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East Carolina University News Bureau
E-mail to durhamj@.ecu.edu  Web site at http://www.news.ecu.edu
252-328-6481 FAX: 252- 328-6300
UNC system President Erskine Bowles wants administrative costs to be a prime target as campuses plan spending cuts of 10 percent.

submitted

Bowles orders UNC to cut from the top

UNC chancellors are told that reports on top-heavy administrations are 'an absolute embarrassment.'

BY ERIC FERRERI, Staff Writer

UNC system President Erskine Bowles has rebuked the leaders of the 17 campuses for their top-heavy administrations and put them on notice: Make significant cuts. Now.

In an Aug. 17 e-mail to the chancellors of the UNC system's campuses, Bowles characterized a News & Observer report on the steady growth in administrative positions across the UNC system as "an absolute embarrassment."

Campuses are putting together plans to cut spending 10 percent, and administrative costs must be a prime target, Bowles warned in the e-mail. Four times, Bowles wrote words entirely in capital letters for emphasis.

"The coverage in today's News & Observer on administrative growth within the university is an absolute embarrassment -- and we brought it all on ourselves," Bowles wrote. "In the conversations that we will be having with you regarding your 10 percent budget reduction plans, we will be looking for absolute PROOF that you have focused FIRST on administrative reductions and solid evidence that you have taken steps to shore up our academic core."

Campus budget reduction plans will not be approved by Bowles' office or the UNC system's Board of Governors unless administrative costs are pared much as possible, the e-mail stressed.
The president's frustration was clear in the e-mail, but he declined to discuss it with a reporter. He will talk about the issue face-to-face with chancellors Monday in a regular meeting.

Bowles' e-mail was sent the same day the N&O reported that administrative ranks across the UNC system had swelled by 28 percent over five years, from 1,269 administrative jobs to 1,623 last year. That increase in administrators outpaced the growth of faculty and other teaching positions, which was 24 percent, as well as student enrollment, which climbed 14 percent.

And administrative growth came even as Bowles was warning against it. In his e-mail, Bowles notes that he has urged campuses for nearly four years to reduce administrative costs.

Bowles made efficiency and accountability mantras upon taking office in January 2006. But the university system he presides over is a far-flung and decentralized enterprise that has, in recent years, given campus leaders more decision-making power. Much campus hiring requires no UNC system approval.

Hannah Gage, chairwoman of the UNC system's Board of Governors, said the growth was likely the result of that flexibility given to campuses to manage their own affairs in an era of prosperity.

"As the system has grown and more autonomy has been given to the campuses, there has been an assumption that the judgment of the campuses will reflect the philosophy of the university system," she said. "The campus oversight was not strong enough."

Bowles and Gage have both spoken of the rising administrative costs and other issues eroding the trust of taxpayers and legislators.

It's on the radar

State Rep. Ray Rapp, an education budget writer, said the UNC system's management costs and spending on hundreds of academic centers and institutes have expanded too much. The UNC system took a $171 million cut to its budget in the current year, and next year will likely have to cut another $246 million, Rapp said.

"Some programs have grown like unchecked, without adequate supervision," said Rapp, a Democrat from Mars Hill. "It is on our radar, and I think it's fair to say it's on Erskine Bowles' radar as well."

James Woodward, N.C. State University's interim chancellor, said Friday administrative costs have risen steadily across higher education. He said he supports Bowles' desire to make dramatic changes.

"We have a tendency to over-fix a problem," said Woodward, who previously spent 16 years as chancellor at UNC-Charlotte before retiring from that job in 2005. "If we make a mistake someplace, we'll change a process and add an administrative task. And we do that without adequately judging the cost versus the benefit."

At East Carolina University, Chancellor Steve Ballard sent a long e-mail Aug. 18 to members of his governing board after the newspaper report was published, saying executive and administrative positions had decreased 35 percent since he began the job in 2004. Last year's budget cuts, he said, focused almost entirely on administrative spending, leaving just a 2 percent reduction to academics.

