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Department shields ECU from 'risky' business
By JOSH HUMPHRIES
The Daily Reflector
Wednesday, August 4, 2010

Protecting East Carolina University’s reputation, financial standing and future strategies could be considered the job of every official on campus, but for Tim Wiseman these form the definition of his job.

Wiseman is the director of the Office of Enterprise Risk Management, a department that works to maintain ECU’s standing as a fiscally responsible, strategically innovative and safe university. The concept is borrowed from the corporate world where major scandals like those at Enron and WorldCom caused serious economic damage and pages of new laws from Washington. ECU is helping to lead the effort of public institutions that want to get ahead of trouble before it starts.

“We are rightly expected to catch those who misuse resources, to prevent the worst abuses with strict internal controls, and to develop the best standards of practice across a range of difficult and often complex business enterprises,” ECU Chancellor Steve Ballard wrote on the university’s Web site. “This is as it should be, but most universities haven’t been aggressive enough in evolving their approach to risk management, nor vigilant enough in addressing both traditional and new vulnerabilities.”

The strategy of using ECU’s resources appropriately and keeping students safe led to the creation of the Office of Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) and the hiring of Wiseman to oversee it.

“Enterprise risk management is a holistic, comprehensive approach to risk identification and prioritization ultimately leading to better governance, strategic decision-making, resource allocation and stewardship,” Ballard wrote. “In the university setting, ERM involves assessing risks in strategic, financial, operational, compliance and reputational categories.”

Wiseman said the growth of ECU over the last decade has necessitated a strategy to watch over those categories of risk in an effort to maintain the university’s status as safe and law-abiding but also maintain the university’s overall reputation.

“Many would argue that reputation is sort of the circle that has a part to play in all the others,” Wiseman said. “Ultimately, we have a stewardship role and resource accountability to the taxpayer, parents and stakeholders at ECU. Our reputation can be enhanced by our work or it can be harmed by mistakes.”

Avoiding potential public relations disasters like a school shooting or a financial scandal is very important to ECU officials. Wiseman works across departments to find the best ways to avert potential reputation-crippling situations.

“When you get to be as large as ECU has become, you have to step up your game of watching across departmental lines to see how risks that develop in one sector of the university might have an effect somewhere else,” Wiseman said.
“We are looking at risks that might emerge on the horizon or that we are currently mitigating or controlling that could significantly derail ECU from achieving its mission.”
Wiseman said it is all about having a healthy process to identify risks before they occur. That, he said, is why ECU spends so much time on safety training and financial auditing.
“We want to head off at the pass a number of things that at a minimum would distract us from our goals and objectives,” he said.
ECU is considered a leader in enterprise risk management among the public sector. Wiseman will speak at the Federal Enterprise Risk Management Summit in Washington, D.C., and the Enterprise Risk Management in Higher Education Conference in California this year.
ECU also has provided materials to the Florida Department of Revenue to assist with the creation of an ERM program.
“We have taken some significant first steps on our ERM journey, and in true Pirate fashion, we are in a small, elite group of universities that have chosen to pioneer the ERM construct in a university environment,” Ballard wrote.
“We cannot neglect our risks as our university’s operations become more complex, interrelated, and far-reaching. I will offer ‘no quarter’ to complacency in this regard, nor should we expect otherwise from our ECU supporters and stakeholders.”

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Rhett Butler/The Daily Reflector

Members of the group get a closer look at metal plates used to print the paper in the pre-press area at The Daily Reflector on Tuesday afternoon.
Rhett Butler/The Daily Reflector

**Workshop introduces high schoolers to journalism**
The Daily Reflector
Wednesday, August 4, 2010
Fourteen students from the Greenville area visited The Daily Reflector on Tuesday for the newspaper’s first High School Minority Journalism Workshop.
The students spent the day at the newspaper offices to learn about careers in journalism and how the business operates.
“It’s been a very enlightening experience,” said Bridget Demery, a rising sophomore at J.H. Rose High School.
Michael Cavanagh, an instructor in the East Carolina University School of Communication, presented information on the First Amendment and included cases involving high school students and their rights, generating discussion among the group.
Newspaper reporters also shared their experiences reporting and writing the news, including the stories and people they’ve enjoyed and the heartbreaking tragedies they wished they didn’t have to cover.

