THE DAILY CLIPS

August 16, 2012

News, commentary, and opinion
compiled by East Carolina University News Services:

The Greenville Daily Reflector
The Raleigh News & Observer
    The New York Times
    The Wall Street Journal
    USA Today
The Charlotte Observer
The Fayetteville Observer
The Greensboro News & Record
Newsweek
U.S. News & World Report
Business Week
Time

East Carolina University News Services
Web site at http://www.ecu.edu/news
252-328-6481
Editorial: UNC needs to come clean  
Thursday, August 16, 2012

Here in East Carolina country, where the Pirate faithful have for years heard about the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill’s academic superiority, it might be tempting to take some measure of satisfaction in that school’s recent unpleasantness. When one thinks back to the fight this community waged to establish the medical school, for instance, seeing UNC receive this comeuppance somehow seems just.

And yet, in the broader context, the scandal consuming the state’s flagship university does far more harm than good, as it tarnishes the reputation of the entire higher education system in North Carolina. The latest revelations provide further evidence that those entrusted to lead that school must come clean about UNC academics and any misdeeds committed in the name of athletics.

More than two years have passed since NCAA investigators first contacted UNC officials and interviewed several football players regarding those players’ acceptance of improper benefits from a sports agent. The ensuing revelations led to the suspension or dismissal of more than a dozen players, the resignation of associate head coach John Blake and, ultimately, the firing of head coach Butch Davis.

Last fall, in what UNC officials would be the end of the episode, the school received the allegations of nine major violations and offered its response, including a proposal for self-imposed sanctions. The NCAA imposed additional penalties to Tar Heel football, including scholarship losses and a post-season ban, in March.

However, a parallel examination of academics stemming from that investigation uncovered strong suspicion of fraud, focusing on “no-show” classes heavily attended by athletes. Here was a more serious allegation, namely that UNC had steered players toward classes with minimum requirements and low expectations to maintain their eligibility. While the expectation was that the practice was limited to recent years, this week’s release of a student transcript — widely reported to be that of former Tar Heel great Julius Peppers — indicates it could stretch back more than a decade.

It is one thing to see a football program take liberties, cut corners, get caught and be punished. It is another thing entirely to see the academic principles of
so respected an institution disregarded in the reckless pursuit of athletic glory. While East Carolina fans, like other UNC rivals, may delight in the first, they should not revel in the second. Instead they should join the rising din of voices calling for UNC to come clean about what happened, for the good of that university and of the state.
Live ferrets no longer will be used by students at East Carolina University’s Brody School of Medicine to practice a medical procedure, according to a statement issued Tuesday by the school’s public affairs office.

“Ferrets are no longer used in neonatal intubation training laboratories at the Brody Medical Sciences Building,” the news release said.

The action follows a complaint and request for an investigation filed on April 26 with the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service by the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine. The nonprofit organization promotes alternatives to animal research and testing, and non-animal methods in medical education.

The USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service administers the federal Animal Welfare Act. Under the AWA, the service issues licenses and registrations to research facilities and performs inspections to ensure proper animal care and treatment.

A 2010 public records search by the physicians committee uncovered information that medical residency students at Brody were using ferrets to practice techniques for placing airway tubes into newborn humans, said Dr. John Pippin, the committee’s director of academic affairs.

“Ferret airways are thought to ... approximate the airway of a premature baby,” Pippin said. “The tissue is similar, but the anatomy is not correct.

“The procedure is not the same as that you would perform on a baby, but the rationale has been that they are small and alive.”

The practice has been supplanted at most medical training centers by the use of purpose-designed inanimate simulators, the physician said.

“ECU was the only pediatrics program in North Carolina and among only a handful (nationally) that was still using animals,” Pippin said. “There is a very impressive array of simulators available specifically designed to replace and improve on the use of animals to train pediatric residents.”

