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Speakers say crime concerns not addressed by City Council

By Kathryn Kennedy
The Daily Reflector

Wednesday, August 26, 2009

Twenty-five people addressed Greenville City Council members Monday night about their crime concerns across the city, and some feel the actions taken following the public hearing missed the mark.

Four ordinances are being drafted by city staff at the council’s request in an attempt to improve safety downtown. They will return to the council for discussion and a vote and would be applied citywide if approved. But several of those who spoke at the meeting, attended by about 60 people, said their concerns were not addressed by the council.

“They didn’t really listen to the people at all,” said Terry Boardman, the first citizen to speak Monday night. “Myself or anybody else. This was a set-up. They had a preconceived notion of what they wanted to get done.”

Boardman advocates cutting back on “paper-pushing jobs” in planning and other departments in order to pay for more police manpower.

Rufus Huggins, Pitt County Southern Christian Leadership Conference, was another speaker disappointed by the council’s response. He said they keep trying the same things, expecting a different result. They should go door-to-door, be visible, in west Greenville and other crime-troubled areas themselves, he said.

“They’re doing more planning,” Huggins said. “We can meet all over this city and find a solution for someone else to do. Before you give out a pill for the pain, you’ve got to know what the pain is.”

Only five people spoke directly to concerns about public safety downtown Monday.

Dolly Hart, a mother of three, said she has lived in Greenville more than 25 years and thinks crime downtown is “pushed under the rug.” Fights and shootings are fueled by cheap drink prices, she said.

“Downtown Greenville is the worst place there is,” she said. “We got kids going down there, buying alcohol because they’ve got a fake card. Stop it before it gets worse because it’s going to get worse.”

Police-Community Relations Council Chair Diane Kulik said there needs to be more officers or cameras in the bars. Bob Thompson said bartenders should be careful not to serve those already intoxicated, and should interact more with Alcohol Law Enforcement (ALE).

Patrick Sebastian, president of the Fraternity Council at East Carolina University, said downtown feels safer with increased police presence, but patrols of the outskirts for those walking home could be improved. Manon Barnes said nightclub bouncers should have training to prevent altercations with patrons.

People also were frustrated by the amount of funding and attention showered on the area. Ali Hassan, a member of Muhammad Mosque No. 79 on Fifth Street, said the additional money used to police downtown is an example of the racial discrepancies in public safety. He spoke about the attention given to the killing of two white males, but said black murders are overlooked by the larger community.

“Black people have pain just like white people,” he said. “Our pains are not being given adequate attention.”
R.J. Hemby and Carolyn Melvin agreed. “Please,” Hemby said. “Show love for the entire community across these times.”

Melvin, a former police detective, said black clubs are being pressured and closed while downtown clubs are protected. She said she sees a lack of security in west Greenville.

Businessman Jeremy Spengeman, who owns Unk’s and Basil’s restaurants, said it’s not fair to look at downtown alone, and resources should be dispersed throughout the city. Still Life owner Sharif Abhatoum summed up the opinion of many on crime: “This is not a downtown issue. This is not a bar issue. This is a community issue.”

City Manager Wayne Bowers said the potential actions were considered as a result of the drive-by shooting that killed two men downtown June 30. The mayor and council members were involved in a number of private meetings where residents and business owners asked that action be taken to improve safety.

Bowers said the list of 15 options was compiled based on specific council member requests, suggestions from the non-profit revitalization group Uptown Greenville and input from the people attending those initial meetings. He and City Attorney Dave Holec just “filled in the blanks” and examined the legality. Bowers could not say with certainty which council members inquired about particular items.

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College failures

When parents plunk down thousands this fall for a year’s worth of college room, board and tuition, it might be relevant to ask: What will their children learn in return? The American Council of Trustees and Alumni ask that question in their recently released publication, “What Will They Learn: A Report on the General Education Requirements at 100 of the Nation’s Leading Colleges and Universities.”

ACTA conducted research to see whether 100 major institutions require seven key subjects: English composition, literature, foreign language, U.S. government or history, economics, mathematics and science. What ACTA found was alarming, reporting that “Even as our students need broad-based skills and knowledge to succeed in the global marketplace, our colleges and universities are failing to deliver. Topics like U.S. government or history, literature, mathematics and economics have become mere options on far too many campuses. Not surprisingly, students are graduating with great gaps in their knowledge — and employers are noticing.”

