THE DAILY CLIPS

August 29, 2012

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

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   USA Today
   The Charlotte Observer
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252-328-6481
Rule change helps ECU freshmen
By Tony Castleberry
Wednesday, August 29, 2012

Most of the time, when the NCAA makes rules changes, it results in much handwringing by athletic directors and arguments among coaches who are sure the new rule is either the greatest thing for their sport or the worst.

While overwhelming support for amendments to the NCAA rulebook is as rare as half-court game-winning shots going in, the governing body of collegiate athletics made a change in January that has seemingly pleased all parties involved, particularly incoming freshman men’s basketball players.

This summer, hoops coaches were given up to two hours per day — and eight hours per week — to work with players in various capacities, like shooting or ball-handling drills or conditioning. Eight hours a week may not seem like much, but East Carolina skipper Jeff Lebo has long been an ardent supporter of the new rule and he has witnessed firsthand how much it has helped newcomers to his program.

“I think it was a great rule change because you get the guys here, they get acclimated to the university, they know where things are,” Lebo said during the team photo shoot in Minges Coliseum last Wednesday. “There’s not as many students here. It’s not as hectic. ... They have more of a comfort level when they come back (for the start of the fall semester) versus just starting here and getting overwhelmed by everything at the beginning. It’s really important.”
Two incoming freshmen — Marshall Guilmette and Mike Zangari — said the time they spent at ECU this summer was vital to their integration into the college life, both on and off the court.

Most freshman student-athletes are encouraged to take summer school classes in order to get familiar with their professors, classmates and even to learn simple things like where their classrooms are. Guilmette and Zangari were on campus for two weeks this summer, working their brains in classes while working out in the weight room and on the hardwood.

“Working out in a weight room with college guys is definitely different than high school,” said Guilmette, a 6-foot-10 Kennesaw, Ga., native. “Also, in the classroom, it gives you a head-start because (it means the beginning of fall classes really isn’t) your first day. You’re kind of used to everything.”

The on-court chemistry players develop during their time on the court in the summer usually pays dividends once practice officially starts and on into the season.

Zangari, like Guilmette, credited ECU’s upperclassmen with helping make the transition to college a smooth one, but he said the work the newcomers put in over the summer was only a starting point.

“The guys on the team made (the adjustment) easy,” said Zangari, a 6-9 forward from Harrisburg, Pa. “They welcomed us and I just try to follow their lead.

“It was definitely different, but I think we adjusted pretty quickly. You’ve got to work hard every day. Every rep in the weight room, every drill, every pickup game, you’ve got to go hard or you’ll get left behind.”

Contact Tony Castleberry at tcastleberry@reflector.com, 252-329-9591 or follow @tcastleberrygdr on Twitter.
Rio Johnson, left, and Brad Wornick get some throws in during an East Carolina football practice. (Scott Davis/The Daily Reflector)

QB keeps even keel
By Nathan Summers
Wednesday, August 29, 2012

Rio Johnson doesn’t look or act any different this week, and why should he? He’s likely trying to mimic everything he’s done so far this football offseason, in fact, the things that won him the starting quarterback job at East Carolina, so a business-as-usual approach is appropriate.

The new ECU starter’s game experience to this point — mostly mop-up duty spread over four backup appearances in 2011 — is nothing in comparison to what he’ll see Saturday when he leads the Pirate offense for the first time against Appalachian State.

And since starting in front of 50,000 people will be new to him, Johnson is focusing on something very familiar this week — the ECU offense he’s been waiting a couple of years to operate.

“Nothing mentally changes, and I’ve still got to attack it like I’m competing with somebody,” said Johnson, who narrowly edged out sophomore Shane Carden last week after a nine-month battle to become the replacement for decorated two-year starter Dominique Davis.

Unlike Davis before him, Johnson could be on a short leash until he’s proven he can handle the job, but head coach Ruffin McNeill said Johnson’s recent leadership on the field won him the position.

