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Police: ECU assault not random
By Michael Abramowitz
The Daily Reflector
Wednesday, July 27, 2011

Police do not believe an assault involving an ECU student-athlete early Monday was a random act.

The 17-year-old woman, who has not been identified, was reportedly confronted and physically assaulted at 14th Street and Berkley Road about 5:36 a.m., ECU Assistant Chief Dawn Tevepaugh said.

Two male suspects reportedly were involved in the incident, which resulted in minor injuries to the student. They fled in an unknown direction on foot, an alert said. No weapons were involved, Tevepaugh said.

“This is what we consider a targeted assault, not a random act of violence where someone is just walking along and attacked,” Tevepaugh said.

The confrontation occurred as the student was walking from the Jones Hall dormitory to a team session at nearby Minges Coliseum.

Just as all students are told, athletes are routinely cautioned by their coaches and athletic department officials not to walk alone to and from the sports complex, Tevepaugh said.

The investigation of the incident is continuing, she said.
A fifth man filed today to run at-large for the Greenville City Council this November.

District 4 resident Terry Boardman joined the increasingly crowded field competing for the open seat, Pitt County Board of Elections staff confirmed.

Mayor Pro-Tem Bryant Kittrell represents the city at-large but has said he will not run again this year.

Boardman, 64, owns the retail store Neil's Soccer and is an East Carolina University instructor and a certified public accountant. He frequently brings concerns about local government to the attention of the media and city officials.

“I'm going to start putting my time where my mouth is,” he said Wednesday. Boardman has lived in Greenville for 25 years and said he is familiar with crime and infrastructure problems across the city.

“We need a balance on the council,” he said. “And when I looked at the four (who are also running at-large), I didn't see the level of experience I can offer.”

Dave Barham, Dennis Mitchell and Howard Stearn filed to run at-large Monday, followed Tuesday by Kevin Howard. The candidate with the most votes in November wins the office — a 50 percent majority is not required.

Filing continues through Aug. 12.

Contact Kathryn Kennedy at kkennedy@reflector.com or 252-329-9566.
Career options take flight
By Jackie Drake
The Daily Reflector
Thursday, July 28, 2011

Career dreams took flight Wednesday night at an aviation education event at the Pitt-Greenville Airport.

Pitt County students gathered for an introduction to the flight industry and the aviation science program at Elizabeth City State University.

“We want young people to have an opportunity to go to college,” ECSU Chancellor Willie Gilchrist told the students, who ranged from elementary school to community college. “The skies are the limit.”

Gilchrist arrived by plane, flown in by Anthony Sharpe, director of the aviation science program.

“It was a beautiful flight,” Gilchrist said.

Though flight was born in North Carolina, the program at ECSU is the state's only four-year bachelor's program in aviation science.

“We don't want students to graduate from eastern North Carolina and go to Florida or Ohio, where there are six bachelor's programs,” Sharpe said.

The ECSU aviation science program is growing, adding an eighth field of concentration as well as a second plane this coming school year. Students can train in an air traffic control lab and a flight simulator that mimics the program's main plane, a Cessna 172.

An aviation center at the Elizabeth City Regional Airport also is planned. The program graduated 38 licensed pilots last year, according to Gilchrist.
“It all starts right now,” said pilot Desmond Powell, who flies for UPS and the Air Force. “It's competitive; you have to work hard. The most rewarding day of my life was when I graduated flight training.”

The aviation science program also hosts a weeklong residential aviation camp for high school students in the dorms at ECSU.

South Central rising senior Candace Ford, who wants to be a pilot and is thinking about attending ECSU, finished up the camp last week. “It was fun and educational,” she said, “I just like being in the air; I like the view. I've loved airplanes ever since I was little.”

Students need encouragement to enter the aviation field, especially blacks, according to Sharpe.

Of the 19,000 air traffic controllers in the United States, less than 1,000 are black, he said, and of the 75,000 commercial pilots, only 14 are black women.

“I mean, come on, when you think about the population of African Americans in the United States, it just blows your mind,” Sharpe said. “We've got a lot of work to do.”

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Connors' multi-layered impact

By Nathan Summers
The Daily Reflector
Thursday, July 28, 2011

There are countless ways to measure the effects brought about by the return of East Carolina head strength coach Jeff Connors.