The National Center for Education Statistics reports that only 31 percent of college graduates can read and understand a complex book. Employers complain that graduates of colleges lack the writing and analytical skills necessary to succeed in the workplace. A 2006 survey conducted by The Conference Board, Corporate Voices for Working Families, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, and the Society for Human Resource Management found that only 24 percent of employers thought graduates of four-year colleges were “excellently prepared” for entry-level positions. College seniors perennially fail tests of their civic and historical knowledge.

ACTA says that “paying a lot doesn’t get you a lot.” Generally, the higher the tuition, the less likely there are rigorous general education requirements. Average tuition and fees at the 11 schools that require no subjects is $37,700; however, average tuition at the five schools that require six subjects is $5,400. Average tuition fees at the top national universities and liberal arts colleges are $35,000 (average grade is “F”).

ACTA’s report concludes by saying that a coherent core reflects, in the words of federal judge Jose Cabranes, “a series of choices — the choice of the lasting over the ephemeral; the meritorious over the meretricious; the thought-provoking over the merely self-affirming.” A general education curriculum, when done well, is one that helps students “ensure that their studies — and their lives — are well-directed.”
Radio interview, letter avow Richardson's innocence

By Michael Abramowitz
The Daily Reflector

Wednesday, August 26, 2009

The man accused of murder in connection with the June 30 shooting deaths of two bystanders downtown avowed his innocence in a call to radio station Tuesday, a week after a group submitted a similar written statement on his behalf to The Daily Reflector.

James Earl Richardson told station WOOW announcer Jim Rouse on air that he did not shoot at Andrew Kirby and Landon Blackley outside The Other Place on East Fifth Street.

He promised supporters he would walk from the Pitt County Detention Center a free man.

“I just want everybody to pray for me and just know that I'm innocent and will be walking out of here,” Richardson said via phone from the detention center.

An anonymous group of supporters, acting through a spokeswoman, submitted a lengthy written statement to The Reflector that also proclaimed Richardson’s innocence. The paper declined to run it as an advertisement and the group declined to run it as an editorial letter.

The spokeswoman said the supporters are based in Atlanta and she declined to identify them or answer questions related to the statement.

The statement said Richardson’s “heart goes out to the grieving family of the young people that lost their lives. My prayers go out to them.”

It said he’s been a member of charitable organizations and has acted as a mentor to young people. It described him as a victim of discrimination and accuses authorities of judging him guilty without bothering to find evidence of his guilt.

It offered no details about Richardson’s version of the events of June 30. He also told Rouse he could not discuss what happened that night because of pending litigation.

Richardson remains in jail, meanwhile, awaiting his next scheduled court appearance on Sept. 30. He was represented by attorney Ernest L. “Buddy” Conner, but Conner resigned in a motion to withdraw filed Friday with the Pitt County Clerk of Court. There was no record Wednesday of new counsel being assigned to Richardson.

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More than 200 students, staff members and friends attended the 45-minute memorial service at the Chapel of the Cross in Chapel Hill. Fraternity members indicated they were surprised by what they heard on the 911 tape.

Harry Lynch, Staff photo by Harry Lynch

Friends and fellow UNC-Chapel Hill fraternity members mourn DKE President Courtland Smith.

Harry Lynch, Staff photo by Harry Lynch

UNC student's final call was calm, chilling

BY JAY PRICE, Staff writer
CHAPEL HILL - Minutes before he was shot to death by an Archdale police officer early Sunday, a UNC-Chapel Hill student called an emergency dispatcher from his speeding SUV, claimed to have a 9 mm pistol in his back pocket and said that he had been drinking.

"I mean, I'm trying to kill myself on I-40," said Courtland Benjamin Smith, 21, in a tape of the 911 call released Wednesday by Guilford Metro 911.

Throughout the 15-minute call, the junior biology major from Houston spoke sluggishly, but was calm and unfailingly polite.

"I really appreciate what you're doing," he told the dispatcher at one point.

The Archdale Police Department said officers responding to the call stopped Smith's gray Toyota 4Runner on Interstate 85 and a fatal confrontation ensued.

A spokeswoman for the State Bureau of Investigation, which routinely investigates shootings involving police, said Wednesday it couldn't release further details about the shooting because the investigation was incomplete.

