THE DAILY CLIPS

September 1, 2009

News, commentary, and opinion
compiled by the East Carolina University News Bureau from:

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Student journalism in transition

BY KIM GRIZZARD
The Daily Reflector

One area paper has stopped the presses and is moving its content online. Another has recently changed hands, and a third has been fighting closure.

The situations in local classrooms, in some ways, mirror the nation's newsrooms. As student journalists work to publish their first issues of the school year, many find themselves faced with some of the same issues that affect mainstream print media: the economic downturn and the rise of the Internet.

Monica Hill, director of the North Carolina Scholastic Media Association, said high school journalism programs have been protected from some of the financial problems that have plagued mainstream print media, but they are not immune.

"While I strongly contend that scholastic journalism is not experiencing the travails the industry is experiencing, or is doing so at a much slower pace, I have seen the industry's effect on high school journalism," she said. "There is some evidence that they're being affected."

Hill said that many high schools that are working to launch or reestablish journalism programs in the current economy are choosing Web pages over printed pages.

Aydin-Grifftton High School is one of those.

Due to rising costs, The Charger Express published only four issues last year, prompting adviser Dawn Everett to move the publication online this semester. The Web site, which is in development, will be hosted by Pitt County Schools.

Everett hopes that producing daily stories will help simulate a real-world experience for her journalism staff and will draw readers to the site.

"I'm excited about it," she said. "I don't have to worry about selling ads, which in this economy, is tough...I'm hoping that the students will embrace it."

Last week, Ayden-Grifftton journalism students, who learned about the new format during the school's open house, were already doing just that.

Editor Sarah Rabon hoped that putting the paper online would give student journalists a better way to hold the attention of their teen readers, who often discarded the print edition hours after it was distributed.

"I felt that the paper wasn't generating a lot of interest from the student body," Rabon said, "so I thought this was something the students might be more interested in this year."

Staff member Tawana Franklin believes the change will make the paper seem more relevant to its target audience.

"As teens, we spend a lot of our time on the Internet," she said. "With it being online and having daily updates, I can go there whenever I want to and see what I want to see. I think that's better."

It is certainly cheaper. Everett said the class had to generate about $3,000 to fund the newspaper last year.

At D.H. Conley High School, student journalists are asked to generate $100 each in sponsorships and revenue to support the school's news magazine. Senior staff member Karen DeUrquidi contributes money she earns from baby sitting, and sophomore Miles Wobbleton gets his parents to write a check.

But that almost wasn't enough to protect The Shield from being eliminated this year. Though students published 10 issues last year and received an award in the North Carolina Press Club's High School Communications Contest, it appeared the paper might come to an end when longtime adviser Donna Mills retired. Student journalists were initially reassigned to another elective.

Co-editor Emily Tucker said students even offered to make journalism a club and meet after school rather than give up publishing. Instead, yearbook adviser Marissa Johnson agreed to have 11 journalism students working in her classroom at the same time as her 21 yearbook students, just so the paper could stay afloat.

"We fought it as much as we could," DeUrquidi said. "What school doesn't have a school newspaper?"

Locally, there are a few of them. There are no journalism electives offered at Farmville Central and North Pitt high schools. South Central has offered a course sporadically.

Steve Row of Greenville, a former chairman of journalism education committee for the Virginia Press Association, said the loss of a student newspaper can be costly to a school.
“It loses the opportunity for a handful of students to become better citizens of the community, better communicators and probably loses out on ways to get information out to the student body,” said Row, who teaches a beginning reporting class at East Carolina University.

Row, who has served as a volunteer adviser to newspapers at both public and private schools across the county, said studies show that student journalists often outscore their peers on standardized writing tests as well as other aptitude tests. Still, he said, the primary value of a journalism program is the channel of communication it provides for a school.

See PAPER, B5

PAPER

Continued from B4

“The local paper can’t cover the school community as well as a school publication,” Row said. “The school newspaper should be the first voice, basically.”

Journalism students at South Central High School have struggled to find their voice after going through several journalism teachers and two newspaper names in the school’s short history. After trying to get a print edition off the ground, South Central journalism teacher Ross Whitfield is hoping to publish The Falcon Chronicles online this semester.

The school has no journalism elective scheduled for the spring. Last spring, half a dozen journalism students shared a classroom with Whitfield’s creative writing students.

“We’re looking at ways to draw interest,” Whitfield said.

Hill said the Scholastic Media Association is finding that statewide, journalism still appeals to many students. The NCSMA has seen an increase in the number of entries in its annual high school newspaper competition.