But none are more important than charting how it has affected the progress of the ECU football team's new 3-4 defense. No one who witnessed the Pirates' defensive struggles in 2010 could likely forget that the line of scrimmage and the front seven were where many of the team's battles were lost.

The switch was implemented following the end of the season and was still in its beginning stages in spring practice. But now that Connors has put his influence on the program again, the results are written all over the ECU players' bodies as they prepare to embark on August camp, and very likely into the brains as well.

Though the team's results outweigh that of the individual, it is perhaps easier to appreciate the progress through the individual gains, especially in the young players set to take on far greater roles on the team.

Redshirt freshman linebacker Jeremy Grove typifies not only the conditioning improvements made by the Pirates under Connors, but also the rapid maturation of the team's next generation.

“He's trying to make us better, and he can send us through the worst thing ever, but at the end it's about making us better and it's going to help us on Saturdays,” said Grove, who's slated to start at linebacker this season. “You can see the improvement throughout the team.”
Grove undoubtedly represents the rest of his team in his understanding of what Connors has referred to as “a fanatical approach to finishing games.”

All of the pain and duress Connors visited upon his players during the summer months is designed to continue to elevate their thresholds one level at a time. As Grove plans his college debut, he does so with Connors' words echoing between his ears.

“We've been working hard on conditioning to make sure that in the fourth quarter we're still going, just like when coach Connors was here (for a decade in the 1990s),” said Grove, an Ijamsville, Md., native. “Those teams were great in the fourth quarter. That's what we need to improve on.”

With the likes of linebackers Marke Powell and Justin Dixon joining Grove in the 3-4, the Pirates will not lack speed, athleticism or power.

But next week when camp opens, all of the physical gains must fit properly into the football framework. For Grove, that means doing some fine-tuning in order to master the new defensive scheme.

“The biggest difference is being patient,” Grove said, comparing the traditional 4-3 to the 3-4. “In the spring I was real downhill a lot and I was getting caught up with the linemen. With the 3-4 I've got to be patient and read the gaps because it's a whole different scheme with our linemen. I'm still adjusting to that because I've only ever played a straight 4-3.”

Contact Nathan Summers at nsummers@reflector.com or 252-329-9595.
Butch Davis addresses the University of North Carolina Board of Trustees on Nov. 18 regarding investigations into misconduct on the football team as Chancellor Holden Thorp, right, and athletics director Dick Baddour look on.

UNC-Chapel Hill announced football coach Butch Davis' firing Wednesday after the damage caused by an NCAA investigation to the school's reputation became too much for Chancellor Holden Thorp to bear.

"To restore confidence in the University of North Carolina and our football program, it's time to make a change," Thorp said in a statement. "What started as a purely athletic issue has begun to chip away at this university's reputation."

The school has called a news conference for 11 a.m. today at the Friday Center in Chapel Hill. The school did not announce who will take over as interim coach in Davis' absence; the team begins practice Aug. 5.

It's not clear whether UNC will pay a buyout. Davis' contract calls for him to be paid $275,000, plus $315,000 for each of the four years remaining in his contract.
His contract also states that he can be terminated without a buyout if his staff members break NCAA rules and he reasonably should have known about it. Davis and Thorp have maintained throughout the 13-month NCAA investigation that Davis did not know about violations.

"I was honestly shocked to receive word that I will no longer be the head football coach at the University of North Carolina," Davis said in a statement late Wednesday. "I can honestly say that I leave with full confidence that I have done nothing wrong. I was the head coach and I realize the responsibility that comes with that role. But I was not personally involved in, nor aware of, any actions that prompted the NCAA investigation."

Davis was unavailable for comment Wednesday.

Thorp said the firing doesn't reflect any new developments in the NCAA investigation but was the result of the cumulative damage to UNC's reputation over the past year.

Davis, 59, had an overall record of 28-23 with three bowl appearances in four seasons, but he steered UNC into what he said earlier this week was the most serious issue the school has faced in decades. A school with a strong track record of rules compliance saw 14 players miss at least one game and seven sit out the entire 2010 season in connection with the NCAA investigation into impermissible benefits given to players and into academic misconduct.

**Nine major violations**

On June 21, Davis the NCAA sent UNC a letter alleging nine major violations. Three were leveled at John Blake, the associate head coach who was receiving money from a sports agent and had ties to Davis going back 35 years.

