has a new leader.
East Carolina University officials announced Wednesday Dr. Paul R.G. Cunningham has been named dean of the medical school and senior associate vice chancellor for medical affairs.

Cunningham, chosen after a year-long search, is to start work Sept. 15, according to a news release from the University.

He is believed to be the first African-American medical school leader in the state.

"Paul Cunningham is exactly the right choice to lead the Brody School of Medicine," said Chancellor Steve Ballard. "He is a highly accomplished, widely respected physician. He is familiar with the school's mission and with the health-care challenges facing this region and state. "Most importantly, Dr. Cunningham has the leadership skills and strength of character to assure excellence in the Brody School."

Cunningham, a former faculty member and administrator at ECU, returns to the university after six years at the State University of New York Upstate Medical University in Syracuse, where he has been chair of the Department of Surgery.

"The overwhelming feeling is celebration that I am returning to a familiar environment," said Cunningham, who worked for 21 years at ECU before moving to New York. "The Brody School has grown tremendously in the last six years. Personally, I'll be coming in with an open mind."

Cunningham said it is critical to the health of east-
DEAN

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ern North Carolina for the medical school to continue expanding its mission — pro-
ducing primary care doctors, educating minority and dis-
advantaged students and improving the health status of the region.

As dean, he said, his goals will be to expand student en-
rollment, stabilize the school’s finances and increase the di-
versity of the school’s faculty and administration.

Dr. Phyllis Horns, interim vice chancellor for health sci-
ences and interim dean of the medical school, said she is pleased to welcome Cun-
ningham back to the medical school.

“He is extraordinarily well-prepared for this leadership role and brings a wealth of experience that is needed for the school’s future growth,” Horns said. “His insights and partnership will be invaluable to the development of the Health Sciences Division at ECU at a time when the division’s growth is unprecedented, including the addition of the new School of Dentistry.”

Cunningham, a native of Ja-
maica, graduated from medi-
cal school from the University of the West Indies in Jamaica. He completed surgery train-
ing there and at Mount Sinai Hospital, Bronx Veterans Administration Hospital and City Hospital at Elmhurst, all in New York City.

He remained in New York to begin his career as a sur-
geon before moving in 1981 to the eastern North Carolina town of Windsor, in Bertie County. After working at Bertie Memorial Hospital as vice chief of the medical staff, Cunningham joined the ECU faculty full time in 1984 and soon became medical director of trauma.

In 1993, Cunningham rose to professor of surgery and was chief of general surgery at the time he left the Brody School in 2002.

“I think we’re fortunate to have, first of all, someone who’s a passionate, thoughtful and highly competent physician,” said Dr. Walter Pories, a professor and former chair of surgery who recruited Cunning-
ham to ECU in the 1980s. “He has the unusual capacity to pull segments together and unite.

“I can’t think of anybody who is more fitting in these times and the challenges that we face.”

Contact: Tom Marine at tmarine@coxnc.com and 329-
9567.
Gas prices fuel online classes

BY NANCY KELSEY
The Associated Press

BOSTON — Laurel Ranticelli considered driving 40 miles round-trip to take education classes at the University of Massachusetts campus in Amherst. Then she realized she could take the same courses from her computer at home and save on fuel.

"It's gotten out of hand, the gas prices," said Ranticelli, 50, who lives in Springfield. "It's $70 a week. That's pretty close to my groceries."

She joins a growing number of students trying to save gas money by enrolling in online classes. Online enrollment has been steadily growing for years, but college administrators say the spike in gas prices — to more than $4 a gallon — has fueled a surge in students seeking classes without the cost of commuting.

Although most colleges do not track students' reasons for choosing online learning, many administrators cite a clear link with fuel prices.

John Bourne, director of the Sloan Consortium, an organization in Wellesley that studies online education, said he expects gas prices to bring about "a blended classroom — half online, half in class."

At Villanova University, the engineering school has seen a 40 percent increase in online enrollment this summer — even though summer enrollments typically stay flat.

