Published Friday, Aug. 10, 2012

**UNC board debates how much to set aside for financial aid**

By Jane Stancill - jstancill@newsobserver.com

For a dozen years now, when University of North Carolina campuses have raised tuition, they have set aside a percentage of the revenue to cover the cost for lower-income students.

Now, the UNC Board of Governors is debating the merits of that strategy.

Several members of the Republican-majority board have expressed concern about the philosophy of middle and higher income families subsidizing tuition for other families. At the very least, some members say, universities are not transparent about the practice; most families who pay tuition don’t even realize it’s happening.

The board’s current four-year tuition plan requires each campus to set aside at least 25 percent of all new revenue from campus initiated tuition hikes for financial aid for needy students. On Thursday, UNC President Tom Ross floated a proposal to amend the plan to remove a minimum requirement and instead cap the set aside at 25 percent.

State financial aid was cut by the legislature last year, though some dollars were restored through lottery funds this year. And federal financial aid is in flux, Ross said, so a two-year temporary plan would allow campuses to have some stability in a changing landscape.

“If this isn’t right, vote it down, and I’ll be fine,” Ross said of his proposal of a 25-percent ceiling.

Board members had a spirited debate about the issue.

David Powers, a member from Winston-Salem, said it came as a shock to a single mom whose daughter at East Carolina University gets no financial aid when she learns that $100 of her daughter’s $400 increase is going to another student.

“There does need to be some transparency built into the system so the people who are paying for a child’s tuition actually know what they’re paying for,” he said.

‘Plain to the people’
Member Fred Eshelman of Wilmington called the financial aid set aside “a hidden tax.”

Some suggested disclosing the specifics of the set aside on the tuition statements that are sent to families. “I just think we need to make it plain to the people who are paying the bill of what we’re doing and what’s going on,” said Frank Grainger, a member from Cary.

Franklin McCain of Charlotte made an impassioned plea not to limit financial aid. He pointed out that all UNC system students are already subsidized by the taxpayers.

“I get a little concerned when we want to balance all of our funds for kids on the backs of the very poor,” he said. “When middle-class or middle-income kids have a little bit of tension or a little bit of difficulty, we seem to go into a tizzy. ... When we reduce the funds, you know who gets squeezed out of the educational equation. You already know that,” McCain said. “I think rather than trying to be exclusive, we ought to be looking for ways to keep these folk in the system.”

McCain, a civil rights pioneer and one of the four N.C. A&T State students who staged the famous Woolworth’s sit-in in Greensboro in 1960, chided his fellow board members. “You’re good people, but I don’t think you want to do and accomplish what I’m hearing around this table,” he said. “I don’t think you want to do that.”

**At some schools, more students need aid**

A 25 percent cap would be the worst-case scenario for some campuses, said James Anderson, chancellor of Fayetteville State University, where 80 percent are poor students who qualify for federal Pell Grants.

Some members liked the idea of a disclosure statement but said campus leaders should be allowed the flexibility to determine the percentage of the set aside for each university.

Cameron Carswell, an Appalachian State student and nonvoting member of the board, pointed out that more students need financial aid than ever before. She said the set-aside translates to an additional $7 a month for her and that is well worth helping needy students and ensuring diversity on campus.

“It’s not just about being able to afford education, it’s that someone else believes in you and they are willing to pay money to help you succeed,” Carswell said.

The board is likely vote on the issue in September.

Stancill: 919-829-4559
Greenville City Councilman Max Joyner presented a plan for revising the city’s housing code to City Council members on Thursday night.

Referred to by Joyner as the “Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative,” his plan would change city housing laws to allow for four unrelated people to live together in all properties between Fifth, Elm and Greene streets to the Tar River.

Many of the more than 100 people in the crowd shook their heads as Joyner read his initiative aloud to council and audience members.

Council members Dennis Mitchell, Rose Glover and Kandie Smith voted in favor of the plan. Marion Blackburn and Calvin Mercer opposed.

The council spent more than an hour arguing, sometimes bitterly, over the details of the two-prong plan that would extend only to homes that have four or more bedrooms and are greater than 1,500 square feet.

The change would require landlords to make room for three off-street parking spots and get a zoning compliance letter prior to opening up homes to four or more renters.

On the side, a crime-free addendum must be included in all rental agreements and a year-long civilian work group would be established to help pursue funds for revitalization, organize a parking permit plan and launch a community watch program.

“This isn’t a perfect plan, but it is a start,” Joyner said. “Parts of these neighborhoods are broke and things are not working as well as they could be. We need change.”

