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ECU board swears in four new trustees

By Josh Humphries
The Daily Reflector

Thursday, July 23, 2009

The East Carolina University Board of Trustees welcomed four new members Thursday.

Danny Scott, Steve Jones, Ken Chalk and Brad Congleton were sworn in at the trustees' meeting on campus.

Scott is a marketing executive with Monsanto in St. Louis. He was appointed to the board by the University of North Carolina Board of Governors.

He has a degree in business administration from ECU and joined Monsanto this year after serving as vice president for diversity for Anheuser-Busch.

Jones is a former executive with RBC Bank in Raleigh. He also was appointed to the board by the UNC Board of Governors. He is a 1991 graduate of ECU and recently served as chairman of the ECU Board of Visitors.

Chalk, retired chief credit officer for BB&T Corp., was appointed to the board by Gov. Bev Perdue.

He is immediate past chairman of the ECU Foundation and co-chairman of the BB&T Center for Leadership Development at ECU. He is a past dean of the North Carolina School of Banking, and he received his bachelor's degree in business administration and his master's degree in business administration from ECU.

Congleton is the newly elected president of the Student Government Association at ECU. SGA presidents serve on the Board of Trustees during their terms as president.

The ECU board has 13 members. All serve four-year terms except the student, who serves for a year.

The board also discussed the funding environment in the state.

"I want to reassure our students and students' parents the budget deficits, as severe as they are, will not affect the quality of your degree," Chancellor Steve Ballard said.

"We are making good on our obligations to minimize the cuts to the core functions of the university."

ECU already has cut $30 million from its budget, only two percent has been to the academic core, Ballard said.

The majority of cuts have been administrative reductions, cost savings and non-core reductions, he said.

He said the number of people who will lose their jobs as a result of budget cuts from the state is limited and he will have more information on the topic after the General Assembly approves a budget.

The board also decided to lease a Moyer II medical building in the future and it awarded a Tyler Residence Hall renovation contract to Barnhill Construction. It also approved minor changes to the drug testing policy for ECU's athletes.

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EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

Pedestrian recovering

An East Carolina University faculty member struck by a pickup truck Wednesday is recovering at Pitt County Memorial Hospital.

Charles Gustina, 52, a teaching assistant professor in the Department of Interior Design and Merchandising, was listed in good condition Thursday afternoon, according to a hospital spokesman.

Ricky Suggs, 31, of Walstonburg, was driving the 1994 Chevrolet pickup truck that struck Gustina, said Assistant Chief Dawn Tevepaugh with the ECU Police Department. Suggs was cited for failure to yield to a pedestrian.

According to the police report, Suggs was driving down College Hill Drive and was turning left onto 10th Street when Gustina was struck, Tevepaugh said. Gustina was in the pedestrian crossing on 10th Street walking toward College Hill.
Group discusses giving buildings a second life

By Ginger Livingston
The Daily Reflector

Friday, July 24, 2009

Restoring downtown buildings brought new businesses and an uptown feel to Greenville, an advocate of adaptive reuse told the city's young professionals.

Don Edwards, owner of University Book Exchange and a longtime advocate of Greenville's downtown business area, took about 50 members of the Greenville-Pitt Young Professionals group on a slideshow tour of area buildings given a second life in business during a Thursday event at LA Lounge and Spa.

"Look around you; this is your first slide," Edwards said while gesturing at the space, located on the third floor of the Jefferson Blount Harvey Building at the corner of Fourth and Evans streets.

A long-abandoned department store, the building was renovated by the Glenn family, owners of Jefferson's Florist, and houses that business, the restaurant, a wine shop, hair salon and several other businesses.

"This is adaptive re-use," Edwards said. "This is what you do with historic preservation.

"I can't say enough about what Michael Glenn and the Glenn family has done with this building," he said.

Scanning through the slides, Edwards stopped on the structure known as the Cupola Building, which houses Taft Office Equipment Co. He urged the group to skip franchise office supply stores and buy from locally owned businesses willing to preserve the city's architectural history.

"When you go to New York, you don't go to the malls to shop," Edwards said. It's the same in Florence, Rome and other great cities, he said.

"You go where there is great architecture," he said.

Edwards said businessmen also are making a commitment to pedestrian-friendly projects, pointing to the First Street Place, a student housing project being built at the foot of the Pitt Street bridge.

"It's a smart-growth project. We've got gridlock. We've got to start locating our students in the uptown area," he said.

Edwards also said there are discussions about building a development in the Reade Circle area that will have 6,000 square feet of retail space topped with 570 student housing beds.

