THE DAILY CLIPS

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East Carolina University is determining how it will pay for damages from Hurricane Irene.

Administrators expect repairs will be covered by a combination of federal money, state funds and insurance, according to Bill Bagnell, associate vice chancellor for campus operations.

Recovery is under way, with repairs estimated at $1.7 million to fix water damage in several buildings and remove more than 150 large trees felled by the storm.

“We're taking care of the issues and then providing all the information to the state,” Bagnell said. “We're not holding up on repairs. We're putting all the costs and contracts into an account and tracking each one separately so we can address each one at a time.”

Pitt County was given a disaster declaration Friday from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which provides assistance for individuals to qualify for grants and loans to help with disaster recovery.

FEMA inspectors still were conducting assessments as of Friday to see if the county and its municipalities will qualify for public assistance, which will help governmental entities pay for debris removal and repairs to public buildings.

If the county gets the declaration allowing public assistance, ECU will join the county and be part of the process, Bagnell said. The university would provide FEMA with information on what the state and its insurance covers so the agency could determine where public assistance would be received.

Contact Jackie Drake at jdrake@reflector.com or 252-329-9567.
As Hurricane Irene raged across Greenville, the phones in the East Carolina University Police Department were busy. Really busy.

“We were getting all kinds of calls,” Major Frank Knight said. “One student called saying they were being held inside their rooms and weren't being fed. We told them to talk to their resident advisor. And then the rumor went around that the roof had been blown off a residence hall.”

He then laughed and said, “And we took calls from students living off campus who had lost power and were calling to see if we could find them a room on campus in one of the dorms.”

Recovery from Irene moved quickly on ECU's campus. Even with 170 downed trees and an estimated $1.7 million in damage, classes resumed Wednesday. That took non-stop work and personal sacrifice from many staff on campus whose roles keep them mostly behind the scene: police, building and grounds, facilities and housekeeping.

The residence halls were full with an estimated 3,000 students over the weekend; ECU’s 15 residence halls are housing 5,034 students this semester, according to Aaron Lucier with Campus Living/Housing.

Knight said Dispatcher Dawn Arnold got the job of handling the calls coming in during the storm, along with three other dispatchers. The calls ranged from worried parents to students reporting damage on campus. During the height of the storm, Knight said ECU police had officers “sheltered in place” across the campus. “After things calmed down around 10 or 11 p.m., we started going around doing the preliminary assessment,” he said.
He credited Lt. Curtis Hayes and Lt. D.J. Gregory with running the Emergency Operations Center and Lt. Amy Davis and Lt. Chris Sutton for their direct supervision of the officers out in the storm.

**Picking up the pieces**

Hurricane Irene left downed trees, broken residence hall windows, battered roofs and damp quarters in many buildings at ECU.
The damage has kept staff busy with mops, hammers, nails, chain saws, Bobcats and tractors.

The job of removing the downed trees went to the university's Facilities Services department.

As the storm continued to blow Aug. 28, Matt Vayo with ECU Facilities-Grounds Services received a phone call from his supervisor Ron Newton asking him to report to campus at 7 a.m. Sunday.

“I knew the situation must be bad,” Vayo said. He was not prepared for what he saw.

“I was shocked at the number of trees and debris that littered the grounds. It looked like a tornado had come through campus,” he said.

Wielding a chain saw, Vayo and three other crew members began removing debris around the mall area between the Spilman and the School of Art buildings where three oaks had fallen. The largest of the 100-year-old trees rested on an electrical switch box.

“It's always sad to lose one of those (trees),” he said. “They've been here a long time.

Pockets of ground crews echoed similar cleanup scenarios throughout the day Sunday. Heavy equipment traversed the campus and chain saws buzzed.

“Everyone worked well together,” Vayo said. “Grounds crew members who typically don't work with each other joined forces to get the job done and bring order back to our campus.”

**Spilman damage is urgent**

Some of the worst damage was in Spilman, an administration building built in the 1920s that houses the chancellor's office. Irene snatched metal sheeting off the roof and rain soaked ceilings and walls inside, including in the chancellor's conference room.

In Greene Residence Hall, wind pried at the roof enough to break a storm drainpipe underneath and send water into the building. About two dozen students were moved to the lobby during the storm. Five students from three rooms in Greene have been relocated to another residence hall for a few weeks while permanent repairs are made.