“I think it’s been something he’s grown into,” McNeill said Tuesday of Johnson’s leadership.
Johnson has grown into the playbook of third-year coordinator Lincoln Riley too. McNeill said the junior from Atlanta was immediately able to not only pinpoint a missing hot route after a broken play on Tuesday but also to communicate it to his teammates.

“I think he’s come leaps and bounds since we first got here,” McNeill said. “He’s always been a football savvy type of player. He understands the system. From day one, he picked up on audibles, where to deliver the ball and how to deliver it.”

Johnson said his preparation for the Mountaineers this weekend will understandably be more self-preparation than anything else.

“We’re just going to focus on ourselves and execute our plays, and whatever they line up into (on defense), we’ll get into a different call if we need to, and just execute our plays at top tempo, 100 percent,” said Johnson, who learned he was the starter last Sunday night in Riley’s office.

Tuesday practice
The Pirates’ first long Tuesday of the season looked more like midseason in terms of weather, as the outermost effects of Hurricane Isaac brought steady rain throughout the session.

The workout included heavy game-planning for Appalachian State but also more concentration on self, as McNeill again pitted his top offense against his top defense for at least some of the team portion.

“It’s a day where we put most of the game plan in,” the ECU coach said following Tuesday’s wet workout, a contrast to the forecast of hot and sunny weather for Saturday’s noon kickoff. “(Today) will be a continuation of that and Thursday will be a summary of that, but I am pleased with where we are today.”

Contact Nathan Summers at nsummers@reflector.com or 252-329-9595.
Panel investigating UNC academics to meet Wednesday

Chapel Hill, N.C. — A panel investigating possible academic fraud at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill will meet Wednesday – the group's second meeting in two months. The panel plans to meet again on Thursday.

UNC Chancellor Holden Thorp announced earlier this month that former North Carolina Gov. Jim Martin will work with a consulting firm to see if academic irregularities within the university's African and Afro-American studies department began prior to 2007, and if so, how widespread the problem was.

The mounting evidence of no-show classes, altered grades, forged signatures and transcripts made public prompted the university to ask the former governor to lead the review.

So far, irregularities have been found in 54 African and Afro-American classes – where no-show or questionable courses appear to have benefited athletes, especially the UNC football team. After the initial UNC investigation, WRAL News found irregularities with independent study courses within the program, most of which were tied to former department chair Julius Nyang’oro.

Earlier this month, former UNC football star Julius Peppers' college transcript appeared online. It showed grades from the African and Afro-American studies department, which appear to have kept Peppers eligible as a student. He has denied any academic wrong-doing.

Martin and his team plan to review more departments and all athletic programs at UNC and will submit a full report by mid-October, which will be made public once it is complete. Martin said Thorp told him everything is fair game in the investigation – no restrictions, no limitations.

There's no dollar figure on the upcoming review. However, the school has paid nearly $600,000 for other scandal-related services. Outside legal bills
are estimated at about $467,000 so far. Additionally, for the past 13 months, the school has paid a Raleigh-based communications firm $113,000.

A school spokesperson says that firm is providing services beyond this issue. UNC confirmed that communications consultant Doug Sosnick has been working for the school since Aug. 1. Details on his compensation have not been finalized. The school says none of the bills are being paid with taxpayer dollars.

The North Carolina Court of Appeals will hear oral arguments in Michael McAdoo’s lawsuit against the school, Thorp and the NCAA on Sept. 13.

The former UNC football player, who was caught up in the academic scandal and lost a year on the field, filed a lawsuit last August seeking damages stemming from his being ruled ineligible. That lawsuit was dismissed in November and he filed an appeal in June.

Reporter: Tara Lynn
Web Editors: Kelly Hinchcliffe, Aaron Schoonmaker
 Posted August 29, 2012, Updated: 6:51 a.m.

**NCSU student told police he wanted to kill officers, others**

Raleigh, N.C. — A North Carolina State University student was involuntarily committed last month for mental health treatment after confessing to campus police that he had planned to go on a killing spree, according to a court document.