"We've attributed it to the huge gas prices," said Sean O'Donnell, who runs the engineering school's distance-education program.

In many online classes, students log on at their convenience for coursework, which is done mostly through independent study. Students and professors interact through online chats, message boards and e-mail.

Other classes are more traditional, with a mix of students attending in person and online. The on-campus students can speak to their online classmates, and the students online can watch lectures through cameras.
The Day
ACROSS THE STATE

State motor fleet smoking ban OK'd

RALEIGH — North Carolina state employees could soon be barred from lighting up if vehicles owned or leased by the state.

The Senate voted 43-5 on Wednesday to give final legislative approval to a bill that would prohibit smoking in all state-owned or leased cars in the motor fleet starting January 1. The measure now goes to Gov. Mike Easley's desk for his signature.
Our Views

Paint it purple

Budget nods to East Carolina needs

Gov. Mike Easley has yet to affix his signature to the state's budget, but East Carolina University supporters enthusiastically await that pen stroke. The General Assembly's spending plan includes millions for a new dental school and a family medical center that will further solidify its status as a health leader.

Credit should be given to the county's legislative delegation, university leaders and others who helped achieve this victory for this community. North Carolina, and particularly the eastern counties, will surely benefit from this investment in medical care and education.

The General Assembly rarely impresses with the pace of its work, and this year was no exception. With the fiscal year ending June 30, the Legislature used stop-gap spending measures to wrestle with adjustments to the two-year budget approved last year. Gov. Mike Easley pursued ambitious changes that complicated lawmakers' work, a job further complicated by declining revenue projections amid the economic downturn.

Throughout the negotiations, and knowing the obstacles that lawmakers would face in appeasing the governor's desire for an emphasis on increased education spending, fears arose about how interests central to East Carolina would fare.

The school sought funds for the dental school, which earned approval from the University of North Carolina Board of Governors in 2006 and an initial appropriation of $28 million last year. Plans for construction of a family medical center at the Brody School of Medicine hinged on state funding, as did any hope of expanding student enrollment in the medical school.

When House Speaker Joe Hackney and Senate President Pro Tem Marc Basnight announced on Friday that they had reached a budget agreement, East Carolina's concerns proved unfounded. The results were overwhelmingly positive for the school, which stands to receive $107.3 million for projects related to the dental and medical schools.

Construction projects were funded to the tune of $69 million for the dental school and its satellite facilities and $36.8 million for the new Family Medicine Center at the Brody School of Medicine. Lawmakers provided $1.5 million for dental school staffing and planning, and another $1.5 million for expanded enrollment at East Carolina and UNC Chapel Hill.

The county's legislative delegation deserves praise for their commitment to the school's interests in Raleigh, as to East Carolina officials and supporters, whose tireless efforts made this achievement possible.

However, Easley's signature will make North Carolina residents the beneficiaries of that work. With greater access to medical care, the education of dental professionals and the graduation of more doctors, the state will address its health care liability, an area that directly impacts citizens' welfare.

This budget advances East Carolina and the state, and represents a proud moment for this community.
New proposal for treatment of childhood cholesterol sparks debate

BY TARA PARKER-POPE
New York Times News Service

Doctors who sat on the academy's committee on nutrition, which issued the guidelines, agree there are no long-term data on statin use in children. But they say there are adequate safety data to justify the recommendations. One statin, Pravachol, has already been approved by the Food and Drug Administration for use in children as young as 8.

"We extrapolate from the information we have in adults," said a member of the panel, Dr. Nicolas Stettler, an assistant professor of pediatric epidemiology at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. "We know that in adults, decreasing cholesterol and giving some of those drugs decreases risk of heart disease or death. So there's really no reason to think that would be any different in children."

Some recent ultrasound studies of the carotid arteries in high-risk children also show that statin use in children does appear to slow the progression of heart disease, Stettler said.

To be sure, the statin recommendation does not apply to most children. "Among the vast majority of children, this will not even be an issue," said Dr. Daphne Hsu, a chief of pediatric cardiology at Children's Hospital at Montefiore. But it signals a more aggressive approach to treating cardiovascular disease at a young age using drugs that have been studied primarily in adults.