Tom Taft, a local attorney, is spearheading the project, said Mike McCarty, who works with him.

Edwards' presentation follows several weeks of unrest in the downtown area. Last month, two men were shot to death outside a nightclub. Less than a week later, gunfire erupted as a large group of people got into an argument on the corner of Fourth and Evans streets.

Edwards and chamber of commerce officials didn't reference the problems during Thursday's gathering.

"There are so many attractive things and unique things in the uptown area that we feel were worth highlighting," said Allen Smith, senior vice president with the Greenville-Pitt County Chamber of Commerce and a member of
the Young Professionals' steering committee.

"So many people have time, energy and more invested in the uptown area, we believe it is important to highlight positive things, not only uptown but the city as a whole."

Tamalyn Torrecilla, owner of LA Lounge, and her staff were closing up when the second incident occurred and said they felt the bullets strike the building. Torrecilla said she was going to close the restaurant if the city didn't aggressively improve safety.

Torrecilla said overwhelming community support kept the business open. However, Torrecilla said she only saw the promised police foot patrol for one week.

Lighting was temporarily increased along the streets and a nearby parking lot but it is gone.

"(City officials) said there would be a more communicative relationship, but I haven't heard from them about why the lights were taken away," she said.

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NCSU band's Ireland trip off

Budget, Easley controversy cited

BY NAUREEN KHAN, Staff Writer

N.C. State University administrators called off the marching band's trip to Ireland, telling disappointed students that the uncertain budget and controversy surrounding former first lady Mary Easley's hiring were to blame.

The band and the university's chorus were to travel to Dublin next spring to march in the city's 2010 St. Patrick's Day parade. Expenses were to be paid for by the students themselves.

"Going on the trip at this time would be irresponsible on our part," Paul Garcia, director of the marching band, said in an interview Thursday. "We will revisit it again sometime in the future."

An e-mail message that Garcia sent to band members last month said concern for the reputation of NCSU influenced the cancellation. The university's chancellor, provost and chairman of its board of trustees have stepped down and Easley was fired from her NCSU job after The News & Observer published articles about how her connections enabled her hiring, and about an 80 percent raise she received.

"Due to the economic climate of our state, and the unfortunate recent issue with our former chancellor, provost, board of governor chair, and Mary Easley, we will not be allowed to travel to Ireland this upcoming year," Garcia wrote to the band students. "I know that we were not planning on using ANY state funds, and this point was made very clear. Please understand that the people of North Carolina believe that ALL funds for every university group is state appropriated. As a result, the perception of a large trip taken at this time would be a negative rather than a positive."

The decisions hit a sour note with members of the band, known as the "Power Sound of the South."

They had been planning for the trip since late March.

Each of about 150 members who had signed on to go had been told to come up with $1,900 to pay for airfare, lodging and meals for the five-day trip.

Garcia's expenses would have been provided for free by the tour company as part of the band's travel package.

'It was an injustice'

"We all feel that it was an injustice," said rising junior Megan Myers, who has played saxophone in the band for the past two years and has never left the United States.

"If it had been any other reason, if the airlines had been asking for too much money, if we
weren't going to go because there weren't enough people willing to pay the money, then it would make sense. But something that has nothing to do with the band just doesn't seem fair."

J. Mark Searce, director of the music department at NCSU, said it is important to be as prudent as possible because the band doesn't know yet what its 2009-2010 budget will be.

"An unknown budget is not the time to fly," he said.

Searce added that some university funds would have paid for miscellaneous expenses, such as the cost of transportation to and from the airport and for equipment. Neither he nor Garcia had an exact figure for how much those costs would be.

"It's less the actual cost than to know what state the band is going to be in by the time the tour even comes about," Searce said.

Easley link minimized

Although Garcia addressed the Easley situation in his e-mail to students, he said in an interview Thursday that the resignations and Easley's firing were not factors in his and Searce's decision to cancel the trip.

"It really didn't have anything to do with it," Garcia said. "I just wanted to explain to our students what the climate on campus was like, since many of them are on summer vacation."

None of the reasons given by administrators is a consolation to the students, who had already sent in their first deposit in anticipation of the trip.

"It was going to be the highlight of my marching band experience in college and probably college in general. You'll never get another opportunity to go to another country with your best friends and go march in one of the biggest parades in the world," said junior Grayson Halstead. "They yanked the carpet out from underneath us."

Added rising senior Travis Nofle, "It seems to me our band is being scrutinized and punished for something that the administration did wrong with the Mary Easley scandal."