Despite Smith's claim, it's unclear whether he actually had a gun. Archdale Police Chief Darrell Gibbs said in an interview Wednesday that he is not aware of any gun being found on the scene, though his officers left all evidence untouched for the SBI investigation and had not searched Smith's vehicle. Smith's father, Pharr Smith, said in an interview Monday that his son didn't own a gun.

Gibbs said that he wanted to wait for the results of the SBI probe before saying that he was sure his officers had acted properly. But from all he had heard so far, Gibbs said, they followed the right procedures.

200 at memorial service

Smith's friends were still struggling Wednesday to understand what happened. More than 200 people packed a solemn afternoon memorial service at the Chapel of the Cross in Chapel Hill that was organized by Smith's fraternity brothers from Delta Kappa Epsilon, where he was the chapter president.

During the service, a minister noted that many of those present might have felt as though they had more questions than answers.

Three of Smith's friends spoke, including Thomas Crimmons Ewing, who described Smith as the kind of man who always worried about others rather than himself. Ewing said Smith had planned since he was 13 to become a doctor and had decided to be a pediatric cardiologist.

Dozens of the mourners were members of UNC-CH's large Greek community. As they left, many fought back tears. After the ceremony, the fraternity held a reception for mourners at its chapter house.

The polite tone of Smith's last phone call was characteristic, said Chris Rice of Cary, a 1994 alumnus who keeps close ties to the DKE chapter. Rice said Smith wasn't confrontational, but a calm, controlled leader whom others sought when they had troubles.

It's hard for Smith's friends to reconcile the idea of his doing anything that would provoke a police officer to shoot him, Rice said.

In a formal statement that Rice issued later on behalf of the fraternity, he wrote that fraternity members were saddened and surprised by what they heard on the 911 tape, and that Smith had
seemed fine when he left a party at the fraternity house about 12:30 a.m. Sunday. Smith lived in a house off campus, and his roommates there were the last ones to see him, about 2 a.m. Sunday. They also said he sounded normal, Rice said.

About 30 of Smith's friends in Chapel Hill plan to travel to Houston for his funeral Friday, Rice said.

Video still under wraps

Following department policy, Archdale police put the officer who shot Smith, Jeremy Paul Flinchum, 29, on paid leave pending the results of the SBI investigation. The second officer on the scene, who police said was not involved in the shooting, also was put on leave under the policy.

Archdale police and the Randolph County District Attorney's office confirmed that at least one police cruiser was equipped with a video camera and that there is a video recording that they are treating as evidence. They declined to describe what it shows.

For now, the closest thing to an explanation is the 911 recording, which started when Smith called while driving west on Interstate 40 in or near Greensboro. Early in the conversation, he said he was suicidal and mentioned the gun.

The dispatcher asked whether he had been drinking, and Smith responded that he had. At another point, as the dispatcher tried to get more information about Smith, he replied that that wasn't necessary.

"I e-mailed anything that anyone needed to know to my parents," he said.

The dispatcher asked him at various points to describe where he was, and Smith repeatedly filled her in on what he saw around him and the numbers of the interstate exits as he passed them. He asked at one point whether she could send someone to pull him over but at other points declined to stop on his own.

Finally, she told him he had moved from Guilford County into Randolph County. Seconds later, he said there were police cars behind him with their lights flashing. "Whoa, there's two of 'em," he said.

The dispatcher responded that he should pull over. He said he was and asked whether she had direct contact with the officers. She replied that she did not.

After that, the tape seems to indicate Smith got out of the vehicle at least once and the officers ordered him to move back to the vehicle. All the words aren't clear. Twice, it sounded like Smith said he had to "pull something out."

Smith sounded calm while dealing with the officers, but he said "whoa" several times.

The tape ends before the shooting.

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Audio: 911 call
Glimpse at the uninsured

Sarah Campbell
2009-08-22 18:45:34

Sabrina Lewis can’t find a job — and it’s a plight she partially attributes to being uninsured.

The 40-year-old Kinston resident said access to prescriptions for her chronic health problems — diabetes and high blood pressure — have interfered with her job search.

“How can a person go out looking for a job or try to find one if they don’t feel good?” she said. “I’m supposed to be on about four or five different medications, but I can only get two through local agencies.”

Lewis said at some points, her blood sugar sky-rockets to 500, generating a trip to the emergency department at Lenoir Memorial Hospital.

“I don’t have any health insurance, so I go to the emergency room,” she said. “If you don’t have Medicaid or some kind of insurance, you have to pay $25 to $50 to go to the doctor and I just don’t have that.”