Under the old guidelines, children considered at high risk for heart disease could be given starting at age 10. The new guidelines apply to children as young as 8 with LDL, or "bad," cholesterol of 190 milligrams per deciliter, or those with LDL of 160 and a family history of heart disease or two other risk factors.

Among children with diabetes, drug treatment may begin when bad cholesterol reaches 130.

In addition, the academy recommended that children with a family history of heart disease be screened as early as age 2 and no later than age 10. And by the age of 12 months, if a doctor is concerned about future weight problems, low-fat milk may be recommended.

Although the real numbers are small, some experts worry that the new guidelines will encourage too much reliance on drug therapy rather than more difficult lifestyle changes.

"It will open the door for pharmaceutical companies to heavily advertise and promote their use in 8-year-olds, when we don't know yet the long-term effect on using these drugs on prepubertal kids," said Dr. Alan Greene, a pediatrician in Danville, Calif., and the founder of the popular Web site DrGreene.com.

None of the doctors on the academy's nutrition panel have disclosed any financial relation-
ship with makers of statin drugs. (Its chairman, Dr. Stephen Daniels, did tell The Associated Press that he had worked as a consultant to Abbott Laboratories and Merck, but not on their cholesterol drugs. He was not available for comment on Monday.)

Some childhood obesity experts said they understood the need for the new guidelines, but added that there needed to be more focus on public health changes to address childhood obesity.

"When you have a kid whose cholesterol looks like an overweight 65-year-old, what do you do?" said Dr. David Ludwig, director of the childhood obesity program at Children's Hospital in Boston. "The committee had to balance the risks of treating children with powerful drugs, about which there is limited long-term data, with the risks of not treating children with unprecedented cardiovascular disease risk factors."

Even so, Ludwig says he has some concerns about what the guidelines say about public health. "My concern is what this is saying about society..."

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**STATINS**

Continued from D1

when we are so quick to prescribe drugs for these conditions before having systematically attacked the problem from the public health perspective," he said.

Part of the concern about statin use in children stems from the fact that there is still controversy about how widespread their use should be in adults. Statins, which are the most prescribed drugs in the world, have been shown to lower risk for heart attack and death in middle-aged men with existing heart disease. But there is little evidence they prolong life in healthy men, women or people over 70. And since statins have been around only since the mid-1980s, there is no evidence to show whether giving statins to a child will lower his or her risk for heart attack in middle-age.

Side effects, particularly muscle pain and cognitive problems, also have been a concern in adults, but it is unclear whether children will experience similar problems. "We're talking about potentially treating thousands and thousands of children simply to possibly prevent one heart attack," says Sanghavi. "That kind of risk-benefit calculation is entirely absent from the AAP's policy."

While most of the attention has focused on the drug therapy guidelines, far more parents may be affected by the recommendation that low-fat milk products are appropriate to give to children after the age of 12 months. Historically, low-fat milk has been discouraged for very young children because fat is essential to brain development.

But the academy noted that because children were getting so much fat elsewhere, low-fat milk may be recommended by pediatricians concerned about future weight problems.
Easely raise skirted policy

First lady's pay hike at NCSU leads UNC system to review it and similar contracts.

By Eric Ferreri

A raise of nearly $80,000 that N.C. State gave to first lady Mary Easley has prompted UNC system officials to review how work contract and others like it, school officials said late Wednesday.

The 88 percent raise appeared to violate UNC system policy intended to provide an extra layer of scrutiny to unusually large pay increases.

That policy requires the UNC system's governing board to approve increases topping 15 percent or $10,000.

Easley has held an executive-in-residence position at NCSU since 2005. Last week, the school raised Easley's salary from $90,300 to $170,000.

"It appears to me that this is the size increase that should come before the board," said Hannah Gage, chairwoman of the UNC system's Board of Governors. "We have this policy that in essence checks and balances, so there's a second set of eyes that looks at significant increases. It's in everyone's best interest that governance be carried out consistently across the system."

