The Washington Post

Rx: Xbox?
Researchers Explore Mental Health Benefits of Video Games

By Shankar Vedantam
Washington Post Staff Writer
Tuesday, August 18, 2009

Gail Nichols has suffered from depression for years. When the 49-year-old resident of St. Marys, Kan., cannot sleep, she falls back on a form of entertainment that is gaining increasing credibility as a medical intervention: video games.

Nichols said she discovered the mental health benefits of video games some years ago during a particularly bad spell of depression. She had just started playing a game called Bejeweled, which requires players to move gems into rows based on their color. When she could not get to sleep one night and was tormented by mental pain, she said, she turned on the computer and played the game for hours.

"In the day, you can find someone to talk to," Nichols said. "Games are a big help in getting through to the next morning."

Nichols liked the game so much that she got in touch with the manufacturer, PopCap Games. The inventors of the game were surprised to hear about its possible mental health benefits, and the company decided to study Bejeweled's untapped potential systematically. In a preliminary study that PopCap commissioned and funded, researchers found that volunteers who played Bejeweled displayed improved mood and heart rhythms compared with volunteers who weren't playing. The preliminary study was published this year in the Annual Review of Cybertherapy and Telemedicine. Now, the company is about to launch a second phase of testing to see if the video games can have measurable effects on clinical markers of depression.

The research is part of a broad array of unconventional efforts that video game companies are devising to find new markets for their products. Many of these steps are based on the idea that depression and other disorders -- as well as everyday stress and worry -- involve systematic patterns of thought and self-doubt, and that games can distract people and put them in a different mental zone. You don't have to play with a computer or an Xbox 360 to notice the effect: Anyone who has used a crossword puzzle or Sudoku game to decompress after a difficult day recognizes the idea.

Nichols said she liked a version of the game where she was not competing against anyone or trying to rack up mammoth points. In her favorite version, colored gems drop endlessly onto the screen, and Nichols said she falls into a trance of simultaneous concentration and relaxation that she calls Zen.

Carmen Russoniello, who directs the psychophysiology lab and biofeedback clinic at East Carolina University in Greenville, N.C., is conducting the controlled research studies for PopCap. He said he has found the same pattern among many volunteers: Certain games allow people to fall into a rhythm where they can play without either effort or boredom. Russoniello said some games seem to activate the parasympathetic nervous system, which can reduce the heightened tension that is a natural response to stress.

The researcher hypothesized that one reason for the apparent mental health benefits of video games is that
many people in Western countries find it impossible to switch off; they are always alert and stressed out. When those Type A people try to relax, they get bored because they have come to require a certain level of stressful arousal. Playing certain video games, Russoniello said, offers just enough mental challenge to keep such people occupied while putting them into a state of relative mindlessness. That state appears to have salutary effects on stress and other mental problems.

Nichols said that she receives no money from PopCap but that the company periodically sends her new games to try, so she can report back on whether they help her fight her depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. (A publicity agent for PopCap put The Post in touch with Nichols.)

Russoniello said that in the next phase of the study, he would randomly patients who meet clinical criteria for depression into two groups. One will be assigned to look up material on the Internet related to mental disorders; the other will be asked to play video games. Russoniello said he wants volunteers who will participate for a month while he studies salivary markers of stress, breathing and heart rhythms. At the end of the month, the volunteers will be evaluated again to see if the video games have had any effect on their symptoms.

Russoniello and several other researchers said that one of the breakthrough ideas in combating stress and other mental disturbances was manipulating a factor known as heart rate variability. Different emotions seem to produce heart rhythm "signatures," and several devices have been invented to measure that variability. Companies such as HeartMath, of Boulder Creek, Calif., have developed video games in which winning requires players to regulate their heart rate variability, thus gaining greater control over their emotional responses to stressful situations.

HeartMath's "emWave" system, for example, has a sensor that can pick up a person's heart rate variability and feed those measurements into a computer. The screen then displays a game that gives people feedback about their heart rhythms and challenges them to play in such a way as to smooth them out. The biofeedback allows people to see how they can control their stress levels through conscious effort.

The company put a Post reporter in touch with Rollin McCrty, a psychophysicologist who directs research at the Institute of HeartMath. He said dozens of studies demonstrate that the intervals between a person's heartbeats are linked with various emotional states.

McCraty said his institute functions as an independent body from the HeartMath company and receives no funding from it, instead seeking out research funds from various grant-making bodies.

