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Wahab shares knowledge of local history

By KEVIN SCOTT CUTLER
Lifestyles & Features Editor
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BATH — While many of her peers are working this summer at fast-food restaurants or mowing lawns, rising Northside High School senior Callie Wahab is enjoying the opportunity to pursue her interest in history.

Wahab began her first part-time job this summer with Historic Bath State Historic Site. Her duties include manning the information/gift-shop desk in the visitors center and conducting tours of the historic Palmer-Marsh House. She’s also studying up on local history to add tours of the Bonner House to her job description.

“During the tours, we tell about the history of each house and the artifacts,” said Wahab, a 17-year-old Bath native. “I know more about the history of the town now and more details about each house.”

Wahab, classified as a temporary employee, will work part-time hours throughout the upcoming school year, said Bea Latham, historic interpreter and assistant site manager.

“It’s always nice when we can hire teenagers for our temporary position and open their eyes to not only the history of Bath, but to the different parts in North Carolina history,” Latham said. “We certainly have been fortunate to have Callie here with us because she already knows a lot of history, which made it easier for her to just ease right into this job.”

Wahab is certainly no stranger to local history. As a child, she volunteered in costume for different programs hosted by Historic Bath. And along with her parents, Ron and Phoebe Wahab, she has participated in period reenactments at the USS North Carolina battleship in Wilmington and with Revolutionary War-related events.

History is her favorite subject at Northside. After high-school graduation, Wahab hopes to attend East Carolina University.

“It has a really good archaeology program, and that’s what I want to do,” she said. “ECU just seems to
fit with what I want to do.”

For information about tours and special events at Historic Bath State Historic Site, call the visitors center at 252-923-3971.
Tuition help for military spouses to resume
Laura Oleniacz
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A Department of Defense tuition assistance program for military spouses will reopen in the fall under new rules that restrict access to the program to spouses of personnel who fall within certain pay grades.

The Military Spouse Career Advancement Accounts program, or MyCAA, was halted in February after a surge in enrollment pushed the program to its limits. The program was restarted again in March for students who were already enrolled in the program.

MyCAA will reopen on Oct. 25 to new spouses of active duty services members in the pay grades E-1 to E-5, W-1 to W-2, and O-1 to O-2, according to militaryonesource.com.

Spouses must finish their programs within three years, and the funding can only be used for associate’s degrees, certifications and licensures.

Students can receive up to $4,000 in tuition assistance under the new guidelines. Their tuition assistance is capped at $2,000 per fiscal year.

Maj. April Cunningham, a Department of Defense spokeswoman, wrote in an e-mail that MyCAA payments will be made after a spouse opens an account and puts together an education plan. Students who pay for a class before that is done will not be reimbursed.

The assistance under the new guidelines is less than what it was when the program started in March 2009 to give spouses an opportunity to pursue “portable careers” in high-demand, high-growth occupations.

Spouses were eligible to receive up to $6,000 in assistance then, but on Oct. 25 all accounts will be reduced to $4,000, and spouses who no longer qualify for the program under the new rules will have their accounts locked.

Cunningham said there is no set timeline for how long the program will remain open. She said about $215 million was reprogrammed to meet fiscal year 2010 needs, and the estimated cost for fiscal year 2011 is $250 million.

"In coming years, with a reduced defense budget reality, every program will be closely scrutinized for its contribution to military family readiness," Cunningham wrote in an e-mail.

Sen. Kay Hagan, D-N.C., sent a letter to Secretary of Defense Robert Gates stating that she does not believe the program is consistent with its original intent, according to a news release.

"I stand ready to work with you to adjust the implementation guidelines in order to restore the tuition assistance cap to $6,000, allow for the application of benefits to apply towards bachelor’s and master’s degrees, and ensure the program does not exclude certain military spouses," she wrote.

Spouses with existing MyCAA accounts are continuing to use the program at Craven Community College.

Sandy Wall, the college’s public information officer, said 90 students signed up for fall 2010 using MyCAA. From last fall to the summer, he said 207 students from the college used MyCAA.

“As a retired Marine, I think anything they can do for military dependents is great," said Wally Calabrese, faculty chair of the college’s Havelock-Cherry Point Campus.

Wall said registration re-opens for five days starting Aug. 9. Fall classes start Aug. 18 for the regular and A terms.

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Getting Into Med School Without Hard Sciences

By ANEMONA HARTOCOLLIS

For generations of pre-med students, three things have been as certain as death and taxes: organic chemistry, physics and the Medical College Admission Test, known by its dread-inducing acronym, the MCAT.

So it came as a total shock to Elizabeth Adler when she discovered, through a singer in her favorite a cappella group at Brown University, that one of the nation’s top medical schools admits a small number of students every year who have skipped all three requirements.

Until then, despite being the daughter of a physician, she said, “I was kind of thinking medical school was not the right track for me.”

Ms. Adler became one of the lucky few in one of the best kept secrets in the cutthroat world of medical school admissions, the Humanities and Medicine Program at the Mount Sinai medical school on the Upper East Side of Manhattan.

The program promises slots to about 35 undergraduates a year if they study humanities or social sciences instead of the traditional pre-medical school curriculum and maintain a 3.5 grade-point average.