Gigi Walter, the Reflector’s former Newspapers in Education coordinator, presented the history of the newspaper, including significant historical events in Greenville and Pitt County. The students also participated in posting a story and photo on reflector.com with the guidance of Bobby Burns, associate editor of Internet News and Information. Information about careers in other newspaper departments, including advertising, creative services, production and circulation, also was shared.

Reflector publisher and owner John Cooke Jr. welcomed the group to the paper, along with executive editor Al Clark.

The workshop was designed to give the students a glimpse at journalism and the newspaper business at a time when they’re beginning to think about going to college and considering their careers, said Cherie Speller, who coordinated the program. She is associate editor for readership and news.

“It’s important for newsrooms to represent the communities they cover with a diverse staff, not only with race and gender, but other factors, including age, socioeconomic background and other experiences,” Speller said.

“We want to be sure area students know that there is a demanding, but fulfilling, career and future in providing news and information to the community.”
Demolition crews end reign of Kings Arms Apartments
By Kathryn Kennedy
The Daily Reflector
Wednesday, August 4, 2010
It’s been a fixture on Charles Boulevard for more than 25 years: The unadorned, brick building that former tenants and Greenville residents will remember for its cheap rent, quirky characters and seedy reputation.
Demolition began on Kings Arms Apartments on Monday, with crews stripping the “skin” or outside layer of the buildings beginning at the back of the property. Chunks were already missing from the roof and walls following training drills by Greenville Fire-Rescue.
Edwards Communities Development Company, based in Dayton, Ohio, will also remove the former Real Crisis Center house and Green Mill Run apartment complexes to make way for a 15.81-acre apartment complex.

The Province in Greenville will include nine three-story buildings, a maintenance building and a swimming pool that will be marketed to college students with one, two, three, and four-bedroom units, according to plans approved by the city. The complex will include 244 units and 729 beds. It will, no doubt, change the landscape of that block between 10th and 14th streets. Former apartment tenants hold a mixed bag of memories.

Chris Cooper moved into Kings Arms in 1998 and lived there until everyone was moved out during the first week of last month.

"I never had any problems living there," he said. "It was a nice place to live since it was relatively cheap and it was close to (East Carolina University) campus where I was a sociology grad student."

"I could walk out the front door, turn right and walk to school," agreed Bob, an employee of Edgecombe County's Department of Social Services who withheld his last name. "For football or basketball I could turn left and walk to the games."

Bob moved in seven years ago and also turned his keys this July. That move to a new apartment "bettered his life," he said. At Kings Arms people were constantly partying, knocking on his door to ask for a beer or a cigarette or a quarter.

Shannon Wolfe, a former photographer for The Daily Reflector who now lives in Winston-Salem, also remembers strange interactions with fellow residents.

"Some crazy college student that I had never met who lived in another apartment came into my apartment while I was there, said hello to me and was trying to take Louie bird out of his cage," she said. "Of course, he was drunk. I had to tell him that he needed to leave my bird alone and leave my apartment!"

But she also remembers the kindness of a manager who allowed a friend and her two daughters to stay with Wolfe for a month when they were without housing.

"There were quite a few loony people living in that building so I fit right in," Wolfe quipped.

Brian Whichard recalled a Mr. Jonny who "always played guitar on the porch, day or night, on or off tune."

"Over the years the residents changed," Cooper said. "Originally, I was surrounded by fellow ECU students but within the last six years more and more immigrant families moved in. The place started to get a little rundown around the same time with problems getting things fixed," he continued, citing flooding from storms and overhead apartments. He described long waits for air conditioning repairs.

Many living in adjacent neighborhoods say they are glad to see it go.

Glen Arthur Neighborhood Association President Melissa Tilley said she's hosting an invitation-only "wrecking ball party" when the last Kings Arms brick falls. Tilley said she'd made efforts in the past encouraging ECU to buy the land for dorms and is glad the complex is coming to fruition.

"The neighborhood calls (the new development) the chick-magnet," she said, laughing. "Because who's going to pay $575 a month to put their son in there? It's going to be girls and it's going to be awesome."