McCraty acknowledged that people do not need an electronic system to tell them they are stressed; most people know that already. But he said that people are usually aware when stress levels reach an extreme, not when they are slipping into stress.

Soldiers who have become habituated to being hyper-vigilant may no longer realize that they are not relaxed because their bodies have established a new threshold for "normal." When these soldiers are hooked up to the biofeedback machines, they come to see that even in everyday settings they are stressed out. McCraty is currently studying whether soldiers who learn to control their cardiac rhythms by playing certain video games are better able to perform efficiently under pressure and whether they recover more quickly from traumatic events.

A study among correctional officers funded by California and several studies among nursing staff at leading hospitals have shown that giving people greater control over their internal states allows them to work better and reduces the risk of burnout, according to McCraty.

"Relaxation is not what I am talking about," said McCraty, pointing out that it would be inappropriate to get a soldier in a war zone or a guard at a high-security prison to feel excessively relaxed. "Everyone should learn to relax, but what I am talking about is coherence."

Whether your heart is at 70 or 170 beats per minute, McCraty said, people can learn to have heart rhythms that are coherent or incoherent (equally spaced and smooth, or wavy and haphazard).
While the new tools, games and biofeedback gizmos make it easier to develop control over your heart rate variability, McCraty acknowledged that people could learn to develop smoother heart rhythms without external aids. One system for this, he said, is described at http://www.heartmath.org/for-you/destress-kit-for-the-changing-times.html.

"We have more power to self-regulate our feelings that most people know," he concluded.

Comments: health@washpost.com.
ECU gears up for students, plans test of loudspeakers

The Daily Reflector

Tuesday, August 18, 2009

East Carolina University will welcome approximately 27,000 students to campus — physically and virtually — when the fall semester begins officially on Monday with the annual faculty convocation.

Students will begin moving into residence halls Thursday, and classes begin a week from today, according to a news release issued by the university today.

The total university enrollment is projected to be about 27,000, including approximately 4,175 first-year students, according to the release. Included in the enrollment projection are more than 5,800 distance education students. Official enrollment numbers will be available after the university’s census day, Sept. 8.

Approximately 5,000 students are expected to move into residence halls beginning Thursday, bringing on-campus housing close to capacity.

During move-in weekend, the university will test its new outdoor notification speakers on the east campus. The Emergency Notification Team will test the speakers three times on Friday, Saturday and Sunday to determine how well they can be heard.

The clusters of four loudspeakers are in eight locations throughout “main campus.” Activation times are scheduled for noon, 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. each day.

Persons on campus will hear a tone and then a verbal message, noting that is only a test of the ECU Alert emergency notification system.

The testing will allow the Emergency Notification Team to find any “weak” areas on campus where additional speakers should be placed, according to Tom Pohiman with Environmental Health and Safety.

Outdoor notification speakers have also been installed at the health sciences campus and the North Recreational Complex, but they will not be tested at this time.

Funds provided through the UNC General Administration safety initiative paid for the speakers and the installation, the news release said.

Several events are scheduled for students at the public as students begin their return to Greenville. Here’s a sampling:

Saturday: Million Meals Event, 8:30 a.m.-6:30 p.m., Boys & Girls Club on Firetower Road. Organized by Stop Hunger Now and the Volunteer and Service-Learning Center, the University Million Meals Event is designed to package meals to feed the hungry around the world.

Sunday: New Student Convocation, 3-4 p.m., Wright Auditorium. Panel discussion with Chancellor Steve Ballard and football head coach Skip Holtz, faculty chair Marianna Walker, and SGA President Brad Congleton speaking about university life.

Sunday: “ECU Stars,” 7-9 p.m., in Wright Auditorium for ECU’s version of “American Idol” with cash prizes.
Auditions will be earlier that day, 12-2 p.m., in Wright Auditorium.

Monday: Ninth annual Pirate Palooza, 6:30-9:30 p.m., Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium. This free event is for ECU students and will feature live music, inflatable attractions, give-aways, food and the opportunity to meet ECU coaches.

Aug. 27: P3= Pirates, Pool, and Professors, 3:30-5:30 p.m., Student Recreation Center. Students will meet ECU faculty members and then, at 6 p.m., head to Grainger Stadium for a Kinston Indians game.

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Frat house set to re-open after fire

The Daily Reflector

Tuesday, August 18, 2009

The East Carolina University Interfraternity Council and Student Government Association will formally welcome Sigma Phi Epsilon back to campus after a January fire destroyed part of the fraternity’s living quarters at Fifth and Summit streets.