In a statement released late Wednesday, N.C. State officials said they have "historically" interpreted the system policy incorrectly and have been giving raises without the governing board's approval. The UNC system will therefore look into Easley's contract and all other N.C. State contracts with fixed-term, non-tenure-track faculty members, the statement said.

Mary Easley released a statement saying in part: "I am happy to have my position, duties and responsibilities reviewed."

The system's raise policy does not apply to new hires, and the system allows large raises without board approval for current employees being promoted through a competitive process or to a higher rank.

It isn't clear whether any of those exceptions apply to Easley, for whom the position was created in 2005.

According to two university offer letters — the first from 2005, the second dated May 7 — Mary Easley's job title has not changed. She was and still is a senior lecturer with the "special faculty rank" of executive in residence. From the start, her job was in the provost's office rather than in a specific academic department. She is not eligible for tenure, according to the offer letters, which were provided by the UNC system and N.C. State.

Her starting salary in 2005 was $80,000. The job always has been full time, but is has expanded, officials say now.

In 2005 Easley, a lawyer, was hired to teach three courses and direct a speakers program. Now she will teach two courses, coordinate law education initiatives and create and direct a public safety leadership center.

In 2005, the job carried a three-year term. The expanded job described in the 2008 offer letter is for five years.

The average salary for a full professor at NCSU is $110,000.

Pay increase defended

N.C. State Provost Larry Nielsen defended Easley's pay and position late Wednesday and said her salary is within the range of similar management and law faculty and administrators. "We are delighted and fortunate to have someone of Mrs. Easley's caliber and breadth of experience at N.C. State," Nielsen said.

The pay increase would dramatically raise Easley's state retirement benefits, which are based on an average of an employee's four highest-earning years. The raise came as Easley was in the news for having been part of a state delegation on two trips to Europe that cost taxpayers more than $109,000.

Easley graduated from Wake Forest University and its law school. She was a prosecutor for 10 years and in private practice for eight. She also taught law at N.C. Central University. Since being hired at NCSU, she has directed a speaker series whose participants have included former U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala and South Carolina Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham.

Universities routinely offer executive-in-residence positions to industry leaders looking to spend time in a college classroom. It is particularly common at business schools, though most are part-timers who just teach a course or two. UNC-Chapel Hill and Duke University also have executives in residence.

UNC-CH's Kenan-Flagler Business School has several such people, each of whom teaches one course and earns $7,500, the standard university payment for a course taught by an adjunct professor, said Jim Gray, the business school's director of external affairs.

"Instead of coming from a long academic career, they come from a long business career," Gray said.

"They're extremely valuable to us because of all the real-world experience they bring to the classroom."

by the numbers

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<tr>
<th>15</th>
<th>Percent or $10,000. Level above which the UNC system's governing board must approve raises</th>
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<tr>
<td>88</td>
<td>Percentage of Mary Easley's raise from $90,300 to $170,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>$7,500</td>
<td>Standard per-course payment for an adjunct professor at UNC's Kenan-Flagler Business School</td>
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by eric.ferreri@newsobserver.com or (919) 956-2415
Sexism? Looks like it

There seems to be quite a lot of complaining about Mary Easley regarding her recent raise at N.C. State University (news story, July 3). I did not hear the same cacophony of critics when the chancellors of the major UNC system schools received raises that were far greater than the average mean income of the North Carolina resident.

How is it that the "boys" (read House and Senate conservatives) find it acceptable for chancellors, whose job descriptions did not change, to receive outlandish increases in compensation and the "governor's wife," a professional in her own right, not only takes on additional responsibilities but forgoes the private sector that can be far more lucrative, receives a significant raise in salary along with political and social castigation?

I realize that the state workers deserve greater compensation for their efforts when warranted, but their bargaining arm is no less politically motivated than the House and Senate.

It seems that the naysayers want it both ways! But then I guess I forgot that "she's just a girl!"

Bradley Landon
Raleigh