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Students meet, greet and mingle at summer orientation

BY KATHRYN KENNEDY
The Daily Reflector

They say you can spot a freshman a mile away. Well, several hundred freshmen-to-be strolled around campus Monday, with telltale purple lanyards around their necks, name tags and white student store bags clutched to their sides.

The last of eight two-day orientation sessions started Monday morning at East Carolina University, bringing in more than 700 students — the largest crowd yet. The university’s summer-long total is nearing 4,500 students.

They piled into lecture halls for lessons on registering for classes, student clubs or organizations and tips on having a fun but safe social life.

“The goal of orientation is to acclimate new students to the place they will call home for the next four years, and to introduce them to the mechanics of the institution that will enable them to make the most of their time here — both academically and socially,” according to a university news release.

The students responded well. Despite getting a little stir-crazy during some of the sessions that kept them seated, several said they were more excited about college

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now that orientation had arrived. Others were encouraged about the choice they’d made in enrolling at ECU.

“I didn’t realize it was such a close-knit college,” said James Jeter of Fayetteville. “I just figured it was a big school, just a bunch of people.”

Parents also are checked in and accounted for, attending tours and seminars on financial aid or public safety. ECU officials said approximately 600 have participated in each orientation session this summer.

For some, orientation has made turning their children loose a little bit easier.

“It’s hard,” said Janet Taylor, who is sending her only daughter, Courtney, to ECU this fall. “She’s the only one. But I feel good about it, because everyone here is so helpful.

“I really feel she’ll be good here,” Taylor said. “She’s met a lot of people already, and she’s excited about her classes.”

Orientation at ECU is a welcomed program by the local tourism industry. The economic impact of the roughly 9,000 visitors to Greenville is around $1.2 million over the summer, said Debbie Vargas, executive director of the Greenville-Pitt County Convention and Visitors Bureau. Vargas said the summer is generally a slow time for the tourism industry in Greenville. Here, she said, local hospitality industries are driven largely by business, and businesses rarely conduct conventions and large meetings during the summer.

“Outside of orientation at ECU, the summer is typically not a good time for lodging businesses in Greenville,” Vargas said.

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Judge tosses lawsuit by state employees

State Treasurer Richard Moore said the lawsuit against him, which sought public records of the state pension fund in the midst of his failed bid to win the Democratic nomination for governor, was a political ploy.

BY GARY D. ROBERTSON
The Associated Press

RALEIGH — A judge on Monday dismissed a public records lawsuit against State Treasurer Richard Moore that claimed he withheld documents about the state’s pension fund, ruling there wasn’t the evidence to let the case continue.

Superior Court Judge Jim Hardin sided with Moore in the lawsuit filed by the State Employees Association of North Carolina, which accused Moore and his office of failing to comply fully with records requests for information about the pension funds, valued at $73 billion.

Moore said his agency ultimately provided more than 2,000 pages of documents that the group had asked for and called the lawsuit politically motivated.

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The lawsuit was filed in February during the heat of the Democratic gubernatorial primary between Moore and eventual winner Lt. Gov. Beverly Perdue. The association never endorsed a candidate but has been critical of Moore in recent years.

"It is unfortunate that SEANC’s tactics scared retirees about the security of the second best pension fund in the nation," Moore said in a news release. "North Carolinians can rest assured that our pension fund remains strong and secure.”

Association executive director Dana Cope said he will recommend to the group’s governing board to appeal the ruling. He said there are still specific correspondence that his group hasn’t received from Moore.

"If they give us the documents we want, we will drop the lawsuit," he said.

The association sued after it said Moore and his office failed to completely respond to two records requests about the pension funds, including detailed information about outside fund managers and the types of investments made by the pension funds since 2001, when Moore took office.

The hostility between association leaders and Moore ramped up over the past year after a 2007 report found he had accepted more than $700,000 in campaign donations from employees, or their relatives, of nearly half the companies that have contracts to manage portions of the pension money.

Moore has repeatedly denied there was any connection between the donations and who received the management contracts.

The association unsuccessfully pushed legislation during this year’s legislative session that would have removed the treasurer as the sole legal trustee in charge of pension money for 820,000 public employees and retirees.

The legislation became the focus of bribery allegations last month. Moore’s lawyer said that an association attorney offered to drop the lawsuit provided in part that Moore publicly back the bill shifting oversight of the pension money to a panel.

The association called the allegation preposterous, saying it was simply part of out-of-court settlement negotiations.

Hardin heard the bribery claims in open court last month but didn’t mention them in his order.
Ever growing
Preparing for UNC enrollment influx

When East Carolina University welcomes the class of 2012 to campus next month, some will begin their college careers in unanticipated surroundings. The school will lease 300 apartments to house some of the incoming class due to a lack of available space in residence halls and a record number of students.