In the Physicians Committee or Responsible Medicine.’s April request to the USDA for an investigation of ECU’s practices, Pippin wrote that 190 of 200
pediatric residency programs surveyed in the United States and Canada — including Duke University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill — exclusively use non-animal methods to teach the intubation procedure.

Officials at Brody declined to comment or explain their decision to do away with the use of ferrets and how they will be replaced. They did not answer questions about other uses of animals for medical training.

Contact Michael Abramowitz at mabramowitz@reflector.com or 252-329-9571.
Editorials

Tuition truths at UNC-system schools

Members of the University of North Carolina Board of Governors are right to be concerned about frequent and substantial tuition hikes. Although the UNC system’s comparatively low annual expenses continue to make some of its campuses “best buys” nationally, the tuition increases of recent years are undeniably burdensome.

That’s particularly so for families in the middle – those who earn too much to qualify for some financial aid programs but who lack the resources that would make paying for four years at a public university relatively easy.

Relief shouldn’t lie in pitting one segment of the student population against another. Yet that’s a course some members of the Board of Governors seem interested in taking.

The N&O’s Jane Stancill reported last week that there’s growing discontent on the Board of Governors with existing UNC policies designed to take some of the sting out of tuition hikes for lower-income families.

In part, this takes the form of pressure to cap the amount of financial aid that flows to needier students from across-the-board tuition hikes. In response, UNC system President Tom Ross proposes a 25 percent cap on the amount of new revenue from campus-initiated tuition hikes that is set aside for financial aid for needy students.

This would be a substantial accommodation, because in some cases the financial-aid percentage has been higher. Ross’ bow to the prevailing winds may be unavoidable, but no matter how you slice it the effect would be to make the lowest-income students pay more – not a good thing.

Some members of the Board of Governors, however, are on record as wanting more, a pound of flesh if you will.

They’re calling the longstanding UNC system practice of using some of the tuition-increase revenue to ease the strain on lower-income students a “hidden tax.” They’re pushing for increased “transparency” so that the aid that goes to needier students is reported on the bills that go out to all students and their parents.

Call it transparency with a vengeance.
However, if full disclosure really is the aim, billing practices would have to go a lot farther than this. The entire university system, after all, is subsidized and supported by taxpayers (state and federal) and by private donors in myriad, interlocking ways.

Almost uniquely, North Carolina requires in its constitution that higher education “as far as practicable, be extended to the people of the State free of expense.” It’s an aspiration rather than a reality, but nonetheless taxpayers here do pony up an above-average amount to support the system’s 16 campuses.

That, in turn, holds down the cost for everyone, rich and poor, paying in-state tuition. Should the amount of this “subsidy” also be printed on tuition bills? Should notices be sent as well to all taxpayers who don’t have a family member at a public university? Shouldn’t the Board of Governors try to get them irked too?

Furthermore, to call setting aside some tuition-hike revenue to ease the strain on low-income families “a hidden tax” implies that the policy is somehow secret. Yet news stories about tuition increases commonly mention it, as did at least two in The N&O earlier this year.

Finding a cure for tuition hikes is no simple task, nor is apportioning fairly the unavoidable costs of running a well-regarded higher education system. Some real relief – for middle-income families most of all – could come from the General Assembly, which could place a higher priority on the constitution’s promise. After all, tight state budgets (partly due to hard times, partly to legislators’ political preferences) are largely responsible for public universities’ tuition hikes.

There’s your battle, Board of Governors.
Winthrop president DiGiorgio delivers last opening address

By Anna Douglas

Emotions cut through the formality of Winthrop University President Anthony DiGiorgio’s voice as faculty and staff gathered on campus Wednesday for his last opening address.

DiGiorgio, 72, choked up toward the end of his speech while reminiscing on challenges the university has overcome since his arrival in 1989.

A packed McBryde Hall listened as DiGiorgio spoke about his wife and family and his transition to retirement as he enters his 24th year as Winthrop’s president.