At UNC-Chapel Hill, Chancellor Holden Thorp said the newspaper report didn't account for cuts made after 2008. Since July 1 of last year, seven associate or assistant vice chancellor positions
have been eliminated, Thorp wrote in an e-mail.

It was a consultant's analysis of Thorp's campus that brought much of this administrative growth to light. The consultant, Bain & Company, concluded recently that work flow often bogs down at UNC-CH because there are too many supervisory layers.

"We commissioned the Bain report because we wanted to see if that was the case," said Robert Winston, chairman of the UNC-CH Board of Trustees. "We've done the study. Now we have to get better and more efficient. This is not just about cutting money and titles. This is about creating a better-managed university."

eric.ferrerl@newsobserver.com or 919-932-2008

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Health officials brace for H1N1 resurgence

Young likely to be hardest hit

BY LAURAN NEERGAARD, The Associated Press

WASHINGTON - The alarm sounded with two sneezy children in California in April. Just five months later, the never-before-seen swine flu has become the world’s dominant strain of influenza, and it’s putting a shockingly younger face on flu.

So get ready. With flu’s favorite chilly weather fast approaching, we’re going to be a sick nation this fall. The big unknown is how sick. One in five people infected or a worst case -- half the population? The usual 36,000 deaths from flu or tens of thousands more?

The World Health Organization predicts that within two years, nearly one-third of the world’s population will have caught it.

"What we know is, it’s brand new and no one really has an immunity to this disease," Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius says.

A lot depends on whether the swine flu that simmered all summer erupts immediately as students crowd back into schools and colleges or holds off until millions of vaccine doses start arriving in mid-October.

Only this week do U.S. researchers start blood tests to answer a critical question: How many doses of swine flu vaccine does it take to protect? The answer will determine whether many people need to line up for two flu shots -- one against swine flu and one against the regular flu -- or three.

The hopeful news: Even with no vaccine, winter is ending in the Southern Hemisphere without as much havoc as doctors had feared, a heavy season that started early but not an overwhelming one.

The strain that doctors call the 2009 H1N1 flu isn’t any deadlier than typical winter flu so far. Most people recover without treatment; many become only mildly ill.

Importantly, careful genetic tracking shows no sign yet that the virus is mutating into a harsher strain.

We’re used to regular flu that, sadly, kills mostly grandparents. But the real shock of swine flu is that infections are 20 times more common in the 5-to-24-year-old age group than in people over 65. That older generation appears to have some resistance, probably because of exposure decades ago to viruses similar to the new one.

Worldwide, swine flu is killing mostly people in their 20s, 30s and 40s, ages when influenza usually is shrugged off as a nuisance.
Especially at risk are pregnant women. So are people with chronic conditions such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease and neuromuscular diseases including muscular dystrophy. Some countries report more deaths among the obese.

Most amazing to longtime flu researchers, this new H1N1 strain seems to account for about 70 percent of all flu now circulating in the world. In Australia, eight of every 10 people who tested positive for flu had the pandemic strain.

That raises the question: Do people still need to bother with regular flu vaccine?

Definitely, stressed Dr. Anne Schuchat, director of the CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Disease, who plans to get both kinds.

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**Flu shows no respect for rank**

President Alvaro Uribe of Colombia has the swine flu, and officials are contacting other South American governments whose leaders also attended a recent summit.

The 57-year-old Uribe began feeling symptoms Friday, the same day as a meeting of South American presidents in Bariloche, Argentina, and he was confirmed to have swine flu on Saturday. Uribe is not under quarantine, and none of his family members or close associates has shown symptoms of the disease, officials said.

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ECU News Services

John Franklin was hired knowing he was staring down a deadline: Sept. 5, East Carolina University’s home football opener.

Franklin began as director of the Marching Pirates on Aug. 4, meaning he had one month to turn 220 college students into a cohesive marching band ready to hit the field and impress the fans.

Before joining the School of Music faculty, Franklin directed the athletics and symphonic bands at the University of West Georgia. At ECU, Franklin is director of athletics bands and associate director of bands.