Frank Evans, director of clinical finance at East Carolina University’s Brody School of Medicine, said uninsured patients receive all the services that they need, but emergency room costs can be much higher.

“I think everybody pretty much knows that emergency room care is probably more costly,” he said. “It’s an expensive way to receive your primary care.”

Toughing it out

Six months ago, Larry Kilpatrick lost his job and his health insurance. The 53-year-old Kinston resident suffers from gout, a condition that causes pain, swelling and tenderness in a joint.

Kilpatrick used to control his gout flare-ups with a prescription, but the pills are simply too expensive to buy without insurance.

“I just let nature take its course and let it wear off,” he said.

Searching for a new job can be a daunting task for anybody, but even more so for Kilpatrick.

“I have gout in my foot,” he said. “Sometimes it’s hard for me to get around.”

For Kilpatrick, the transition from having insurance to living without it has been an eye-opener.
“I didn’t have any problems getting my pills when I had insurance,” Kilpatrick said. “But now it’s kind of bad.”

**Billing woes**

After eight years of employment, Randaal Sheppard was laid off from his job at Smithfield Packing Company during May.

Sheppard said he is fairly healthy. But, he admits he was supposed to visit a specialist a while back and never did.

Dr. John K. John of Eastern Carolina Physicians said this wasn’t an uncommon practice for patients without health coverage.

“Everyday, I see patients come into my office facing challenges with health care,” he said. “Every year, it’s getting worse.”

John said many patients are skipping out on visits to specialists because of the cost, acknowledging such actions could be detrimental to their health.

“If people go to get health care … they get excellent care,” John said. “The problem is people don’t go and we don’t have a system that allows them to go.”

Sheppard said the transition to being uninsured has made him reassess his finances.

“I didn’t have to worry about having a lot of money back when I had insurance because most of the time the job would pay it,” he said.

Sheppard admits if his health began to decline he would seek treatment, but knows it would be a costly endeavor.

“I would probably go,” he said. “I know that I’d have a lot of bills to pay later.”

**Local impact**

Lewis, Kilpatrick and Sheppard are just three of an estimated 46 million uninsured Americans, according to 2007 data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Both the Kinston Community Health Center and the Lenoir County Health Department have seen an increase in the number of uninsured patients entering their doors.

At the KCHC, an increase of more than 40 percent in the number of uninsured patients have visited the facility from January to June.

Linda Albers, KCHC’s chief financial officier, speculated on the increasing number of uninsured, citing unemployment, benefit cuts and costly private insurance are possible culprits.
“It’s just that health benefits are one thing that are easy to cut when you need to cut something in order to keep jobs going,” she said. “This is going to continue for a while. Unfortunately, one of the things that seem to lag in the recovery is the restoration of benefits.

“Company’s are going to add jobs before they restore any of the perks.”

Albers said more companies are offering a high deductible insurance plan because they are cheaper premium-wise than traditional insurance.

“(These plans) are good for young, healthy people,” she said. “However, they don’t work when you have children or some sort of chronic condition.”

Although three out of five patients who visit KCHC are uninsured, Albers said the majority of those are working individuals.

The National Coalition on Health Care, a nonprofit, nonpartisan alliance working to improve America’s health care, reports that more than eight in 10 uninsured people come from working families; that number drops to 70 percent for families with one or more full-time worker.

Joey Huff, Lenoir County health director, said he’s seen a substantial increase in the number of uninsured patients being served at the health department.

“In our family planning program, about 67 percent of our clients are uninsured in our maternity program, about 50 percent of our clients are uninsured and in our child health program, about 15 percent of our clients are uninsured,” he said.

Huff said it was hard to define a particular population of people who are uninsured.

“Access to health care is affecting a lot of people, regardless of their race or age.”

Albers said the same was true at KCHC.

“It’s across the board,” she said.

**Sky high**

This week, Families USA issued a report indicating family health care premiums rose an estimated 5.3 times faster than earnings for North Carolina workers from 2000 through 2009.

Family health insurance premiums rose by 96.8 percent, while median earnings rose by 18.4 percent, according to the report, which is based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the U.S. Department of Labor and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

“Rising health care costs threaten the financial well-being of families in North Carolina and across the nation,” Ron Pollack, executive director of Families USA, said.
Sarah Campbell can be reached at (252) 559-1076 or scampbell@freedomnc.com.