Campus police checked on the student on July 17 after his girlfriend told officers she was worried about his well-being.

The student, a former Marine sniper who served two tours of duty in Iraq, told officers that he was depressed and had been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and bipolar disorder.

According to an application for a search warrant to gain access to the student's computer files, he gave campus police a detailed account of how he would daydream in class about robbing banks and killing people. He would draw up maps and outline which weapons he would use.

"He stated that he has pictured what the victims would look like when he shot them in the head and killed them," the document states.

The student told police that he lost all respect for law enforcement when he was 12. His younger sister was hit by a car driven by a local police officer's wife, and the police who investigated the case "did not appear to be professional and appeared to promote a 'cover-up,'" the document states.

He said he wanted to kill a law enforcement officer to get a badge, which he said would help him gain membership in the Hells Angels motorcycle gang, according to the search warrant application. He said he planned to follow an officer who took his patrol car home while off duty.

"He explained that he felt officers with take-home vehicles were easy targets," the document states, noting that the student also planned to kill the officer's family.
Campus police shared the information with Wake County prosecutors, but authorities said an investigation turned up no real threat.

The student was taken to the VA Hospital in Durham for treatment.

Reporter: Adam Owens
Photographer: Bill Herrero
Web Editor: Matthew Burns
ACT Scores Show High School Students Are Not Ready for College

This year's ACT scores show that only 1 in 4 high school students are prepared for college in all four subject areas the test examines. Plus, education news on Hispanic enrollment and the college students most likely to be in debt.

By Kayla Webley

There’s a reason why colleges have to remediate so many students. According to a report on college and career readiness from the ACT, the Class of 2012 has some catching up to do. According to the latest results of the organization’s standardized college entrance test, only 1 in 4 students qualify as prepared for college in all four subject areas: English, reading, math and science. While about 72% of all ACT test takers met at least one of the four benchmarks for college readiness, 28% of students did not meet any of them.

Students were best in English, with 67% of test takers meeting that benchmark, and worst in science, with fewer than 1 in 3 students making the grade. Overall, the ACT scores were identical to last year’s—a 21.1 composite average.

When broken down by race, the ACT results are consistent with the typical portrait of the achievement gap: Asian students were the most college ready, with 42% meeting all four benchmarks, and black students were the least college ready, with just 5% meeting the mark in all four subject areas.

More education news from the week:
Schools As Segregated Today as They Were in the 1960s
The same week as a report from the Pew Hispanic Center showed Hispanics comprise 25% of all public elementary school students, a report released yesterday by the Center for American Progress shows schools spend $344 more on every white student than they do on every student of color. The report also found that our schools are “as segregated today as they were in the 1960s.” Nearly 40% of black and Hispanic students attend schools where
more than 90% of students are nonwhite, whereas the average white student attends a school where 77% of his or her peers are also white, the report found. Read the full report here. (At the higher ed level, the Pew report found Hispanics are now the largest minority group on two- and four-year campuses, comprising 16.5% of all college enrollments. See the full report here.)

**Number: 91%**
That’s the percentage of teachers who say they spend some of their own money on school supplies for their students—a stat that definitely won’t surprise any teachers out there. According to the survey of more than 1,100 teachers, conducted by AdoptAClassroom.org, 67% of teachers spend money on snacks and 30% spend money to buy jackets, hats and gloves for their students.

**Middle Income College Students Most Likely to Be in Debt**
A forthcoming paper finds students from families who make between $40,000 and $59,000 a year graduate with $6,000 more debt than students from families who bring in less than $40,000. According to Education Week, black students, first-generation college students and children of single parents are also more likely than others to have more debt. Read more here.

**Court Says Schools Can’t Check Students’ Immigration Status**
The 11th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled on Monday that the part of Alabama’s controversial immigration bill that ordered public schools to check the citizenship status of new students was unconstitutional. Doing so, the ruling said, wrongly singles out children who are in the country illegally. However, the court upheld a key part of the law that requires police to ask for proof of citizenship. Read more here.