Campus Living's Lucier praised the residence hall staff — both student and professional — who worked to make sure the residents stayed safe during the storm. “It is not easy to have a day like (last) Saturday. Some of the hall staff had water and other issues in their staff apartments while addressing student concerns,” he said.
He noted Veronica Rodriguez Rivera, a residence hall coordinator who just started at ECU this summer, had to deal with the challenges of the broken roof drain in Greene, which caused hundreds of gallons of water to enter the building. Her apartment took some damage and she had to temporarily move to a spare apartment, he said.

Across campus, Holly Bowen, another residence hall coordinator who has been with ECU for a year, was facing her own challenge at College Hill Suites: No power for a longer period of time than the other halls. That caused issues with the plumbing and no air conditioning for most of Saturday.

A wet mess
Back at Spilman work on the more than 90-year-old building began on Sunday as well. Facilities Services employee Jay Wainwright left his 4-month-old son and wife at home to come into campus and help out in the damaged building.

“It was the biggest mess I've ever seen,” said Wainwright who works in the carpentry division. He said the guys working the night before had done the best they could, but “everything was soaking wet. There were ceiling tiles on the floor. Sheetrock had gotten wet and fallen on the floor. It was just a mess.”

Born and raised in Greenville, Wainwright has seen a few hurricanes come through, including Hurricane Floyd. Although the water damage from Floyd was extensive, he said, he had never seen wind damage so bad on campus.

Wainwright had little damage at home, just some shingles off the roof. Leaving his wife and infant son was not easy, but he wanted to help out on campus as well. Power came back at home about 1 a.m. on Sunday, which made it easier to leave for work, he said.

Also working in Spilman was Henry Henderson, Facilities Services-Carpentry. He arrived on campus Sunday morning about 7:30, after a difficult trip navigating around downed trees and flooded roadways from his home north of the Pitt-Greenville Airport.

In Spilman, he worked removing wet ceiling tiles, wrapping up wet furniture and checking the building for additional damage. Taking out the ceiling tiles quickly was critical, he said, because they will begin get moldy within 24 hours.

‘Everyone pulled together'
Henderson left a wife, daughter and grandson at home to come and work at ECU, waiting until after his shift on campus to inspect his own home's damage. At home he found some trees down, a fence ripped apart and a few shingles, but nothing like the damage he experienced after Hurricane Floyd.

In the flooding that followed Floyd, Henderson lost everything to about 2 or 3 feet of water in his house. After something like that, he said, “every time a storm happens, it makes you think. We had bags packed and ready in case we had to leave in a hurry.”
But this storm was more about wind than water, he said, with lots of trees coming down in his neighborhood. The scene was similar at ECU, where he saw “a whole lot of downed trees and standing water.”

Henderson was especially proud of the way the entire ECU maintenance department pulled together to get the campus back to normal.

“Everyone really pulled together and worked hand in hand, like one big unit, to get done what needed to be done. I felt really good about that,” he said.
There's no holiday today for many Greenville public works employees as they will spend Labor Day picking up the mess left by Hurricane Irene.

The Category 1 storm made a slow and damaging trek across eastern North Carolina on Aug. 26 and Aug. 27, leaving two people dead in Pitt County and an estimated 2,000 homes and businesses damaged.

The losses also included $38.8 million to Pitt County crops, $6.6 million damage to Greenville private buildings and $1.7 million damage at East Carolina University.

Few places were untouched, and tree trunks, limbs and other debris still occupy curbs and yards across the city. Public Works Director Wes Anderson advised Sunday that staff are making the rounds.

Sanitation division vegetation crews are collecting today in areas including Kristin Drive, Ashburton, Cleere Court, Red Banks and Cherry Oaks North.

The streets division will focus on the Irish Creek area and the city's portion of the Windsor neighborhood.

Hired company Ceres Environmental will continue work in four general areas:
West Greenville from Memorial Drive to the CSX railroad tracks and around 14th Street and Farmville Boulevard to the Tar River.

The East Carolina University area from Elm Street and Greenville Boulevard to 10th Street to the Tar River.

A triangle fenced in by Charles Boulevard, 14th Street and Greenville Boulevard.

The area inside of Charles Boulevard, Greenville Boulevard, 14th Street and Red Banks Road.

