THE DAILY CLIPS

July 19, 2007

News, commentary, and opinion
compiled by the East Carolina University News Bureau from:

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East Carolina University News Bureau
E-mail to durhamj@ecu.edu  Web site at http://www.news.ecu.edu
252-328-6481 FAX: 252-328-6300
Search for colleges’ leader detailed

BY JANE STANCILL
STAFF WRITER

RALEIGH — The panel looking for the state’s next community college system president will consider two batches of candidates — one from a national pool and one from North Carolina — with the goal of narrowing the field to three finalists by November.

On Wednesday, the presidential search committee approved a description of desired qualifications and hashed out the process for finding a successor to Martin Lancaster, who will retire in May after a decade at the helm of the 58-campus system.

There is likely to be intense political interest in the search, said Chairman Herbert Watkins. Already he has been asked whether local college presidents should help review candidates.

“It does strike me that here is an opportunity where we could create some good will,” Watkins said, after posing the possibility of a subcommittee of presidents.

The answer from the committee Wednesday was a firm no.

“I don’t think it’s their responsibility,” said committee member Linwood Powell of Fayetteville. “I don’t think it’s a good idea.”

The panel’s vice chairwoman, Norma Turnage of Rocky Mount, agreed, saying the committee has to avoid the appearance of “unfair political influence.”

And Anne-Marie Knighton, a member from Edenton, pointed out that two or three of the state’s community college presidents are interested in the position. “I think that would be very, very inappropriate for sitting presidents to be involved in the process,” she said.

Watkins said there would be pressure to hire someone from North Carolina.

And Gordon “Buddy” Greenwood of Asheville joked that it was possible a candidate could come from “some foreign country, like South Carolina.”

“Although we are running a national search, there — rightly so — is keen interest in candidates from North Carolina,” Watkins said.

A search firm will start advertising for the position in the next few weeks, then review applications in the early fall. In mid-October, the committee will winnow the applicants to five semifinalists.

After interviewing those candidates, the search committee will recommend three finalists to the State Board of Community Colleges in November. A final decision could come in December or January.

Confidentiality will be important early in the process, said Bob Barringer of Gold Hill Associates, the firm hired to assist in the search. But Barringer recommended identifying three finalists and inviting them to participate in meetings with faculty and staff members and students.

“We’ve done nearly 90 searches across the country, and it seems to work,” Barringer said. “It’s valuable to have the public know who’s being considered in the final stage.”
UNC Charlotte transit study under scrutiny
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
Wednesday, July 18, 2007

CHARLOTTE
Misconduct allegations are being investigated at UNC Charlotte over a taxpayer-funded study about a possible light-rail system in the city.

The university completed a report earlier this year that was mostly favorable to the proposed system, but critics said that tax dollars should not have been used and questioned the Charlotte Chamber's role in the study. The chamber, a not-for-profit organization owned and operated by business leaders, supports a tax that would help fund the system.

Erskine Bowles, president of the 16-campus UNC system, assigned staff attorney David Harrison to investigate the complaints. After two days of going through e-mails and documents, Harrison said that an investigation was warranted but declined to provide details.

"That's a huge concern for anyone in my job, in academia. The biggest question is, 'Was the research sound?'" Harrison said. "The key is that we do it objectively, fairly and without misconduct."

The study said that operating and construction costs of the proposed transit system were in line with similar systems in other cities. The project would be funded, in part, by a half-cent tax that voters will be asked to approve in November.

UNC Charlotte officials defended the study, and the school was already conducting an internal investigation when contacted by Harrison, he said.

"It makes sense for someone who doesn't work with the university to take a look at it," said Tom Ashcraft, an attorney who opposes the half-cent sales tax.
Campus lockdowns are unrealistic, expert says
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
Wednesday, July 18, 2007

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va.
Lockdowns of college campuses during emergencies are difficult to execute and are not appropriate in most cases, a campus law enforcement expert today told a governor's panel investigating the Virginia Tech shootings.

"I think we have this impression of 'lockdown' that you hit a switch and everything shuts down," said Don Challis, president of the Virginia Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators and police chief of the College of William and Mary. "It's not as easy as saying, 'why weren't the doors locked?'

In the wake of the April 16 tragedy, some criticized Virginia Tech for not locking down the campus after gunman Seung-Hui Cho shot two students in a dormitory. More than two hours later, he killed 30 people and himself inside Norris Hall.

However, Challis said the size and layout of most college campuses make lockdowns an unrealistic option. Instead, Challis said that universities should advise faculty, staff and students to find a secure location such as their room or office during an emergency.

But at least one victim's parent took issue with Challis' comments.

"Imposing something might have been better than doing nothing," Holly Sherman, the mother of slain student Leslie Sherman, said during a break. "I think notification of the first shooting should have been made immediately. And I don't care how. It may be a loud siren. Even in the Green Zone in Iraq, they've got the siren that tells everybody to take cover. They didn't even do anything like that. And that, to me, is inexcusable."

Today's session was the last scheduled public meeting for the panel, which is expected to issue a report with wide-ranging recommendations next month.

The panel's staff director, Phil Schaefer, outlined what the report will include: a detailed timeline of events, university security issues, Cho's mental health history, counseling treatment and legal issues, gun access and gun purchase laws, and the police and university's actions related to both sets of shootings on April 16. The report also will include a section on the aftermath of the tragedy and how the university and state reacted.

Sherman said she still has doubts about the quality and comprehensiveness of the panel's review.

"I'm getting a little bit more bitter as time goes on, because I feel like some of the major issues are being ignored," Sherman said. "On a nationwide scale, it would be very nice if we could fix these problems. My problem is my daughter's dead. I want to know why.

"I don't hear accountability at all," she added. "I don't want a name, I don't want a head to roll, I want to know as a part of the investigative report, there has to be a section on accountability."

Panel chairman Gerald Massengill said during the meeting that the panel planned to improve its communication with the victims' families, many of whom were in the audience.

"We have begun to reach out to the families, and I think you'll see us do better," Massengill said. "We want that. The families are tremendously important to this panel."

Several victims' family members said in a statement to the panel before its last meeting that they felt ostracized and demanded representation on the commission. Kaine later asked that panel member Carroll Ann Ellis, a victim advocate, serve as a liaison to the families.