**Stat of the week:**
Fresh off the Olympics—where the U.S. won more medals than any other country—a report from the Center for the Next Generation takes a look at how the U.S. stacks up against China and India in terms of how well each country is preparing its next generation for competition in the global economy. The most telling stat: By 2030, China will have 200 million college graduates—more people than are in the entire U.S. workforce. Read more here.

**In case you missed it:**
Officials at Emory University announced that since at least 2000, administrators had knowingly misreported information of incoming students, such as their GPAs and SAT scores, in order to gain a more favorable spot
on college ranking lists. The false information was given to U.S. News & World Report and other companies who compile college rankings. Last year, the university was named the 20th best school in the nation by U.S. News. Read more here.

*Kayla Webley is a Staff Writer at TIME. Find her on Twitter at @kaylawebley, on Facebook or on Google+. You can also continue the discussion on TIME’s Facebook page and on Twitter at @TIME.*
Floods are one of the most common U.S. natural disasters. A new NOAA award to the non-profit Nurture Nature Center in Easton, Pa., will fund research to develop strategies to improve online flood forecasting tools and to better motivate residents to prepare for floods and respond to flood warnings.

High resolution (Credit: NOAA)

New NOAA awards to fund studies of weather warnings, social media, Internet tools and public response

August 27, 2012

How do people sift important weather information out of the incessant buzz of 24/7 social media, text messages, smart phone app alerts, overflowing email inboxes, the blogosphere, and traditional print and broadcast media? Four new research awards funded by NOAA seek to answer this question and to improve the way potentially life-saving weather warnings reach those who need to act on them.

The awards, totaling about $879,000 for four, two-year projects, are being awarded by the Office of Weather and Air Quality in the NOAA Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research with funding from the U.S. Weather Research Program and the NOAA National Weather Service (NWS).

“These projects apply innovative social science research methods to the immense challenge of communicating crucial weather information in an
increasingly complex world,” said Kathryn Sullivan, Ph.D., assistant secretary of commerce for environmental observation and prediction and NOAA deputy administrator. “The results are expected to improve communication within the weather community and motivate appropriate responses from the public when dangerous weather threatens.”

University and nonprofit social science and weather researchers will lead the projects, which support the NOAA Weather-Ready Nation initiative. NOAA experts from the Storm Prediction Center, National Severe Storms Laboratory, weather forecast offices, and river forecast centers will collaborate on them. Award recipients include the Cooperative Institute for Mesoscale Meteorological Studies, the University of Oklahoma, Arizona State University, East Carolina University, the University of North Carolina, and the Nurture Nature Center in Easton, Penn.

**Tornadoes and Twitter:** A two-year award of $250,000 will fund research on how Twitter messages could be tapped as a source of local weather observations and how Twitter could be used to share weather updates. Carol Silva, Ph.D., associate director of the Center for Applied Social Research at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Okla., will lead this project. Part of the project will explore the promise and possible pitfalls of using Twitter in severe weather forecasting operations. Another phase of the research will study the nature and content of tweets about severe weather events. In the final phase, researchers will work with the NOAA National Severe Storms Laboratory and the NOAA Storm Prediction Center to assess possible use of Twitter data in detecting and tracking storms, issuing warnings, and assessing damage after a storm.

**An inundation of flood data:** A two-year award of $160,000 will fund research to develop strategies to improve online flood forecasting tools and to better motivate residents to prepare for floods and respond to flood warnings. Rachel Hogan Carr, director of the Nurture Nature Center of Easton, Penn., will lead the project. The Nurture Nature Center is a nonprofit organization that has previously partnered with NOAA and NWS on flood education. The center will partner with the NWS Middle Atlantic River Forecast Center and NWS Weather Forecast Offices in Mt. Holly, N.J., and Binghamton, N.Y., to assess NWS flood forecast and warning tools. The aim is to help NWS understand how people living in the Delaware River Basin use NWS online tools to understand and prepare for flood risk.