Five days before fall semester classes began at ECU, Franklin had the marching band on its practice field at the bottom of College Hill for its first practice of the season. Yes, two weeks before the first home football game.

Franklin, along with his student staff of drum majors and nine section leaders, will teach the band the music and the halftime routine through multiple daily practices.

“They go in knowing the essentials (of being in a marching band), but this is getting everyone on the same page,” Franklin said. “Half of our band are non-music majors.”

During the football season, the band will perform five halftime shows at Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium, learning 15 songs and the marching routine for each show’s three songs. The band also will learn the 15 to 20 tunes to play in the stands, five pre-game songs including the National Anthem, and the music for the “Call to Port” concert, a new tradition planned for this year outside the stadium as part of the pre-game festivities.

“We’ll play songs like ‘He, Baby’ and have lots of interaction with the fans at tailgating,” Franklin said.

ECU senior Tremayne Smith, head drum major for the Marching Pirates, helped keep the program on track between band directors this summer.

“We worked orientation to sign up students for marching band, made copies and created folders, kept the communication going to the band, and kept planning over the summer since Dr. (Chris) Knighten left,” Smith, a music education and political science double major, said. Knighten resigned as the marching band director in the spring for a similar position at the University of Arkansas.

Smith said he’s proud of the way the section leaders have responded to the challenge of preparing their areas and welcomed Franklin and his new ideas.

“I hope this is an indication of how the season will go,” he said. “Some directors come in and immediately try to make the program their own. Dr. Franklin has said, here’s some things we’re going to change, and here are the things we’re going to keep for tradition. It’s a good mix,” Smith said.

On the first full day of marching band camp, the heat and humidity were aiming for a record even before 10 a.m. Franklin was sweating, the students were sweating, and the sun was beating down on the open field. During a five-minute water break, Franklin used “Twilight” and “Harry Potter” references to get one of the horn sections motivated to come onto the field intending to impress the fans (and their fellow Marching Pirates) with their precision.

Joking about the heat, Franklin said he has worked in some of the hottest places for marching bands — tradition- and temperature-wise — Florida and Indiana.

Franklin completed his doctor of music degree in wind conducting at Indiana University Jacobs School of Music in Bloomington, where he also earned his master’s of music education degree. He earned a bachelor’s of music education degree from Florida State University.

Chris Buddo, School of Music director, said that ECU is lucky to have Franklin coming in and gearing up so quickly for the football season.

“We are fortunate to have found a marching band director of John’s exceptional qualifications,” he said. “It is a tribute to his dedication and work ethic that he was in Greensville preparing for the upcoming football season three weeks after interviewing, and on the field with the band one week later.”

The rise of ECU’s football program was a ready-made recruiter for the Marching Pirates director position, Franklin said. The band has an opportunity to play at sold-out home stadium games before loyal Pirate fans and potentially at a bowl game.

Franklin said he was inspired to take this career path by exceptional band director in his high school and college years. He added, “Plus, I’m a longtime college football fan.”

1. CONT...
Newest Brody Scholars begin medical studies

Among the 76 first-year medical students who began their studies this month at the Brody School of Medicine are the three newest recipients of the Brody Medical Scholarship — Daniel James Goble, Jordan Ray Preiss and Diana Nicole Spell.

The scholarship provides full tuition and fees to medical students who show high scholarship ability, leadership, a desire for service, moral character and a promise of distinction in medicine.

Goble, of Marion, is the son of Anna Goble-Talley and the late Dr. James R. Goble of Marion. He is a graduate of McDowell High School and N.C. State University.

Preiss, of Charlotte, is the daughter of Cathy and Richard Preiss. She is a graduate of Myers Park High School and Duke University.

Spell, of Raleigh, is the daughter of Linda Spell. She is a graduate of Millbrook High School and Spelman College.

Runners-up were Kristen Nicole Carpenter of Wilmington and James Hunter Meffrey of Clyde. They received a year's tuition at the medical school.