Local contractors desiring to work with the city's debris management firm can contact Tia Laurie, Ceres subcontractor liaison, at 813-333-8254 for information.
Editorial: Bearing student debt burden
Tuesday, September 6, 2011

A 25 percent increase in the amount of outstanding student loan debt since 2008 should have the nation concerned about the burden hoisted on recent graduates at the outset of their professional careers. The compact that once existed, in which students enjoyed the strong likelihood of gainful employment after college, no longer holds and threatens the financial solvency of younger generations.

East Carolina University, the cost of an education increases nearly every year and, while remaining a great value, forces more students to accept a high debt load in order to attend. Though the state Constitution requires government to provide education as free from expense as possible, it increasingly saddles young adults with an ever-greater debt load difficult to repay.

Students entering East Carolina this fall face an uncertain experience as they begin their college careers, with higher tuition costs than last year and the prospect of another increase looming for the 2012-13 school year as well. At the same time, the two-year state budget approved by the General Assembly translated to the loss of $49 million for the Greenville university, part of the $414 million in spending cuts spread throughout the University of North Carolina system.

For these young men and women, that means they will pay more for less, forced to accept a greater burden in exchange for larger class sizes, diminished subject offerings and a core academic mission that Chancellor Steve Ballard fears will be compromised by the budget. Most will turn to financial aid to fund their college education, a decision that virtually assures the accumulation of significant debt as they enter the workforce.

The Federal Reserve Bank of New York's quarterly report, released last month, found that burden to be growing precipitously of late. According to the Wall Street Journal, mortgage debt, home equity loans, credit card debt and auto loans are all down sharply,
but student loan debt jumped from $440 billion in the third quarter of 2008 to $550 billion in the second quarter of this year. And with unemployment so high and many students struggling to find jobs after graduation, it fuels tremendous desperation in the next generation.

That expectation of young adults cannot be sustained in its present form. Forcing so much debt on these young men and women puts them immediately in a troubling predicament, unfair in this economic climate. Greater public investment in education coupled with tax reform targeted at student debt could make the difference to millions should lawmakers show the courage to pursue those initiatives.
ECU athletic director Terry Holland says a top-heavy schedule will prepare the Pirates for conference play and help build its fan base.

With ECU's schedule, Pirates pass on cupcakes

BY J.P. GIGLIO - Staff Writer

It's a coincidence that North Carolina, N.C. State and Duke all open their college football seasons today with home games against lower-level Division I teams from Virginia.

There's no ESPN logo to slap on it - the ACC/Ye Olde Dominion Challenge? - and the real interest is in the start of the season, after months of buildup, not the actual opponents.

Meanwhile, East Carolina will take on No. 12 South Carolina in Charlotte, a game of both national and regional interest, not only because of the Gamecocks' ranking but because it's between two Football Bowl Subdivision opponents. Outside of the marquee, made-for-TV matchups between No. 3 Oregon and No. 4 LSU and No. 5 Boise State and No. 19 Georgia, that's an increasing rarity.

Consider that:

-- Of the 67 teams inside the Bowl Championship Series power structure, 28 start the season with Football Championship Subdivision opponents.
-- There are only five nonconference games between teams in BCS conferences, and one conference game - Maryland-Miami in the ACC.

-- Of the 10 ACC teams with nonconference openers, seven scheduled FCS opponents and only two will face opponents from another BCS conference (Clemson hosts Sun Belt power Troy).

So given the scheduling dynamics of college football, there are more Liberty-N.C. State, James Madison-UNC and Richmond-Duke matchups in future opening weekends than there are ECU-South Carolina clashes.

Not that the Triangle schools haven't scheduled more challenging, or interesting, openers in the past. UNC faced LSU in Atlanta last year, and N.C. State is scheduled to play Tennessee next year in Atlanta. But it's the complicated nature of scheduling - and the financial reality of college football - that leads to an unappealing slate of games.

Based on gate receipts alone, N.C. State, ECU and UNC can expect between $1 million and $1.5 million per home game. Duke, with a significantly smaller stadium capacity, brings in less. Liberty and James Madison will each make $350,000 for their trip today, while the bigger SEC and Big Ten schools pay out close to $1 million for nonconference opponents.

"Everybody in the country would like to have seven home games," said UNC associate athletic director Larry Gallo, who has handled the Tar Heels' scheduling for 15 years. "To make that happen, it basically leaves you with FCS opponents."