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Team studies the N.C. coast

OCEAN ISLE BEACH -- Seven people walked the 50-meter-long seine net into chest-high water, then slowly returned to the beach with scores of Florida pompano, striped mullet and gulf kingfish, among others.

Destined for labs at UNC Wilmington, the fish, along with water and sediment samples gathered nearby, will be used to create a baseline measurement of what the coastal environment is like now, unsullied by oil from the spill in the Gulf of Mexico or anywhere else.

The oil apparently has not left the gulf. State officials who gathered last week at UNC-Chapel Hill for an oil-spill forum were told that the probability of crude reaching North Carolina was extremely small.

"It's beyond remote now," said Kenneth Taylor, disaster response coordinator for the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources. "The oil is breaking up in the gulf all by itself."

But that does not mean the science has stopped. On Wednesday, about a dozen researchers, many of them students, worked with UNC Wilmington professors to gather samples. N.C. Sea Grant provided $6,000 for the research, which will eventually encompass visits to six beaches, from Ocean Isle to Hatteras.

Lawrence Cahoon, a UNCW professor of biology and marine biology, helped the students take sediment samples. Back at the lab, researchers will examine the tiny algae that live in the water and sediment.

"The microscopic algae is the base of the food chain," Cahoon said. "The fishes are here because this is the buffet line."

If oil did arrive, scientists could point to these samples to show the condition of the ecosystem before it was tainted. Data from the algae and fish could be important.

"We have a series of tests that tells us how happy and healthy these fish are," said Thomas Lankford, an associate professor of biology and marine biology.

Researchers will take tissue samples from the fish, analyze their oils and fats, and examine the contents of their stomachs. The fish will be tested for parasites, and some tissue samples will be frozen and archived.

The professors had been working on a long-term study in New Hanover County on the impact of beach nourishment, the practice of adding sand to beaches to fight erosion. They were nearing the end of the project when the gulf spill gave them a new research opportunity.
"We were well-positioned to respond," Lankford said.

In the weeks immediately following the Deepwater Horizon disaster in the gulf, scientists along the East Coast began forecasting the oil's movement. The National Center for Atmospheric Research released a computer model that showed how currents could bring oil to North Carolina waters, though the conditions that would have made that happen haven't materialized.

This week, Gov. Bev Perdue signed into law a bill that lifts the cap on damages that can be recovered as the result of an offshore oil spill. She had previously directed state officials to update the state's oil spill contingency plan to prepare for the unlikely event that the leaked BP oil makes it to North Carolina.

In June and July, the state gathered extensive samples of sea life from 34 spots up and down the coast. Oysters, shrimp, crabs and a wide variety of fish were collected as part of a separate effort to create a snapshot of an oil-free environment.

Even if tar balls never reach the North Carolina coast, the samples gathered and the science collected from them will not go to waste.

"Having that data in the bank," said Michael Voiland, executive director of N.C. Sea Grant, "is not a bad thing."

Cahoon, the UNCW professor, agrees. Accidents happen.

"We could have a hurricane knockover a tanker in two weeks," he said.

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NCAA visits UNC again

NCAA investigators were back on the North Carolina campus on Wednesday, athletic director Dick Baddour confirmed.

The NCAA has visited several schools in what appears to be a wide-ranging investigation of potential improprieties involving athletes and sports agents.

"We are all working as hard as we can to resolve this issue as quickly as we can," Baddour said.

Meanwhile, a UNC football team spokesman said defensive tackle Marvin Austin and wide receiver Greg Little will practice with the team Friday when the Tar Heels' training camp opens.

Shane Lyons, the ACC's associate commissioner for compliance, said there is no NCAA rule against players under NCAA investigation participating in practice.

On July 12 and 13, NCAA investigators Rachel Newman-Baker and Chance Martin interviewed an undisclosed number of athletes at UNC. Little's father later said that Little was interviewed, and The News & Observer confirmed that Austin also spoke to investigators.

Baddour declined to reveal who was interviewed during the NCAA's return to campus. Baddour did say Wednesday that the school is participating in the investigation in conjunction with the NCAA.

"We view this as a joint review, absolutely, that's ongoing," Baddour said. "Their initial call to us was that we will conduct this review together, and that's what we're doing."

