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UNCA cuts jobs, research centers

By Josh Boatwright

UNC Asheville is cutting eight current staff jobs and closing two scientific research centers in response to an expected 10 percent reduction in state funding, university officials announced Monday.

Half of the layoffs are tied to the research institutes. The university is cutting an additional 35 staff positions, transferring some employees to essential departments and eliminating vacant spots. No faculty jobs were cut.

“We are trying to manage significant budget cuts while preserving the quality of UNC Asheville and its core mission of teaching and learning,” UNCA Chancellor Anne Ponder said in a statement.

North Carolina universities have been planning for ever deepening cuts since January, when the officials warned of up to 7 percent reductions.

Western Carolina University in March announced cuts of 31 current jobs and the elimination of another 47 vacant positions in preparation for an 8 percent reduction. The university also closed three centers focused on special research and instruction.

WCU does not plan to make further cuts to personnel, Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance Chuck Wooten said.

UNCA has left numerous vacant faculty and staff positions unfilled over the past year and taken other cost-cutting measures to make up for budget shortfalls. Many adjunct faculty positions have also been cut, with full-time professors being reassigned to focus on core classes.

The university uses 84 percent of its state funding for personnel, and a 10 percent reduction means making up for a loss of about $4 million, Ponder said. The total of 43 positions being eliminated for the 2009-2010 fiscal year will reduce university expenses by $1.65 million, she said.

The Environmental Quality Institute and the Mossbauer Effect Data Center were two research centers university officials deemed nonessential to student education.

The institute analyzes water quality for nearby municipalities, a task that will likely be passed on to private labs when it closes within the next year. Three staff members at the institute have been laid off and another has been transferred.

At the Mossbauer center, researchers compiled data about a specialized nuclear effect and published an international scientific journal. One staff member has been laid off and another was reassigned.
The nation's economic crisis is forcing schools to take unprecedented steps to survive: laying off teachers, cutting bus services, eliminating summer classes. But more drastic measures may not be far off. Could the next step in saving American education be Introduction to Nutrition, Sponsored by McDonald's or PricewaterhouseCoopers' Financial Accounting 101?

Don't laugh. The City College of San Francisco is considering selling the naming rights to nearly 800 endangered classes. The 105,000-student institution gets most of its funding from the state government, which is grappling with an estimated $27 billion budget deficit. The school has already imposed a freeze on new hires and cost-of-living adjustments to employees' salaries. Faced with an estimated $25 million budget deficit, the school's chancellor, Don Griffin, has proposed eliminating 800 of the school's roughly 9,800 classes for this fall. Last month, however, he proposed a novel potential solution: saving the classes with corporate sponsorships of up to $6,000 per semester.

So far, the reaction in San Francisco has been mixed. Some officials at the college view the proposal as unseemly, but acknowledge its potential practicality in the absence of sufficient government funding. "We have to go after private money, but in a thoughtful way that doesn't compromise our values — or let the public sector off the hook," says Milton Marks, president of the college's board, which is expected to review a formal proposal later this month.

Even if corporations can be enlisted in the plan, there may not be enough time to save any classes for this fall. But the proposal has got some teachers thinking. Fred Chavaria, chair of the college's Administration of Justice and Fire Science department, expects four of his classes to be cancelled this fall. He is considering approaching local firemen and police officers' associations — hardly flush with cash — to sponsor endangered classes like Concepts of Law and Terrorism & Counterterrorism. "We're in a crisis," he says, while adding, "I'm not going to take anything from a gun manufacturer."
Many schools, of course, have long used corporate partnerships to finance buildings and other facilities. From Fargo, N.D., to Worcester, Mass., banks and other companies have bought the naming rights to public libraries and high school football fields. The University of Wisconsin at Madison offers doctors and other health-care professionals an online continuing-education course on menstrual disorders that is funded by the pharmaceutical giant Bayer. While the class's title doesn't carry Bayer's name, the company's drugs are mentioned in the course, and the school fully acknowledges the arrangement in course materials.