Community members, ECU staff and faculty, and many Greek alumni will join students in an event to celebrate Sigma Phi Epsilon’s new home, according to a university news release.

The program will emphasize the new safety precautions that Sigma Phi Epsilon has taken to make the home one of the safest in the country, the release said.

ECU Environmental Health and Safety as well as ECU Student Legal Services will distribute information throughout the event.

Scheduled speakers include Patrick Sebastian, IFC president; Brad Congleton, Student Government Association president, and Ryan Harris, Sigma Phi Epsilon president.

The new structure will be open from 3-6 p.m. for tours, and the program will begin at 5 p.m. The event is open to the public.

ECU’s Assistant Director of Greek Life Keith Tingley said the house opening sets a good example for ECU’s Greek Life community.

"After the horrible incident in the spring, Sigma Phi Epsilon is now able to be a campus-wide leader in fire safety. Their new house will be equipped with all tools needed to keep students safe in the case of a fire," he said.

On the morning of Jan. 30, a fire destroyed the two-story auxiliary house being leased by the fraternity and located behind the main fraternity house. Nine students living in the house were safely accounted for after the fire. One student was treated for burn injuries.
New mission: College

AMANDA HICKEY
2009-08-18 17:15:36

Marine Corps Installations East has a new mission, and is seeking motivated men and women with "remarkable drive, leadership skills and life experience and academic skills," to complete it, officials say.

Through the Elite to Elite Academic Mission (ETEAM), MCI East hopes to have more Marines attend branches of the University of North Carolina after they separate, said David Schock, MCI East regional school liaison officer.

Marines who are a North Carolina resident, a high school graduate, receive a minimum combined score of 70 on the Armed Forces Qualification Test, a score of 115 on the General Classification Test and leaving the Corps before Aug. 1, 2010 will be eligible to compete for slots at UNC schools through ETEAM, said Schock.

The Marines are also encouraged to have a minimum combined math and critical reading score of 1,000 on the SAT or 22 on the ACT. Schock said it also helps when the Marines are already taking college courses and have at least a 3.0 grade point average.

"(Maj. Gen. Carl B. Jensen) can pick from the applicants of our program who he thinks could be quality young Marines to go into the university campuses," said Schock.

One Marine recently began attending the University of North Carolina at Wilmington through the program.

"We just took the one applicant that was the best slot and put her in the school because that was the best fit. She was from here, she was getting out and she wanted to go to UNC-Wilmington," Schock said, explaining that the program had a late start for the 2009-10 academic year. "By the time we got the program blessed by UNC most of the kids had made up their minds about what they wanted to do or were already enrolled in college and didn’t need the program."

When approached about the program, UNC general administration staff thought it was a good idea, said James Sadler, associate vice president for academic planning with UNC general administration.

"The Marines have basically guaranteed that they’re going to send us top-notched students and I have no doubt about that. … Our campuses regard this as a wonderful opportunity to enroll some very well-qualified students that may have taken an alternative path to higher education but, through their life and their education experiences that they’ve had in the military, we’re confident that the Marines will provide highly prepared, self-motivated individuals that should have great potential for success in college," said Sadler.

Marines interested in ETEAM will put together a package of paper work and submit it to Schock or Robert Songer, with the Camp Lejeune Lifelong Learning Center, by Feb. 1.
“We have until 1 March to get the people that we select to UNC so they can put them wherever they can fit into the system and they’ll be boarded by a board of officers and enlisted personnel here at MCI East,” said Schock.

Each Marine will list three campuses they would like to attend, Schock said, and UNC will attempt to accommodate them.

However, the Marines must still be accepted by the university.

“Our campus will have to admit them, there has to be the decision on the campus, but I’m confident that with the Marines picking high qualified individuals (they’ll be accepted),” said Sadler.

Seven UNC campuses — East Carolina University, Fayetteville State University, N.C. A & T, UNC Charlotte, UNC Pembroke, UNC Wilmington and Western Carolina University — are currently participating in the program.

“We’re hoping that they go to the campuses and, besides being good students, they’ll be great leaders because they’ll have the five, six years of Marine Corps experience and they’ll be very mature and very worldly,” said Schock. They’ve seen some things that your 18-year-old freshman hasn’t seen yet so we’re very happy that the UNC system is cooperating and allowing us to do this program.”

The number of Marines able to be admitted to UNC branch schools has not been limited, said Schock.

For more information about the program, or to receive an information packet, e-mail Schock at david.schock@usmc.mil or Robert Songer at songerrl@usmc-mccs.org.