The review won't affect who can practice with the team. Lyons said a player would be able to practice even if ruled ineligible.

"They would be ineligible for competition, not for practice," Lyons said.

Kevin Best, the team's spokesman, said Austin and Little will be at practice Friday.

South Carolina tight end Weslye Saunders, who was also interviewed by the NCAA, practiced with the Gamecocks on Tuesday.

UNC opens the season on Sept. 4 against Louisiana State in Atlanta. If it doesn't get a ruling from the NCAA, Lyons said, then the school would have to make a decision.

"The institution has to ask itself if they have violated any rules," Lyons said, without specifically commenting on the UNC probe. "Then they would have to make a determination if they are going to withhold the players in question."
Lyons said players ruled ineligible by the NCAA are still eligible to remain on scholarship and practice with the team, under NCAA rules.

It would be up to UNC, not the ACC or NCAA, to revoke an ineligible player's scholarship, Lyons said.

Since their initial visit to North Carolina, NCAA investigators are known to have met with athletes at South Carolina, Alabama, Georgia and Clemson.

NCAA rules prevent athletes from agreeing to allow agents to represent them and from accepting anything of value from agents. NCAA penalties for athletes can range from having to repay the benefit to permanent loss of eligibility, depending on the severity of the violation.

Schools also can be forced to expunge from their records any games in which ineligible athletes participated. North Carolina's Uniform Athlete Agent Act also requires agents to register with the state and prohibits them from making false promises or providing anything of value to student-athletes before they enter into a contract.

As a result of media reports about UNC, North Carolina Secretary of State Elaine Marshall has launched an investigation into possible violations of the law by agents.

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Pain drug might stop the hurt for days

A new way of blunting pain is being developed at UNC-Chapel Hill, where researchers hope their approach could eventually be used to block pain for several days and diminish the need for narcotics.

The novel therapy interrupts the cascade of events that occurs when nerves are stimulated by pain, blocking the flow of a crucial enzyme that nerves need to communicate sensation. Used before surgery, it could block pain for days.

Although much research remains to be done, the approach adds a glimmer of hope for tens of millions of pain sufferers who have few safe and effective choices for chronic discomfort. Just last month, another promising pain drug was pulled from clinical trials amid concerns that it was harming patients.

"We do need to discover new ways to understand how pain works and understand how to provide relief," said Will Rowe, CEO of the advocacy group American Pain Foundation.

The UNC-CH team said its work is in the early stages but has shown significant results in the lab.

"It's not ready for prime time in terms of somebody taking a pill or protein in the next six months, but we're getting close to being able to test in humans," said Mark Zylka, a neuroscientist and co-author of a study about the new treatment published in this week's edition of the Journal of Neuroscience.

Zylka said the UNC-CH group is working to sell the technology or launch a startup company to develop a therapy for clinical trials. The university holds patents on it.

Tests in laboratory animals have used an injectable protein at an injury site. Zylka said the injection zeroes in on the pain pathway for at least three days. In other instances, pain has been blocked for up to nine days.

If such long-term results bear out in human trials, the approach could be used before surgeries, and it could alleviate the chronic pain that plagues 76.2 million people in the United States. More people suffer from chronic pain conditions than from diabetes, heart disease and cancer combined, according to the American Pain Foundation.

New treatments for chronic pain are desperately needed, said Dr. Roger Chou, a pain specialist at Oregon Health & Science University and director of the American Pain Society's Clinical Practice Guideline Program.

"Chronic pain is very difficult to treat," Chou said. "We've known that for many years and are still struggling with it. People who have chronic pain, even with opioids, which are our strongest drugs, only experience a one- or two-point improvement on a 10-point pain scale. It's not that big of an
improvement."

But few alternatives have emerged to replace narcotic pain relievers, which include opioids such as morphine. Such drugs have long been problematic, often requiring larger and larger doses to alleviate pain, triggering dependency and addiction in some people and raising concerns about illegal uses.

And drugs further along in the approval process have run into snags. A promising candidate, Tanezumab, was pulled from trials last month because of side effects. An earlier trial of the drug was stopped when arthritis patients reported that their conditions worsened.

"Sometimes enthusiasm precedes the science," Chou said. "We need to be sure about what works and what's safe."