The next step is for city attorney Dave Holec to draw up a bill for the Planning and Zoning Commission to review. Once a recommendation is returned, a final vote will go before the council. Public hearings would be held before each board.

A high level of attendance at the meeting forced the council to create a separate comment period for the public to speak on what has become commonly known as he “three-unrelated” rule. A three-decade old law, it
caps at three the number of unrelated people who can share a home in Greenville.

Twenty minutes was set aside for those in favor of a change and those against. A total of six people spoke for change, while seven opposed. Thirteen were turned away.

Michael Saad, owner of Pitt Property Management, urged the council to invite students back to the College View Historic District, a neighborhood close to 80 percent of which is made up of rental property, according to tax records.

Saad described students as “victims” of the rule of three, saying they were forced out due to being labeled as partiers. Their exodus, he said, resulted in petty crime evolving into rape, robbery and murder. He said if they were brought back it would make for a better business environment.

“Do we want loud parties and noise or do we want rape?” Saad asked. “Do we want parking on the grass or do we want robbery? Do we want trash in yards or do we want murder? That is what it really boils down to.”

West Greenville, which accounts for close to 1,100 rental properties, seemed to dodge Joyner’s proposal, while the Tar River University Neighborhood Association, home to more than 2,200 rentals, was included.

Three out of every four people in the crowd were from TRUNA. Resident Michael McDonald, spoke on their behalf, calling change “unfair” to his community’s residents, landlords and developers.

Blackburn, whose district includes much of the area covered by Joyner’s proposal, said the Greenville Police Department has investigated 2,400 code violations in the past year.

Merrill Flood, community development director for the city said police have investigated 22 cases since 2009, with the record high of 83 separate cases coming in 2007.

Blackburn said she was “perplexed” and “flummoxed” that Joyner suggested a change in her district without first seeking her input.

Close to 80 percent of the 275 people who completed questionnaires on the Web or at one of the three public meetings held in June throughout the city opposed changing the City of Greenville’s three-unrelated standard.

The attitude of residents toward a change reflected broader concerns about quality of life in neighborhoods rather than the occupancy issue alone.
While a small percentage of residents support allowing more than three unrelated persons to live together, most supporters stress the importance of clear restrictions and diligent enforcement.

The planning and Zoning Commission will meet again on Aug. 21. It is unknown if the issue will be up for debate that soon or how the board may approach it.

Contact Wesley Brown at 252-329-9579 or wbrown@reflector.com. Follow him on Twitter @CityWatchdog.
McNeill kicks off GGSC season
By Nathan Summers
Friday, August 10, 2012

Ruffin McNeill helped the Greater Greenville Sports Club kick off another season of athletic interaction and events on Thursday night, but the intangibles surrounding the beginning of McNeill’s own new season seemed to overwhelm the coach’s voice at times.

While McNeill discussed the finer points of this year’s East Carolina football team, he did so with a voice hoarsened by the encouragement, teaching and inevitable frustrations of August camp. As the GGSC celebrated another roster of speaking engagements featuring local, state and national sports personalities, there was no mistaking the presence of ECU football all around the Murphy Center.

The third-year ECU coach combed over his roster, discussed recruiting and the steady process of building a winner, and as he did, the hustle and bustle of his players outside Harvey Hall at one point gave him pause. Another weight training session complete, members of the ECU defense were crowding into the upstairs of the Murphy Center to eat.

“They might come in here and eat you all,” said McNeill, ushering the doors shut to reduce the noise.
With the ECU football season looming, McNeill also detailed his team’s offseason and in-season schedule, his philosophy and his hopes for his third season atop the Pirate program.

“This is a team I enjoy being around,” McNeill said, lauding his team’s resilience. “They just get it done. Do we have problems sometimes? Of course, that’s part of our job, but they do a good job of doing what we ask them to do.”

He championed his staff’s ability to not only generate but maintain competition for starting roles, from quarterback all the way down the depth chart.

“First team, second team, they know they’d better perform at a high level every day at practice because if they don’t, they’ll make all-wood team,” McNeill said.

The coach shed light on his non-stop pursuit of knowledge, repeating numerous times that while he might not be the smartest in the business, he was plenty well informed. McNeill’s painstaking attention to detail was backed by Grambling coaching legend Eddie Robinson in four important words in a New Orleans hotel lobby.

“Never neglect special teams,” McNeill recalled Robinson telling him.

In the realm of recruiting, McNeill discussed the need for a self-described old-schooler like himself to get with the times in the name of landing the best players.

