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The Raleigh News & Observer
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Persistence has paid off this summer for the East Carolina football coaching staff, but there is more to it than that.

The Pirates have added three key elements to their offensive future by garnering verbal commitments from a trio of notable rising high school seniors. And while they can still be recruited by other schools until next February’s national signing day, the three thought enough of their visits to ECU that they’ve already pledged their futures to the Pirates.

Quarterback Kurt Benkert (Cape Coral, Fla./Island Coast High School), running back Jabo Lee (Dillon, S.C./Dillon) and offensive lineman Larry Williams (Wilmington/Laney) all traveled different paths before committing, but each said the influence of head coach Ruffin McNeill and his staff played major roles in them making their colleges choices before playing a snap of their final scholastic campaigns.

“I’ve been on plenty of visits and saw plenty of schools, but when my mother and I went to Greenville, it just seemed like the right place to play and all the coaches showed a lot of love to me,” said Lee, who gave his verbal nod to ECU late in the spring. “After the decision, I was constantly still in touch with the coaches, and they wanted to make sure I was still on their team. They keep me involved.”

Even with television exposure and conference affiliation at an all-time high on the minds of most recruits, staying in Conference USA has done nothing, seemingly, to cool off ECU’s recruiting success.

All three recent commits have and will continue to draw the attention of other schools, but ECU’s coaches, facilities and sales pitch have rung true so far.

“They recruited me the hardest out of everyone,” said Benkert, who committed on July 1. “Probably the main thing was when I went there on my visit — I was on my way to the camp at N.C. State and (ECU) was close so I stopped by to visit there — it was a lot better than I thought it was going to be. I kind of fell in love with the place and the people there, and it was just a cool experience and I could see myself going there the next four years.”
But it’s not always so simple as falling in love.

As was the case with the recruitment of Williams, the reality of depth charts and playing time affected where he landed.

“Before I committed I was thinking about N.C. State, but they don’t need the position I play,” said Williams, primarily an offensive tackle for Laney but who played on the defensive line at the Wolfpack’s camp. “If they were to offer me a scholarship for O-line, I feel like I would be one of their last choices or like somebody else didn’t come through or that they were just offering to offer me. But I feel like ECU, they really want me and they’re not going to offer me and not play me.”

All three players agreed that making their decisions early provides a whole new motivation for their respective senior prep seasons.

“I don’t want to disappoint them when I get there,” said Williams, who knows he’ll have to make some adjustments to adapt to the Pirates’ spread offense. “Right now, I’m just working on my individual drills and keeping up my skills so it can transfer to college when I get there.”

Benkert said he’ll come to Greenville with a great grasp of running the spread, but noted he’ll spend his senior season in Florida working on throwing more with his legs for greater power and trying to take some of the air out of his deep ball.

The three players are united in thinking that they’ll only get better in the time before they check in to their August dorms at ECU next year, and all three appear bent on doing plenty of winning in Greenville.

“It was tough to pick a school. You watch football and you imagine yourself playing for every team but you can only play for one team,” Lee said. “I chose ECU because I know I can play there for four years and we can build something and get ECU on a roll again.”

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Editorial: New manager faces challenges
Wednesday, July 11, 2012

Greenville’s new city manager, Barbara W. Lipscomb, begins work in a little more than a month, and citizens will expect that she hits the ground running. Though it can reasonably be expected that relocation to this area and getting up to speed with the community will take time, the city faces the impending influx of thousands as East Carolina University and Pitt Community College begin their fall semesters.

Atop the list of concerns facing the new manager is the vacancy at the helm of the city’s police department, which has operated without a chief since the departure of William Anderson in February. Though the selection of his replacement should be conducted with great care, it also will require all deliberate speed given the public safety issues that annually emerge when the students return to town.

The unanimous decision of the City Council last month to replace former manager Wayne Bowers with Lipscomb elicited reserved optimism from much of the community. The council was effusive in its praise and excitement about the hire, and certainly the rare expression of unanimity speaks a great deal about the council’s confidence in its new manager. However, there remain a few questions that will only be answered as Lipscomb begins work.

Consider that the new manager comes to Greenville from the town of Casselberry, Fla., with a population — 26,241 by the 2010 Census — far smaller than Greenville. Lipscomb posted an impressive five-year track record of economic growth and development while in the manager’s seat there, but she also was terminated by the city commission in January.