**Deciding to seek shelter:** A two-year award of $75,000 will fund research to explore factors that explain why some people rush for shelter when they
receive a tornado warning and others do not. Renee McPherson, Ph.D., associate professor of geography and environmental sustainability at the University of Oklahoma (OU), will lead this project. She is a fellow of the Cooperative Institute for Mesoscale Meteorological Studies (CIMMS), a partnership between NOAA and OU. Researchers will identify the factors relevant to an individual’s response to a tornado warning, specifically the NWS polygon warning tool which defines a geographic danger zone. They will collaborate with the NWS Warning Decision Training Branch and the NOAA National Severe Storms Laboratory.

**Managing a weather emergency:** A two-year award of $394,000 will fund research on how NWS can improve its products and services to feed helpful information into the complex network of people who manage public emergency services. Kenneth Galluppi, director of the Arizona State University Decision Theater, will lead this multi-institution project with Arizona State University, East Carolina University, the University of North Carolina, and CIMMS at the University of Oklahoma. For several years this team has been studying how the emergency management network – managers of public services such as transportation, police and fire units, and utilities – processes weather information. This project will build on earlier NOAA’s mission is to understand and predict changes in the Earth’s environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and to conserve and manage our coastal and marine resources. Join us on Facebook, Twitter and our other social media channels. More information about NOAA is available at: http://www.noaa.gov.
What GOP platform says on education

By Valerie Strauss

Here’s what the 2012 Republican Party platform calls for regarding education:

**Education: A Chance for Every Child**

Parents are responsible for the education of their children. We do not believe in a one size fits all approach to education and support providing broad education choices to parents and children at the State and local level. Maintaining American preeminence requires a world-class system of education, with high standards, in which all students can reach their potential. Today’s education reform movement calls for accountability at every stage of schooling. It affirms higher expectations for all students and rejects the crippling bigotry of low expectations. It recognizes the wisdom of State and local control of our schools, and it wisely sees consumer rights in education – choice – as the most important driving force for renewing our schools.

Education is much more than schooling. It is the whole range of activities by which families and communities transmit to a younger generation, not just knowledge and skills, but ethical and behavioral norms and traditions. It is the handing over of a personal and cultural identity. That is why education choice has expanded so vigorously. It is also why American education has, for the last several decades, been the focus of constant controversy, as centralizing forces outside the family and community have sought to remake education in order to remake America. They have not succeeded, but they have done immense damage

**Attaining Academic Excellence for All**

Since 1965 the federal government has spent $2 trillion on elementary and secondary education with no substantial improvement in academic achievement or high school graduation rates (which currently are 59 percent for African-American students and 63 percent for Hispanics). The U.S. spends an average of more than $10,000 per pupil per year in public schools, for a total of more than $550 billion. That represents more than 4 percent of GDP devoted to K-12 education in 2010. Of that amount, federal spending
was more than $47 billion. Clearly, if money were the solution, our schools would be problem-free.

More money alone does not necessarily equal better performance. After years of trial and error, we know what does work, what has actually made a difference in student advancement, and what is powering education reform at the local level all across America: accountability on the part of administrators, parents and teachers; higher academic standards; programs that support the development of character and financial literacy; periodic rigorous assessments on the fundamentals, especially math, science, reading, history, and geography; renewed focus on the Constitution and the writings of the Founding Fathers, and an accurate account of American history that celebrates the birth of this great nation; transparency, so parents and the public can discover which schools best serve their pupils; flexibility and freedom to innovate, so schools can adapt to the special needs of their students and hold teachers and administrators responsible for student performance.

We support the innovations in education reform occurring at the State level based upon proven results. Republican Governors have led in the effort to reform our country’s underperforming education system, and we applaud these advancements. We advocate the policies and methods that have proven effective: building on the basics, especially STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, and math) and phonics; ending social promotions; merit pay for good teachers; classroom discipline; parental involvement; and strong leadership by principals, superintendents, and locally elected school boards. Because technology has become an essential tool of learning, proper implementation of technology is a key factor in providing every child equal access and opportunity.