An "aggressive" approach

East Carolina's first two games are against No. 12 South Carolina and No. 13 Virginia Tech. Three weeks later, the Pirates host UNC in a night game at Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium.

Given the lack of box-office appeal inside its own conference (Conference USA), ECU athletic director Terry Holland believes the best way to schedule outside the conference is aggressively.

Better opponents outside C-USA help ECU prepare for the conference schedule, and it appeals to the Pirates' fan base, Holland said.

"Two CUSA Championships and five consecutive post-season bowl appearances are a direct result of the recruiting success driven by the great game day atmosphere created by the Pirate Nation's support of the aggressive scheduling," Holland wrote in an email response to questions about the Pirates' schedule.
Holland said gate receipts have increased annually from $1.9 million to more than $7 million, and that Pirate Club donations have doubled during his tenure.

The Pirates return games with the Hokies, Gamecocks and UNC next season. They have N.C. State and the Hokies again in 2013. Holland said they will continue to schedule with the same philosophy going forward.

**Change in plans**

Football scheduling follows Newton's third law of motion, where every action has an opposite and equal reaction. So when Tennessee pulled out of a home-and-home deal with UNC, Gallo scrambled to find an opponent. He was able to get Louisville on the schedule for this year and next.

"Football scheduling is real challenging task," Gallo said. "I think people realize we had Tennessee for this year and next, and that opening put us in a bind."

Typically, Gallo will schedule three to five years in advance.

Gallo set up a deal with Colorado under coach John Bunting, which Butch Davis canceled. With an interim tag on Everett Withers, the plans for the next three years remain somewhat fluid, but the Tar Heels will open at South Carolina in 2013 - a Thursday night showcase game on ESPN.

The Tar Heels have only one more game set with ECU, a home game next year, but that's a series Gallo would like to see extended.

"From a pure atmosphere standpoint, and fan interest, I think it's great that we play them," Gallo said. "You know those games will be sold out."

**A winning formula**

N.C. State plays two FCS teams this season, but only one of those potential wins can count towards bowl eligibility (six wins). In his first four seasons in Raleigh, Wolfpack coach Tom O'Brien has opened twice with South Carolina and has Tennessee lined up for the Chick-fil-A Kickoff next year, so he's not averse to playing up in the opener.

Still, there's a formula O'Brien would prefer to follow: one FCS opponent, two BCS conference opponents and one FBS team from outside the BCS structure.

Duke has hit something of a scheduling jackpot the last two years, bringing No. 1 Alabama last year and No. 7 Stanford to Wallace Wade Stadium.
Duke associate AD Stan Wilcox wants to put the Blue Devils in a position to be able to win three of its nonconference games. That and three wins inside the league would usually get the Devils to a bowl game.

The national appeal will be downplayed on future Duke schedules, with the likes of Memphis, Florida International and Tulane joining the mix, but Wilcox feels that the program is in a position to create an appealing local event with an annual meeting with N.C. Central (the two Durham schools played for the first time in 2009).

"We were really pleased with the first game and think we could build that into an annual event," Wilcox said.

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Gail Garner receives a resolution of appreciation for her 19 years of service to East Carolina from A. Scott Buck, left, associate vice chancellor for administration and finance, and Kevin Carraway, director of Materials Management. Garner retired on April 29.

**Garner retires after 19 years at ECU**

Monday, September 5, 2011

WorkWeek

Gail Garner of Simpson retired from East Carolina University in April. She was assistant ProCard manager in the Department of Materials Management.

The Materials Management staff honored Garner with a party on April 25 and presented her a Pirate necklace and a plaque of appreciation for her 19 years of service. Garner spent her entire career at ECU in Materials Management.

Garner is a graduate of D.H. Conley High School and attended Pitt Community College. She and her husband, Mark, have been Pirate Club members since 1981. They have two daughters, Kelly and Megan.

Garner's plans for retirement include spending time with her family and at the beach, reading, and watching movies.
ECU receives grant from biotech center

The North Carolina Biotechnology Center has awarded $1,378,772 in grants to six North Carolina universities, including East Carolina University, to boost biotechnology research.

The 12 Institutional Development Grants, matched at least 25 cents on the dollar by the universities, went to scientists at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Duke University, North Carolina State University, ECU, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and the UNC Wilmington.

The grant program carries a maximum award of $200,000. It funds core facilities and equipment serving multiple investigators. Jared Brown, assistant professor in the Brody School of Medicine, received $143,308 to assess health risks associated with nanoparticle exposure.