In Greenville, she faces a greater challenge given the diverse population, a unique economic climate and a council routinely divided on even simple matters. The No. 1 problem consistently cited by public officials and residents is crime, and Lipscomb’s responsibility to fill the police chief job speaks directly to that issue. Job creation and economic development rank a close second, but this city cannot hope to have financial success without public safety.

That would be a tall order for any newcomer, and so will it be for Lipscomb. There is reason to believe that the officials elected by this community have
made an informed, visionary decision with her hire, one that promises to reap benefits for years to come. However, that will only be confirmed should Lipscomb succeed in her new job, where the hiring of a new police chief awaits.
There have been council meetings and public forums, and there will be more to come in the faceoff between the Tar River University Neighborhood Association and area landlords over a change in the ordinance that prohibits more than three unrelated persons from living in a home or apartment.

Neighbors and the neighborhood need to be kept up, patrolled and maintained. Whose responsibility is landscaping? Landlords?

The East Carolina University students who live there and the neighborhood association members will continue to co-exist. We all live here temporarily anyway. We still will. There will be more talk, more discussion, more meetings, and all are welcome to provide their views and pray for guidance and wisdom.

God’s will be done.

DEBORAH CHAPMAN
Greenville
A little too much team spirit at UNC

To echo UNC-Chapel Hill’s noted son Andy Griffith, may he rest in peace: What it was, was fraud to help the football – academic fraud, a blight whose full extent has yet to be determined but that already has tarnished the university’s reputation.

Evidence is accumulating that shows a high percentage of student-athletes, notably football players, enrolled in “courses” lacking in structure and supervision. It’s questionable whether the courses, offered within the Department of African and Afro-American Studies, even met or whether legitimate work was performed, although a final paper supposedly was required.

The more that’s uncovered, so far thanks mainly to investigative work by The N&O, the plainer it becomes that UNC-CH had a system designed to let football players remain eligible to compete, but with little regard for proper academic standards.

How far into the athletics department and its supporting cast of academic advisers does responsibility for that system extend? How many blind eyes were turned among professors, deans and administrators who should have noticed that something was amiss?

University officials have been firm in denying any special treatment for athletes – as if making bogus courses available both to athletes and regular students somehow makes things better. Yes, it appears that some regular students did get in on the deal.

Athletes welcome

But The N&O’s Dan Kane has done the accounting to show that athletes benefited disproportionately. A total of 54 courses have been identified “with little or no instruction,” as a chart on Sunday’s front page described them. There were 215 athletes, 26 former athletes and 193 non-athletes in those courses. Professor Julius Nyang’oro was listed as the instructor or was the person who signed the grade rolls in all but nine of the courses.

The largest group of athletes was football players, reflecting the size of the football team. There also were a few basketball players (the team is much smaller) as well as athletes from “non-revenue” sports.
Taking into account students who signed up for more than one course – many offered during abbreviated summer sessions, when football players often are on campus – there were 391 enrollments by athletes, 48 by former athletes and 247 by non-athletes. The pattern is unmistakable. How did it occur?

Nyang’oro, the former chairman of African and Afro-American Studies who was allowed to retire July 1, hasn’t publicly commented. Nor has a former department manager, Deborah Crowder, who was responsible for scheduling courses until she left the university in 2009. As it happens, Kane reports, an enrollment pattern suggesting that seats in phantom summer courses overseen by Nyang’oro were being reserved, primarily for athletes, goes back at least until 1999.

The pattern, which should have set off alarms in the academic chain of command, involved courses with an announced maximum enrollment of a single student. Those who weren’t in the loop would have been deterred from enrolling. In practice, some of those courses wound up with several students – and no set hours or classroom.

**Enrollment games**

Of the 54 courses with negligible instruction, 44 were listed as having a one-student capacity, according to Kane’s front-page Sunday report. Nevertheless, university records showed that 31 of them had enrollments in which athletes made up the majority.

Criminal investigators are looking into payment to Nyang’oro for a course that he did not teach in the expected format – i.e., with actual classes – and into the apparent forgery of other professors’ signatures in connection with classes they say they didn’t teach.