Consumer Choice in Education

The Republican Party is the party of fresh and innovative ideas in education. We support options for learning, including home schooling and local innovations like single-sex classes, full-day school hours, and year-round schools. School choice – whether through charter schools, open enrollment requests, college lab schools, virtual schools, career and technical education programs, vouchers, or tax credits – is important for all children, especially for families with children trapped in failing schools. Getting those youngsters into decent learning environments and helping them to realize their full potential is the greatest civil rights challenge of our time. We support the promotion of local career and technical educational programs
and entrepreneurial programs that have been supported by leaders in industry and will retrain and retool the American workforce, which is the best in the world. A young person’s ability to achieve in school must be based on his or her God-given talent and motivation, not an address, zip code, or economic status.

In sum, on the one hand enormous amounts of money are being spent for K-12 public education with overall results that do not justify that spending. On the other hand, the common experience of families, teachers, and administrators forms the basis of what does work in education. We believe the gap between those two realities can be successfully bridged, and Congressional Republicans are pointing a new way forward with major reform legislation. We support its concept of block grants and the repeal of numerous federal regulations which interfere with State and local control of public schools.

The bulk of the federal money through Title I for low-income children and through IDEA for disabled youngsters should follow the students to whatever school they choose so that eligible pupils, through open enrollment, can bring their share of the funding with them. The Republican-founded D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program should be expanded as a model for the rest of the country. We deplore the efforts by Congressional Democrats and the current President to kill this successful program for disadvantaged students in order to placate the leaders of the teachers’ unions. We support putting the needs of students before the special interests of unions when approaching elementary and secondary education reform.

Because parents are a child’s first teachers, we support family literacy programs, which improve the reading, language, and life skills of both parents and children from low-income families. To ensure that all students have access to the mainstream of American life, we support the English First approach and oppose divisive programs that limit students’ ability to advance in American society. We renew our call for replacing “family planning” programs for teens with abstinence education which teaches abstinence until marriage as the responsible and respected standard of behavior. Abstinence from sexual activity is the only protection that is 100 percent effective against out-of-wedlock pregnancies and sexually-transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS when transmitted sexually. It is effective, science-based, and empowers teens to achieve optimal health outcomes and avoid risks of sexual activity. We oppose school-based clinics that provide referrals, counseling, and related services for abortion and contraception. We support keeping federal funds from being used in
mandatory or universal mental health, psychiatric, or socio-emotional screening programs.

We applaud America’s great teachers, who should be protected against frivolous litigation and should be able to take reasonable actions to maintain discipline and order in the classroom. We support legislation that will correct the current law provision which defines a “Highly Qualified Teacher” merely by his or her credentials, not results in the classroom. We urge school districts to make use of teaching talent in business, STEM fields, and in the military, especially among our returning veterans. Rigid tenure systems based on the “last in, first out” policy should be replaced with a merit-based approach that can attract fresh talent and dedication to the classroom. All personnel who interact with school children should pass background checks and be held to the highest standards of personal conduct.

**Improving Our Nation’s Classrooms**

Higher education faces its own challenges, many of which stem from the poor preparation of students before they reach college. One consequence has been the multiplying number of remedial courses for freshmen. Even so, our universities, large and small, public or private, form the world’s greatest assemblage of learning. They drive much of the research that keeps America competitive and, by admitting large numbers of foreign students, convey our values and culture to the world.

Ideological bias is deeply entrenched within the current university system. Whatever the solution in private institutions may be, in State institutions the trustees have a responsibility to the public to ensure that their enormous investment is not abused for political indoctrination. We call on State officials to ensure that our public colleges and universities be places of learning and the exchange of ideas, not zones of intellectual intolerance favoring the Left.