“The challenge ahead is to make the most of each day we are given,” he said. “After this year, Gale and I intend to do that – just in a little more low-key and private way.”

DiGiorgio is one of the longest-serving public university presidents in the nation.

In his time at Winthrop, he has navigated the waters of declining state funding to public universities, led the task of reaching national accreditation in all of Winthrop’s degree programs, and fostered a partnership between the college and the city of Rock Hill to build a “college town.”

During his speech, DiGiorgio took a particularly proud tone in saying that Winthrop had achieved 100 percent national academic accreditation, despite doubts from many in South Carolina and even on campus.
“In the Southern vernacular, some folks may even have thought Winthrop was getting ‘above its raising’ to just suggest such a thing,” he said. “But, together, we made that Winthrop’s reality, and we were the first institution in the state to do so.”

He shared a framework of seven “elements” he has used in creating what he calls “a university aligned to achieve.”

To the faculty and staff, he said he realized some of his words would “sound like advice to the 10th president of Winthrop” – his as yet unnamed successor – but it is intended for “all of you.”

Among those seven “elements,” DiGiorgio noted taking “calculating risks,” keeping leadership in place to “harness” the university’s talents and energy, and giving “deep attention to detail and quality” in Winthrop’s presentation as important tasks for the campus.

Other parts of DiGiorgio’s speech announced developments occurring across the university’s departments.

Some employees saw a “long overdue” salary increase this year, he said.

“While our recurring operating support from the state this year still was not increased from the great recession low point,” he said, lawmakers have “shared some additional one-time money with Winthrop for this academic year.”

DiGiorgio asked the crowd to welcome two visiting faculty members from Nantong University in China, both working with Winthrop’s School of Business.

He also noted the university’s efforts to keep up with new incoming freshmen classes in a digital age. Last year, Winthrop offered 75 completely online classes and 39 courses with about half of the class online.

“Keep in mind,” he said, “Winthrop offers more than a thousand courses a year, so the percentage remains small and purposefully selective.”

DiGiorgio closed by thanking faculty and staff and saying that – after 67 years of operating on a “school year” calendar as a student, teacher, administrator and finally president – the move to retirement is a new venture.

“So I know this time next year, it won’t seem quite right to not be opening the pages of a fresh notebook or work calendar and preparing myself for the first day of classes in a new academic year.”

Anna Douglas • 803-329-4068
Dragas opens U-Va. board retreat with apology

By Jenna Johnson

RICHMOND — Helen Dragas, rector of the University of Virginia, opened the governing board retreat here Wednesday at about 1:40 pm by acknowledging “the many difficulties of the last few months” and again offering her “sincere and personal apology” for the controversies that have distracted the board.

Dragas said the retreat is an opportunity for the board to “reconcile our differences, rejuvenate our leadership and reshape our future outcomes.” Dragas also pointed out challenges ahead for the board: sustainable funding, changing education delivery and keeping up with the fast pace of changes.

Much of the retreat, which runs through Thursday morning, will focus on how the board operates and governs the university. On Wednesday afternoon, a governance consultant led the board through a series of questions and discussions. Terry MacTaggart of the Association of Governing Boards kicked off his presentation by acknowledging everything that has happened this summer, with the ouster and reinstatement of U-Va. President Teresa Sullivan, and the swarm of reporters in the back of the room.

“This is an awkward environment, okay, this is not a great environment,” said MacTaggart, a former university president himself. “Let’s just acknowledge that, and relax to the extent that we can.”

Meanwhile, Gov. Robert F. McDonnell (R) sent a letter Tuesday to the governing Board of Visitors to mark the occasion.

In one passage in the letter, McDonnell wrote: “The recent events on campus prompted and renewed numerous important discussions about everything from board governance procedures to the reforms needed to maintain U-Va.’s extraordinary reputation. You now have an historic opportunity for open and direct discussion on these issues to lay the foundation for generations of students to enjoy innovative and excellent instruction at a reasonable price at Mr. Jefferson’s University.”