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A leaner UNC

This wasn't the best news for the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. A private consultant, funded by an anonymous donor, has found that the Chapel Hill campus spends more on administrative costs than it does on academics. The categories may be somewhat overlapping -- the academic enterprise requires administrative support -- but the strange balance suggests that something is out of whack.

The consultants, Bain & Company, cited findings showing that the university has too many layers in its bureaucracy, more than 100 academic centers and institutes without standard reporting structures -- many with their own finance, human resources and technology staffs -- and inadequate technology supporting its research projects.

At a time when North Carolina's budget is a few billion dollars in the hole, and the public universities are fighting economic moves they say could affect classrooms and course offerings, the last thing that a flagship institution in the UNC system needs is a report indicating bloat at the top. The report says, for one example, that up to $6 million a year could be saved if those centers and institutes consolidated their support services.

Chancellor Holden Thorp will have a task force discussing the recommendations. But changes and improvements leading to a leaner bureaucracy need to come sooner rather than later. This is no time to approach the need for change at an all-too-deliberate academic pace. Money wasted needs to be money saved.

Thanks to a generous higher education bond program that represented a huge investment in public higher education by taxpayers, UNC-CH has spent about $500 million on new buildings and renovations since 2000. Thorp says that has meant more administrative costs. To his credit, the chancellor says he'd like to reverse that ratio of administrative expense to academic expense. Now he needs to push for that change with urgency.

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Mary Easley contests her firing by NCSU

Grievance hearing to be closed to public

BY JAY PRICE, Staff Writer

RALEIGH - Former first lady Mary Easley filed a formal grievance with N.C. State University on Thursday over the termination of her contract last month by Interim Chancellor James Woodward.

The university's board of trustees recommended Woodward end the contract after The News & Observer published a series of articles about the roles of several university leaders in her hiring and an 88 percent raise she received.

Woodward said Easley was no longer needed because substantial portions of her job were eliminated as a result of budget cuts required of the university by the shortfall in the state's budget.

It's unclear what grounds Easley is using to contest her firing. A university spokesman said that he couldn't release her grievance petition because it is a personnel record.

Because of state law and university policy, Woodward said, the hearing before a grievance committee would be closed to the public and media. The university would release the results, though, he said.

"It is essential to the integrity of the process that the grievance proceedings be closed," he said.

"This is a confidential personnel matter and will be treated as such. At the conclusion of the process, we will make the outcome public."

Unless both sides agree to arbitration, the grievance could be heard by a committee appointed by the faculty chair. The committee would make a recommendation to the university about how to proceed.

If Easley is still not satisfied, in some circumstances she could then appeal to the UNC system's board of governors.

During a university trustees' meeting last week, Woodward said that the Easley scandal was consuming an inordinate amount of university leaders' time at a crucial moment.

He appealed to the Easleys to drop the matter for the good of the university, but he added that it was obviously her right to file a grievance.

A federal grand jury is investigating issues connected to Gov. Mike Easley, including Mary Easley's hiring at NCSU. Federal authorities have subpoenaed records from N.C. State University related to her hiring and the raise.

Also subpoenaed were former NCSU Chancellor James Oblinger and former Provost Larry Nielsen, who testified before the grand jury this month. Easley had worked at NCSU full time.
since 2005, first leading a speakers series and then taking an expanded role in 2008 that paid her $170,000 per year.

Oblinger, Nielsen and former NCSU Board of Trustees Chairman McQueen Campbell all resigned from their posts amid the controversy, and all three have admitted playing a role in Easley’s employment at the university.

NCSU grievance policies are online at www.ncsu.edu/policies/employment/grievance/POL05.25.1.php.

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University of North Carolina scooter riders can get permits for $24

FROM STAFF REPORTS

CHAPEL HILL - UNC-Chapel Hill trustees have lowered the price of a new permit required for scooters on campus and pledged to address some of the concerns expressed by those who rely on the eco-friendly vehicles to get to campus.

The board on Thursday altered a policy it enacted in May, dropping the price of a scooter permit to $24 for all users. The previous policy would have charged employees between $174 and $371, depending on salary level, while students would have paid $175, or $44 if they already had a car permit.

The change addressed issues raised by scooter riders who lobbied trustees via e-mail and an online petition that garnered more than 300 signatures.

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Red Hat educates profs

Open-source software development is topic of seminar

BY DAVID RANII, Staff Writer

RALEIGH - Red Hat is sowing the seeds of open source software development among college professors.

This week a fourth-floor meeting room at the company’s Centennial Campus headquarters in Raleigh is the site of a boot camp for faculty from a half-dozen universities, including N.C. Central and Elon. It’s a prototype for a program whose ultimate goal is to immerse computer science students in real-world open-source development projects.