**Addressing Rising College Costs**

College costs, however, are on an unsustainable trajectory, rising year by year far ahead of overall inflation. Nationwide, student loan debt now exceeds credit card debt, roughly $23,300 for each of the 35,000,000 debtors, taking years to pay off. Over 50 percent of recent college grads are unemployed or underemployed, working at jobs for which their expensive educations gave them no training. It is time to get back to basics and to higher education programs directly related to job opportunities.
The first step is to acknowledge the need for change when the status quo is not working. New systems of learning are needed to compete with traditional four-year colleges: expanded community colleges and technical institutions, private training schools, online universities, life-long learning, and work-based learning in the private sector. New models for acquiring advanced skills will be ever more important in the rapidly changing economy of the twenty-first century, especially in science, technology, engineering, and math. Public policy should advance the affordability, innovation, and transparency needed to address all these challenges and to make accessible to everyone the emerging alternatives, with their lower cost degrees, to traditional college attendance.

Federal student aid is on an unsustainable path, and efforts should be taken to provide families with greater transparency and the information they need to make prudent choices about a student’s future: completion rates, repayment rates, future earnings, and other factors that may affect their decisions. The federal government should not be in the business of originating student loans; however, it should serve as an insurance guarantor for the private sector as they offer loans to students. Private sector participation in student financing should be welcomed. Any regulation that drives tuition costs higher must be reevaluated to balance its worth against its negative impact on students and their parents.
Smoothing the Path From Foreign Lips to American Ears

By RICHARD PÉREZ-PEÑA

ATHENS, Ohio — For hundreds of grown men and women here, work can mean sticking fingers into models of the human mouth, or trying to talk while peering at their tongues in mirrors or while hopping up and down stairs.

They are foreign graduate students at Ohio University who are spending up to two hours a day learning how to speak so that their American colleagues and students will understand them. Many of them spend more than a year in the program, and they are not allowed to teach until their English instructors say they are ready.

It is a complaint familiar to millions of alumni of research universities: the master’s or doctoral candidate from overseas, employed as a teaching assistant, whose accent is too thick for undergraduate students to penetrate. And it is an issue that many universities are addressing more seriously, using a better set of tools, than in years past.

“These are often students whose reading and writing in English is excellent, but whom Americans have a very hard time comprehending, and it calls for a lot of work,” said Dawn Bikowski, the director of the English Language Improvement Program here.

At American universities, one in every six graduate students hails from another country — about 300,000 of them, almost half from China and India, according to the Institute of International Education. In science and technology fields, foreigners make up nearly half of the graduate students.
Those from China and other East Asian countries are often like Xingbo Liu, a graduate student in nutrition here, who said she had taken English classes nearly all her life. “But we only learn how to write and read,” she said, “how to choose the right answer on a written test.” Many Indian or African students have done most of their formal education in English and are comfortable speaking it, but with accents that challenge American ears.

“This is something that nationwide, people are paying a lot more attention to,” said James Tierney, the director of the English Language Program at Yale University. Universities worry not only about the foreigners’ ability to function as students and teachers, but also about “competing on an equal footing in the job market when they graduate.”

Graduate students require particular attention because their exposure to American education and culture can be much narrower, said Julia Moore, the director of the English Language Program at Northwestern University, with “friends, colleagues, roommates and even faculty mentors who speak their languages.” In addition to requiring language instruction for many graduate students, Northwestern enrolls them in a monthlong summer immersion program in American language and culture.

In some cases, university action has been prodded by politicians. Louisiana, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania and Washington have laws requiring that instructors be intelligible, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures, and similar bills have been introduced in many other states in the last decade.

Foreign applicants to American universities must submit scores on standardized tests of their English skills. In the not-too-distant past, that almost always meant a written exam. But university officials say that the growth of tests that include oral components has given them a much better idea of applicants’ speaking skills.

The test most commonly used by American institutions, the Test of English as a Foreign Language, or Toefl, added a spoken portion in 2005 when it was first administered online. The company that produces the exam, ETS, says that 98 percent of people who take it now take the Internet version, which includes listening and speaking.

In another step forward, professors say, increasingly sophisticated software programs analyze and critique speech. One program, NativeAccent, which became available three years ago, has been adopted by more than 100 universities.