The Brody Medical Scholarship was established in 1983 by the family of J.S. "Sammy" Brody. It also features summer enrichment programs that can include travel abroad. The program shares the goals of the medical school to improve the health and quality of life for people in eastern North Carolina.

The Brody Scholarship is administered by the ECU Medical & Health Sciences Foundation.

FoodMASTER receives further NIH funding

FoodMASTER at ECU has received another hefty endorsement from the National Institutes for Health with a $198,500 supplement award to expand efforts over the next year.

FoodMASTER (Food, Math and Science Teaching Enhancement Resource) was developed in 2005 as a 45-lesson curriculum for third- through fifth-grade students to help increase math and science skills through food preparation and handling.

The curriculum was designed under the direction of Dr. Melani Duffrin, ECU associate professor of nutrition and dietetics.

In 2008, FoodMASTER received a Science Education Partnership Award (SEPA) from the NIH for $504,000 to help Duffrin and other researchers collect data on the impact of multi-media FoodMASTER materials and gather information about the best way to disseminate the curriculum and materials.

The new supplement award provides for workshops and start-up supplies for 100 teachers at regional and national teacher conferences, and it covers the cost of printing and disseminating the FoodMASTER curriculum for another 500 teachers and professionals throughout the U.S. who have expressed interest about the initiative.

"The new funds will help us give teachers the curriculum, utensils and food products they need to complete the curriculum. We can also send complimentary activity books to hundreds of teachers hungry for innovative ways to teach math and science. From the response, we think FoodMASTER is poised for national attention," Duffrin said.

After-School art program available

ECU's School of Art and Design will again offer an after-school art program for students in third through eighth grades beginning Sept. 14 in the Jenkins Fine Arts Center.

School of Art and Design faculty and students will lead the young artists in creating two- and three-dimensional artwork. Projects may include clay modeling, painting, drawing, fabric design and paper models.

The classes for third-, fourth- and fifth-graders will meet from 4:30-5:30 p.m. Mondays or Tuesdays; and classes for sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders will meet from 5-6 p.m. Wednesdays.

Classes begin Sept. 14 and will end Dec. 8. Classes will not meet during ECU's fall or Thanksgiving breaks.

The cost is $10 per child (checks only). Registration will be Sept. 11-12 in Room 2000, Jenkins Fine Arts Center.
Mayor picks book for program in fourth year

By Kathryn Kennedy
The Daily Reflector

Sunday, August 30, 2009

It's not easy to choose one book that will appeal to an entire community.

Fiction or non-fiction? Should the author be local? Will a female protagonist appeal to male readers?

Sheppard Memorial Library keeps trying. This is the fourth year of the One Book, One Community program, and a proclamation by Mayor Pat Dunn earlier this month declared “Roxanna Slade” by Reynolds Price the must-read book for Greenville residents.

It seems they're listening.

The program doesn't officially start until September but the library is already low on books. Sheppard staff purchased an additional 44 copies — they already had four and one in large print — but only one in paperback and one in hardback remained Thursday afternoon. They'd both been returned earlier in the week.

Tammy Fulcher, head of Adult Public Services for Sheppard, said the display table set up Aug. 17 must have caught people’s eye. They didn't even get posters hung until Wednesday, she said.

“Roxanna Slade” follows the life of a woman in eastern North Carolina beginning on her 20th birthday with a life-changing event that sends her into adulthood. Romance, childbirth, mental health struggles and aging follow. The 90-year saga Roxanna narrates also reflects the development of the modern South.

“There are lots of things in there you could talk about,” Fulcher said.

A professor from Barton College, Dr. Rebecca Goodwin, will be in town Sept. 15 to do just that. She'll lead a discussion of the novel and its themes at the library, and Fulcher is hoping attendance will be higher than usual this year.

Price's novel was also chosen because the author will receive the 2009 Roberts Award for Literary Inspiration during East Carolina University's sixth annual Eastern North Carolina Literary Homecoming.

Price, 76, is the author of more than 30 novels and plays, was born in Macon and now lives in the Piedmont region.