It’s unfortunate, however, that the university itself has been so slow on the uptake, and that the UNC system’s Board of Governors has not been more aggressive in demanding answers from the Chapel Hill campus and making those answers public.

Even if it reawakens the NCAA, which sanctioned the university for “improper benefits” received by football players but did not delve into the evidence of academic misconduct, this scandal must be fully exposed. That’s the only way the university that North Carolinians with good reason have viewed as one of the nation’s best of its kind can restore a reputation sullied by its own misplaced priorities and neglect.
UNC scholar dies in rock-climbing accident

By Kyle Jahner

Many people have climbed mountains. Or played Bach on piano. Or earned a black belt in Taekwondo, edited 200 Wikipedia articles, become an Eagle Scout, studied five years of Latin, scored a near perfect SAT in one try or been admitted to an honors math program at a top-tier college.

Few have done them all. Eric Metcalf did each before he turned 20.

It was all the time he had. Sunday evening, the 19-year-old Cary native fell to his death in a rock climbing accident at Moore’s wall in Hanging Rock State Park, about north of Winston-Salem. But as family members spoke of lost potential and a life tragically cut short, they all said he did more living in his limited time than most.

“Everything he touched turned to gold,” Steven, his brother said.

Rock climbing was a particular passion for a young man with many. He was an experienced climber and had won competitions at UNC Chapel Hill, where he was a sophomore honors student and math major. His athleticism blew away William Metcalf, who counts climbing Mount Elbert – the second tallest mountain in the contiguous U.S. – and the Grand Teton among his fondest memories with his son.

Eric Metcalf had climbed on Moore’s Wall many times, but Sunday around 7:30 p.m., he fell trying to rappel down it.
“It was what he loved to do. He told me numerous times, if he were to ever go out, he’d want it to be doing what he loved,” Steven Metcalf, a graduate of the University of Indiana, said.

The brothers had planned a trip to drive from Cary to California this summer, where Steven would be attending graduate school, and then spend time exploring Yosemite National Park. Instead, their father drove to Bloomington Sunday night to personally break the news Monday morning.

“He was my best friend,” Steven said.

Eric’s parents called him inquisitive and a voracious learner. Asked why he bothered with the Wikipedia articles, he told his family: “Because they were wrong.”

He picked up things, often from his brother – Steven’s degree and graduate school revolves around playing classical music on double bass – and ran with them. Eric earned his black belt in middle school. He started playing piano late, around eighth grade according to his father. His brother said he was “obsessive compulsive” about Sebastian Bach, and a youtube video of him playing Liszt’s “Dreams of Love” has more than 120,000 hits.

“He hated it, he thought it didn’t show how good a player he was. Everyone who heard it was blown away,” his father said.

Kim Berthiaume, his mother, was devastated at the loss.

“He was extraordinary, he was phenomenal. He was a beautiful son,” she said. “The world will be at a loss, because I think he had so, so much more to offer.”
Defensive end Robert Nkemdiche (90) wanted Clemson to offer a scholarship to his close friend and teammate Ryan Carter.

Top Football Recruit Makes a Request, Sparking a Debate

By ADAM HIMMELS BACH

Late on Friday nights last fall, members of the Grayson High School football team in Loganville, Ga., gathered in quarterback Nick Schuessler’s basement and watched tape of the just-completed game. As the Rams, Georgia’s eventual Class AAAAAA champions, gorged on fettuccine Alfredo and steak and potatoes, they relived big hits and contemplated reuniting as college teammates.

“Those are my brothers,” said Robert Nkemdiche, Grayson’s 6-foot-5, 260-pound defensive end who is the top-ranked recruit in the Class of 2013. “I’ve been with them forever.”

In June, after his classmates Wayne Gallman and David Kamara had already decided to play for Clemson, Nkemdiche committed to the Tigers. Soon after, Schuessler, who graduated last spring, was released from his commitment to Mississippi State so he could walk on at Clemson. But Nkemdiche also wanted the Tigers to offer a scholarship to his close friend and teammate Ryan Carter, a 5-foot-10 defensive back.
“I was like, ‘Man, I’ve got to get you up there,’ “ Nkemdiche said. “ ‘I can’t leave you out.’ “

Last week, Nkemdiche created a national stir when he told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution he might consider attending another university if Clemson did not offer a scholarship to Carter, who has said he has offers from Mississippi, Tulane and Arkansas State. In a telephone interview Sunday, Nkemdiche said his commitment to Clemson was firm, regardless of Carter’s status, and that he had not issued an ultimatum to Tigers Coach Dabo Swinney.