That represents but one of the growing list of challenges posed by enrollment growth across the University of North Carolina system. While the General Assembly did address some concerns, that issue promises to dominate any conversation about higher education in North Carolina for years to come.

Last week’s Board of Trustees meeting saw members addressing the space crunch expected when East Carolina welcomes a record number of incoming freshmen. From 2002 to 2007, East Carolina saw enrollment increase from 20,577 to 25,990, and 27,000 is possible in a few years.

The school is already planning for the future. Local residents can see the site work under way for construction of a new residence hall on First Street in Greenville, overlooking the Tar River. That structure will have 193 units and be ready for students for fall semester 2009.

But this will represent the first use of off-campus housing. Trustees approved renting 300 apartments to accommodate students as needed, with those assigned to off-campus housing enjoying all the amenities of living on campus. Those students will be moved to residence halls as space becomes available.

Such problems are increasingly common across the UNC system. The 16 member schools educate more than 185,000 students now, and UNC System President Erskine Bowles predicts enrollment could approach 300,000 students by 2017. That would be unprecedented and poses tremendous challenges to the state and member institutions.

Addressing the demands posed by growth was a key concern for Gov. Mike Easley’s last budget proposal, and was honored by lawmakers in the final budget agreement. The two-year budget passed in 2007 included $39.8 million for enrollment growth, and this year’s revision delivered an additional $34.6 million. That puts the state on the proper path.

But the implications of the state’s growing student population will be far reaching and costly. North Carolina will need to continue to keep a close watch on enrollment and preparation for thousands of new students annually, and ensure that the UNC system grows in a way that benefits the state and those university communities.
The Day
ACROSS THE STATE

Divers survey sunken submarines

MOREHEAD CITY — An underwater expedition this summer is surveying sunken German submarines off the North Carolina coast as part of a government project to document World War II shipwrecks.

Divers from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and other agencies, including researchers from East Carolina University, have explored one submarine, U-352, off Morehead City already. The expedition now is focused on two other U-boats off Oregon Inlet, U-85 and U-701, through Friday.

The submarines were sunk in 1942.

Officials say the expedition will continue next summer with exploration of sunken Allied ships.

"This expedition is the first part of a larger multiyear project to research and document a number of historically significant shipwrecks tragically lost during World War II, including U.S. and British naval vessels and merchant marine vessels," said Davis Alberg, leader of the expedition.
NOAA goes diving for U-boats in North Carolina

DIAMOND SHOALS

Deep purple water with streaks of sparkling azure concealed a war grave 110 feet beneath the surface. A vessel plying the waters off the Outer Banks on Saturday was hunting for what was once the hunter, a German submarine sunk 66 years ago by depth charges dropped by an American bomber.

Divers on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's new 41-foot catamaran were geared up and waiting to descend to survey the U-701, the most intact of discovered U-boats sunk off the North Carolina coast.

Boat captain Chad Smith, NOAA's East Coast vessel coordinator, slowed the catamaran's motor and circled the position above where the wreck lay mostly buried on the ocean floor about 22 miles off Avon.

"All right, guys, start moving toward the stern," dive master Tane Casserley said to the five divers. The boat's motor was cut.

"Dive, dive, dive!"

Casserley, a NOAA archaeologist and diver who is serving as the principal co-investigator in the research expedition, watched as the men disappeared under the water. The divers on the vessel were part of a 19-day project to study the U-701 and two other submarine wrecks sunk off the coast in 1942 during the Battle of the Atlantic.

"Ultimately, the goal is to protect all the wrecks around here," said Casserley, the national maritime heritage coordinator for NOAA's Office of the National Marine Sanctuaries. "What we want to stop is the looting and souvenir hunting that goes on."

On their second attempt, the divers, some carrying huge cameras as well as the 120 pounds of tanks on their backs, located the U-701. Visibility was good, they said, but the strong 2-knot current made it a challenge to survey the wreck.

"Everything is on it - all the hatches, everything," John McCord, education programs coordinator with the University of North Carolina Coastal Studies Institute, said as he peeled off his diving gear. "I had my feet dug in and I was leaning as far back as I can. Every time I'd sit back and film, it would slowly push me back up."

Exploration of the U-352 off Morehead City began the week of July 7, but four days were lost to bad weather. The U-85 off of Nags Head, as well as the U-701, will be studied this week.