“He's contributed a huge amount to literature in Eastern North Carolina,” said Blythe Tennent, Director of Library Project Development at ECU's Joyner Library.

Due to declining health, Price won't be attending but Tennent said they've arranged a teleconference from Duke University.

“We will sort of beam him in,” she said. “He'll be able to see us and we'll be able to see him.”

That ceremony will be held Sept. 25 in the Mendenhall Student Center and will feature a theater piece based on Price’s works.

Contact Kathryn Kennedy at kkennedy@coxnc.com or (252) 329-9566.
SAT prep: Family support, hard work best mix

Monday, August 31, 2009

Average scores for the SAT college entrance exam have been dropping nationally for five years. While overall scores among some Pitt County high schools slightly exceed state and national averages this year, we're not exactly setting the collective bar for achievement goals. Two groups that are doing that — students from high-income families and Asian-American families — have one thing in common: hard work.

While average scores among most groups dropped in 2009, students from families earning more than $200,000 a year averaged a 26-point gain. But before we conclude that good fortune alone produces good test scores, consider that students identifying themselves as Asian, Asian-American or Pacific Islander posted a 13-point gain all across the family income scale.

Both of these top-scoring groups can provide an important lesson for those behind them on the SAT-achievement scale: High test scores can only be accomplished through good old-fashioned studying — and lots of it.

Students from high-income families view the SAT as a vehicle into prestigious universities. They may have the means to purchase expensive test-preparation programs and to hire tutors, but the students still have to do the work. Their willingness to work hard springs from a culture of parental support and involvement.

As evidenced by Asian-American students, the culture-of-support factor far outweighs financial considerations. Most Asian-American students, regardless of family income, also enjoy strong family support and motivation, which translates to higher SAT scores.

This culture of family support has been present in both top-scoring groups for generations. Less prominent than the headlines about falling SAT scores is news that the culture of high achievement may actually be spreading.

One reason SAT test scores have dropped slightly is that more minorities than ever before are taking the college entrance exam. Minorities comprised 40 percent of all SAT takers this year, according to the nonprofit College Board, which owns the test. Hispanics are the fastest-growing group of test takers and account for nearly 14 percent of those who took it this year, up from less than 8 percent 10 years ago.

Public school administrators are optimistic that the rising number of students considering higher education will eventually translate to improved academic achievement. That will almost certainly happen as long as those more motivated students pass that culture of hard work and support along to their own children.
Dr. Jennifer Defazio, a dermatologist specializing in skin cancer, has joined the faculty of the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University and its group practice, ECU Physicians. Defazio joined ECU as an assistant professor. She has a bachelor's degree from Alderson-Broaddus College in West Virginia and a medical degree from West Virginia University. She completed residency training in dermatology at WVU and a fellowship in Mohs surgery in Macon, Ga. Defazio is board-certified in dermatology and specializes in Mohs surgery, a type of micrographic surgery effective for treating skin cancer. She sees patients at the Brody Outpatient Center on the campus of the Brody School of Medicine.
Debate on health care reform hits Greenville corner

By Michael Abramowitz
The Daily Reflector

Saturday, August 29, 2009

People with strong feelings on the health care issue lined up on opposite sides of Greenville Boulevard Saturday to support their positions on the hot-button issue.

Swartering temperatures at 11 a.m. caused one person to fall out of line temporarily. Despite the heat, about 75 people held signs and chanted rhetoric at the intersection of Charles and Greenville boulevards to bring attention to their belief that health care reform is sorely needed in Greenville and Pitt County.

A smaller group of about 10 people were on the other side of the boulevard with signs of their own. Both sides exhorted passing drivers to oppose the proposed new health care legislation.

Among the group supporting government-led reform of health insurance, Ray Sobel of the Greenville-Pitt County Health Care Coalition said the issue boils down to some basic questions.

"Do we agree that we are our brother's keeper? Do we all take care of each other, or not? Is health care a right or a privilege?" he asked.

Sobel said he thinks most Americans believe in those principles, but some are swayed by corporate propaganda.