Contact Amanda Hickey at 910-219-8461 or ahickey@freedomnc.com.
**Marching to education**

The Elite to Elite Academic Mission, where Maj. Gen. Carl E. Jensen will handicap Marines set to leave the service to attend University of North Carolina schools, may help these Marines get in but it is the G.I. Bill that will help pay the costs. Through the G.I. Bill, veterans are able to receive funds while earning their degree.

Through the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, veterans who completed 36 months of active duty and attend school full time attending public universities with in-state tuition and fees could qualify for the following on a semester basis if the highest in-state tuition is $5,800.

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Lt. Gov. speaks about growth at Chamber luncheon

By Kathryn Kennedy
The Daily Reflector

Tuesday, August 18, 2009

The national economy will recover, and North Carolina can lead the way, Lt. Gov. Walter Dalton told a crowd at Brook Valley Country Club.

The state leader dropped in Tuesday afternoon for a Greenville-Pitt County Chamber of Commerce's Power Luncheon. Chamber leaders introduced him as the best small business advocate in Raleigh. Luncheon Chairman Brad Evans lauded his efforts to help small business owners get health insurance for employees and the Learn and Earn program, which enables public high school students to take college classes free of charge.

Dalton's 30-minute address was lighthearted and largely optimistic. He began by congratulating the chamber for its five-star rating — only the second chamber in North Carolina to achieve that recognition.

"You are a leader because of the programs you have and because of the efficiency that you have," he said. "You can be very proud of that."

From there, he launched into a "State of the State" review. Dalton said the state and nation are more dependent on small businesses than ever, with 70 percent of jobs created during the last 10 years coming from small business and 86 percent of total jobs attributable to small business. He said entrepreneurs throughout the state are frustrated with the lack of attention to their field coming from Washington, D.C.

"What I heard as we went around the state was that we understand what Congress does for banks or for the auto industry or for AIG," Dalton said. "We'd like to hear more about what they'll do for small business, because we're hurting, too."

He said credit is tough and capital is disappearing for existing, long-term family businesses. There has been help following natural disasters, Dalton said, but that the current economic problems are "much more pervasive" and there wasn't much money available in the state budget.

The Small Business Assistance Fund only gained about $500,000, he said, but can be leveraged to larger amounts with loan guarantees through commercial banks, the Small Business Administration and the Golden Leaf Foundation.

"I think we all look forward to a better economy," Dalton said. "This is about as tough as it gets. What you hit in September and October was a credit crunch that nobody anticipated and, really, came very close to another Great Depression."

He said as a state legislator, many of the conditions causing the recession were out of his hands.

"A lot of our problems are related to trade policies that have sent our jobs overseas to China, to India, Dalton said. "Those are set at the federal level. The credit policies are set at the federal level. We don't have a thing to do with that ... in Raleigh. It was rather frustrating."

But the remainder of his speech revolved around the positives residents can look forward to. Dalton said the state budget largely preserved education, spending remains low compared to surrounding states, and the state maintains a AAA bond rating. North Carolina is the second lowest tax state for business, he said.
"I believe that North Carolina is on a sound basis and our future looks bright," Dalton said.

He said the community college and state university systems — including continued growth at East Carolina University — will help drive a new economy. The "ology" fields, as Dalton calls them, can be led by North Carolinians. He named climatology, photonics, regenerative medicine, biotechnology, and food and cancer research as areas where the state already boasts accomplishments.

"We will only lead, however, if we can spread that prosperity throughout North Carolina," he said. "That means investment in infrastructure, in things like broadband access."

Jobs will continue to be available through military contracts, allied health, biotechnology industries, teaching and entrepreneurship in green industries, he said. Students will be prepared for these jobs through initiatives like the early college program and Innovative Education Act, providing ninth-graders the chance to earn a five-year technical degree. Joining Our Businesses and Schools (JOBS) is a legislative study also addressed at improving educational options.

"Opportunities come from different places," he said. "Let's not get so caught up in the way we have done things and about ourselves that we don't realize where those opportunities are. And let's not stereotype people or ignore their talents and abilities."

Dalton closed with a quote from British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, who recently said, "Our task must be to build tomorrow today."

Chamber President Susanne Sartelle said that final statement struck her.

"Sometimes the needs of our members, our community don't really change," she said. "But the way we meet those needs must change."

Contact Kathryn Kennedy at kkennedy@coxncc.com or (252) 329-9566.