“You’ve got to invade their private space a little bit,” McNeill said of recruits, noting that recruiting finally has made him become Facebook and Twitter savvy.

The GGSC announced it will go back to a one-speaker-per-month itinerary this year. The next speaker will be a timely one, as Appalachian State director of athletics Charlie Cobb will address the club on Aug. 31, one day before the Pirates host the Mountaineers to kick off the season.

College football
Andrew Bodenheimer has become perhaps the most reliable first down marker mover at East Carolina since superstar Dwayne Harris was plying his trade with the Pirates a couple of years ago.

Far from the showstopper Harris was in his prime, Bodenheimer is nonetheless working hard in his final collegiate season to shed the likely undeserved tag of possession receiver.

Last season, the former walk-on from the Skip Holtz coaching era became a much more polished pass-catcher, making a career-best 46 catches, but no visits to the end zone. In fact, he has just a couple of touchdowns in his career.

That could change for the Clemmons native who is set to return to his starting post at the Z position, especially with the help of first-year outside receivers coach Dave Nichol.

“Yards after the catch is something that coach Nichol has been preaching to us on the outside, each play,” Bodenheimer said. “He tells us to catch the ball and get up field, where you can set up a juke or something. That’s the thing I’ve been trying to work on, catching the ball and getting up field.”

Being a senior has its advantages, and for Bodenheimer the biggest one is the ability to see everything on field without being overwhelmed.
“I feel more comfortable out there,” he said. “I’ve learned the offense, I know every position and I know what’s going on. I understand situations, and I think that’s the biggest thing as a player matures. You understand different ways that you can run a route or set up a block, just a maturity that comes with a knowledge of the game, setting up routes and being more prepared.”

Behind Bodenheimer in camp are promising redshirt freshman Antonio Cannon and another former walk-on surprise, junior Brandon Weymann.

Sharing is caring

Reggie Bullock’s Arizona Western Community College highlight reel is a body of work by a classic tailback — a one-man show given dozens of chances to break off big gains each game.

A lot has changed since those Saturdays just a couple of years ago, but Bullock is still a running back. Now, however, the ECU senior is hoping to learn how to do more with less.

After an injury-derailed junior season with the Pirates, Bullock is feeling healthy as ever in camp, but now he has lots of company and will be sharing carries no matter what happens.

“Every back wants to get as many carries as they possibly can,” said Bullock, who is joined in the backfield by juniors Torrance Hunt, Michael Bowman and Hunter Furr, redshirt freshman Chris Hairston and soon JUCO transfer Vintavious Cooper. “We take what we get. All of the running backs here are team players.”

Bullock admits it is motivating knowing that he must make the most of every carry now more than ever before. He credits first-year running backs coach Kirk Doll with helping to keep that foremost in the minds of his backs.

Although he knows he might get less of a share than he’s used to, Bullock also understands it will be tough to keep the ball out of the hands of the strongest rusher.

“It’s going to be a tough decision,” the Las Vegas native said of who will get the most carries. “Any one of us can go out there and make plays, and we’re going to play a big role with the balanced attack. I think we’re going to play a big part in the game, giving positive yards for the quarterbacks to make plays throwing the ball.”

Practice notes
The Pirates returned to the one-session format on Thursday, and will do the same this morning in preparation for Saturday’s first scrimmage.

As normally is the case, some of the Pirates’ lightly-injured players were back on the practice field, while others sat out with lingering pains. Starting center Taylor Hudson (right hand) and redshirt outside linebacker Montese Overton (concussion) missed Thursday’s practice, but could return in time for Saturday’s scrimmage.

college football
Judge allows access to business-related calls on Butch Davis' cellphone

By Dan Kane - dkanewsobserver.com

A state Superior Court judge issued a decision Thursday that appears to pave the way for university-related calls that former UNC football coach Butch Davis made on his personal cellphone to be accessible to lawyers representing the media in a public records lawsuit.

Judge Howard Manning said in the decision that public business conducted by UNC chancellors and coaches on personal cellphones is public. But his decision allows Davis to keep private the cellphone bills to ensure that no personal matters become public.

His decision allows media lawyers to review those billing records to identify university-related calls. The decision, however, does not specifically state that such calls could then be released to the public.

Manning wrote: “(I) do not believe that our government officials, including University officials and coaches, are entitled to use the personal cellphone ‘dodge’ to evade the North Carolina Public Records law. If Chancellors of the UNC system are doing this thinking that they can avoid public scrutiny of their cellphone records by using their personal cellphones to conduct public business, they need to re-think their decision.”
The decision is in response to a public records lawsuit filed by The News & Observer, the Charlotte Observer and other media companies as part of their coverage of a long-running NCAA investigation that culminated in a one-year bowl ban and the loss of athletic scholarships for the football team.

