THE DAILY CLIPS

August 22, 2012

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

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   The New York Times
   The Wall Street Journal
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When we learned about possible irregularities in some African and Afro-American Studies department courses at UNC-Chapel Hill, we investigated. We asked hard questions, and we found answers that are painful for a university built on a commitment to academic excellence.

What happened was wrong and completely contrary to what our university stands for, and we’ve taken numerous steps to make sure it never happens again.

Our first goal was to determine what enabled the problems and who was responsible. The two people implicated in our investigation are gone. We forced the retirement of Professor Julius Nyang’oro, who previously resigned as department chair, and the former department manager retired long ago.

Our next goal was to fix the problems we found and do everything possible to avoid similar problems in the future. We’re implementing recommendations coming out of four extensive internal reviews. They covered department course irregularities found between 2007 and 2011, the Academic Support Program for Student-Athletes, independent study practices, and input from faculty leaders seeking to improve the relationship between academics and athletics.

We’re cooperating fully with a UNC Board of Governors panel convened by UNC system President Tom Ross to assess our investigative work and the new academic controls we’ve put in place.

As part of our ongoing review of irregularities found in department courses, we’ve been reviewing the extent to which those may have occurred before 2007. We asked former Gov. James G. Martin, who was a Davidson College professor, to lead an independent review of any additional academic irregularities that may have occurred. He will work with Virchow, Krause & Company, a consulting firm with expertise in academic performance audit procedures and controls. Those findings will be provided to the Board of
Governors panel. This is an important step in rebuilding the confidence that North Carolinians deserve to have in the university’s academic integrity.

The consultants will examine and assess new academic policies and procedures adopted in the department, the College of Arts and Sciences and the summer school. The department has a new chair, governance structure and strict procedures for independent studies. The college has adopted best practices for independent study in all departments and annually reviews all teaching assignments and enrollments. The summer school has new policies and monitoring tools, and a new campus database is helping better monitor and track student records and grade forms.

Faculty leaders asked me to bring in outside experts to help analyze the proper future relationship between academics and athletics. We asked Hunter Rawlings, president of the Association of American Universities (which represents more than 60 public and private research universities including Carolina), to help us examine that complex dynamic. He will bring unique perspective as a top academic, the former president of two distinguished public and private universities and a former college basketball and baseball player. We hope to engage the entire campus in discussing an important issue facing American higher education.

On campus, we’re making organizational and personnel changes to further strengthen how student-athletes are advised. We want to ensure academic affairs is “fully in control,” consistent with our own faculty report and the findings of the 2011 Task Force on Athletics and Academics commissioned by Ross.

New Athletic Director Bubba Cunningham has eagerly embraced the opportunity to enhance collaborations with College of Arts and Sciences Dean Karen Gil, her colleagues and faculty. One result is that we’re making it unequivocally clear that the college is in charge of the Academic Support Program for Student-Athletes. We’ve restructured that office and will search nationally for a new director. We’re adding two positions in Academic Advising to monitor and oversee academic advising for student-athletes. We’re expanding the college’s successful summer residential academic support program to incorporate student-athletes who may need help with the transition from high school.

Faculty involvement and support is critical for making these changes successful. Under Cunningham’s leadership, the athletics department is strengthening relationships among faculty advisory committees. In
reorganizing his own staff, he hired two new senior administrators to better coordinate the oversight of athletics with the college and our administration.

I am a Carolina graduate. I still serve on the faculty and teach undergraduates. I’m proud to be the chancellor and humbled to represent amazing students, brilliant faculty and devoted staff.

The academic issues that we have confronted are unacceptable, and we are intent on resolving them. Our focus every day remains on fixing the problems we discovered and ensuring they never happen again. Nothing is more important than restoring confidence in the university.

Holden Thorp, a Fayetteville native, is chancellor of UNC-Chapel Hill.