Did you know?

The large majority of the uninsured (85 percent) are native or naturalized citizens.

Nearly 1.3 million full-time workers lost their health insurance in 2006.

The Urban Institute estimates that under a worse case scenario, 66 million Americans will be uninsured by 2019.

Lack of insurance compromises the health of the uninsured because they receive less preventative care, they are diagnosed at more advanced disease stages and once diagnosed, tend to receive less therapeutic care and have higher mortality rates than insured individuals.

On average, the uninsured are 9 to 10 times more likely to forgo medical care because of cost and twice as likely to have medical debt.

Source: National Coalition on Health Care, a non-profit, non-partisan organization
Duke bets big on a new cancer center

BY ERIC FERRERI, Staff Writer

DURHAM - Duke University Health System will spend $700 million on a new cancer center and medical tower, a sum one industry expert called staggering and said shows that Duke wants to build its reputation on a global scale.

The investment shows Duke bets it will emerge competitive no matter the outcome of the health-care debate, said Dawn Carter, principal of Durham’s Health Planning Source, which helps hospitals strategize.

"There’s always a risk, even if reform wasn’t on the table," said Carter, who has worked with Duke and counts UNC Health Care and Rex as clients. "Duke is looking at this in terms of their international reputation."

Construction is expected to start in November. The center is expected to open in 2012, and the new hospital wing focusing on surgery and intensive care services in 2013. In all, Duke will add 850,000 square feet of research and treatment space to its health system.

The projects will create an estimated 1,000 permanent jobs and will be paid for over many years through loans, financed debt and fundraising, said Victor Dzau, the health system’s CEO.

"We’re saturated. We have three hospitals, and we’re full," Dzau said. "We’re doing it cautiously, and we understand the economic environment."

Dzau said the projects respond to a need. While Duke treats many patients who need routine care at outpatient clinics and ambulatory care centers, its hospital has still become overburdened; thus the need for the new eight-floor pavilion, which will have 16 operating suites and 96 critical care beds.

"The patients who end up at the hospital are sicker and more complex," Dzau said.

The pavilion will be built just south of the current Duke North hospital facility.

The seven-story center, which will adjoin the current Morris Cancer Clinic, will consolidate outpatient cancer services and clinical research, functions currently spread across the health system's campus, Dzau said. It will add 140 exam rooms, 75 infusion stations and a pharmacy.

It will follow the creation of a cancer center just down the road, UNC-Chapel Hill’s N.C. Cancer Hospital, which will open next month.

Officials at both universities say they plan to collaborate more and don’t view each other as competition.

"The number of cancer patients and the need for cancer care will outstrip our ability as a state to manage it," said Shelton Earp, director of UNC-CH's Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center. "We will both, unfortunately, have more than enough patients to take care of."
More care and clout

Gwen Darien with the American Association for Cancer Research said Duke's plan will open clinical trials to more patients.

"If the state is growing and the population is aging, there will be greater numbers of people with cancer," she said. "And any expansion of cancer centers is a great thing."

But Carter, of Health Planning Source, called $700 million "a staggering number" and said Duke is looking beyond how many patients it can treat in Durham or even the United States.

"It certainly begs the question, what's the gain you're seeking in these investments that's going to make it worthwhile," she said.

"They're seeking. They're also being sought after. It is the Duke brand folks wants around the world."

A booming industry

Duke's plan is the latest of several large health-care initiatives in the Triangle despite the faltering economy. Duke Medicine has also done recent renovations to Duke Raleigh and Durham Regional hospitals. In addition to the N.C. Cancer Hospital opening in September, UNC-CH also recently announced plans for a hospital in Hillsborough.

Dzau said Duke's steady growth is due in part to the state's population growth, which health-care planners see as proof that business will continue to grow. The Duke health-care system currently employs about 20,000 people. "We are more stable than any other economy," Dzau said. "Everyone needs health care."

Still, a massive expansion amid a national health-care reform debate and unknown future reimbursement rates carries risk, Carter said.

"My speculation is, compared to their peers, if Duke is performing well, they may believe that they're not going to be hurt as much as their peers would be."