Davis had a UNC-CH cellphone but never used it, acknowledging that he used his personal cellphone for university-related business. At one point, he agreed to make his personal cellphone records public, but he changed his mind after the university fired him.

**Media request had been blocked**

UNC-CH officials had brought in an outside lawyer to review the records – but not make copies of them – thereby preventing the media from getting the records through the university. They and Davis say the records do not reflect any improper behavior.

Davis’ attorney, Jon Sasser, said Manning’s decision does not mean Davis’ business-related calls will become public – just that the media attorneys will get to review them. He called the judge’s decision a victory because it quashes a subpoena filed by the media attorneys to produce the cellphone records. It also grants Davis’ request that the phone records be kept private, he said.

Sasser said he would also oppose any efforts to make the business-related calls public. He has contended that Davis and other university athletics coaches are not public officials subject to the public records law.

Amanda Martin, an attorney representing the media, said the decision is “a bit hard to decipher” on that point, but she thinks ultimately the business-related calls will be made public. Manning’s decision identifies “Coach Davis’ private calling records for non-public/job-related calls” as needing to be protected.

UNC-CH Chancellor Holden Thorp said the university is reviewing the ruling.

“We appreciate Judge Manning’s attention to this complex case, and we are reviewing his ruling,” Thorp said in a statement. “We are pleased that his decision affirms the privacy of student-athlete information related to academics and protects the important relationship between the university and its counsel.”

Manning told lawyers for both sides to work out an arrangement for the cellphone records review but did not provide a deadline.
Manning also said other records held by UNC-CH related to impermissible benefits received by athletes should be released if they do not involve academic matters – but other records that are part of an attorney-client relationship between the university and a law firm it hired to help with the NCAA investigation are not. Among those attorney-client records, Manning wrote, are recorded interviews of those involved in the NCAA investigation.

**Academic records private**

The decision means UNC-CH records in which football players were found by the NCAA to have received impermissible benefits such as money and gifts are public, but those pertaining to academic issues – such as cheating – are not. Manning also wrote that unfounded allegations of NCAA violations are not public record.

Student education records are largely protected by the federal Family Education Rights and Privacy Act, commonly known as FERPA.

Manning also found the media may be entitled to “some award of attorneys’ fees” from UNC-CH, but said that would have to be determined “by separate order and hearing if necessary.”

Kane: 919-829-4861
Cars are seen 04 August 2007 on the collapsed I-35W bridge in Minneapolis, Minnesota. US President George W. Bush was visiting the scene after the bridge collapsed 01 August during rush hour.

**NCSU researchers work to prevent bridge disasters**

By Annika McGinnis - McClatchy Newspapers

WASHINGTON–Five years after the devastating collapse of an interstate bridge in Minneapolis, researchers at the University of Maryland and N.C. State are developing wireless technology to warn of problems that could cause such disasters.

On Aug. 1, 2007, rush-hour traffic moved along the Interstate 35 West bridge in Minneapolis. Suddenly, most of the bridge broke off and fell into the Mississippi River, killing 13 people and injuring 145. It was one of the worst bridge disasters in U.S. history. The bridge had passed federal inspections for years, the National Transportation Safety Board found.

As the nation’s bridges age, they’re becoming more dangerous, especially the “baby boomer bridges,” the large number built during the 1950s and ’60s, according to the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. In 2010, the Federal Highway Administration labeled more than 11 percent of highway bridges – almost 70,000 – “structurally deficient,” meaning the bridges had significant defects requiring major improvements or replacement.
As part of the push for increased bridge safety stemming from the Minneapolis disaster, separate engineering teams at Maryland and N.C. State are designing wireless sensors that can detect problems early and alert authorities in time to prevent similar tragedies.

“You go to a checkup, you find a condition of your body,” said Chung Fu, a University of Maryland engineering research professor who helps lead one of the teams. “So you put a sensor on the bridge and find the health of the bridges.”

For instance, the tiny sensors are placed on areas of the bridge where there are cracks or that are prone to cracks, Fu said. Then the bridge’s health can be monitored from computers at another site. In the event of an emergency, a text message or email alert would be sent to authorities, said Mehdi Kalantari, a University of Maryland research engineer who leads the other team.