Chou said the UNC-CH drug therapy has a long way to go before pain patients can hope for a new alternative.

"The basic science stuff is critical, and we need it to get the breakthroughs," he said, noting that the UNC-CH work is still being conducted in laboratory animals.

"It sounds very interesting, and we always hope we find things that are effective and safe."

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Perdue: Thank you, senators

The U.S. Senate voted 61-38 Wednesday to break a filibuster blocking a measure that would help states pay for Medicaid and teachers' salaries.

North Carolina and other states are desperate for the Medicaid money. Under the stimulus law, the federal government has been picking up a bigger share of the cost of the government health insurance for the poor and disabled. States were counting on getting the extra money through July 2011, but it appeared as if the beefed up payments were going to end in December because of shaky Senate support.

Faced with the uncertainty, state lawmakers wrote a budget that included a list of progressively painful steps that would have been taken in January had the money not been approved. After state officials had raided savings accounts, cuts would have hit the state's contribution to the pension system and would have eventually sliced 1 percent of all state spending.

Because the amount the Senate approved was less than what states had expected, North Carolina would likely get about $300 million instead of $500 million.

Still, Gov. Bev Perdue said in a statement that she was pleased.

"I want to thank the U.S. Senate, and especially Sen. Kay Hagan, for voting to move forward with Medicaid funding and money to keep teachers in the classroom," Perdue said in a statement.

The contingency cuts would have been difficult for the state, Perdue said. "This was the dire scenario I emphasized when I called members of our congressional delegation in recent weeks to push for this funding, and I thank them. I am confident both the Senate and House will ultimately approve this critical legislation."

House Speaker Joe Hackney called the Senate vote "excellent news for education in North Carolina and for public school teachers."
LIFE & STYLE | AUGUST 5, 2010

No More New Kid on Campus

*Students Turn To Online Roommate Matching Services to Avoid Getting Paired With a Stranger*

By ISAAC ARNSDORF

As soon as he received his roommate assignment in the mail, Sam Brown did what any 17-year-old about to enter college would do: He looked him up on Facebook.

When Sam, who will be attending the University of Colorado at Boulder, couldn't find him, he turned to Google Earth. By searching the address the college provided, Sam could see aerial photos of his future roommate's house in Encino, Calif.—his lawn, his basketball hoop, the cars in his driveway, his pool.

Incoming Bowling Green State University freshmen Erica Steele and Katelyn DeVore had never met. But after they scored a 95% match on an online compatibility test, they signed up to room together this fall.

This online scouting—and the judgments students make based on what they see—are dramatically changing the time-honored college practice of learning to live with a stranger freshman year.

Many schools see assigned roommates as a chance for students to learn to get along with different types of people as they're forced to negotiate everything from who gets the top bunk to varying
religion. And many student deans and admissions officers view online roommate screening as a threat to all that.

Droves of parents have been calling to complain to colleges and universities, often demanding to change their children's roommates based on information discovered online. Schools generally will not change room assignments, aside from rare exceptions for issues of safety, says Greg Victory, who oversees freshman orientation at Syracuse University. A student with severe asthma, for example, would not be required to live with a chain-smoker.

Other colleges, though, are rethinking their approach to freshman housing for a generation that uses friend as a verb.

"We decided that rather than continue to fight against the social media that is so much a part of our students' lives, we need to get engaged in that social media," says TJ Logan, associate director of housing at the University of Florida.

This summer, for the first time, incoming UF students could use a Facebook application called RoomBug to connect with others seeking roommates, letting them gauge each other's neatness, sleep schedules and other cohabitation essentials, as well as general interests. Students who found a match could then request to room together.

More than a quarter of the 5,179 incoming freshmen who will live on campus have signed up, Mr. Logan says. While the final data won't be available until all the rooms are assigned, he expects more mutually requested roommates than in the past.

Erica Steele, an 18-year-old from Dayton, Ohio, who is about to be a freshman at Bowling Green State University, says she signed onto a website that promises to gauge students' compatibility as roommates, URoomSurf, because she was nervous about living with a stranger. She met Katelyn DeVore, 18, of Van Buren, Ohio, who was 95% compatible based on the website's survey, which asks about neatness, hygiene and sleep cycle as well as politics, religion and sexual orientation. The women agreed to live together, but not before they also met in person.