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Unhappy with intensity, Holtz boots team from field

By Nathan Summers
The Daily Reflector

Tuesday, August 18, 2009

The East Carolina football team earned an early departure from the practice field Tuesday night, but it wasn't the sort of dismissal a team gets for overachieving.

For the first time in the Skip Holtz coaching era, the Pirates were sent out of the Cliff Moore Practice Complex a full 30 minutes prior to the scheduled end of the session.

Afterward, Holtz cited a lackluster effort as the cause of his cease-and-desist order.

"We've just got to find out how good these guys want to be," said Holtz, 29-22 with the Pirates heading into his fifth season. "I just think we're out here today and we're running plays. I don't think we're practicing to try to get better, so I threw them off the field."

Holtz said he would address the team before today's scheduled 3:30 p.m. practice.

While he did not pinpoint any specific problem, Holtz said his team turned in an uninspired effort and appears to be allowing outside distractions to creep onto the practice field.

"I think there are a lot of distractions on campus, and I think there are distractions with them moving out of the dorm today and the students (being) back on campus," Holtz said. "Those type of distractions, we talk about it all the time as a team, you've got to leave those right here at the gate."

Holtz said it's not merely a matter of showing up and knowing the plays. He said it's a waste of time getting sore and tired without a team-wide commitment to getting better.

The Pirates open the season Sept. 5 when they host Appalachian State. Holtz has said since last Saturday's opening scrimmage of camp the team has a long way to go to be game ready.

"We can kid ourselves all we want," Holtz said. "We can come out here and go through practice and say, 'Wow, we made it through camp.' Test day is going to come Sept. 5 when App State rolls into town, and we've got to go to West Virginia and go to North Carolina, and I don't think going through camp and just walking through the motions is going to make us any better and I don't think it's going to get us to where we need to be in order to play at that level."

Holtz said it comes down to his players making the decision about how good they want to be.

He said Tuesday night's practice lacked enthusiasm, intensity and passion.

Holtz said he didn't see the team getting any better and decided to vacate the field.

"We'll find out what kind of leadership we have in these seniors and we'll find out what kind of football team we have over the next couple of days and see how they respond," he said.

Contact Nathan Summers at nsommers@coxnc.com or (252)329-9595.
Shaw aware of administrators' checkered pasts

BY JOSH SHAFFER, Staff Writer

RALEIGH - Shaw University, deeply indebted and aggressively seeking donors, has hired a vice president who was successfully sued for sexual harassment and a dean dismissed from the only other administrative job on his résumé.

The vice president, Lee Monroe, a Shaw alumnus, was hired this summer after his 2007 departure as president of Voorhees College in Denmark, S.C., where a jury awarded $500,000 to a professor who accused him of punishing her for rejecting repeated sexual advances. A university spokeswoman said Tuesday that Shaw officials knew about the lawsuit when they hired Monroe.

The dean of arts and sciences, David Marshall, was appointed in July after his contract was not renewed in 2006 at McNeese State University in Lake Charles, La., for issues that include his unapproved use of school foundation money, according to records from the Louisiana state university system.

Marshall's hiring -- and the firing of a professor -- triggered a sharp rebuke from a top faculty member. In an open letter e-mailed to colleagues last week, Faculty Senate President James Nelson said that the rescue mission has been undermined by a "moral crisis" brought on by personnel decisions, including Marshall's hiring.

"We say we wish to restore our financial base," Nelson wrote. "Our actions suggest we waste much of this base on a few individuals."

The arrival of Monroe and Marshall comes at a time of turmoil for the school. Interim President Dorothy Yancy is tasked with eliminating more than $20 million in debt and has called on supporters to revive Shaw, the oldest historically black college in the South.

Top officials at Shaw declined requests for comment. Board Chairman Willie Gary, a Florida lawyer, did not return repeated calls. Yancy did not answer a telephone message or respond to written questions hand-delivered to her office.

In an interview Tuesday, Shaw spokeswoman Tanya Wiley stressed the skills and hard work of
both Monroe and Marshall, adding, "There's some people out there with an ax to grind."

Wiley also said Shaw officials knew of the lawsuit against Monroe but added that it "has nothing to do with his track record for raising money. It has nothing to do with his track record as a leader."

In a separate interview last week, Monroe downplayed the impact of the sexual harassment judgment on his ability to right Shaw's finances. He said he had recently snared a big donation despite his legal defeat.

"With those court documents in place, we got a commitment for $1 million," Monroe said. "So you go figure."