One of the projects conducted by University of Maryland researchers has developed wireless sensors that can detect problems including strains, cracks, deformation, vibration, temperature and humidity – all aspects of bridge health, said Kalantari, who led the project and recently started a company to manufacture his systems. The project has been tested on an Interstate 495 bridge in Maryland for two years with great results, he said.

“We have detected certain changes on the bridge from time to time,” Kalantari said, saying the sensors recognized changes that had come about through repair jobs. “Our system detected each and every structural modification, which means if these changes were due to a structural problem, that would’ve been detected.”

In the future, Kalantari said, he hopes to gain official state and federal approval for the technology.

The other project, paid for by state and federal funding and conducted with N.C. State, is designing sensors that can detect bridge fatigue as part of “smart bridge” technology, said Fu, the project’s leader. Unlike Kalantari’s sensors, these aren’t yet wireless, but hopefully they will be by November, when the researchers plan to test the technology on bridges, probably in Maryland and North Carolina, Fu said.

The wireless aspect, which N.C. State researchers are designing, makes the new system more affordable than systems that require the presence of crews to track possible problems, Fu said.
Fu said bridge maintenance was “on the list” for all state governments but that it often was neglected because of the high price tag.

According to Kalantari, bridge safety is a huge problem that cannot be ignored, however. And he said most bridges relied only on visual inspections for safety monitoring.

Problematic metal plates, called gusset plates, on the Minneapolis bridge most likely caused the disaster, the National Transportation Safety Board wrote in its report on the collapse. There was an “inadequate use of technologies for accurately assessing the condition of gusset plates on deck truss bridges,” the report said.

The new sensors are much more reliable, the researchers said. Fu said they might even have prevented the collapse of the Minneapolis bridge.

“You probably would have seen the sensors change, the signals become more intense, probably getting higher – and those are the signals we want to see, that’s all the warning message,” he said.
Duke acquires papers of influential rabbi, civil rights leader

By Lauren Carroll - lcarroll@newsobserver.com

DURHAM–Duke University will acquire the papers of religious leader and activist Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, helping the university reach a goal of becoming an academic leader in the study of religion and human rights.

The university announced this week that it will receive original manuscripts, correspondence and other documents written by Heschel – a 20th-century theologian, scholar and writer. Administrators and professors say Duke is the logical place for the documents because of its commitment to human rights and Jewish studies, as well as its location in the South, where Heschel built his civil rights legacy.

“Duke will be a destination research place for all of these subjects,” said Eric Meyers, a religion professor who directs the Duke Center for Jewish Studies. “As a major research university located in the historic South, civil rights has a special resonance.”

Heschel, who lived from 1907 to 1972, was widely known as a leader of the civil rights movement and the anti-Vietnam War campaign in the United States. Heschel’s most famous theological works include “The Sabbath,” “Man is Not Alone” and “God in Search of Man.” He marched alongside Martin Luther King Jr. in Selma, Ala., and came up with the iconic phrase: “We pray with our legs.”

The collection, which spans five decades and four languages, was previously unavailable to scholars. The papers were obtained from Heschel’s family and will be housed in Duke’s David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Duke already has several strong collections of religious material, which made the university a suitable location for the Heschel papers, said Andrew Armacost, head of collection development at the Rubenstein Library. In particular, Armacost said, Duke has a large amount of material related to various sects of Christianity as well as Judaism.

Additionally, Duke has a leading religion department and divinity school, Meyer said.

Two collections now joined
The Duke archives currently has the papers of Rabbi Marshall Meyer, another Jewish human rights activist and a student of Heschel, as well as Eric Meyers’ uncle. As soon as his uncle’s work arrived at Duke three years ago, Meyers knew the university should work to obtain Heschel’s papers. “The unification of (this) human rights archival material throws light on two of the most important voices of the 20th century opposing injustice,” Meyers said.

Heschel’s daughter, Susannah Heschel, professor of Jewish studies at Dartmouth College, said she is pleased that her father’s work will be united with the Meyer collection. “I am delighted that my father’s papers have found a good home at Duke, which has long had an important research program in the fields of Jewish studies and religious studies,” she said in a statement.

In addition to his human rights work, Heschel served as the Jewish liaison to the Vatican during the Second Vatican Council. He was born in Poland but eventually moved to London and then New York, escaping the Holocaust.

Armacost said the papers will provide Duke students with a unique opportunity to handle original materials that bring together American history, Judaism and human rights. “It certainly extends our collections related to social engagement and activism,” Armacost said. “It will bring a lot of attention and, I hope, create a lot of future research papers and interest.”

Carroll: 919-829-4918