"This program serves a crucial need in North Carolina’s research community," said Maria Rapoza, the Biotechnology Center's vice president, science and technology development program. "The equipment and facilities needed for life science research grows more expensive and specialized each year. By providing these funds, the Biotechnology Center helps North Carolina open doors to scientific discoveries and commercial opportunities such as new biotech companies, products and jobs."

The IDG program is one of several grant and loan programs administered by the center to support life-science research, business, education and workforce training statewide.

The Biotechnology Center is a private, nonprofit corporation supported by the N.C. General Assembly. Its mission is to provide long-term economic and societal benefits to North Carolina by supporting biotechnology research, business, education and strategic policy statewide.
Cars. Cash. Prostitutes. Academic fraud. Scandal after scandal in college sports threaten the integrity of universities and the jobs of the people who run them.

Yet UNC Charlotte will start playing football in two years. A committee at Appalachian State has recommended the Mountaineers move to the top level of college football.

Why? Because for universities, the benefits outweigh the costs, says Charles Clotfelter, a Duke University economist who has taken a clear-eyed view of big-time sports in higher education.

Since the 1920s, major universities - some of the best around - have had big-time sports programs. The problems with college sports started in that era and are similar to the problems of today.

Yet Clotfelter points out that once a university starts playing big-time sports, it almost never steps away.

"These are not institutions known for bad decision making," Clotfelter said in an interview. "It is rather striking that these great institutions known for rationality, they keep doing it."

Clotfelter's new book, "Big-Time Sports in American Universities," is a must-read for those who work in academia. UNC-Chapel Hill Chancellor Holden Thorp, ensnared in an NCAA investigation into his football program, gave copies to his cabinet and deans. They discussed it this week with Clotfelter. (Full disclosure: I was one of Clotfelter's students years ago.)

Clotfelter says the people who run universities typically downplay the role of big-time sports, perhaps out of embarrassment. University mission statements often mention teaching, research and service. Few mention athletics.

Pretending that big-time sports are just another extracurricular activity, or that athletes are held to the same academic standards as other students, "is to engage in a form of double-talk that would be unacceptable" in most college classrooms, Clotfelter writes. He urges universities to acknowledge that they are in the entertainment business.
Clotfelter writes about the problems of college sports. But he says there are benefits to universities in playing big-time sports, which he defines as Division I basketball and schools in the Football Bowl Subdivision. Those benefits go beyond money and can be difficult to measure.

Particularly for state schools, sports helps maintain support from taxpayers and politicians. Clotfelter looked at who attended football games in the chancellor's box at several universities, including N.C. State and UNC-Chapel Hill.

"If UNC Charlotte got a look at who the guests are in the box at Kenan Stadium - that's enough reason (to start a football program)," he said. "These are people who could really help the university in the long run."

Universities have academic sides, and they have cultural sides, which Clotfelter described as "a cross between Halloween and religion." But Clotfelter said it is unwise to dismiss the cultural side.

Tailgating and screaming fans, Clotfelter said, are as much a part of American universities as physics labs and seminars on Milton.

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UNCW students feeling pinch of budget cuts

By Jason Gonzales
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In their first week of classes, students at the University of North Carolina Wilmington have taken notice of budget cuts.

With some classes at the school increasing in size and fewer classes available, senior Kristin Black said she and her fellow students are feeling the effects.

"We are all really aware of the budget cuts," she said. "We can tell for different departments it's been an issue."

In July, the UNC system Board of Governors cut UNCW's budget by 15.8 percent, bringing the school's budget allocation down to $89 million. The cut was part of a $414 million cut across the state system by the N.C. General Assembly. Most school's budgets were cut by about 16 percent.

After the $16.6 million cut, school officials said it would be hard not to keep the smaller budget from impacting the classroom.

Making the reduction worse was a requirement that the school stop spending during the month of June to reduce the state's 2010-2011 shortfall. UNCW racked up $1.3 million in expenses that month.

For Black, the cuts have meant looking elsewhere for credits to graduate on time.

"I am going to graduate in December and had to find some online classes at a different university to get my credit hours fulfilled," the film studies and French major said. "If I hadn't, I would have had to go another semester."

Students have also noticed teachers are teaching more classes, junior Jeanelle Johnson said.