Marshall said Tuesday that Nelson's letter does not represent the feelings of Shaw's whole faculty, just that of one man. "He found something, he thought it was sexy, he sent it out," the dean said.

A loyal alumni base

Shaw supporters look to the campus as the mother of North Carolina's historically black schools. As a small institution with 2,750 students, Shaw produces graduates with fierce loyalty and appreciation for the doors it opened.

In May, President Clarence Newsome accepted a year's paid sabbatical and left his post amid criticism over poor finances and crumbling infrastructure. At the time, Gary described a debt of at least $20 million and said each Shaw board member would contribute $50,000 of his or her own money. But officials also lamented the school's graduation rate, which was hovering around 36 percent.

"We've had a rough go of it," Wiley said. "There's a national economic disaster going on."

Monroe, who turns 66 this month, is a Shaw graduate whose résumé includes jobs heading three historically black schools and serving as senior adviser for education to Gov. Jim Martin.

Alumni already praise Monroe's work for the troubled school, especially his reaching out to graduates through Internet seminars.

"He has been nothing but giving," said Emily Perry, president of the national alumni association. "I have nothing but good things to say about Doctor Monroe."

But Moreen Joseph, who successfully sued Monroe in South Carolina, called his hiring at Shaw an outrage and attributed it to the network of friends who hire each other for top jobs at historically black schools.

"I am appalled," Joseph said, adding she has tried unsuccessfully to get a job at Shaw. "It's the misuse of power. They are recycling these people that they put in there. The presidents are being recycled by their friends."

Joseph collected $136,000 plus attorneys' fees under a statutory cap that reduced the amount a jury initially awarded her.

The suit filed in South Carolina was the second harassment action brought against Monroe as a college president. The first, in 1995, came from Marilyn Marshall, a former vice president at Paul Quinn College in Dallas, who alleged Monroe repeatedly made inappropriate remarks about her appearance, court records said. That suit was dismissed after a year because of a lack of evidence.

The South Carolina sex case was not his only problem at Voorhees.

In 2006, Denmark shut off water to the campus citing consistently late bills and partial payments, said city administrator Heyward Robinson. Monroe disputed the debt and paid with personal money.

"I remember he took out a check and wrote a check in my office," he said.
Shortly afterward, the city manager noted that Voorhees had also not paid for its share of a ladder truck needed to fight fires in multi-story buildings.

Stint at McNeese State

Marshall came to Shaw after several short stints as professor and chairman of the McNeese State mass communications department, according to his résumé. He received his first reprimand in July 2005 after a month on the job, according to records from the grievance committee of the Board of Supervisors for the University of Louisiana system.

Marshall’s appeal to the grievance committee was denied. In its decision, the committee cited Marshall’s organizing a luncheon for a mass communications advisory board using McNeese Foundation funds without the dean’s approval. A letter of reprimand was kept confidential.

As an assistant dean and chair of Shaw’s Humanities Department, Frederick Jones interviewed Marshall before he was hired as a professor in 2008. The firing at McNeese was not listed on his résumé.

"He told us he had left because of the hurricane," Jones said.

That explanation stands, Marshall said Tuesday. He was financially devastated after Hurricane Rita came through Lake Charles in September 2005 and he decided to leave before he got official notice of his termination. To his mind, anything that came after the hurricane was "inconsequential," he said.

"This is one of our stars," Wiley, the Shaw spokeswoman, said of Marshall.

A secret appointment

Nelson’s letter to faculty said Marshall was secretly installed as dean in March while Newsome was still president and another staffer officially held the post -- a version Jones confirmed.

The letter also criticized the June termination of mass communications professor Russell Robinson, claiming he was fired without a hearing or required notice, learning of his status only by certified mail. In an interview, Robinson confirmed the circumstances of his dismissal and said both Monroe and Marshall’s hirings have upset Shaw faculty.

Marshall said he had nothing to do with Robinson’s dismissal.

Jones said his experience with Marshall’s hiring and Robinson’s firing propelled him to resign from the school.

"This was in complete violation of the regulations," he said, adding that others share this view but fear to speak publicly. "I just don't understand it. If I could justify it, I would still be there."

Staff researcher Brooke Cain contributed to this report.

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Grand jury asks for details about Easley

State auditors could be making another round of appearances at the federal courthouse this week as a grand jury meets in Raleigh in the continuing investigation of former Gov. Mike Easley.

A new federal subpoena asks for more information and possible appearances from staff, including current State Auditor Beth Wood.

Among the details federal authorities seek from Wood, a Democrat who took office in January, is whether she has been in any business ventures or took any kind of money or payments from the Easleys or from several people connected to them.