The academic misconduct was tied to tutor Jennifer Wiley, who also personally worked for Davis as a tutor for his son. Nonetheless, Davis wasn't personally cited in the Notice of Allegations, and Thorp continued to express support.

But the damage to UNC's reputation continued into this summer. A media lawsuit forced the school last month to turn over players' parking tickets; fewer than 12 players amassed 395 tickets and $13,125 in fines.

The Notice of Allegations last month detailed nine major violations, and UNC officials were embarrassed this month when they learned they had
failed to discover evidence of plagiarism in a term paper turned in by former player Michael McAdoo.

"I have been deliberate in my approach to understanding this situation fully, and I have worked to be fair to everyone involved," Thorp's statement said. "However, I have lost confidence in our ability to come through this without harming the way people think of this institution. Our academic integrity is paramount, and we must work diligently to protect it. The only way to move forward and put this behind us is to make a change."

Davis was hired following the 2006 season after John Bunting had been fired for posting a 27-45 record in six seasons. Tar Heels fans hoped Davis would bring big-time football to a floundering program at a school where the highly successful basketball team overshadows the football team.

Davis arrived with two Super Bowl rings as a Dallas Cowboys assistant; NFL head coaching experience with the Cleveland Browns; and experience turning the Miami Hurricanes in the right direction after that school faced NCAA sanctions.

Quick success

Davis immediately brought big-time recruits to UNC, beginning with highly rated prospects Marvin Austin and Greg Little in Davis' first recruiting class.

Under Davis, UNC posted three winning seasons, including a dramatic Music City Bowl victory against Tennessee in December.

The momentum the program generated helped finance costly facilities improvements at Kenan Stadium.

But for the past 13 months, the NCAA's investigation has cast a shadow over the program. Blake, the recruiting coordinator, was accused by the NCAA of acting as an agent in cooperation with sports agent Gary Wichard.

Players including Austin, Little and Robert Quinn were found to have accepted a total of $27,097.38 in impermissible benefits as agents swarmed around Davis' highly recruited athletes.

And the university's own investigation of agent benefits turned up academic misconduct.

UNC has until Sept. 19 to respond to the NCAA's notice of allegations and is scheduled to appear before the Committee on Infractions on Oct. 28 in Indianapolis.
Davis said at the ACC media kickoff Monday in Pinehurst that he always has been confident in the administration's backing of him. But the support Thorp showed Davis for months eroded after the bad news continued into this summer.

Now the Tar Heels move forward without a head coach, with the start of practice little more than a week away.

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Facts

NCAA investigators landed in Chapel Hill in July 2010 to interview University of North Carolina athletes about allegations of improper benefits from sports agents.

In August, university officials announced the investigation had expanded to examine possible academic misconduct involving football players and a former university tutor who also worked for coach Butch Davis.

Seven Tar Heels football players missed the entire 2010 season as the investigation continued; associate head coach John Blake resigned one day after a season-opening loss to Louisiana State.

A media victory in a lawsuit gaining the release of players' parking tickets in June showed fewer than 12 players had amassed 395 tickets over 31/2 years, with fines totaling $13,125.

That same month, the NCAA delivered a Notice of Allegations to UNC detailing nine alleged major violations.

Earlier this month, after former football player Michael McAdoo filed suit against the NCAA and the university in an attempt to restore his athletic eligibility, a term paper that had earned him a one-semester suspension from the university's honor court was discovered to contain more serious transgressions: numerous plagiarized passages.

On Wednesday, UNC announced the dismissal of Davis without identifying an interim replacement.
Questions arise over dismissal
BY ANNE BLYTHE - staff writer

CHAPEL HILL When Butch Davis was selected as North Carolina's head football coach, questions swirled about whether a man not steeped in Carolina tradition would be as committed to the classroom as the play fields.

More questions arose from faculty, alumni and old-time fans when the UNC-CH trustees gave Davis a bonus after his first season -- one in which he lost more games than he won.

Even more questions surfaced last summer, as NCAA investigators arrived on campus to look into allegations of academic misconduct and improper benefits from agents.

Now new questions arise with the abrupt dismissal of Davis a little more than a week before football practice begins.