Nevertheless, Nkemdiche’s initial comments sparked a debate about the propriety of an amateur recruit essentially engaging in a negotiation for his athletic services. Traditionalists were quick to denounce Nkemdiche, but others, including some who have called for the N.C.A.A. to compensate its athletes, rose to defend the idea of a recruit attempting to capitalize on his market value.

“I know there’s a great deal of discomfort around the idea, and it seems to frighten the heck out of everybody in the college ranks to think we might have high schoolers actually organizing in a way that they understand their rights,” said Dr. Ellen Staurowsky, a professor of sport management at Drexel University. “Once they get into the system, after they sign that scholarship, they don’t have any more capability of negotiating.”

When a player is enrolled, there are restrictions on his ability to transfer to another university, or to hold a paying job. As millions of dollars are generated by the football program, scholarships are the players’ reward. But a high-profile recruit like Nkemdiche wields some fleeting power.

“Robert’s in that catbird seat where he can almost call his shots,” said Chad Simmons, a national recruiting analyst for Scout.com. “I guarantee Clemson is thinking right now, ‘Should we take Ryan Carter tomorrow just to lock in Nkemdiche?’ “

College football is a big-money sport run by coaches, administrators and bowl representatives, and the recruiting process is one of the few phases in which players have leverage. There is no rule, for example, against requesting a scholarship for a high school teammate, though it is certainly not a practice the N.C.A.A. encourages. The organization did not respond to a request for comment. (There are also many examples of a college hiring a coach who has previously worked with a recruit, ostensibly to make it a more attractive destination for the player.)
“He wants to help as many people as he can,” Nick Schuessler’s mother, Stephanie, said of Nkemdiche. “It’s not like Rob’s talking about kids who would never be looked at otherwise. He’s not getting a water boy out there on a full ride.”

Nkemdiche is the son of Nigerian immigrants, and his mother returned to the country several years ago to seek political office, so he has spent much of high school living with his father, who is a doctor in the Atlanta area, and the families of teammates, like the Schuesslers.

Those close to Nkemdiche describe him as a selfless people-pleaser who is not concerned with the spotlight. After games, he gives his wristbands, gloves and towels to young fans. On request, he goes to children’s birthday parties in Loganville to sign autographs and pose for pictures. When he considered selecting a college last May, he delayed his decision so more recruiters would attend team workouts, providing a showcase for his teammates.

And when he ultimately selected Clemson, he did it quietly, without a splashy news conference. Now, he does not want to leave a close friend behind.

“He wants to do right by another player who helped him get to where he’s at,” Staurowsky said. “From that perspective, it seems to say something very good about his character, rather than criticizing him for trying to make his way through this very confusing college sports structure that requires athletes to be subservient.”

But some say that when top recruits urge universities to dole out scholarships or assistant coaching jobs to friends or family members, it fosters a sense of entitlement filled with hazards.

And in this look-at-me-now social media age, there is feeling that recruits will be more aware of the perks others are receiving, and they could turn scholarship requests for friends into an unavoidable part of the process.

“I hope Clemson just keeps recruiting the players they planned to recruit,” Simmons said. “If they have Ryan Carter somewhere on their board and they offer, that’s great, but I don’t think you want to start putting too much power in the kids’ hands.”

Dr. Daniel Gould, director of Michigan State’s Institute for the Study of Youth Sports, said that the onus was ultimately on the universities.

“If a kid goes in with a big head thinking he owns the place, you’d sort of wonder if he’s entitled,” Gould said. “But at the same time, the school can take or leave these kids. Adults are working on the other side of the table.”
Clemson has not publicly discussed Nkemdiche because coaches are not permitted to talk about recruits until they sign binding letters of intent.

So-called package deals in recruiting are not a new phenomenon. The results tend to be mixed.

Running back Jason Gwaltney was one of the most highly regarded recruits in Long Island history, and in 2005 he signed with West Virginia, partly because the Mountaineers offered a scholarship to his half-brother, Scooter Berry.

