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ECU program uses biofeedback to combat PTSD

By Mark Rutledge
The Daily Reflector
Wednesday, July 14, 2010

Staff Sgt. Armand Mayville was into his 10th year as a Marine when he was deployed to Iraq in 2007. An injury he suffered there has left a cloud over his desire to complete his military career. As Mayville, 36, was leading his civil affairs team back to its base in Fallujah, an unknown vehicle approached the convoy. When warning flares failed to convince the driver to stop, the next deterrent to be used was a non-lethal flash grenade. But the ignited grenade accidentally landed on the floor of the vehicle in which Mayville was riding.

A fellow marine picked up the grenade and it went off in his hand, about six inches from Mayville’s left ear.

“I don’t remember the next 10-15 seconds,” Mayville said. “It gave me a perforated eardrum and a grade-three concussion.”

Mayville was reassigned to a desk job in Iraq, but his problems were just beginning.

“I started having a lot of trouble sleeping,” he said. “I was fatigued all the time. I had headaches, ringing in my ears and was very sensitive to light.”

After the Richlands resident came home to his wife and two young daughters in March 2008, there were signs of deeper issues. “I was non-social,” he said, “quick to anger and I started having family problems.”

He was diagnosed with depression and given medications. The drugs helped, but he started to gain weight, which can threaten the ability to remain in the Marines. Subsequent medical examinations resulted in diagnoses of traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Since last October, Mayville has been a member of the Wounded Warriors Battalion East at Camp Lejeune, where he lives with fellow marines recovering from similar injuries.

Mayville is one of 15 wounded warriors participating in training and group therapy at East Carolina University’s Psychophysiology Lab and Biofeedback Clinic in the College of Health and Human Performance. The training services began in February 2008 through a cooperative agreement between the university and the U.S. Marine Corps.

Traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder are signature wounds of the Iraq War and most of the Marines involved in the biofeedback training at ECU are dealing with both.

Carmen Russoniello, director of the lab and clinic, is uniquely qualified to connect with the Marines on a personal level. Aside from being a noted researcher and expert in the areas of biofeedback, therapeutic fun and post-traumatic stress disorder, Russoniello is a Marine combat veteran who spent a year as a machine gunner in Vietnam.

He says that for seven years after his time in Vietnam, he dealt with the classic problems associated with PTSD.

“I felt lost,” he said, “and like nothing was right.”

When he describes those and other feelings to groups of Marines entering his program, Russoniello said heads always begin to nod.
“They say, ‘That’s me. That’s exactly what I’ve been experiencing.’”
Russoniello says PTSD comes from the way the brain deals with traumatic experiences.
“It’s not a psychological problem,” he said. “It’s a shock to the autonomic nervous system. The
system has been shocked by the trauma, and humans acclimate to that.”
Once a person with PTSD understands there is an imbalance with regard to things like heart rate
and breathing, Russoniello said they can take steps toward controlling their own symptoms and
rehabilitation.
“When a person is exposed to extreme trauma, these chemicals are released,” he said. “This
happens in the brain. It’s not a conscious process, it’s a reaction to what’s going on in the body
biochemically.
“The body doesn’t lie. The brain is a master at it, but the body will give you up every time.”
Using several biofeedback training methods, combined with a circuit-training format, the
program provides improved control of the central and autonomic nervous systems.
Through simple breathing exercises and things like video games, Russoniello said people with
PTSD can gain a lot of control over their symptoms.
While the program has been fully supported by ECU, Russoniello said its success increasingly is
being recognized and supported by the Department of Defense as well. Russoniello is heading an
upcoming study that could lead to a video game that military personnel can carry in their cell
phones. The hope is that the games will enable the military’s men and women to recognize and
deal with traumatic stress issues during deployments.
“People can convince themselves that this works because they can see it,” he said. “They’re
training themselves. They own it. That’s highly important.”
As for Mayville, he doesn’t sense total ownership yet, but he’s working on it.
“I do see results,” he said. “I think if I try a little harder, I’ll be able to take more control and get
off of the meds.”
With 13 years of service, Mayville wants most of all to continue his military career. Knowing that
might not happen, however, he’s taking some college courses toward an engineering degree.
“I want to stay in the (Wounded Warriors) program,” he said. “Right now I’m looking another
year of active service.”
If Mayville gets a clean bill of health and the Marines want to deploy him again, he says he would
go.
“I wouldn’t say no,” he said.