Wood said through a spokesman that she has not been involved in any business ventures. She is reviewing campaign reports, but does not believe she got money personally or for her campaigns, either.

Wood’s office has not released an audit that reviewed the $170,000 salary paid to Mary Easley at N.C. State University before she was fired in June.

Wood acknowledged in a previous interview that she had told her staff that one reason for not releasing the salary audit was that state Sen. Tony Rand, an influential Democrat from Fayetteville, would poke holes in it.

Rand had represented Mary Easley when Wood’s predecessor, Republican Les Merritt, audited her European travels and determined that some expenses were questionable.

Investigators in the new subpoenas also asked for information about Mary Easley’s trips to France, Estonia and Russia in 2007 and 2008.

Several Auditor’s Office staffers already have appeared before the grand jury.

Budget cuts lead to layoffs

Twenty-six people at the state Department of Public Instruction lost their jobs as a result of state budget cuts.

The budget required the state education department to drop 64 state-paid jobs to save about $4.6 million. In addition to the 26 layoffs, 15 workers moved to positions paid by other sources, DPI spokeswoman Vanessa Jeter said. The rest of the positions were vacant.

Several state agencies were forced to shed positions in the budget adopted by lawmakers this month. In many cases, those positions were vacant. Senior budget officials said the number of people who lose their jobs could reach about 700.

GOP scouting for candidates

U.S. Rep. Kevin McCarthy, a California Republican and top recruiter for the National Republican Congressional Committee, is in North Carolina this week checking out potential GOP candidates for several House seats held by Democrats.

That includes the 8th District, which Democrat Larry Kissell won from then-incumbent Republican Robin Hayes last November.
"I don't believe Robin's going to run again," McCarthy said. "I would not rule that out, [but] Robin's been very helpful in helping us find somebody."

Hayes, who held the seat for five terms, could be Kissell's worst nightmare. In 2008, the wealthy textile heir spent $3.8 million on the race to Kissell's $1.5 million. And in an off-year, Kissell won't have a Barack Obama tailwind like he did last year.

"You look at town hall meetings and others, there's a frustration out there. People are looking for new faces, fresh ideas," McCarthy said.

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By staff writers J. Andrew Curliss, Lynn Bonner and Jim Morrill of The Charlotte Observer

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N.C. community colleges reviewing immigrant policy

The Associated Press

RALEIGH - North Carolina community colleges leaders will consider reversing a ban keeping illegal immigrants out of the statewide system of two-year colleges.

A committee of the state Board of Community Colleges holds a special session on Wednesday to weigh the pros and cons of admitting undocumented students. A decision could come on Friday on keeping them out of the state's 58 community colleges as they have been for the past year.

The country's third-largest community college system has changed its illegal immigrant admission policy four times since 2000. The new look comes as laid-off workers are jamming classrooms.

A study commissioned by the system said taxpayers wouldn't be affected if the students pay out-of-state rates of $7,000 a year.

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Public forum to focus on bicycling safety tonight

The Daily Reflector

Tuesday, August 18, 2009

As Greenville's roadways and traffic arteries expand, one group wants to make sure room is included in the city's growth plans for bicyclists.

The Bicycle Friendly Task Force is holding community forum at 6:30 p.m. today at City Hall to gather ideas on making the city safer for biking, its chairman said Tuesday.

Several bicycle-motor vehicle collisions occur each year and some prove fatal. About a year ago, the City Council commissioned the Bicycle Friendly Task Force. The panel chaired by Dr. Herb Garrison, professor of emergency medicine at the Brody School of Medicine, director of the Eastern Carolina Injury Prevention Program and associate director of medical services for the State Highway Patrol

The task force set a number of goals and objectives, which includes having Greenville designated as a bicycle friendly community by the League of American Bicyclists.

The league gives the designation to communities that provide facilities and activities that encourage cycling, infrastructure and education for cyclists. In Greenville, this would mean changing the culture of the city to a more bicycle-friendly environment with more dedicated bikeways, Garrison said.

North Carolina cities with the bicycle friendly designation are Carrboro, Cary and Charlotte.

Other forum topics include creation of a permanent bicycle and pedestrian commission and a proposed amendment of the city code to allow bicycles on sidewalks in certain areas, Garrison, said.

"Before we take our ideas to the council, we want to take them to the community," Garrison said.
UNCC receives largest academic gift in its history

The Associated Press

Tuesday, August 18, 2009

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — The University of North Carolina Charlotte has received its largest academic gift in the school’s history — $9.3 million to create a merit scholarship program.