"The pharmaceutical and health care industries spend millions every day to put out information that supports them," Sobel said. "The CEO of Blue Cross-Blue Shield makes $4 million per year, and they drop people from coverage. I understand they are trying to make a profit. We're not here for profit, though. We're here to see that everyone is covered, just like we want everyone to get an education."

Don Cavellini, of the Coalition Against Racism, defended a public option as a choice that closes the health insurance gap in America.

"Millions of people are going without quality affordable health care in America," Cavellini said. "This leaves a burden on all of us — those who pay taxes and those who don't. Everybody pays for those who don't have coverage."

Sobel said affordable health care coverage for all Americans can't be possible without a public option.

"Only when there is a competing public insurance program will private insurance rates come down," he said.

Pitt County Southern Christian Leadership Conference president Rufus Huggins also was there to support health care reform.

"Someone has to speak up for those who are really suffering," Huggins said. "I guess there's two sides to every coin, but I can't understand how anyone would not want everyone to have affordable health care."

He said some people's decision to go without health insurance is a natural reaction to having it out of their financial reach.

"It's like unreachable apples in a tree," Huggins said. "They want to have insurance but can't afford it for so long that they finally decide they don't want any apples. But they have it anyway because you and I pay for it."
Reforms) will allow them and their employers to participate, so I strongly support the reform proposals.”

Huggins said he does not want to think in this day and age that people look at the situation from a racial point of view, “but I can’t help thinking there are many who oppose reforms because they feel they will benefit mostly black people. The percentages tell you that’s not true, of course,” he said.

“I love Greenville,” Huggins said. “We have a lot of great people here. We’re all in this together. What has never worked before won’t work now. It’s never going to.”

Brenda Highsmith of Greenville opposes the proposed government reforms.

“I’m not in favor of a total government takeover of our health care system,” Highsmith said. “I agree the system does have some problems and needs some help, but I don’t think the government needs to be in the middle of it.”

Nanette Ryan criticized the reform plan that President Barack Obama supports.

“If Ted Kennedy had the national health care plan that Obama talks about, he would have died a long time ago,” she said. “The chemotherapy he received would not have been cost-effective to the government.”

Kim Koo, a neurosurgeon at Nash General Hospital in Rocky Mount, came with her husband, Richard Smith, to offer her point of view as a physician.

“I’ve been in practice more than 20 years, and it’s frustrating,” Koo said. “My experience with insurance companies has been very negative. Physicians get pulled into rationing health care to our patients. We have to take care of insurance approvals and give patients the bad news that they are not covered.

“I just want to take care of patients. We don’t want sick patients to have to worry about all this. I have seen so many patients who did not get the care they need because they don’t have the insurance. Also, many covered patients get a bill anyway because they have a so-called pre-existing condition. My patients are already sick, then they have to worry about these things.”

Smith said he is covered by his wife’s insurance, but felt he needed to come and share his concern.

“Basic compassion and moral values mean that everyone should be covered,” Smith said. “There is a personal stake involved, but I believe health care is a basic human right.”

Other groups participating in the event included the East Carolina University chapter of the National Medical Association and the N.C. Justice Center.

Contact Michael Abramowitz at mabramowitz@coxnc.com or (252) 329-9571.
The ugly secret why tuition costs a fortune

By John Zmirak

8:55 a.m. Monday, August 24, 2009

In times of economic slowdown, prices usually fall. Is your home worth as much as it was two years ago? As much as the mortgage you have on it? (For your sake, I hope so.) In major cities rents are falling, and shoppers are skipping organic groceries in favor of mongo-sized discount produce from Price Club. There’s just one sector of the economy that’s bizarrely insulated from reality: Academia.

Tuition, room and board at Sarah Lawrence College just hit $53,166 per year. That’s like buying a C-Class Mercedes every year... except you never get the car. Other colleges are comparable, with even state school tuition rising to levels some parents find impossible. Why hasn’t reality had its revenge?