Briju Thankachan, an Indian graduate student here in instructional technology, has spent hundreds of hours using NativeAccent. The software can isolate hundreds of pronunciation issues and even show animations of how to position parts of the mouth for each sound.
“Every morning I would hear him repeating things over and over into the computer, and you could hear him getting better,” said Mr. Thankachan’s wife, Betsy J. Briju, a visiting assistant professor in plant biology.

The comprehension problem is far from solved. Even at an institution like Ohio University, with an unusually robust remedial program, undergraduate students say they have run into hard-to-understand teaching assistants.

“You get better at understanding after a while, and they’re willing to talk it over again, but it can be hard,” said Karen Martinez, a sophomore from Chicago.

The university’s efforts to address the accent problem date to the 1980s. Every foreign student’s command of spoken English is assessed on arrival, and each year about 300 go through the improvement program, part of the linguistics department.

In classes, the students learn to break language into individual sounds, forcing them to be aware of how each part of the mouth is positioned to make a particular bit, while instructors contort their faces and touch their tongues to drive home the point. Students take sentences apart to learn rhythm, emphasis, pauses and rising and falling pitch — elements that can convey as much information as words — and reinforce them with stair-hops and other physical exercises.

“Many people come here without having learned intonation at all,” said Lara Wallace, a lecturer in linguistics. “Everything comes out in a flat monotone, which makes an accent even harder to understand.”

Students are assigned to practice in computer labs, using the speech analysis software, and — possibly the most unpopular exercise — recording audio or video of themselves speaking. They have to transcribe those recordings verbatim, with every pause, false start, repetition or “um” noted.

“I like it and I hate it,” said Xuan He, a 24-year-old sociology student. “Every time, I feel like I sound very stupid. But it is useful.”
College students sell services to lazy classmates

By Oliver St. John, USA TODAY
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Who will clean up after your children, do their laundry or bring them snacks when they go off to college this fall?

Relax. Students can now outsource everything, from grocery shopping to laundry to businesses often run by, you guessed it, more enterprising students.

Laura Vanderkam, author of time-management book 168 Hours, says student entrepreneurship is part of a trend aided by social media savvy, and also a good way for kids on student loans to make ends meet.

But it's not going to save other students time, because they probably wouldn't have bothered with cleaning and cooking anyway. "I'd say it's more about Mom being assured that you're not living in total squalor," she says.

Preventing just that:

• Laundry-free linens. No matter how gross sheets get, some students never wash them. College moms since 2009, Beantown Bedding founders Joan Ripple and Kirsten Lambert released a solution July 30: Bedsox, biodegradable sheets that go into the compost instead of the wash, available online at $25 a set.

"Basically, what it boils down to is, college students are lazy. They'd like to have clean sheets, but their moms aren't there to wash them," says Lambert.

• Clean room. Nate Andorsky's own messy room at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., inspired the student cleaning service he founded with Mike Waterman, in April 2011. He says DC3 can do 60-70 cleanings a month because one crew can clean many dorm rooms in a single trip. Cleanings start at $39.

• Snack delivery. For a $1.99 delivery fee, students at University of Texas in Austin can order snacks from MunchyMart.com. And just about anything else, from Doritos to frozen burritos, but also beer pong tables, kegs and condoms, says Arshad Rehman, 24. He founded the business in January as a
senior. His student employees deliver until 3-4 a.m., but they won't bring booze to dorms.

• Clean laundry. Jeremy Young helped found HillFresh Laundry in 2011 as a Hamilton College sophomore in Clinton, N.Y. He says students are too busy to do laundry. However, Wendy Leone pays $349 a semester for HillFresh to wash and fold her 19-year-old son's weekly laundry, because he doesn't know how to do it himself, she says.

• Pack and move. Students at Cornell University pay $38 an hour if they miss the dorm move-out deadline. Can't meet the deadline? Students can pay $67 an hour for student-run Big Red Shipping and Storage to box up all the items in their rooms and load them in the car. Bubble wrap is extra.