"If you don’t win the professors, you will never get to the students," said Greg DeKoenigsberg, senior community relations manager. DeKoenigsberg, who wore a black T-shirt emblazoned with "I change the world" during Thursday’s session, is one of the organizers of POSSE, or Professors' Open Source Summer Experience. Red Hat teamed up with Seneca College in Toronto to create POSSE.

Red Hat is the world’s largest distributor of Linux, open-source software whose source code -- essentially its recipe -- is freely available. That code has evolved over the years as programmers around the world, many of them with no links to Red Hat, have worked on it.

Red Hat, which is poised to join the Standard & Poor’s 500 index after the market closes today, makes its money by bundling Linux with various levels of support services.

The more open-source developers there are, DeKoenigsberg said, the more open-source software gets created and, ultimately, the more revenue opportunities there are for Red Hat.

Many college faculty members lack open-source experience and may even be intimidated by the thought of working with the open-source community, he said. Hence the need for POSSE.

Cam Seay, a professor of computer information systems at the business school at N.C. Central, wanted to attend this week’s session because he sees open-source development as a great teaching tool. Unlike proprietary software, students can get to the heart of the matter in the open-source arena.

"From an educational standpoint, students have access to all the code, everything that makes it work," said Seay.

And they can get involved in meaningful projects.

Chris Tyler, a computer studies professor at Seneca College in Toronto and a POSSE facilitator, has been teaching open-source development classes for about three years. Class projects have included fixing bugs in the open-source Web browser Firefox.

"The exciting thing is, those fixes are being used by 270 million people," he said.

What student wouldn’t want that on a résumé?
DeKoenigsberg anticipates that this week's session will be the first of many POSSEs -- and not all of them will be sponsored by Red Hat.

Red Hat also plans to make the materials prepared for this week's session available to anyone who wants them at no charge.

It's open-source training.

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GUIDANCE COUNSELOR | ADMISSIONS

The Other Side of ‘Test Optional’

By LYNN O'SHAUGHNESSY

When colleges announce they’re making entrance exams optional, they publicly embrace a holistic stance: standardized tests are incomplete scorecards on how a student will fare in college; they favor families who can afford test prep, while minority students tend not to do well.

Cynics cite additional motives.

“Evidence suggests there are also marketing and competitive issues at play,” says Jonathan P. Epstein, a senior consultant at Maguire Associates specializing in enrollment and admissions. “After three beers and in a private moment, schools might acknowledge it.”

In a report published this month in The Journal of College Admission, Mr. Epstein examines how dropping the SAT and ACT requirement for prospective students can affect recruitment and enrollment.

Of the more than 800 test-optional institutions listed by the advocacy group FairTest, many are technical or religious schools, or have open admissions. But about three dozen are selective liberal arts colleges, including Smith and Bowdoin, and more join the trend each year.

“With colleges and universities engaged in intense competition to recruit ever more talented and diverse students,” Mr. Epstein says, “test-optional policies become alluring.” One advantage is that they generate significantly more applicants, and more ethnically diverse ones.

But there are others: the crush of applications makes colleges look more selective, and because low-scorers are less likely to share their results with admissions officers, score averages can be artificially higher. That’s information students scrutinize when deciding where to apply. Applicants should also know that some colleges continue to use standardized test scores to divide up merit aid.

The bottom line is to ask how a college handles its policy.

WANT MERIT AID? SEND SCORES.

“We don’t know how widespread it is, but we suspect a significant number of schools that are test-optional do use test scores for some merit scholarships,” says Robert Schaeffer, public education director of FairTest. While quick to plug the benefits of being test-optional, he acknowledges, “This is a problem that we are gravely concerned about.”

To gauge the extent of the trend, I contacted the 37 top liberal arts colleges on U.S. News & World
Report’s 2009 rankings that had test-optional policies. Eight require SAT or ACT scores for one or more of their merit scholarships (though not need-based aid). They are: Dickinson, Gettysburg, Goucher, Gustavus Adolphus, Hobart and William Smith, Lake Forest, Muhlenberg and Lawrence University.

Admission directors at institutions that don’t mandate scores for their merit scholarships express incredulity at the practice: if the tests are a valid measure of who should and shouldn’t get merit aid, why not require them for all students?

“You can’t say, ‘Tests are not a good tool in the process,’” and then say, ‘If you don’t submit you can’t qualify for merit aid,’” says Debra Shaver, director of admission at Smith, which just admitted its first freshmen class under its test-optional program. “I don’t want to pass judgment on institutions, but it doesn’t make sense.”