For decades, the medical profession has debated whether pre-med courses and admission tests produce doctors who know their alkyl halides but lack the sense of mission and interpersonal skills to become well-rounded, caring, inquisitive healers.

That debate is being rekindled by a study published on Thursday in Academic Medicine, the journal of the Association of American Medical Colleges. Conducted by the Mount Sinai program’s founder, Dr. Nathan Kase, and the medical school’s dean for medical education, Dr. Robert Muller, the peer-reviewed study compared outcomes for 85 students in the Humanities and Medicine Program with those of 606 traditionally prepared classmates from the graduating classes of 2004 through 2009, and found that their academic performance in medical school was equivalent.
“There’s no question,” Dr. Kase said. “The default pathway is: Well, how did they do on the MCAT? How did they do on organic chemistry? What was their grade-point average?”

“That excludes a lot of kids,” said Dr. Kase, who founded the Mount Sinai program in 1987 when he was dean of the medical school, and who is now dean emeritus and a professor of obstetrics and gynecology. “But it also diminishes; it makes science into an obstacle rather than something that is an insight into the biology of human disease.”

Whether the study’s findings will inspire other medical schools to change admissions requirements remains to be seen.

Because MCAT scores are used by U.S. News and World Report and others to rank schools, the most competitive ones fear dropping the test, admissions officials said. And at least two recent studies found that MCAT scores were better than grade-point averages at predicting performance in medical school and on the series of licensing exams that medical students and doctors must take.

“You have to have the proper amount of moral courage to say ‘O.K., we’re going to skip over a lot of the huge barriers to a lot of our students,’ ” said Dr. David Battinelli, senior associate dean for education at Hofstra University School of Medicine.

But, Dr. Battinelli added, “Now let’s see how they’re doing 5 and 10 years down the road.” The Mount Sinai study did not answer the question.

There are a few other schools in the United States and Canada that admit students without MCAT scores, but Mount Sinai appears to have gone furthest in eschewing traditional science preparation, said Dr. Dan Hunt, co-secretary of the Liaison Committee on Medical Education, the medical school accrediting agency.

The students apply in their sophomore or junior years in college and agree to major in humanities or social science, rather than the hard sciences. If they are admitted, they are required to take only basic biology and chemistry, at a level many students accomplish through Advanced Placement courses in high school.

They forgo organic chemistry, physics and calculus — though they get abbreviated organic chemistry and physics courses during a summer boot camp run by Mount Sinai. They are exempt from the MCAT. Instead, they are admitted into the program based on their high school SAT scores, two personal essays, their high school and early college grades and interviews.

The study found that, by some measures, the humanities students made more sensitive
doctors: they were more than twice as likely to train as psychiatrists (14 percent compared with 5.6 percent of their classmates) and somewhat more likely — though less so than Dr. Kase had expected — to go into primary care fields, like pediatrics and obstetrics and gynecology (49 percent compared with 39 percent). Conversely, they avoid some fields, like surgical subspecialties and anesthesiology.

But what surprised the authors the most, they said, was that humanities students were significantly more likely than their peers to devote a year to scholarly research (28 percent compared with 14 percent). They scored lower on Step 1 of the Medical Licensing Examination, taken after the second year of medical school, which generally correlates with scientific knowledge. But over all, they ranked about the same in honors grades and in the percentage in the top quarter of the class.

Humanities students were also more likely to take a leave of absence for personal reasons, which could reflect some ambivalence about their choices, the study authors said.

Typically, 5 percent to 10 percent of the class drops out before getting to medical school. Those students cannot handle the science or they have changed their minds about their intention to be a doctor, said Miki Rifkin, the program director. One who dropped out was Jonathan Safran Foer, who became an acclaimed novelist.

Dr. Kase founded the Mount Sinai program shortly after a national report on physician preparation questioned the single-minded focus on hard science.

He began with a few students from five colleges and universities that did not have their own medical schools — Amherst, Brandeis, Princeton, Wesleyan and Williams — because, he said, “we did not want to poach.”

It has been going full tilt for the past 10 years, and received nearly 300 applications last year from more than 80 colleges across the country, though admissions heavily favor elite schools.

Among undergraduates accepted in 2009, the mean SAT math and verbal score was 1444, and the mean freshman G.P.A. was 3.74. About a third of the class had at least one parent who was a physician; among all medical schools, about one in five has a parent who is a doctor.

Among the current crop is Ms. Adler, 21, a senior at Brown studying global political economy and majoring in development studies.

Ms. Adler said she was inspired by her freshman study abroad in Africa. “I didn’t want to waste a class on physics, or waste a class on orgo,” she said. “The social determinants of health are so much more pervasive than the immediate biology of it.”
She added that her parents, however, were “thrilled when I decided to go the M.D. route, because they were worried about my job security.”

A classmate in the program, Kathryn Friedman, 21, graduated from the Chapin School in New York City, before going to Williams, where she is a senior, majoring in political science. Her mother and uncle are doctors at Mount Sinai; her father, Robert Friedman, who works in the entertainment business, is on the Mount Sinai Medical Center board.

The humanities program has allowed her to pursue other interests, like playing varsity tennis and going abroad, she said. When her pre-med classmates hear about the program, she said, “a lot of them are jealous.”

She added, “They are, like, ‘Wow, I wish I had known about that.’ ”