Some want to know why now, nearly a year after the NCAA allegations began percolating -- months after top administrators stood behind the coach offering their strong support.
Others ask whether UNC-CH, a school that had long prided itself on having a reputation for a clean and winning athletics program, would ever shine as brightly again after the football program tarnished the image.

Bill Friday, a former UNC system president who long has been an advocate for taking the big-time costs out of big-time college sports, said the decision to dismiss Davis would offer a new beginning.

"This sad story has now come to an end," Friday said. "The university is a resilient institution and can turn this around. The university has suffered from it; there's no doubt about that. But there will come a time when everybody will look back on this and say, 'It's time to lock arms and move ahead.' "

Joseph B. Cheshire V, the Raleigh lawyer representing the tutor in the middle of the academic misconduct allegations, was unhappy with the decision.

"It's a sad day for the university that they would cave in to obviously orchestrated efforts to destroy their football program," said Cheshire, a UNC-CH alumnus, a Tar Heel fan and a lawyer with inside knowledge about the NCAA investigation. "It makes absolutely no sense that this happened now. There's no additional information that justifies this firing of Butch Davis now, and if there is something, they ought to say what it is. This makes no legal sense. This makes no common sense. This makes no institutional sense and no sense for the athletic program or the players in that program."

UNC-CH trustees declined Wednesday to discuss how or why the dismissal came about when it did.

Davis was informed of the decision by Chancellor Holden Thorp and athletic director Richard Baddour.

"What started as a purely athletic issue has begun to chip away at this university's reputation," Thorp said in a prepared statement. "I have been deliberate in my approach to understanding this situation fully, and I have worked to be fair to everyone involved. However, I have lost confidence in our ability to come through this without harming the way people think of this institution. Our academic integrity is paramount and we must work diligently to protect it. The only way to move forward and put this behind us is to make a change."
Though Chapel Hill is in a lull these days with many UNC-CH students and faculty on summer break, alumni and fans on Franklin Street Wednesday evening had mixed reactions to the news.

"I do respect Chancellor Thorp's commitment to maintain the academic reputation of Carolina despite the setback it might cause for the football program," said Greg Carrero, a 2007 graduate and Raleigh resident. "I'm totally a sports fan. I love our athletes. ... I'm just hoping we can get good leadership with the replacement head coach. Let's see what happens."

Peter Ayres, a 1975 graduate who lives in Miami, was visiting Chapel Hill and his alma mater. The timing of the decision on Davis was the biggest surprise, he said.

"He survived way longer than I thought he would," Ayres said Wednesday. "I'm just surprised he was around as long as he was. That's what made today surprising. I thought he survived it."

Ayres added that he thought it was time for Davis to go, that he had become a distraction, that it seemed like no one was minding the program. He recommended a new tack that takes in old traditions -- a "new focus on the Carolina way."

"High integrity and let the football fall where it may," Ayres said.

Staff writer Edward G. Robinson III contributed to this report.

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Layoffs, closures loom at UNC

BY KATELYN FERRAL - Staff Writer

CHAPEL HILL State budget cuts will force more layoffs and could force closing some buildings on the UNC-Chapel Hill campus, Chancellor Holden Thorp said Wednesday.

The university faces a $100 million cut in state funding this fiscal year, a cut of 17.9 percent.

Part of the loss in state funding will be offset by a one-time $20 million payment from the UNC Health Care system, but Thorp said the university faces "difficult choices about our priorities."

The cuts will make it harder to attract and retain faculty members and to keep class sizes low. Course offerings also will be reduced, Thorp said.

"There will be measurable damage," he said.

Thorp did not predict job-loss numbers for the new fiscal year. Last year, 115 employees were laid off: 91 non-faculty employees and 24 faculty members and administrators. The university focused on cutting nonacademic areas as much as possible first, which has left support departments thin.

More layoffs could result in campus buildings closing, Vice Chancellor Richard Mann told the board of trustees in a meeting at the Carolina Inn.

"We are facing a significant gap in operations," he said. "We have a number of buildings we're concerned about. ... We might not be able to keep them open."

Less state money will affect the academic structure of the university and prolong the freeze on employee salaries and make it more difficult to attract and retain prestigious professors and faculty, Provost Bruce Carney said.

"These have real impacts on our students and the debt they will graduate with," he said. "Compared to other universities, UNC is well supported, but it's on a downward trend. ... We are falling behind our peers in the amount of support per student."