NOAA and partners from the state, the Minerals Management Service, the National Park Service, East Carolina University and the UNC Institute have combined their areas of expertise in surveying and photographing the vessels.
"Never has a detailed archaeological survey of the wrecks been done," David Alberg, superintendent of the Monitor National Marine Sanctuary, said in an interview before the expedition. "This is step one. We're not digging, and we're not touching the site."

At least 10 German sailors are believed to be entombed in the U-701. The U-352 also contains war dead. U.S. and international policies prohibit disturbance of maritime graves.

The U-85, the first U-boat submarine sunk in U.S. waters, and the U-352 have been popular recreational diving sites for years; each has been picked clean of artifacts. But until 2004, the U-701 was undisturbed because only one diver knew the coordinates, and he kept them secret.

After Hurricane Isabel partially unburied the submarine, word got out about its location. NOAA worked with other government agencies and members of the diving community to create a diving preserve at the site. Within months, a dive team discovered that numerous parts of the wreck had been stolen.

But still, the U-701 retains much of its original condition, and NOAA has maintained its goal of creating a sanctuary for the wreck.

"This is the one that has the most chance of being preserved and protected for the American public," Casserley said.

The other two submarine sites may also qualify for cultural protection, he said. A goal of the project is to have the wreck sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places as well as to establish diving sanctuaries. There are 14 protected areas in the National Marine Sanctuary System.

"We're not limiting divers by any means," Casserley said. "We want divers to enjoy them. We just don't want them to take anything from them."

Researchers plan to post the data learned from the expedition online, he said. And next year, the expedition will be surveying a yet-to-be-learned number of Allied wrecks sunk in waters off the North Carolina coast.

The project is a significant step in preservation of maritime history and culture, said Joe Hoyt, a maritime archaeologist contractor for NOAA.

"It's one of the closest places where the war came home to America continuously," he said.

"It's really the only place where you can visit the battlefield of the Atlantic."

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With No Frills or Tuition, a College Draws Notice

By TAMAR LEWIN

BEREA, Ky. — Berea College, founded 150 years ago to educate freed slaves and “poor white mountaineers,” accepts only applicants from low-income families, and it charges no tuition.

“You can literally come to Berea with nothing but what you can carry, and graduate debt free,” said Joseph P. Bagnoli Jr., the associate provost for enrollment management. “We call it the best education money can’t buy.”

Actually, what buys that education is Berea’s $1.1 billion endowment, which puts the college among the nation’s wealthiest. But unlike most well-endowed colleges, Berea has no football team, coed dorms, hot tubs or climbing walls. Instead, it has a no-frills budget, with food from the college farm, handmade furniture from the college crafts workshops, and 10-hour-a-week campus jobs for every student.

Berea’s approach provides an unusual perspective on the growing debate over whether the wealthiest universities are doing enough for the public good to warrant their tax exemption, or simply hoarding money to serve an elite few. As many elite universities scramble to recruit more low-income students, Berea’s no-tuition model has attracted increasing attention.

“ Asking whether that’s where our values lead us is a powerful way to consider what our values are,” said Anthony Marx, the president of Amherst College, who considered the possibility of using Amherst’s $1 million-per-student endowment to offer free tuition but concluded that it would make no sense, given Amherst’s more affluent student body and the fact that the college already subsidizes about half the cost of each student’s education.

“We’re not Berea, much as we respect them,” Mr. Marx said, adding there would be no social justification for giving free tuition to students from wealthy families.

Although this year’s market drop is taking its toll, the growth in university endowments in recent years has been spectacular. Harvard’s $35 billion endowment, Yale’s $23 billion, Stanford’s $17 billion and Princeton’s $16 billion put them among the world’s richest institutions.

Such endowments have helped make higher education one of the nation’s crown jewels. As Harvard’s
president, Drew Gilpin Faust, said in her spring commencement speech this year, endowments at Harvard and other research universities help fuel scientific advances as government support is eroding, and help drive economic growth and expansion in a difficult economy.

Although most universities have only modest endowments, the wealth of the richest has made them increasingly vulnerable to criticism from parents upset about rising tuition costs, lawmakers pushing them to spend more of their money and policy experts arguing that they should be helping more needy students.

“How much do you need to save for future generations, and at what point are you gouging today’s generation?” said Lynne Munson, of the Center for College Affordability and Productivity in Washington.

In January, the Senate Finance Committee requested detailed endowment and spending data from 136 colleges and universities with endowments of at least $500 million, with a possible eye to forcing them to spend at least 5 percent of their assets each year, as foundations are required to do. Large, tax-free endowments “should mean affordable education for more students, not just a security blanket for colleges,” said Senator Charles E. Grassley, Republican of Iowa, who is reviewing the data.