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Using nothing more than concentration, Staff Sgt. Armand Mayville controls a modified game of space invaders in the Biofeedback Clinic in East Carolina University’s Belk Building on Tuesday.  
Justin Falls/The Daily Reflector

Professional Counseling major Bennie Stover applies electrodes to Staff Sgt. Armand Mayville.  
Justin Falls/The Daily Reflector

Wearing a clip to monitor his heart rate, Cpl. Daniel Printz watches his vital signs being recorded on a computer program called Heart Tracker in the Biofeedback Clinic on Tuesday.  
Justin Falls/The Daily Reflector
Costly campuses

For UNC system students, the tuition squeeze grows tighter as a proud tradition takes another hit.

With the General Assembly's decision to let tuition rise throughout the University of North Carolina system, and the system's quick embrace of that option, higher education in the state moves closer to a user-fee model.

That's not a good path to take, given the profound public interest in keeping college gates open to all who have the mettle and motivation to attend.

The costs of a public university education are bound to be subsidized to some extent. But the trend here unwisely puts more of the burden on students' own shoulders.

The tuition increases -- $750 a year at UNC-Chapel Hill and N.C. State -- are a response to the deep recession that has ripped holes in the state government revenue base and forced the UNC system to absorb large spending cuts. They also represent a failure of imagination and political nerve.

North Carolina's core premise has been that keeping tuition low is in the interests not only of individual families but also of the state as a whole. There's no crystal-clear mark on the cost curve that defines what is affordable and what isn't. It is certain, though, that higher tuition puts more pressure on families who are neither poor enough to qualify for financial aid nor wealthy enough to pay without worrying about it.

Some students will go more deeply into debt. Others may decide they need to take jobs, which can interfere with studies. And others may conclude that an education whose total costs are pushing $20,000 per year is simply out of reach.

Is it really? Families that understand how important a college education can be to a young person's life prospects (yes, it's a tough job market now but these things go in cycles) will scrimp, save and sacrifice to make it happen.

There's this consolation as well: North Carolina's public universities can be expected to remain among the nation's most affordable. By one measure, as recently as 2007-08 they were the most affordable in the South. That measure was the percentage of median annual income required to pay the median university tuition and fees, as calculated by the Southern Regional Education Board. Our figure was 16.9 percent, and the next lowest was 20.6 percent in Georgia. South Carolina came in at 30.9 percent and Virginia at 37.0 percent.

Still, legislators could have kept better faith with this state's worthy tradition if they had looked to other ways of plugging revenue gaps besides soaking university students. A more efficient tax structure could generate more revenue and do it more equitably.

It was easier to jack up tuition -- again -- than to undertake the kind of tax system overhaul that would enable the state to better meet its responsibilities.

Tuition at UNC-CH this coming year will be $4,816. There and elsewhere, most students will find a way to meet their expenses. A few won't. But even if all do, North Carolina is slipping away from its grand commitment to spread the costs of higher education as widely as possible, for the good of all.
UNC tuition hikes finalized

Submitted by eldrew on 07/15/2010 - 09:47

As you may have heard, tuition is going up in 2010-11 for public university students.

At UNC-Chapel Hill and N.C. State, rates will rise $750, while at N.C. Central University, tuition goes up $435. These increases are on top of smaller cuts approved in February that vary by campus but are as much as $200 for UNC-Ch students and $150 for NC State students. That means students on the Chapel Hill campus will pay $650 more in the fall, and NCSU students will pay $900 more.

Across the system, the average increase is $444, according to a statement released this morning by UNC President Erskine Bowles’ office.

Here’s the text of the statement:

After consultation with the chancellors and UNC Board of Governors, UNC President Erskine Bowles today approved campus requests for supplemental tuition increases for the 2010-11 academic year. These supplemental increases—authorized by a special provision in the 2010-11 state budget and averaging $444 per year—will be used to help offset the impact of state budget cuts and protect academic quality.