“There are many, many strong high school newspaper programs across North Carolina,” Hill said. “We still have very many healthy high school journalism programs.”

J.H. Rose High School’s student newspaper received more than a dozen awards in NCSMA’s recent competition.

A PAGE from D.H. Conley’s “The Shield.”

including an “All North Carolina” honor in the large schools category.

“We’re really proud of it,” co-editor Anna Dietrich said of Rampant Limes newspaper. “There’s always something that is interesting to a student. It really reaches out to a lot of people. That’s part of why I think it’s been so successful.”

Rampant Limes published 10 tabloid-sized editions last school year, most of them 20-24 pages. Rose’s journalism class routinely draws 25 or more students a semester, and a number of recent graduates have gone on to work with their respective university newspapers.

Still, Michael Flinchbaugh, who served as the newspaper’s adviser for the last eight years, worries about encouraging students to pursue journalism in today’s job market.

“It makes me nervous sometimes,” said Flinchbaugh, who now works as an instructional coach. “Sometimes you worry: Are they going to go out there and not have a job waiting for them?”

Senior Wendy Lu, who has worked as the features editor for Rampant Limes, said she is still thinking about a career in journalism. But recent events have made Dietrich reconsider.

“When I came to this school, I had my heart set on being a journalist,” she said. “My view has changed as I’ve watched newspapers being downsized and a lot of papers moving strictly to the Internet.”

Rose’s new journalism teacher, Amber Coker, is talking with co-editor Katelyn Chaing about the possibility of giving Rampant Limes an online presence. But Chaing does not see print version being replaced.

“We have Facebook, so you see all these pictures all the time, but people still get the yearbook at the end of the year,” she said. “A lot of people really like to see those.

“It’s a testament to the staff and everybody who supports us that we still have a school newspaper.”

Hill said that school newspapers’ continued presence during a tough time in the newspaper industry is a testament to the passion of high school journalists to keep publishing.

While some in the industry have attempted to write the obituary for mainstream newspapers, student journalists apparently believe they are too young to die.

“I don’t think they’re as frightened by it as the rest of us are,” Hill said. “I think they see possibilities.”

Just the passion and energy that these students have about journalism — when you see that, it’s hard to think that journalism, the industry, is dead.”
State campuses to cut 900 jobs

Public universities get the order to streamline their administrations

BY ERIC FERRERI, Staff writer

CHAPEL HILL - The 16-campus UNC system expects to eliminate about 900 administrative positions this year, an acknowledgement by university leaders of job growth gone wild.

Those 900 positions and other administrative costs could account for 75 percent or more of cuts that public university campuses will be asked to make this year as the system pares $171 million from its budget, UNC system officials say.

In cutting so heavily into administrative costs, UNC system President Erskine Bowles and others say they hope to protect academics.

Bowles has warned for months that the university system could face up to 1,000 layoffs this year as a result of budget cuts. And the 900 administrative jobs he specified this week do not include positions linked to other cuts mandated by the General Assembly.

It isn't yet clear how many of those positions are filled. Since last fall, campuses have kept some positions vacant in the face of the budget shortfall.

Administrative costs on university campuses have come under scrutiny lately. Responding to an Aug.17 News & Observer report on the swelling of administrative ranks within the UNC system, Bowles directed the chancellors of the state's public universities to focus on cuts to administration. Any further delay in doing so, he told the campus leaders, ran the risk of alienating taxpayers and legislators.

Those chancellors submitted budget-cut plans to Bowles' office Monday.

"We will NOT approve your reduction plans until we are convinced that you are focused on
reducing administrative costs to the fullest extent possible," Bowles wrote in an e-mail message to the chancellors.

He met with the chancellors Monday.

While the General Assembly cut the UNC-system budget about 6 percent, campuses are cutting their spending plans 10 percent this year in anticipation of a mid-year request to return more funds to the state.

Cut in Chapel Hill

There isn't yet a campus-by-campus breakdown of expected cuts, but at some institutions, the ax is already falling.

At UNC-Chapel Hill, 300 positions have been eliminated; of those, 100 were occupied, Chancellor Holden Thorp said. Nine positions in upper management -- associate, assistant and vice chancellor posts -- were cut, Thorp added.

While there has clearly been administrative bloat, many of the positions under scrutiny have value, said McKay Coble, UNC-CH's faculty chairwoman.

"Running a university, it takes a lot of administrators," said Coble, a professor of dramatic art. "It's like putting on a [theater] production. You may have one person on stage, but it took 50 to get them there."