"I didn't want to get to school and not know anyone," Erica says. "And it's great because we can color-coordinate the dorm."

Since students are checking out their assigned roommates on Facebook anyway—and often not liking what they see—it makes sense for colleges to use Facebook as a tool instead, says Robert Castellucci, co-founder of RoomBug, which, besides UF, is also active at Emory University in Atlanta, Temple University in Philadelphia, Wichita State University in Kansas, and The William Patterson University of New Jersey. While diversity is important, he says, it doesn't always work if it's forced. "I personally want my home where I live day-to-day to be my sanctuary," Mr. Castellucci says.

Syracuse University, where roommates are assigned at random, deliberately sends out its roommate notices electronically at 4:30 on a Friday afternoon so that people have the weekend to cool off before they call to complain, Mr. Victory says.

"Now that it's so easy to make judgments about everything from sexual orientation to musical taste, there's more opportunity for students to say 'I'm not going to like this person' without ever having a conversation," Mr. Victory says.

The official policy at Syracuse, whose website warns incoming students against making assumptions based on online profiles, prohibits reassigning roommates during the summer.
Schools handle freshman housing differently, but many use a simple questionnaire—smoker or non-smoker? night owl or early riser?—and a computer program that automatically optimizes the matches. Most colleges allow students who already know each other to live together if they both request it.

URoomSurf has capitalized on that request process. More than 83,000 students at 775 U.S. schools have logged onto the online community, where they can create profiles, fill out a survey and view their matches. Roommates who find each other on URoomSurf can mutually request to live together like anyone else with a preexisting friendship.

All incoming students at Missouri State University are using roommate-matching website, RoommateClick, for the first time this year. "Students nowadays want to know as much and have as much control as possible," says Lenord McGownd, Missouri State's assistant director of residence life.

How students represent themselves online gives an accurate portrait of what they're really like, according to a 2010 study published in the journal Psychological Science. It looked at 236 college-aged people’s Facebook profiles and used five personality dimensions to compare how individuals identified themselves, how four of their friends identified them, and how 10 researchers identified them based on their profiles.

Still, using Facebook doesn't necessarily lead to more successful roommate matches, since what people think they want in a roommate is often not what ends up making them happiest, says University of Texas psychology professor Sam Gosling, one of the researchers. For example, two neat-freaks may clash over who decides what goes where. On the flip side, Tom Congoran, now 23 and a real estate agent in Boston, arrived at Arizona State University as a hipster from New Hampshire and discovered that his roommate was a neat Republican business major. They're still good friends.

Larry Davis, associate residence life director at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, says the school has discussed having roommates connect on social media, but has hesitated for fear that racial, religious and sexual minorities might be singled out or excluded.

"This is an institution of higher learning, and we expect [students] to learn and think," Mr. Davis says, "and taking on a random roommate is a good experience to have."

Even when students pick their own roommates, Mr. Logan of the University of Florida notes, they don't pick their entire hallways or entire floors, so they’ll still meet people from different backgrounds.

College officials note that the vast majority of assigned roommates get along fine.

And, in all likelihood, so will Sam and his roommate. Weeks after Sam looked him up on Google Earth, Jordan Benudiz, 18, replied to Sam’s email. He’d shortened his last name on Facebook, which was why Sam couldn't find him. The
roommates-to-be didn’t share much about themselves. Instead, they directed each other to their respective Facebook profiles.

"It was a tremendous help because I got to know him on a virtual level, so to speak," Jordan says. "We've done everything except for actually talk."

Based on what they saw on Facebook, both Sam and Jordan say they think they'll get along. They both like sports and reading. "I could have requested to live with a close friend," Sam says, "but I wanted to branch out. That's what college is about."
BOOKSHELF  |  AUGUST 2, 2010

Ignorance By Degrees

*Colleges serve the people who work there more than the students who desperately need to learn something.*

By Mark Bauerlein

Higher education may be heading for a reckoning. For a long time, despite the occasional charge of liberal dogma on campus or of a watered-down curriculum, people tended to think the best of the college and university they attended. Perhaps they attributed their career success or that of their friends to a diploma. Or they felt moved by a particular professor or class. Or they received treatment at a university hospital or otherwise profited from university-based scientific research. Or they just loved March Madness.