Gwaltney dealt with injuries, was arrested for underage drinking and played in just six games at West Virginia. Berry, who was considered the lesser prospect, had a solid career as a defensive lineman with the Mountaineers.

In 2010, Tennessee lured the top wide receiver prospect Da’Rick Rogers, who had previously committed to Georgia, partly by giving a scholarship to his best friend and high school teammate, Nash Nance.

Rogers has had disciplinary problems during his first two seasons with the Volunteers, but last season he had 67 catches for 1,040 yards and 9 touchdowns. Nance, meanwhile, has transferred to Hampden-Sydney College, a Division III program in Farmville, Va.

“If the prospect is elite, it means sometimes you take a guy who’s not an elite prospect, too,” said the former Louisiana State and Indiana coach Gerry DiNardo, who is now an analyst. “You rationalize, ‘Hey, I’ll take the other guy, because if I sign 25 guys, they’re not all going to be great players anyway.’"

A player who receives a scholarship because of a high-profile friend’s request can enter an uncomfortable situation, with some feeling that their place on the team might be unearned.

Carter said he was flattered by Nkemdiche’s original statement, and he said he would probably accept a scholarship offer from Clemson “on the spot.” But he would not want his roster slot to be perceived as a gift.

“I think about that,” he said. “If it’s somewhere I can play, then it’s somewhere I can play.”

Added Grayson Coach Mickey Conn: “Ryan wants to go and earn a spot. He doesn’t want to just get to a school because he’s friends with Robert.”
University of Virginia Rector Helen Dragas and President Teresa Sullivan walk together from the president's residence to the Board of Visitors meeting where Sullivan was reinstated. (Norm Shafer for The Washington Post)

**Are Va. college trustees groomed for activism?**

By Daniel de Vise

Last October, the president of an organization that advocates for governing boards to play a stronger leadership role at universities spoke at an orientation for new trustees of public universities in Virginia.

Among those attending the one-day orientation: Helen Dragas, rector of the University of Virginia.

A spokeswoman for the conference organizer said she didn’t know whether Dragas attended the one-hour session led by Anne Neal, president of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni.

Dragas sought last month to oust U-Va. President Teresa Sullivan, then reversed her position. The rector, who chairs the U-Va. governing board, declined to comment on the fall board orientation.
If nothing else, the cast of characters at the annual Board of Visitors Orientation by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) provides a glimpse at some of the major players in the state’s higher education system.

University trustees are known as “visitors” in Virginia and appointed by the governor, currently Robert F. McDonnell (R). He attended the Oct. 17 orientation, delivering remarks that apparently were not preserved on the Web for posterity.

Another speaker was Thomas Farrell, a U-Va. alumnus and former U-Va. rector, or leader of the governing board. Farrell chairs McDonnell’s higher education commission. Farrell is also chief executive of the Dominion power company, and he has been involved in Virginia higher education governance for many years.

Dragas and former U-Va. vice rector Mark Kington, who collaborated on the attempted ouster of Sullivan, both serve on Dominion’s board of directors.

Farrell’s presentation, titled The Future of Higher Education in Virginia, touched on the imperative to “create a sustainable funding model” to replace lost state subsidies at U-Va. and other public institutions, and on the need to deliver “cost savings and affordable new pathways to degree attainment” in the state. Farrell also addressed the need for “technology-enhanced instruction” and an expansion in online education offerings.

I don’t know whether Dragas attended Farrell’s talk. Some of his themes — particularly the need for cost-savings and the urgency of online education — certainly resurfaced in her public statements last month about the need for dramatic change at U-Va.

Seats on boards of visitors are often awarded to people with personal or political connections to a governor or the governor’s party. Ideally, board members are successful businesspeople or organizational leaders who can bring some wisdom to the governance of a large public university.

But they often arrive on the board knowing relatively little about how a university functions. Hence, the annual one-day orientation session, offered as a quick primer on how the institutions and their governing boards are supposed to function. Dragas attended the orientation to participate in a panel on “trusteeship”.