The term "administration" is broad. It can refer to anyone from a university chancellor to a finance officer or program director. At UNC-CH, cuts didn't focus on the rank-and-file, Thorp said.

"It goes from the top to what's being called middle management," he said. "There weren't a lot of front-line jobs being eliminated."

While conceding that some divisions and departments on his campus have grown too much, he insists that many administrative positions are critical. He points to the $716 million in research grants brought in by UNC-CH scientists last year and the $271 million in private gifts fundraisers elicited.

"We're trying to minimize, but we do need people to look after all those grants and donations," he said. "You don't really want to tell the federal government you aren't keeping track of their money. And the same for donors."

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Got 'em covered

All students at UNC system campuses will be required to have health insurance next fall. It's a good plan.

Could it be that somewhere in the often contentious debate over health-care reform there will be a lesson in what the University of North Carolina system is doing, starting next fall? That's when a requirement that all students at all 16 campuses have health insurance kicks in. Those who have insurance will not need to do anything. But those who do not can buy coverage through the system, which should have strong bargaining power with insurers given that there are 215,000 students within it.

This has been a long time coming, and it's a welcome development. Student health officials around the state all know cases of students who have not gone to the doctor when they needed to because they had no insurance. One example cited by Mary Covington, health services director for UNC-Chapel Hill, is a student who had appendicitis but didn't have surgery because she had no insurance. The inevitable happened: the student was hospitalized with complications when the appendix ruptured.

Those campuses that do offer insurance plan sometimes have low premiums, but a low ceiling on coverage as well. The system's plan will cost students $549 to $679 a year, with a $100,000 coverage limit and a $300 deductible. Students who are on financial aid will have the insurance premium figured into that aid and into loan payments to be paid off later.

"We're finally using our market muscle as a system," said UNC system President Erskine Bowles. He anticipates some complaints over the fact that carrying insurance will be a requirement and not a choice. But the truth is that the coverage offered for the premium paid is a bargain by any measure against what most people pay for even minimum health coverage. And as everyone who has followed the debate over national health-care reform knows, the costs of care for the uninsured are covered by those who are insured in a for-profit health-care system.

And that prompts the thought: perhaps somewhere in the planning for this program are ideas that could be applied to other groups of people who currently are uninsured or under-insured and find themselves concerned about where the debate on national health-care reform is going.

Or, might getting this coverage at their typically young ages encourage students to acquire health insurance when they graduate and move into the world of work?

One of the problems in the number of uninsured people in the United States, after all, is that some people actually pass on buying insurance through their employers. In some of those cases, the people are young and willing to take a chance that they will remain healthy. That's a risk no one should take.

The truth is, in establishing this requirement, the university system is also contributing to public awareness about the scope and importance of health care. Given the intensity of the current debate over reform, a positive development such as this one is a welcome addition to the dialogue.

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Print Article
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Swine flu is at WFU: Students are advised not to attend classes

By Kim Underwood

JOURNAL REPORTER

More than 80 students at Wake Forest University are believed to have swine flu, university officials said yesterday.

Two cases of swine flu were confirmed Friday and university officials say that the rest of the students likely have swine flu as well, said Kevin Cox, the university's director of media relations.

Most of the cases have been relatively mild and the students are being treated at the university's health service, Cox said.

Students were told about the confirmed cases by e-mail on Friday night.

Since then, a steady stream of students has gone to the health service complaining of flu symptoms, Cox said.

The university has posted information about swine flu on its Web site, he said, and officials plan to continue to hold classes as usual.

"Students diagnosed with the flu are advised not to come to class in order to help reduce its spread," Cox said. "We have been communicating with faculty, staff and students directly through e-mail. In fact, the university began distributing information regarding the potential for H1N1 before we had the first confirmed cases."

So far, no cases of swine flu have been confirmed in the Winston-Salem Forsyth County Schools or in the county's private schools, said Dr. Tim Monroe, the director of the Forsyth County Health Department.

That does not mean there haven't been any cases, he said.

"They are not necessarily reported to us. It really doesn't matter whether you are seeing confirmed or not," he said.

The virus is already established in the county. Officials with the city-county school system have met with Monroe and other health-department officials to develop a plan to deal with the flu.

"It is most important for people not to be afraid of this but to pay attention," said Dr. Larry Givner, a professor of pediatrics at Wake Forest University School of Medicine and the chief of pediatric medicine at Brenner.

The flu caused by the H1N1 virus is no worse than seasonal flu, he said. It just spreads more readily because fewer people are immune to it.