These increases are in addition to tuition and fee changes for 2010-11 previously approved by the UNC Board of Governors. As a result, in-state undergraduates will see an average 15.5% increase in tuition and required fees for the coming year. On every UNC campus, at least half of the revenues from the initial tuition increase and 20% of revenues from the supplemental increase will be targeted to need-based financial aid. [Summaries of tuition and fee changes for all UNC campuses (also attached) have been posted on the University of North Carolina website at www.northcarolina.edu]

Even as the University has absorbed budget cuts totaling $575 million over the past three years, UNC campuses have attempted to sustain academic quality and to keep tuition as low as practicable. On every UNC campus, tuition and fee rates for North Carolinians are either the lowest or next to the lowest among public peer institutions.

Over the past three years, tuition for in-state undergraduates has increased, on average, by 5.2%, 1.2%, and 2.9%, respectively. These increases were very low when compared to any other university system in the nation. Even with the increases approved today, tuition and fees on every UNC campus will remain in the bottom quarter of its public peers.

In an effort to shield academic instruction from the impact of repeated budget cuts, the University cut administrative expenses last year by 23%, abolished nearly 900 administrative positions, froze salaries, and redoubled efforts to raise external funds. UNC campuses now face another $142 million in cuts to their operating budgets and have largely exhausted their ability to absorb additional administrative cuts.

(Photos courtesy of unphotonow.com)

To help the University protect the quality of a UNC education, the 2010 NC General Assembly authorized each UNC campus—subject to the President’s approval—to implement a supplemental tuition increase of up to $150 to help offset the impact of state budget cuts.

Supplemental increases approved today range from $250 to $750; five UNC campuses have opted to phase in the increase over two years. All revenues generated must be used to protect academic quality and provide need-based financial aid.

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Eye on the ball
By Ronnie Woodward
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Pat Watkins was a rookie for the Cincinnati Reds in 1997 when he got a valuable lesson from one of baseball's greatest players.

"See the ball and hit it," Hank Aaron told the former East Carolina star before a game at Atlanta's Turner Field. "Baseball is hard enough. Don't make it any harder than it already is."

Watkins, who is the only ECU baseball player to ever be drafted in the first round, reiterated that same message Wednesday night to the hundreds of kids who will begin the Cal Ripken 8U Southeast Regional tournament in Winterville today. Watkins told the youngsters to keep baseball in perspective and use it as a tool in life.

"Baseball should be used as a tool to get other things out of life," Watkins said. "Working as a team, sportsmanship, work ethic and learning how to deal with failure can all be learned through baseball. Baseball is a failure game."

Baseball was Watkins' third option growing up.

He said he enjoyed basketball the most and was the most successful at football. He was headed to Appalachian State to play quarterback just weeks before his freshman year of college when then-ECU baseball coach Gary Overton got a call from Garner football coach Hal Stewart telling him to take a chance on Watkins.

Overton accepted.

"I had a little bit of scholarship money left, so I took a shot at him," said Overton, who is the winningest baseball coach in ECU history after collecting 427 victories from 1985-1997. "It was the only time I offered a kid without actually seeing him play in high school."

The gamble paid off.

Watkins struggled during his first two seasons with the Pirates — hitting .268 as sophomore — but he exploded his junior year, hitting .445 with 19 home runs and 57 RBIs on his way to earning first-team All-America honors.

"ECU was a great place for me to thrive athletically and academically," said Watkins, who now lives in Wake Forest and owns a restaurant in Garner. "East Carolina gave me the platform to succeed in life. I came here as a 17-year-old kid and left as a first-round draft pick because they gave me the tools."

Watkins was drafted by the Reds with the 32nd pick of the 1993 Major League Baseball amateur draft.
“He was the best athlete I ever coached,” Overton said of the outfielder. Watkins’ stint in the Major Leagues didn’t last long, which he reminded the youngsters of on Wednesday. He logged 195 at-bats from 1997-1999.

“Baseball will be taken away from everybody at some point,” Watkins said. “Hopefully everybody here plays in the big leagues, but chances are they’re not.”

Pool play in the tournament will take place today and Friday; single-elimination games will begin Saturday and the championship game will be played Sunday. The tourney consists of 20 teams from six different states.

Southern Pitt will play today at 12:30 and 3:30 p.m. Winterville plays at 2 and 6:30.

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Skinner invited to trials

Thirty-two players were invited to attend the USA Baseball 2010 Women's National Team Trials at the National Training Complex in Cary from Aug. 2-5, including one North Carolina native.