Read more here: http://www.newsobserver.com/2012/08/22/2283083/steps-were-taking-at-unc-chapel.html#storylink=cpy
Academic support director for UNC athletes moved out of job
By Dan Kane - dkane@newsobserver.com
Modified Wed, Aug 22, 2012 06:15 AM

When UNC-Chapel Hill Chancellor Holden Thorp announced a reorganization of the academic support program for athletes last week, he said the university has installed an interim director and is searching for a new one.

What he didn’t say is what happened to the guy who held that job for nearly a decade, Robert Mercer.

Mercer was quietly moved to a new job, outside of athletic advising, as a “special assistant for operations” at a center for undergraduate excellence, for the same salary of $81,900. His former boss, Harold Woodard, who is serving as interim director, said Mercer had done nothing wrong, but that the issues that have welled up from the academic fraud investigation required a search for a “national” leader to run the program.

The move came less than a week after a special faculty report said evidence suggests that academic counselors working under Mercer were steering athletes to classes that were later found to involve little or no classroom time. An internal investigation found 54 such classes within the Department of African and Afro-American Studies, and placed the blame solely on the former longtime chairman, Julius Nyang’oro, and his former department manager, Deborah Crowder.

“It’s not about Robert, it really isn’t,” said Woodard, who is also an associate dean in charge of the university’s academic support program for undergraduate students. “It’s really about this opportunity for Carolina to claim the mantle of operating a model program.”

Woodard’s Aug. 3 letter to Mercer, 46, notifying him of the reassignment makes no mention of the work he has done leading the program.

It simply stated that he had been reassigned to the Johnston Center for Undergraduate Excellence, effective last Wednesday. The center handles honors programs and undergraduate research. It is led by James Leloudis, an associate dean.
“You will be referred to as the special assistant for operations and will assist with the facility and its operation, programming and other duties, as assigned,” the letter said.

It also said the terms and conditions of Mercer’s previous job will remain the same. Woodard said he is unaware of any other personnel moves within the program or in its home – the College of Arts & Sciences.

Mercer had been director since October 2002, and had worked in the academic support program as an administrator since 1996. Before that he was an area director for student housing.

**Other changes in athletics**

The faculty report said an unidentified “departmental staff manager” within African studies may have directed athletes to enroll in the no-show classes, and that “it seems likely” someone in the department was calling counselors for athletes to tell them “certain courses” were available.

“We were told that athletes claimed they had been sent to Julius Nyang’oro” by the Academic Support Program for Student Athletes, the report said.

Woodard said he knew nothing about the claims of steering athletes.

“I’m not aware of what was happening in that department, and that’s probably a good thing because it allows me to focus on where we want to take the staff during the interim,” Woodard said.

Mercer’s reassignment followed changes that Athletic Director Bubba Cunningham announced last month in hiring a new senior associate director, Vince Ille, from the University of Illinois, and Paul Pogge as an associate director.

Thorp said part of Ille’s job is as a liaison between academic advisers who help athletes pick classes, and separate academic counselors who make sure athletes are doing their school work and progressing toward degrees, as the NCAA requires. Ille also supervises the department’s NCAA compliance efforts. Pogge, who came from the University of Denver, has responsibility for student-athlete eligibility matters, as well as coordinating summer camps.

Thorp said last week he has severed a previous line of reporting between the academic support unit’s director and the athletic department.

**Driven by athletics?**
The moves come amid new evidence suggesting that the academic fraud had
gone on longer than the 2007-to-2011 period examined by the internal
investigation.

Earlier this month, The News & Observer reported that a former student said
he had taken a no-show class taught by Nyang’oro in fall 2005. And two
transcripts from 2001 tied to former UNC football star Julius Peppers have
called into question the quality of athletes’ education as far back as the late
1990s.