The Charlotte Observer reported Tuesday that UNCC officials hope the program will have the same prestige as the Morehead-Cain at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill; Park at N.C. State; and Benjamin N. Duke at Duke.

Charlotte businessman and philanthropist Leon Levine is donating the money for the scholarships, which will begin in fall 2010.

Plans call for 15 Levine Scholars to be named.

Levine founded Family Dollar Stores in 1959 and built it into one of the country’s largest discount retail chains of more than 5,000 stores.


Aug 18, 2009 - 1:43 p.m. EDT

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Analysis shows administration leads growth in UNC system

The Associated Press

RALEIGH — The number of administrators at University of North Carolina system schools has grown 28 percent in five years, faster than the growth of teaching positions or student enrollment, a newspaper analysis shows.

The News & Observer reported Monday that its analysis showed the 16-campus system had 1,623 administrative jobs last year, up from 1,269 five years ago. The 28 percent growth rate is higher than the 24 percent growth in faculty and other teaching positions and the 14 percent growth in student enrollment.

“That’s troubling,” said UNC-Chapel Hill Chancellor Holden Thorp, who took over the campus in July 2008 and soon after started cutting administrative jobs. “We’re here to educate the citizens of North Carolina and produce scholars that help North Carolina and the rest of the world with their problems, and if we are spending money on the administration, we are not spending money on that.”

The News & Observer said it based its analysis on university payroll data and similar work done by the UNC General Administration.

UNC system President Erskine Bowles is among those who say they’re looking to cut positions. The state budget seeks to cut $73 million from UNC schools, recommending the elimination of senior and middle management positions.

“If you are looking at the cuts we are making, they are heavily, heavily weighted on the administrative side,” Bowles said.

One reason for the number of administrative hires is a $3.1 billion bond referendum that voters passed in 2000, allowing more construction, Bowles and other UNC officials said. That resulted in more facilities that needed management.

Research programs also have grown at UNC-CH and N.C. State University, meaning more people are needed to manage the research and the federal funds that typically accompany such programs.

A recent UNC-CH study found that since 2004, administrative costs have risen 6.6 percent a year, while academic spending increased 4.8 percent a year. Much of the growth has been in managing

See GROWTH, A5

GROWTH

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computers and other information technology.

“It’s not a product of universities specifically; it’s a product of an organization our size,” Thorp said. “As we grow, functions become more decentralized. Everyone wants their own IT staff or their own development people. That’s one trend we want to turn around.”

N.C. State University Chancellor James Woodward said he will study the report to find ways to reduce bureaucracy at his school. For example, he said NCSU has about 100 communications staffers because different colleges or departments have added their own publicists.

Woodward wants to reduce the number by centralizing communications.

NCSU professors produced a report showing that from 2002 to 2007, the number of full-time tenure track faculty decreased slightly, while the number full-time administrators grew.
Henry A. Davis

Henry A. Davis AYDEN - Henry Allen Davis, 62, of Ayden, died Monday, August 17, 2009 at his home following a long and courageous battle with cancer. Henry was born June 15, 1947 in La Grange to the late Henry Clay Davis and Annie Elizabeth Barfield Davis. He retired in 2001 from the Maintenance Department at East Carolina University. Henry enjoyed taking care of his grandchildren and raising a variety of animals. Funeral service will be held Thursday at 2 p.m. from Rouse Funeral Home with Rev. Walter Summerlin officiating. Interment will follow at Fairview Cemetery.

Henry is survived by his wife of 40 years, Ann Jones Davis; three daughters, Elizabeth Davis of Grifton, Christy Wilson and husband, Scott, of Ayden, Cheryl Davis of Ayden; nine grandchildren, Ashley, Nikki, Austin, Haley, Hannah, Sarah, Clay, Christy and Jade; brother, James A. Davis and wife, Evelyn of Ayden; two sisters, Annie Ruth Edmundson and husband, Jessie of Greenville and Betty Ann Edmundson and husband, Willie of Ayden; brothers and sisters-in-law, Jackie Jones and wife, Teresa, Bobby Jones and wife, Janet, all of Greenville; special friend, Melissa Pauley of Ayden; along with a number of nieces and nephews. The family will receive friends Wednesday from 6-8 p.m. at Rouse Funeral Home and at other times they will be at the home. Online condolences may be expressed at www.rousefh.com. Arrangements are with Rouse Funeral Home, La Grange.

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