The 2011 orientation featured a PowerPoint presentation by Neal of ACTA, a nonprofit founded in 1995 as a counterbalance to perceived liberal leanings among faculty and college presidents.
ACTA targets what it terms excessive political correctness on campus. It is best known for calling out universities that fail to require students to learn particular subjects, such as math, science and history, through its annual report What Will They Learn? The theory behind the report is that many colleges have become so sensitive to cultural diversity that they are unwilling to impose specific general-education requirements on their students.

Neal and her group urge governing boards and alumni to get actively involved with their presidents and faculty, even if it means exercising their power to remove a president from the job.

Her presentation included a quote from Benno Schmidt, former president of Yale:

“Change in institutional strategy can only come from trustees. … Reviewing an institution’s academic strategy and deciding whether change is called for is a trustee’s most important responsibility.”

Her PowerPoint noted that U-Va. requires students to take science and foreign language, but the university does not specifically require courses in math, composition, history, economics or literature.

She also noted that college seniors are far more familiar with Beavis and Butthead than with James Madison or George Washington, invoking another ACTA theme.

Neal spoke of the budding movement to hold colleges accountable for value. She cited research suggesting that students don’t spend very much time studying, and evidence that students may not actually learn very much over the course of college.

Neal is an interesting character in the U-Va. drama: her organization is one of a very few across the higher education community that voiced any measure of support for Dragas and her allies when they forced the resignation of Sullivan in an action announced June 10. The board eventually reversed that action, unanimously voting to reinstate her on June 26.

In an op-ed published in this newspaper, Neal alluded to a report her organization had released that illustrated the rising costs of a Virginia public college education:

“The old model of increasing budgets and raising tuition — without cutting costs — is unsustainable,” she wrote. “Students and their families are suffering. The in-state tuition for U-Va. already takes up nearly 20 percent of the median household income.
“That’s why U-Va. should be viewed as ground zero in a national struggle for excellent and affordable education. While the university board’s opaque process in removing Sullivan is regrettable, the board is right to be concerned about the direction of the university.”

Neal did not mention Dragas by name. But her perspective is not too far removed from that of the rector, who justified Sullivan’s ouster as a necessary intervention to rescue U-Va. from what she viewed as an increasingly dismal financial model. Dragas suggested that rising costs and dwindling state subsidies call for hard choices and, presumably, significant cuts, and she faulted Sullivan for moving too slowly to address that issue.

Neal advocates for strong governing boards; she opposes listless, powerless, “potted plant” trustees who feel helpless to question the presidents they hire.

I e-mailed Neal. In response, she wrote, “I believe that the objection you encounter to ACTA’s role stems from those who like the status quo to be free of accountability or scrutiny. . . . What is ideological about a focus on quality and affordability? It is threatening to institutions that don’t want to change; but I urgently believe that is what has to happen if we want to maintain a higher education system that is – as higher education leaders are wont to say – the ‘envy of the world’.”

Dragas seems to share Neal’s enthusiasm for empowering university governing boards. In her remarks at U-Va. on the day Sullivan was reinstated, Dragas acknowledged bringing about a “near-death experience” at her alma mater. But she also suggested that her intervention had brought new strength to a panel that “used to be an irrelevant group to most of the U-Va. family”.

Neal’s participation in the fall orientation has caused a minor stir among Virginia faculty. One professor at James Madison University wrote in an e-mail that “the support ACTA apparently enjoys within the McDonnell administration may have been an important precipitant that convinced Ms. Dragas that her actions would enjoy support.”

This professor asked to remain anonymous. “Speaking out against boards, SCHEV, ACTA, and Richmond could have some very real consequences for my career,” he wrote.

I asked Kirsten Nelson, spokeswoman for SCHEV, about Neal’s talk.

Nelson said Neal has spoken only once at a board orientation. In 2010, SCHEV brought in the leader of a different group, the Association of Governing Boards, an organization that is regarded as more ideologically neutral and is certainly far less critical of universities.
“We try to ask different people in different years, with different perspectives,” she said. The orientation session is an unfunded mandate, and SCHEV could not afford to hold one in 2009. But new board members did get an orientation day in 2008. One attendee was Dragas, who was new to the U-Va. board that year.
A New Market for Schools

More U.S. Business Programs Add Specialized Degrees, but Whom Does It Benefit?

By MELISSA KORN

U.S. business schools are trying to master a new corner of the market: specialized master's degrees.