The commissioner of the Internal Revenue Service’s tax-exempt section said this spring that he wanted his agency to be more aggressive in ensuring that universities made “appropriate use” of their endowments. And officials in Massachusetts are studying a proposal for a 2.5 percent tax on the part of university endowments greater than $1 billion — a threshold exceeded by nine of the state’s universities.

“The endowments have grown to such an astonishing extent that people are asking, if the wealth and the value of the tax exemption are increasing, is the public benefit increasing, as well?” said Evelyn Brody, a tax professor at Chicago-Kent College of Law.

This year, Ms. Brody said, the debate has entered new territory. Traditionally, discussion about endowments has focused on the balance between using the money for the current generation versus saving it for the benefit of future generations.

“Endowment spending has usually been a ‘when’ question, about when the money would be used for a charitable purpose,” she said. “But now, it’s also being viewed as a ‘what’ question. What is the money for? And I think that’s new.”

In part, it is simply a question of itchy fingers. When one sector amasses great wealth, other sectors find it irresistible.

“That’s why Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries in the 16th century,” Ms. Brody said. “In those days, it was real estate, which was not easy to hide. Now it’s the disclosure, which makes the universities’ wealth
impossible to hide."

The mounting scrutiny by lawmakers has already prompted some action. Dozens of wealthy colleges have increased their aid to low- and middle-income students, many substituting grants for loans. Many have announced plans to expand their student bodies, and some are doing broader outreach and working with nearby K-12 schools to improve academic preparation.

Nonetheless, according to 2002 data, only one in 10 of the students at the nation’s most selective institutions come from the bottom 40 percent of the income scale. And the proportion of low-income undergraduates at the nation’s wealthiest colleges has been declining, as measured by the percentage receiving federal Pell Grants, for families with income under about $40,000. At most top colleges, only 8 to 15 percent of students receive Pell grants.

At Berea, more than three-quarters of the students receive Pell grants.

Overall, Berea’s statistics speak worlds about the demand for affordable higher education; this year, the college accepted only 22 percent of its applicants. Among those accepted, 85 percent attended Berea, a yield higher than Harvard’s.

Berea can be a haven for the lower-income students at high schools where expensive clothes and fancy homes demarcate the social territory.

“When I first heard about Berea, I didn’t think I wanted to come here,” said Candice Roots, who will be a junior in the fall. “But I visited in my senior year, and as soon as I got here, I knew this was what I wanted. Everybody was like me. You don’t have to have all this money to fit in.”

With its hilly campus, Georgian president’s mansion and old brick buildings, Berea looks much like any elite New England college. But its operating budget is less than half that of Amherst, which has a $1.7 billion endowment and about 100 more students. Faculty pay is much lower, and the student-faculty ratio higher. With no rich parents and no legacy admission slots, fund-raising is far more difficult at Berea.

Lacking tuition, Berea receives 80 percent of its $43 million education and general budget, and about two-thirds of its $55 million operating budget, from the endowment income.

Families bringing a student to a campus interview may stay, free, in a four-bedroom house, complete with flat-screen television and handmade sleigh bed. Students who are single parents have their own residences.

To satisfy the work requirement, some students have jobs in the academic departments, administrative offices and labs, while others are assigned to the college farm, the workshops that make and sell traditional mountain crafts (its handmade brooms, especially, are well-known treasures) or the college-owned hotel, which anchors
the town square.

Mr. Marx, in homage, keeps a Berea broom in his Amherst office.

While Mr. Marx is not trying to match Berea’s student population, he is proud of Amherst’s efforts to attract top students from all income brackets. The college has increased the proportion of Pell recipients to nearly 20 percent of its student body, from about 15 percent five years ago, for example. With more than half of Amherst’s students on financial aid, the college announced last year that it would replace loans in all aid packages with grants. A full-time staff member recruits community college graduates as transfer students. Admissions are need-blind, for both American and international applicants.

Although he, like other college presidents, opposes the idea of a required 5 percent payout, Mr. Marx said the current debate over the use of endowments was healthy.

“Congress, the media, the public all have an interest in knowing whether we’re using our resources to make sure the best students have access to the best education,” he said. “They should be asking, are we really affordable? Are we offering the highest quality education? Are we directing graduates to think about their social responsibilities?”

Berea’s president, Larry D. Shinn, also opposes a required 5 percent payout but wants colleges pushed to do more for needy students.

“You see some of these selective liberal arts colleges building new physical education facilities with these huge sheets of glass and these coffee and juice bars, and charging students $40,000 a year, and you have to ask, does this contribute to the public good, or is it just a way for the college to keep up with the Joneses?” Mr. Shinn said. “We are a tax-exempt institution, so I think the public has a right to demand that our educational mission be at the heart of all of our expenditures.”