State appropriations will make up 17.9 percent of the university's total revenue this fiscal year, down from 20.9 percent last year.
As state funding drops, however, the amount of government contracts and grants and private gifts has increased.

Last fiscal year, the university received $277 million from private donors and $305.6 million in donation commitments.

Both are up from the previous year, gifts increasing 3.3 percent and commitments increasing 5 percent.

"You talk about having a great product to sell and selling the dream, it's right there," said Matt Kupec, vice chancellor for university advancement.

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New trustees chairman

Wade H. Hargrove of Raleigh was sworn in as chairman for the UNC-CH Board of Trustees on Wednesday. He is a corporate and national media lawyer and partner with Brooks, Pierce, McLendon, Humphrey & Leonard. He earned a bachelor's degree from UNC-CH and a JD from UNC Law School.

Three new members joined the board: W. Lowry Caudill of Durham, co-founder of Magellan Laboratories; Steven Lerner of Chapel Hill, appointed by the UNC Board of Governors; and Student Body President Mary Cooper.
Left to right, Kayla Brown, 14, and Carmelia Ward, 17, take part in the simulated delivery of a baby at Camp Bones on the campus of UNCW Wednesday, July 27, 2011. Camp bones is a program that gives underserved and underrepresented middle and high school students from New Hanover and the surrounding eight rural counties a first hand look at the medical field. The program is in jeopardy as funding has for it has been cut. Photo By Mike Spencer

**Grant expires, pulling plug on UNCW's health career camp**

By Jason Gonzales
Jason.Gonzales@StarNewsOnline.com

After looking at an instructional medical mannequin at UNCW's McNeil Hall, 14-year-old Rosaysela Torres told a Camp BONES Academy adviser, "Maybe we will get to use this one next year."

As it stands, that won't happen.

Grant funding for the outreach academy has dried up. And with state budget cuts, the school cannot fund the coordinator's position,

Hosted by the school's nursing program, the Brigade of Nurse Exploring Seahawks (BONES) has helped numerous children get a jump on college, according to those involved.

On Wednesday, the kids participated in the program's last camp session by helping a mannequin give birth and taking care of a lifelike mannequin patient who could even complain about discomfort. Coordinators said they are searching for funding sources to keep the camp alive.
"This is such a loss to the community," said Cyndi Meredith, the coordinator whose last day at the school will be Aug. 31. "There are many more students who can benefit from this program."

Since since its inception in 2006, the camp has helped 12 students each year get a glimpse into the medical profession.

The four-year academy is designed to give ethnically diverse children a chance to see what college is like and offer nursing experience. Many of the children are from rural counties. All are required to have good grades and stay out of trouble.

Program advisers follow students progress from middle school to graduation, said Brandy Mechling, a UNCW lecturer and camp adviser.

"We want to give them exposure to the health care profession," Mechling said. "But the big thing is we want to have them go to college."

During Wednesday's activities, with heart monitors beeping in the background, students were given a rundown on proper sanitation techniques, how to properly deliver a baby and how to care for the baby and mother.

Noelle, the expecting mannequin, provided a look into what the medical profession offers for the aspiring group of nurses and doctors.

"I have always liked babies, and that's why I want to become a pediatrician," said Torres, who will be a ninth-grader at Brunswick County Early College High School this year.

"No one could change my mind, definitely," she affirmed. "But when I went into that room and saw the delivery – a lot changed. I think I want to deliver babies."

Although the program is not one of the casualties of the school's 15.8 percent budget reduction from the state, it comes at a time when less money is available.

Coordinators say they have searched for more grant money, but to no avail. Camp BONES Academy will be the only summer programs not renewed next year, according to Tom Barth, interim vice chancellor for public service.

"There just is a limited amount of funding out there," said Janie Canty-Mitchell, associate director for research and sponsored programs at the nursing school. She said she is still seeking private donations and grants to save the program.
Meredith said the loss of the program will be a blow to the school, the eight counties it serves and most of all, the students.

The opportunity the camp gives, she said, is invaluable.

"It gives them experience and exposure to college and the career," Meredith said. "When they get to college they know what they need to do."

"It's a big loss."

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What are UNCW students reading? ‘Zeitoun,’ for one
by Ben Steelman

Each year, under its “Synergy” program, the University of North Caroling Wilmington picks an important but interesting book as its “Common Reading Experience.”