Infielder Brionna Skinner of Pittsboro is competing for one of the 18 spots on the women's national team, which will be announced at www.usabaseball.com upon the completion of the trials.

Skinner graduated from Northwood High School in 2007 after playing on both the basketball and softball teams. She earned a $500 scholarship from the North Carolina Softball Coaches Association and currently attends East Carolina but does not play for the Pirates.

The 18 players chosen for the national team will compete in the IBAF Women's Baseball World Cup in Venezuela from Aug. 12-22. Eleven players from the 2008 national team, which finished third in the World Cup, return for the 2010 trials.

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The Washington Post

Education grants aim to bolster health-care ranks

By Darryl Fears
Washington Post Staff Writer
Tuesday, July 13, 2010; A02

It is a sign of the economic times: Nursing students at Howard University work part-time jobs and still cannot keep up with tuition. "We have experienced good students having to withdraw from the program because of lack of resources. When parents lose jobs, students can't continue," said Mary Hill, associate dean in the school's division of nursing.

At the start of the month, the game changed. Howard received $1.5 million from the Obama administration to train student nurses and others in sciences such as radiology and occupational therapy. The award was a fraction of $96 million in grants doled out by the Department of Health and Human Services on July 1 to hundreds of health-profession programs at colleges and universities nationwide.

The money is especially intended to increase the racial diversity of the health-care workforce by keeping minority students in health classes, HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius said in a statement. Reports have estimated that the average nursing student leaves school with nearly $50,000 in loan debt.

"The health professions workforce in the United States does not reflect the population it serves," Sebelius said. "These funds will help support the education of disadvantaged students who are more likely to go on to serve in underserved areas."

A 2008 report by the Council on Physician and Nurse Supply said schools would have to produce 30,000 nurses annually to offset a shortage as well as a looming mass retirement of nurses, 45 percent of whom are 50 or older. A 2007 report by the American Hospital Association said 116,000 nurses were needed to fill registered-nurse vacancies in hospitals.

Minority representation in the health professions has grown at a snail's pace since 1980. Among registered nurses, for example, the percentage of African Americans and Hispanics falls far short of their percentage of the population, according to the 2008 National Sample of Registered Nurses.

African Americans represent 5 percent of registered nurses and 12 percent of the population. Hispanics represent about 4 percent of registered nurses and 15 percent of the population. Asian Americans fall short, too, with 3 percent of registered nurses and nearly 6 percent of the population. The sample said that the 83 percent of nurses who are white far exceeds their population representation -- 66 percent.

The grants are needed "because health care does not have large numbers of underrepresented students," Hill said. That is a problem because members of minorities have said in surveys that they are more comfortable with health professionals who are familiar with their culture, and the more comfortable they are, the more they return for treatment before their conditions worsen.
"There are too few white nurses who understand these cultures," said Betty Smith Williams, president emeritus of the National Coalition of Ethnic Minority Nurse Associations. Williams said she was the first black nurse to teach at a major California university, and subsequently became an assistant dean of nursing at the University of California at Los Angeles and the University of Colorado at Boulder.

"Traditional universities don't have the role models and the sensitivities to recruit and train minority students. They always come to us, and we have to help fill the void," Williams said. "We recruit through networking, camaraderie and relationships developed at our conventions."

Howard and two other historically black schools, the Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta and the Meharry Medical College in Nashville, were recently cited in a study as the universities that produce the largest percentage of primary-care physicians who practice in areas where health workers are scarce.

Howard has 1,100 students enrolled in the College of Pharmacology, Nursing and Allied Health Sciences, and keeping them there during the economic slump is an uncertainty. When Hill learned that HHS was offering grants, she grabbed an application and submitted it on the June 1 deadline. "This is the largest grant for scholarships that the college has received," she said.

Still, said Norma Martinez Rogers, president of the National Association of Hispanic Nurses, it is not enough. "Ninety-six million sounds like a lot, but in reality it's not a lot," she said. "I think it's a step in the right direction. But I think we need more mentors, more programs, more funding.

"There's such a shortage of Hispanic nurses that they're bringing Filipino nurses to places like South Texas. But Filipinos don't know our culture. . . . We must encourage our people to go to school and become nurses."

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