"Unfortunately, there is little, if any, immunity in the community," Givner said. "A much larger segment of the population is going to become infected."

Now that school has started and children are in classrooms together, it could begin to spread more rapidly, he said.

"School probably does have a good bit to do with it," he said. "It increases the possibility of passing it."
It's hard to say, though, how long it will be before it becomes an issue here, Givner said. It could be before the vaccine is available this fall.

If cases are found in schools, experts don't recommend that officials close schools or that extraordinary measures be taken to clean classrooms or buses, he said.

What they do recommend is that parents and students practice good hygiene.

For starters, Givner said, "(children) should be taught to disinfect or wash their hands as often as possible."

Children should also be taught to cover their mouths and noses whenever they cough or sneeze to minimize the possibility of spreading the virus. And, Givner said, children should understand that, if they think they have a fever or other symptoms, they should tell their teachers immediately.

The Winston-Salem/Forsyth County school system will send the child home.

So, it's important for parents to make plans for child care, Givner said. "Keep them home for at least 24 hours after fever is gone."

It could take several days for the flu to run its course, he said, and once the H1N1 virus comes into a household, the chances are good that other members of the household will get sick. The incubation period is one to four days, he said.

For most people who get the flu, there's no need to go to the doctor, Givner said.

"It doesn't seem to be any more severe than the seasonal flu," he said. "The majority of people can and should stay home with the flu."

In general, people should see a doctor, he said, only if their temperature reaches 103 or higher, they start vomiting, they have a change in mental status or behavior, or they develop a rash.

People in certain categories should automatically check in with a doctor. They include pregnant women, children younger than 5, people who live with or work with a baby six months or younger, people 65 and older, and people with such chronic medical problems as heart or lung troubles.

The city-county school system has a page of its Web site devoted to H1N1. It makes several recommendations, including that children be told not to share food or drinks with other students.

Theo Helm, a spokesman for the school system, said he knows that having a child at home can be a problem for people who work. Some people have asked if there is a way to keep sick students at school. That's not possible, he said.

"We don't have a sick bay in each of our schools," Helm said. "You have to figure out a way to keep them at home."

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Journal reporter Richard Craver contributed to this story.
Controversy brews over beer cans in school colors

Posted: Aug. 31 6:41 p.m.
Updated: Aug. 31 7:22 p.m.

A new marketing campaign from Budweiser has generated an outcry from college officials nationwide.

The so-called "fan cans" package Bud Light beer in cans that mimic school colors for many campuses. Red-and-black cans of beer can be found in convenience stores near the North Carolina State University campus, for example, while purple-and-gold cans are sold in Greenville near East Carolina University.

The campaign is gearing up just as football season and tailgating start.

"I drink Coors Light, but now that we've got red-and-black cans on the Bud Light, I'm going to drink Bud Light for the whole tailgate season," N.C. State student Clark Stephenson said.

The Federal Trade Commission has criticized the Bud Light campaign, and more than two dozen universities have asked Anheuser-Busch Inc. to pull the fan cans from their areas, saying they don't want to encourage excessive or underage drinking.

Carol Clark, vice president of corporate social responsibility for the brewer, said in a statement that beer distributors aren't required to stock stores with the colored cans. About half of Anheuser-Busch's wholesalers are participating in the fan can marketing program, she said.

"We place great value in the relationships we've built with college administrators and campus communities across the country. Certain cans are not being made available in communities where organizations had asked us not to offer them," Clark said.

"Anheuser-Busch has a longstanding commitment to promoting responsible drinking," she said. "Our company's position on college drinking is clear: If students are 21 or older and choose to drink, we want them to do so responsibly. If they are under 21, we want them to respect the law and not drink."

The Rev. Mark Creech, executive director of the Christian Action League of North Carolina, said his group is encouraging parents to lobby university administrators nationwide to file complaints with Anheuser-Busch, with the goal of getting the colored Bud Light cans pulled off store shelves everywhere.

Some N.C. State students said they don't think the color of beer cans will encourage more drinking.

"Kids are going to drink regardless. We always have, and we always will," Stephenson said.

Reporter: Dan Bowens
Photographer: Chad Flowers
Web Editor: Matthew Burns

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Protect funds: Codify rules in state Constitution

Monday, August 31, 2009

Gov. Beverly Perdue acted out of necessity in February when she halted the scheduled distribution of nearly $38 million in lottery funds to county governments. The state faced a huge budget shortfall and cash-flow issues that threatened to disrupt government operations, forcing Perdue to act.