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**BY THE NUMBERS**

The new cancer center:

- 7 stories
- 267,000 square feet
- 140 exam rooms

The Duke Medicine Pavilion:

- 8 stories
- 580,000 square feet
- 16 new operating suites
- 96 critical care beds
- 64 intermediate care beds
The Washington Post

An Education Debate for the Books

Applications to Colleges Such as St. John's Are Dropping As the Downturn Leads Families to Weigh the Value, And Price, of a Liberal Arts Degree More Carefully.

By Daniel de Vise
Washington Post Staff Writer
Thursday, August 27, 2009

It was move-in day at St. John's College. Within the thick walls of 106-year-old Randall Hall, a father and son teetered along a hallway carrying a refrigerator. Another pair emerged from the stairwell with a rack of shirts hanging from a crutch. And everywhere, books. This was, after all, the Great Books school.

For freshman Graham Gallagher, arriving at the historic Annapolis campus Wednesday, admission to St. John's is destiny fulfilled. Here, he said, learning "is a journey, instead of a competition."

Yet, applications were down 15 percent this year at St. John's, and this year's freshman class of 137 is about 20 students smaller than last year's.

The experience at St. John's is representative of many small, private liberal arts colleges across the country, according to presidents and admissions officials interviewed. Several schools reported a falloff in applications because of the economic downturn, and some struggled to fill the freshman class.

Liberal arts colleges have had to defend the marketability of a philosophy major for as long as competing public and private institutions have offered degrees in engineering and business, often at a lower cost. But never, perhaps, have families weighed the value of a liberal education more carefully than in the 2009-10 admissions cycle, which found the nation mired in its worst recession since the 1930s.

"People all think that in a bad economy, they need skills for a job," said Christopher Nelson, president of St. John's. "What they don't realize is that a liberal arts education will give them skills for life, and that will get them a job."

Applications to St. John's dwindled from 460 last year to about 400 this year. College leaders raised the financial aid budget to $8 million, up from $7 million last year and $6 million in 2007. Even so, enrollment declined, chiefly among families who had applied for aid and did not receive any. A dozen families appealed for more aid over the summer after one or both parents lost their jobs.

"We'd just never seen anything like that before," said John Christensen, admissions director.

St. John's is one of a handful of American colleges that offer a curriculum built upon great works of literature, art, science and mathematics. Students read and discuss texts by Homer, Euclid, Chaucer and Einstein. There are no majors; students graduate with broad knowledge in several disciplines but a
specialty in none, and without anything approaching vocational skills. Investing in a St. John's education requires a leap of faith.

Admissions numbers are down, too, at the other Great Books schools. Applications declined by 30 percent at Thomas Aquinas College in California. The freshman class at Shimer College in Chicago dropped to 36 this year, from 45 last year.

Much like students at a traditional liberal arts school, St. John's freshmen generally assume that they will learn their eventual trade in graduate school: Twenty percent of St. John's graduates end up in business, 10 percent in law, 7 percent in medicine. Majors, they say, are overrated.

"If you go to school and you learn to do one thing and then you change careers down the line, you know nothing that will help you," said Tim McClennen, 19, a freshman from Cutler Ridge, Fla.

Gallagher, McClennen's roommate, said he had to convince his parents and his grandfather -- who lived through the Great Depression -- that the $40,000 tuition would not go to waste.

"I think there's nothing more practical than a hard-core liberal arts education," said Gallagher, 18, who hopes to study law and enter politics after four years at St. John's.

Although the full effect of the downturn on college admissions is unclear, admissions experts say many private colleges and universities had smaller applicant pools this year. They also admitted slightly larger classes than usual, for fear of further attrition over the summer. As a result, many private schools were somewhat less selective this year, and applicants had a somewhat easier time getting in -- although not to the extent, college officials say, that the academic caliber of their students has suffered. Hampshire College in Massachusetts, Reed College in Oregon and Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania had fewer applicants this year than last. At Reed, the acceptance rate for freshmen rose to 39 percent this year, from 32 percent last year.

"Certainly, a lot of families are asking about the value of a $50,000 price tag in this economy," said Barbara Fritze, vice president for enrollment and educational services at Gettysburg College, where applications were down about 7 percent.

Andy Hastings, 18, of Columbia is attending St. John's against the advice of his friends at Wilde Lake High School, who told him that four years from now, "you're going to be really smart, and you're never going to earn any money." He has been reading books from the St. John's curriculum since middle school and hopes one day to teach at the college.

"What I really want," said his father, Alan Hastings, "is for him to find out who he is and what job he was meant to do. And I can't think of any better place to do that than here."

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