Robert J. Massa, until recently vice president for enrollment and college relations at Dickinson, in Carlisle, Pa., sees nothing hypocritical in requiring students who don’t qualify for financial aid to produce scores to qualify for merit money. The only reason colleges give the aid to affluent students, he says, is to keep the competition from grabbing them. And the competition won’t be throwing merit money at low scorers. “Why on earth would we award a non-need scholarship to someone who is not going to get funds from a similar institution?” Mr. Massa asks.

Chris Hooker-Haring, the dean of admission and financial aid at Muhlenberg, in Allentown, Pa., says his college reserves merit awards for students who excel at all the admission benchmarks. “We want every single credential in a student file to suggest he or she is an academic pacesetter if we are to invest in them with non-need-based aid,” he says.

VIEW SELECTIVITY SELECTIVELY.

Colleges making the switch usually see an immediate 10 percent to 20 percent application bump; the bigger pile of rejection letters could give the illusion that the college is more selective. Typically, Mr. Epstein says, “it would cost institutions tens if not hundreds of thousands of dollars in additional recruitment expense to achieve such an applicant boost.” He says the same for a gain of 20 to 30 points in SAT averages.

LOOK BEYOND (INCOMPLETE) AVERAGES.

Test-optional practices have caused some griping among administrators at institutions that haven’t budged on standardized test requirements. Tony Bankston, the dean of admissions at Illinois Wesleyan University, is in this camp. He says he has watched the reported average test scores of peer institutions increase in recent years because the colleges aren’t plugging in the results of freshmen who don’t submit scores. The scores, published in guidebooks, rankings and on the colleges’ own Web sites, can make a college appear to be more of an academic heavyweight. The more nonsubmitters, the higher the average (in the first few years, Mr. Epstein reports, 25 percent to 40 percent of applicants don’t submit scores).

“I don’t think we can ignore the gamesmanship,” Mr. Bankston says. “Schools are saying we want to count your test scores when we like your test scores.”

How much of a lift can colleges get if they ignore some scores? Mr. Epstein says that applicants who don’t
divulge their SAT results generally score 100 to 150 points lower than a typical submitter. He bases this estimate on the experiences of Bates College, which went optional in the '80s, and several institutions that shared data with him. If 25 percent to 50 percent of a freshman class didn’t send in results, he concludes, reported scores could increase 25 to 75 points.

Here’s an example of this phenomenon: Before Mount Holyoke went test-optional, in 2001, its middle 50-percent SAT range (a frequently cited test barometer) was 1170-1360. A few years later, with roughly 70 percent of freshmen submitting scores, the range jumped 60 points on both ends.

Mr. Epstein found Muhlenberg to be the only liberal arts college in U.S. News’s top tier that chases down missing scores and plugs them into its SAT/ACT average. At least two test-optional universities, Providence College and Wake Forest University, also report averages involving all freshmen.

Because of its policy, Muhlenberg did take a hit on its published SAT scores. Its average math/verbal score is 1220, but if it had ignored the scores not submitted with applications, it would be 1250, Mr. Hooker-Haring says. “To me, one of the dangers in not publishing an all-inclusive profile is that you may be artificially discouraging kids whose scores are closer to the true profile.” That is, they may decide a college isn’t a good fit when it actually is.

To avoid the appearance of pumping up its reported scores, Wake Forest made a commitment to track down entering freshmen’s scores when it decided to go test-optional. This fall’s class will be the first admitted under the program.

“We didn’t want this to appear that we were trying to game the system and make our score look higher,” says Martha Allman, the director of admissions.

John Young, director of admissions at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, in upstate New York, says his college hasn’t tried to retrieve missing scores for practical reasons. First, there’s the logistics, with no guarantee students will cooperate. Second, he says, scores from before its test-optional policy was put into place, for fall 2006, aren’t much different from current ones. The average SAT score at Hobart and William Smith increased to 1210 from 1190 (nationally, SAT averages declined over the same period). “If your student body is very different because of the SAT-optional policy, I guess I could see then that it would make sense to go after the scores,” Mr. Young says. As for rankings, Hobart and William Smith’s placement has not improved since the change in policy.

Robert Morse, the director of data research for U.S. News, says that scores represent only 7.5 percent of the ranking; the ability to reject more applicants, he says, would have even less impact. Selectivity, as measured by an institution’s acceptance rate, influences 1.5 percent of the ranking.

Would the magazine consider asking colleges for all their scores? “It’s something we might do,” Mr. Morse replies. “But I don’t have any idea how cooperative schools would be.”