Recently, though, a new public skepticism has surfaced, with galling facts to back it up. Over the past 30 years, the average cost of college tuition and fees has risen 250% for private schools and nearly 300% for public schools (in constant dollars). The salaries of professors have also risen much faster than those of other occupations. At Stanford, to take but one example, the salaries of full professors have leapt 58% in constant dollars since the mid-1980s. College presidents do even better. From 1992 to 2008, NYU's presidential salary climbed to $1.27 million from $443,000. By 2008, a dozen presidents had passed the million-dollar mark.

Meanwhile, tenured and tenure-track professors spend ever less time with students. In 1975, 43% of college teachers were classified as "contingent"—that is, they were temporary instructors and graduate students; today that rate is 70%. Colleges boast of high faculty-to-student ratios, but in practice most courses have a part-timer at the podium.
Elite colleges justify the light teaching loads of their professors—Yale requires only three courses a year, with a semester off every third year—by claiming that the members of their faculty spend their time producing important research. A glance at scholarly journals or university-press catalogs might make one wonder how much of this “research” is advancing knowledge and how much is part of a guild’s need to credentialize its members. In any case, time spent for research is time taken away from students. The remoteness of professors may help explain why about 30% of enrolling students drop out of college only a few months after arriving.

At the same time, the administrator-to-student ratio is growing. In fact, it has doubled since 1976. The administrative field has diversified into exotic specialties such as Credential Specialist, Coordinator of Learning Immersion Experiences and Dietetic Internship Director.

In “Higher Education?” Andrew Hacker and Claudia Dreifus describe such conditions in vivid detail. They offer statistics, anecdotes and first-person accounts—concerning tuition, tenure and teaching loads, among much else—to draw up a powerful, if rambling, indictment of academic careerism. The authors are not shy about making biting judgments along the way.

Of the 3,015 papers delivered at the 2007 meeting of the American Sociological Association, the authors say, few “needed to be written.” As for one of the most prestigious universities in the world, “the mediocrity of Harvard undergraduate teaching is an open secret of the Ivy League.” Much of the research for scholarly articles and lectures is “just compost to bulk up résumés.” College presidents succeed not by showing strong, imaginative leadership but “by extending their school’s terrain.” Indeed, “hardly any of them have done anything memorable, apart perhaps from firing a popular athletic coach.” For all the high-minded talk, Mr. Hacker and Ms. Dreifus conclude, colleges and universities serve the people who work there more than the parents and taxpayers who pay for “higher education” or the students who so desperately need it.

Take the adjunct issue. Everyone knows that colleges increasingly staff courses with part-time instructors who earn meager pay and no benefits. But who wants to eliminate the practice? Administrators like it because it saves money, professors because it saves them from teaching labor-intensive courses. And adjuncts themselves would rather continue at minimum wage than leave the profession altogether. In a “coda,” Mr. Hacker and Ms. Dreifus declare that “it is immoral and unseemly to have a person teaching exactly the same class as an ensconced faculty member, but for one-sixth the pay.” Perhaps so, but without a united faction mobilized against it, such “immorality” won’t stop anytime soon.

But some change may still be possible. A lot of criticism of academia hasn’t stuck in the past, Mr. Hacker and Ms. Dreifus imply, because people have almost unthinkingly believed in the economic power of the degree. Yes, you didn’t learn a lot, and the professors blew you off—the reasoning went—but if you got a diploma the job offers would follow. But that logic may no longer be so compelling. With the economy tightening and tales of graduates stuck in low-paying jobs with $50,000 in student loans, college doesn’t look like an automatic bargain.

We need some hard cost accounting and comparisons, Mr. Hacker and Ms. Dreifus argue, and so they end “Higher Education?” with capsule summaries of, as they put it, “Schools We Like”—that is, schools that offer superior undergraduate educations at relatively low cost. The list includes Ole Miss, Cooper Union, Berea...
College, Arizona State and Western Oregon University. "We think a low cost should be a major determinant in any college decision," the authors wisely conclude, for "a debt-free beginning is worth far more than a name-brand imprimatur."

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