One of those transcripts was a test transcript found by The N&O on UNC’s
web site. That led rival N.C. State fans to Peppers’ actual transcript, which
showed that he had achieved grades of B or better in several classes that the
internal probe found to be academically suspect in later years. For example,
Peppers received a B-plus for a Southern Africa class in his sophomore year,
a course that showed up six times as a no-show class over three later years,
according to the UNC investigation.

Peppers performed poorly in many other classes, including some within the
African studies department that did not turn up later as no-show classes. He
received a D on an introductory course, and failed a civil rights class in
spring 2001.

Peppers’ agent, Carl Carey Jr., released a statement from Peppers on
Saturday confirming that the transcript is his, but denying that he took part
in academic fraud. On Monday, UNC officials announced that Peppers had
made a $250,000 contribution to a scholarship program for African-
American students.

Thorp’s announcement last week included tapping former Gov. Jim Martin
to lead an audit to determine how deep the academic fraud went at the
university. Martin said Thorp has given him the authority to go anywhere he
sees fit, and that could include auditing the courses Peppers took.

In prior weeks, Thorp and other university officials have said the academic
fraud is not an NCAA violation because nonathletes also were enrolled in
the no-show classes. University records show nearly two-thirds of the
enrollments were athletes, largely football players, but two classes showed a
single men’s basketball player enrolled.

Last week in an interview, Thorp declined to say whether he still thought the
academic fraud was not driven by athletics.

Kane: 919-829-4861
After day off, ECU back to business
By Nathan Summers
Wednesday, August 22, 2012

August camp is over, days off are a thing of the past and East Carolina football players have joined the rest of the ECU student body in classes. That means football inside Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium is a mere 10 days away, and the ECU team returns to the practice field today for its first evening practice of the new season.

According to third-year head coach Ruffin McNeill, today begins what he called a mock game week and will be followed by the Pirates’ official week of preparation for their noon season kickoff Sept. 1 against Appalachian State.

As camp came to a close on Monday, McNeill was still stressing tempo on both sides of the ball.

“We’re making sure everybody has tempo, from me to coaches to players, and the guys did that,” McNeill said of the final training day. “(Today) we’ll be on the NCAA-mandated four-hour (per day) schedule. We’ll practice in the afternoons and we’ll try to mock or simulate a game week schedule.”

That means today will be like a normal game week Tuesday, with practice beginning at 3:30 p.m. inside the Cliff Moore Practice Complex. Thursday will be like a Wednesday and Friday like a typical Thursday, McNeill said.

On Sunday night, the first real game week begins.

“We’re trying to get them used to being in that mode, and time restraints will be placed on us because when classes start, we only have four hours a day allotted.”
Fighting back

A small handful of players who spent much of August camp sidelined with injuries is steadily getting back onto the field in hopes of being ready for the Mountaineers.

On Monday, junior starting defensive end Matt Milner got limited repetitions after spending most of camp stuck with a protective boot on his injured left foot. Joining him after injury layoffs were redshirt freshman receiver Antonio Cannon (concussion) and true freshman receiver Quataye Smyre (left leg).

Still on the shelf heading into today were senior starting nose tackle Michael Brooks (concussion), sophomore outside linebacker Jake Geary (left leg), redshirt OLB Montese Overton (concussion), senior starting cornerback Leonard Paulk (right leg) and junior WR Brandon Weymann (right shoulder).

Contact Nathan Summers at nsummers@reflector.com or 252-329-9595.
I have enjoyed the Uptown Umbrella Markets, which happen — weather permitting — on Wednesdays from 5-8 p.m. It has been fun to poke around and sample fares and eat hot dogs, pastries, farm produce and homemade goodies. The events also spotlight local talented musicians.

I have enjoyed discovering downtown shops and the GREAT buses provide transportation into and out of downtown Greenville. There has also been a trolley service provided. That too has been a fun, fabulous way to connect to downtown. Yes, there may need to be a parking garage soon. I am glad to see the area being developed for retail, when it was once ignored, except for ECU.

DEBORAH CHAPMAN
Greenville