The courses in topics such as management, accounting and analytics, generally lasting one year and aimed mainly at college graduates with little or no work experience, have a decadeslong history at many European and other international schools.

But the programs have gained particular traction in the U.S. recently, more than doubling student enrollment to 52,014 in the 2010-2011 academic year, compared with the 2006-2007 year, according to the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business. (Demand is still higher outside the U.S., where member schools enrolled 84,134 in the 2010-2011 year.)

The benefit for schools is obvious—more tuition revenue and a critical mass of students to entice recruiters when interest in traditional M.B.A. programs is declining. But the long-term value for students remains unclear, as graduates' salaries and job titles often look very similar to those assigned to new hires coming straight from undergraduate schools.

Among the business schools leading the way is University of Rochester's Simon Graduate School of Business.
Simon started offering two specialized master's degrees about 20 years ago, and began expanding its slate of offerings in 2005 with a marketing degree. Then came medical management, accounting and general management in quick succession. The school now offers about a dozen specialized master's programs, including two slated to launch this fall.

Applications for the specialized master's degrees are up more than 50% since 2009, and there are now more students in those programs than in the full-time M.B.A., according to Simon.

Simon is seeing benefits: In the 2011-2012 academic year, gross tuition revenue was expected to hit $43.1 million, with specialized master's contributing 28.1%, or $12.1 million. Tuition for the master of science programs start at $53,516 for the full-time program and $51,204 for part-time. The average tuition for the full-time M.B.A. program is $48,007 a year.

"We've been pleasantly surprised by how strong this market is," says Mark Zupan, Simon's dean.

Successes like those at Simon have spurred more schools to expand their offerings. University of Texas at Austin's McCombs School of Business will add an M.S. in finance to its roster this summer and is in talks to begin a degree in data analytics as well. New York University's Stern School of Business recently announced a new master's in business analytics, with classes scheduled to begin next spring. It already offers master's in risk management and global finance.

As for the students, one of the biggest arguments for pursuing graduate study is the hoped-for salary bump that often comes with an advanced degree. But without prior work experience, many specialized master's students land positions comparable in salary and job function to those of undergraduates. (And that's not taking into account the additional $50,000 or so they may incur in student debt.)

"Students in these programs without full-time work experience need to understand that they're going to be candidates for entry-level professional opportunities," says Gary Hochberg, director of specialized master's programs at Washington University in St. Louis's Olin Business School, which offers focused master's degrees in accounting, finance and supply chain management. "They're not going to leapfrog over M.B.A.s." (M.B.A. students generally work for a few years before going back to school, so they are hired into more senior positions.)
In fact, the students may not even leap over their peers without advanced degrees. Graduates from Olin's bachelor's in business administration program saw a median base salary of $60,250 in 2011, more than those in the accounting and supply chain master's programs. Those students received median base salaries of $55,000 and $56,000, respectively. Master's in finance graduates earned a median $65,000.

"The master's in management students will look to the marketplace a lot like a good undergrad," says Robert Mittelstaedt, dean of Arizona State University's W.P. Carey School of Business, which offers master's degrees in accounting, taxation, real-estate development and information management, and is introducing a new master's in management for nonbusiness majors this year.

At the Boston Consulting Group, master's candidates without prior experience generally land associate positions—same as undergraduates, says Jennifer Comparoni, head of Americas recruiting. That population has grown but still makes up less than 5% of the consultancy's entering class.

There is one discipline where the specialized master's has a particular draw: accounting. More than 40 states have adopted a requirement for certified public accountants to have 150 credit hours before sitting for their exam, and most undergraduate accounting programs don't fulfill that requirement. That hours gap has created a ripe new market for the advanced degrees.

Paula Loop, U.S. and Global Talent Leader at accounting firm PwC, says the proportion of new hires with specialized master's comprises about 40% of the 3,500-person annual class of new assurance and tax-practice hires, although those with the advanced degree are hired as "associates," the same positions as undergraduates.

Still, not everyone is keen on specialized master's degrees. University of Iowa's Henry B. Tippie College of Business has shied away from such programs, deciding in the early 1990s that they were too much of a distraction from the core M.B.A., says Gary Fethke, a management and economics professor and former Tippie dean. That school's only specialized master's offering is in accounting.

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