That decision may have helped the state endure a period of financial hardship, but using lottery funds for that purpose contradicts the arguments made to support its passage in 2005. Lawmakers can prevent any future misuse by pushing for a long-overdue constitutional amendment to codify the use of lottery funding.

The governor contends she had no choice but to use all available avenues to keep the state operating earlier this year when she halted the transfer of $37.6 million from the state’s lottery fund to county governments. It was one of several funds the governor used in the face of a massive budget shortfall estimated to reach more than $4 billion and a cash-flow problem that might have delayed paychecks to teachers and other state employees.

The General Assembly approved a budget for the 2009-10 fiscal year in August, and Perdue announced Friday that she would return the money she seized from the Public School Building Capital Fund. No mention has yet been made of the $50 million claimed from the Education Lottery Reserve Fund.

Opponents predicted such an action when the state approved a lottery in 2005. They worried that lottery funding would offset, rather than supplement, education funding, and that lottery proceeds would be used for non-educational purposes. Such arguments were set aside when the lottery won passage by a single vote — cast, ironically, by then-Lt. Gov. Beverly Perdue.

The lottery has collected and distributed $410 million through June 30, operating under the guidelines set forth by the authorizing legislation. They call on the Lottery Commission to designate 50 percent of proceeds to reduce class sizes in public schools, 40 percent for school construction and 10 percent for college scholarships.

However, without a constitutional amendment to codify their use, the funds can be applied as lawmakers see fit without penalty or seized at a governor’s whim, as in this case. That was not the intent behind approving the lottery nor should such action be allowed.

Past efforts to win passage of an amendment have failed, but lawmakers should recognize the urgency of doing so when the Legislature convenes again next year. North Carolina should not promote the charade of an “education” lottery if it does not intend to ensure its integrity.

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UNC student's fraternity under investigation

Posted: Aug. 31 12:46 p.m.
Updated: Aug. 31 6:16 p.m.

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is investigating whether a fraternity whose president was fatally shot near Greensboro violated any university rules.

Courtland Smith, a junior biology major from Houston, Texas, was killed early Aug. 23 after a police confrontation following a 911 call during which the 21-year-old repeatedly asked a Guilford County dispatcher to send help.

Archdale police stopped Smith on Interstate 85. A police report said officers shot Smith after a "confrontation ensued."

Smith was also the president of the UNC chapter of the Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity. He had reportedly left a party at the fraternity house several hours before the shooting.

In an entry on his blog Friday, UNC Chancellor Holden Thorp said he has asked the school's Department of Student Affairs to look into that party after Chapel Hill police contacted the university.

"It was obvious that there had been a party there, with alcohol," Thorp wrote. "I know that doesn't necessarily sound unusual. But in light of the tragedy, we felt that we needed to try to determine whether any university or fraternity policies were violated."

Thorp also wrote that the university will help the fraternity set up a substance-abuse education program after current and former DKE members and parents expressed concern about the party.

It's unclear where Smith was going, but in an edited 911 recording released last week, he said he was headed to Asheville. He told a dispatcher that he was drunk, had a 9-mm pistol with him and that he was trying to kill himself.

Archdale police said Smith confronted police officer Jeremy Flinchum during a subsequent traffic stop and that Flinchum shot Smith, who died at High Point Regional Hospital.

In the 911 recording, an officer can be heard yelling at him to stay in the car, and the caller can be heard later saying, "I've got to pull something out."

Before the call ends, the caller can be heard yelling "whoa" several times, and someone asks "Where (are) you going?"

It's unclear what happened next. The rest of the recording, as well as contents of a video tape from the dashboard camera of the car that pulled over Smith have been sealed.

WRAL News, The Associated Press and UNC's student newspaper, The Daily Tar Heel, are among several media outlets that have filed motions asking that the evidence be made public.

In an e-mail to a family friend, Smith's father, Pharr Smith said evidence he's reviewed shows that his son did not have a gun with him.

In a statement last week, Chris Rice, an alumnus of the fraternity, said that information he had indicated that Smith left the party at approximately 12:30 a.m. and "seemed to be fine." He was with roommates at around 2 a.m. and "sounded normal."

The State Bureau of Investigation, is investigating the shooting, which is routine when an officer is
involved.

Thorp wrote in his blog that investigators requested a court order for Smith's e-mails and that they have also talked with some students.

He said many parents have asked him not to let this teachable moment pass.

"We still don't know why Courtland died, but we can't let this tragic death pass without learning from it," Thorp wrote.

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