There are good reasons why we try to preserve college life from the logic of the market. There’s no clear bottom-line benefit to teaching Shakespeare plays, but we still want professors doing it. Universities in the West were invented by monks in the Middle Ages, and at their best they still serve as a cloistered refuge from the grim necessities of life — offering students not just a degree that’s valued in the marketplace, but a chance to broaden their interests and deepen their souls, to gain a solid grounding in the fundamentals that made our civilization, and explore all life’s possibilities before settling down to a life of working to earn their bread.

Yeah, that’s the theory. But what if universities began to neglect this basic charge, and instead turned into featherbedding, unionized factories that existed to protect their overpaid workers — who were impossible to fire? What if these factories botched the items customers paid for, and spent their energy generating oddball inventions no one wanted?

That is exactly what happened in academia over the past 30 years, according to Emory University professor Mark Bauerlein, who explores the open, ugly secret that most professors are paid based not on the quality (or even quantity) of their teaching, but rather on the volume of scholarly articles and books they can produce.

Bauerlein’s American Enterprise Institute paper, “Professors on the Production Line, Students On Their Own,” reveals the following: Laboring on the age-old axiom “publish-or-perish,” thousands of professors, lecturers and graduate students are busy producing dissertations, books, essays and reviews. Over the past five decades, their collective productivity has risen from 13,000 to 72,000 publications per year. But the audience for language and literature scholarship has diminished, with unit sales for books now hovering around 300.

At the same time, the degree of interaction between teachers and students has declined. While 43 percent of two-year public college students and 29 percent of four-year public college students require remedial course work, costing $2 billion annually, one national survey reports that 37 percent of first-year arts/humanities students “never” discuss course readings with teachers outside of class, and 41 percent only do so “sometimes.”

Indeed, prestigious professors frequently have little interaction with students at all, lecturing to hundreds at a time, consigning discussions and grading to graduate students. Meanwhile, the research these professors are turning out is increasingly obscure and often politicized. If they’re dealing with well-studied writers, they must pursue ever...
more oddball interpretations of the works in order to produce something original. Here’s Bauerlайн again, explaining why: In the year 2007, literary scholars and critics published 85 studies of the life and writings of William Faulkner. Nearly all of them appeared in U.S. publications, and the total included 11 books and eight dissertations. The previous year saw 78 entries on Faulkner, and the one before that 80 of them.

In fact, from 1980 to 2006, Faulkner attracted fully 3,584 books, chapters, dissertations, articles, notes, reviews and editions. During the same years, Charles Dickens garnered 3,437 studies, while Emily Dickinson tallied 1,776. Towering at the top was William Shakespeare with 21,674 separate pieces of scholarship and criticism.

Professors daunted by the task of hunting for treasure in such burned-over fields will often simply switch gears and write about popular culture. At least the movie “Bruno” doesn’t have 47,000 scholarly articles written about it. Yet.

I’m not throwing stones at the hardworking scholars who wade through decades of previous research to try saying something new about canonical authors. I’ve been there and I’ve done it. It’s real work, but it doesn’t add much to teaching, especially at the most basic levels, such as composition courses.

Those classes, which few professors really want to teach, are among the most crucial many students will ever take, determining how fluently they can write in their own first language.

Meanwhile, survey classes — the next most important category of courses — which cover literary history and introduce students for the first time to the greatest works in our language, also have trouble finding teachers because they don’t “tie into one’s research” and are largely useless for gaining tenure.

Ivy League grads can emerge without having ever read Hamlet or the Declaration of Independence, or they’ve learned these texts through some trendy lens, such as Queer Theory.

That’s why it’s essential, when making the ever more costly choices required in education, to carefully scope out each college. Call the admissions office and inquire about the student/teacher ratio and the percentage of classes taught by graduate students.

Is there a core curriculum of solid classes in Western culture, American history and great works of literature? Ask a professor how highly teaching (versus research) is valued in tenure decisions. After all, the teaching is what you’re paying for. Leave the tab for all that research to those 300 people who actually buy the books.

John Zmirak is editor-in-chief of “Choosing the Right College” and Collegeguide.org.

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