All incoming freshmen receive it in their orientation packs, and upperclasspersons are urged to read it. The campus plans a series of events based around the book and faculty members are politely encouraged to work it into their curricula.


For the fall of 2011, the Synergy book is “Zeitoun” by Dave Eggers. Published in 2009, it’s the true story of a Syrian-American painting contractor and his wife, living in New Orleans, who survived Hurricane Katrina.

After the storm, Abdulrahman Zeitoun obtained a rowboat and steered through the flooded city, rescuing neighbors (and their pets) and distributing fresh water. The book received almost universal acclaim (although some critics contained it contained no local dialect and no local cuisine). Director Jonathan Demme (“Silence of the Lambs”) is reportedly working on an animated film version.

UNCW posted this page about ”Zeitoun,” including a link to a video of Eggers talking about the book:

Eggers, now 41, burst to national attention in 2000 with his bittersweet, often tongue-in-cheek memoir “A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius.”
He’s written story collections, but is better known for his non-fiction, especially “What is the What” (2006), about a survivor of the civil war in southern Sudan. “What is the What” was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award and won the French Prix Medici.

Eggers founded the publishing house McSweeney’s, which produces a quarterly magazine and has an active online presence. See: http://www.mcsweeneyys.net/

His 826 Valencia project, launched in San Francisco and since taken nationally, has been active in the cause of youth literacy and helping students with their writing skills: http://www.826national.org/

In 2009, Eggers dedicated proceeds from the sale of “Zeitoun” to the Zeitoun Foundation, a non-profit to aid with the rebuilding “and continued health” of the city of New Orleans. See: http://www.zeitounfoundation.org/
By Mark R. Sullivan, AP

Mike Holland, president of union Local 888 and a carpenter for Rutgers University, participates in a rally July 14 ahead of University's Board of Governors approving an increase in student tuition.

Colleges boost student fees to fill gaps in state funding

By Mary Beth Marklein, USA TODAY

July 28, 2011

Colleges are tacking on mandatory student fees at a time when state funding is dwindling and public universities are trying to hold the line on tuition.

Indiana University-Bloomington is adding a $180 "temporary repair and maintenance fee" this fall; next year it doubles. Freshmen and transfer students this fall at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale will be charged a one-time $150 "matriculation fee" for orientation costs. Students at Georgia's public universities will pay 3% more in tuition, but with fees the increase jumps to an average 9% more than last year. The rise is driven primarily by a "special institutional fee" that will cost as much as $1,088 next year for some students. For Georgia Tech freshmen, all fees total $2,370 — about a quarter of the total charge, $9,652.

The special fee, a temporary measure to help make up for budget shortfalls, "keeps the lights on. It pays the faculty. It pays for all the things that tuition pays," University System of Georgia spokesman John Millsaps says.

A USA TODAY analysis last year of athletics fees found that many NCAA Division I schools don't itemize what student fees pay for. Lawmakers in several states are demanding transparency.

Colorado, where a 2010 audit of public universities found "some fees may be higher than necessary," enacted a law this summer making it easier for students to question proposed charges. Between 2006 and 2010, fees in Colorado rose 142% vs. 69% for tuition, auditors found.

New Jersey state Sen. Joe Kyrillos, a Republican who was incensed this spring that Jersey Shore star Nicole "Snooki" Polizzi was paid $32,000 in student activity fees to
speak at Rutgers University, proposes that state schools be required to detail on tuition bills how fees are allocated.
Beginning next month, North Dakota state universities must publish an online breakdown of how mandatory fees are spent. Legislators also have ordered a study of how fees are determined, identified and justified.

"A big part of planning for college (is) knowing how much things are going to cost," says Emily McLain, executive director of the Oregon Student Association. As a student in 2007, she and other students worked with state legislators to force the state university system to phase out a laundry list of fees by this fall. Many fees had been added more than a decade ago to get around a state-imposed tuition freeze and budget cuts, says Jay Kenton, a system vice chancellor.

For some Georgia students, there's a double whammy: Not only have legislators cut funding to universities, but they're also scaling back merit scholarships. Starting this fall, they won't cover fees.
There’s a new experiment to get Prince George’s County high school students ready for higher education: sending them straight to college.