One school that has been especially aggressive in corporate sponsorships is Central Piedmont Community College in Charlotte, N.C. Shortly after taking over as Piedmont's president in the early 1990s, Tony Zeiss faced a budget crisis. "You either figure out how to generate alternative revenue streams, or complain," he recalls thinking. "We decided to become entrepreneurial." He sold the naming rights to laboratories, buildings and eventually four of the school's six campuses. Then he sold the naming rights to individual classes. But it became less time consuming and more profitable to solicit sponsorships for entire academic programs. One result: the Christa A. Overcash Associate Degree Nursing Program. The program works mainly off the interest from the former nurse's initial $500,000 investment. Sponsors "don't get that involved" in shaping the curriculum, says Zeiss, because "we have our own accrediting standards." In recent months, Zeiss has announced other joint ventures with local companies. The results: Introduction to Motorsports Pit Crews, Pit Crew U and the Cox Schepp Construction Academy. So far, the San Francisco proposal doesn't appear to have generated serious corporate interest.

See pictures of the evolution of the college dorm room.

Read "Battling Extremism with Education."

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http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1909937,00.html
Teaching scholarships ongoing despite vague job outlook in state

*Officials say need for teachers remains, even in tough economy*

By TED STRONG
Staff Writer
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In Raleigh, the state is considering cutting thousands of teachers by increasing class sizes. At the same time, state and local officials are offering scholarships to encourage students to become teachers.

But officials say the situation isn’t as bad as it seems at first blush.

“There is some stress out there among teaching fellows, as there is with non-teaching fellows,” said Jo Ann Norris.

But the schools will still need teachers, she said.

Norris, as associate executive director of the Public School Forum, administers the N.C. Teaching Fellows Scholarship Loan Program. She’s been with the program since its inception in 1986.

Many teaching fellows come to work in Beaufort County, which hosts tours for them while they’re in school, said Beaufort County Schools spokeswoman Sarah Hodges. And many students from Beaufort County go into the program, as well.

Take Marina Bonner of Edward, who graduated in May.

She had wanted to teach since the fifth grade, when her teacher was Ron Clark. Clark taught in Harlem after leaving Beaufort County and later won widespread recognition for his work with disadvantaged children.

He has become something of a celebrity for his work, appearing on the Oprah Winfrey Show and serving as the subject of a made-for-TV movie, in which “Friends” television show star Matthew Perry played Clark.

To help realize her goal, Bonner took the same path Clark had 15 years earlier — she went to East Carolina University as a North Carolina Teaching Fellow, pledging to teach in North Carolina in exchange for financial help with school.

Now Bonner has seven years to put in four years of teaching.

Each year a teaching fellow works removes $6,500 of debt, Norris said. In lieu of working to remove the debt, students can pay off their balance, she said.

The students in Beaufort County’s Grow Our Own program face the same four-year obligation, though the program, which is only two years old, doesn’t have any graduates yet.
"We're hopeful that by the time they get out, maybe this will be better," Hodges said.

Bonner did manage to find a job — though she hasn't signed anything yet. To do that, she had to make some concessions, she said.

"You had to look in places that you normally would not have considered," Bonner said.

She added later, "It's going to be at least an hour commute, anywhere I go."

Bonner said she thought being a teaching fellow helped her with the search process.

"I think being a fellow definitely helps," Bonner said.

And she said she was confident she would be able to work off her obligation.

"The state office is aware of what's going on, and they're not going to leave us high and dry," she said.

Norris said the state office will have a better handle on the situation in October, when it will know how many of its teachers actually found work.

In the meantime, she said, many young teachers have been told their contracts won't be renewed as school systems shudder in anticipation of budget cuts. But many of those positions are likely to be re-added, she said.

"We're still in that no-man's land where local school systems have no idea what their teacher allotments are going to be," she said.