This fall, 100 ninth-graders will attend classes on the campus of Prince George’s Community College in Largo through a public school initiative called the Academy of Health Sciences. They’ll start with typical classes from high school teachers in such subjects as English, biology, math and Chinese.

By 11th grade, administrators expect these students to be immersed in college life. They’ll have meal plans. Ninety percent of their classes will be with professors and college students. Many are expected to earn enough credits to receive an associate’s degree along with a high school diploma.
“It’s going to help us save money for college,” said Sarah Tayel, 13, of Laurel, who is part of the first academy class. “And it feels so different to go to high school in the midst of adults.”

The project, the first of its kind in Maryland, is starting despite the county’s recent budget troubles. School board members initially raised concerns about spending $2.1 million on the program while the system was facing a $155 million budget shortfall. But Superintendent William R. Hite Jr. championed the project, calling it a “rare opportunity.”

The program is known as a “middle college,” reflecting the idea that it blends high school and college. It enrolls students full time on a college campus, which sets it apart from dual-enrollment programs in which high school students take selected college courses for credit.

In the District, the School Without Walls Senior High School is a selective public school based on George Washington University’s campus. In some Virginia community colleges, students over 18 can enroll in programs that allow them to receive an associate’s degree and obtain a GED diploma.

In Prince George’s, the middle college targets disadvantaged students. Half of those students accepted into the program are eligible for free or reduced-price meals, or would be the first in their families to go to college.

Officials say the school aims to give motivated students an extra edge, socially and economically, in pursuing their college dreams. The school received 980 applications from eighth-graders. The 100 students admitted were chosen based on such factors as family income, an assessment test and grade-point averages.

“These are talented kids, who, if given the opportunity, can rise to the level,” said Kathy Richard Andrews, acting principal of the academy. “They have a lot of strengths. All they need is the opportunity.”

To help ease students into campus life, administrators hosted a three-week summer orientation that ends this week.

On the first day of the session, Sarah and three other students walked with the school’s instructional specialist through the brick buildings on campus and past the bookstore. The dean explained that each year, the school will add a class of 100 until it reaches its targeted enrollment of 400.

“We’re pioneers!” Sarah exclaimed.

The students settled into a lecture hall, where an instructor divided them into groups of 10. They asked one another about their likes and dislikes. Then the
instructor told them to treat answers as data and assemble a visual demonstration of the responses.

Through bar graphs, the students showed their collective love for hip-hop and preferences for sneakers over other shoes. In Jay-shawn Miller’s group, 60 percent already spoke more than one language. Two in the group knew how to speak four.

“We all have things in common that we like,” said Jay-shawn, 13, of Temple Hills. “Like biology.”

The middle college concept is nearly four decades old, according to Cecilia Cunningham, director of the Middle College National Consortium and former principal at Middle College High School at LaGuardia Community College in New York. There are 35 schools in the consortium, in addition to other middle colleges that are unaffiliated. Cunningham said the middle colleges have shown particularly strong results for those who are behind academically.

“When you change the milieu, something happens,” Cunningham said. “There’s a signal that goes off that they can rise to the challenge, if they have the support.”

Last year, a study the consortium commissioned from Teachers College-Columbia University concluded that students in such programs generally succeeded, regardless of their previous performance in middle school.

By the time the students graduated, 92 percent felt confident they could handle college course work, said Elisabeth Barnett, a senior research associate at Teachers College. The research also found that students who were below grade level when they entered middle college left 12th grade with roughly 30 college credits, and an average GPA of 2.35 in the college classes in which they were enrolled.

Still, the concept hasn’t gained much traction nationally, even as the number of high school students taking college classes through dual enrollment or taking Advanced Placement courses has risen.

“I think, quite honestly, the issue is, ‘Who pays for it?’” Cunningham said. “Does the district pay for it? Does the college?”

In Prince George’s, the questions were no different. During school board budget hearings in the spring, some parents contended that the academy would drain money from existing programs that faced cuts.
In the end, the school board voted to go ahead with the program, although it cut some of the academy’s transportation funding.

This summer, the students found themselves focused on the tasks ahead of them in coming years: anatomy, calculus and the ability to feel comfortable on a campus where the median student age is 24.

“I have a feeling this is going to be amazing,” Jay-shawn said. “And really hard.”

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