"You have teachers teaching double now," she said.

She said she noticed faculty members trying to be more efficient in how they grade and teach.

"You can tell they are a little stressed, but I think all of my professors are doing well so far," she said.
Charlie Maimone, vice chancellor for business affairs, said the bigger impact from the cuts could be seen in the spring semester.

"We remain concerned about the need to make some tough adjustments to spring semester," he said in a message. "The second half of the year is still an unknown."

That's because the amount of both tuition and state support that the school receives will determine the number of courses and sections that UNCW is able to offer, he said.

As class sizes double, some students have had trouble finding the classes they need, students said.

Many of the students are on wait lists for classes. Others couldn't get into classes at all.

Junior Carissa Ambramowski is one student who was unsure she could get into any of her classes.

"I had overrides for every single one of my classes," she said.

She said she worries she will be at the university for much longer than she wants.

"If I don't get my prerequisites on time, I have to wait a whole year before they are offered again," she said.

Black said she feels fortunate that she won't have to worry about not graduating on time, but others won't be so lucky. She said she feels for the students and professors.

"All of this definitely makes things stressful," she said.

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Bob Morse runs U.S. News and World Report’s Best Colleges guide.

**U.S. News college rankings are denounced but not ignored**

By Daniel de Vise

Bob Morse is a wonk, a number-cruncher who works in a messy office at a struggling publishing company in Georgetown.

He’s also one of the most powerful wonks in the country, wielding the kind of power that elicits enmity and causes angst.

Morse runs U.S. News & World Report’s annual Best Colleges guide, the oldest and best-known publication to rank America’s premier colleges.

The annual release of the rankings, set for Sept. 13 this year, is a marquee event in higher education. Some call it the academic equivalent of the Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue.

Colleges broadcast U.S. News rankings on Web sites and in news releases, tout them in recruiting pamphlets, alumni magazines and “Dear Colleague” letters, and emblazon them on T-shirts and billboards. Institutions build strategic plans around the rankings and reward presidents when a school ascends.

“U.S. News doesn’t advertise the rankings,” Morse said in a recent interview at the publication’s headquarters. “The schools advertise for us.”

Morse, 63, has endured for two decades as chief arbiter of higher education’s elite.
No one can stake a credible claim to academic aristocracy without a berth on the first page of a U.S. News list. He is to colleges what Robert Parker is to wine.

College presidents dismiss the rankings. They line up behind conference microphones to denounce Morse and his methods.

Privately, college administrators fret about rankings and ponder how to move up. Presidents and deans telephone U.S. News several times a week to ask “why they rank the way they do,” Morse said. He usually takes the calls himself.

At industry meetings, Morse answers his critics in a halting monotone. He speaks with a mild stutter.

“His manner is disarming and, in its own way, very effective,” said Ted Fiske, a fellow traveler in the college-guide business, who rates colleges but does not rank them. “It just sort of takes the air out of the room.”

The rankings have changed the way colleges do business. Critics see their influence every time an institution presses alumni for nominal donations, coaxes noncommittal students to apply or raises the SAT score required for admission.

Twenty-eight years after the release of the first U.S. News lists, Morse and his publication dominate the college-ranking business they spawned. Last year’s publication drew more than 10 million Internet hits on launch day.

In a conference room one recent afternoon, Morse heard reports from a group of overworked editors and producers, many in their 20s and wearing comfortable shoes.

“We have a lot to get through. We’re two weeks away from launch,” said Anita Narayan, deputy education editor. Conversation drifted from the “countdown clock” on the U.S. News Web site to potential media coverage to a shift in categories that will place the U.S. Air Force Academy among liberal arts schools for the first time.

The rankings typically make up more than half of the Web traffic at U.S. News, a onetime news magazine that retreated from weekly to biweekly to monthly and finally ceased print publication altogether this year. Morse presides over a staff of six.

Many of the nation’s college presidents, deans and professors say the rankings are worthless. They contend that ranking colleges is as senseless as ranking zoo animals: Every college is unique. So, too, are their applicants.
“The question is not, ‘What’s the best college?’ ” Fiske said. “The question is, ‘What’s the best college for me?’ ”

U.S. News declared Harvard the best university in the nation last year, awarding it a perfect score of 100 based on a formula that considered such factors as acceptance rate (7 percent), graduation rate (98 percent) and student-to-faculty ratio (7 to 1).

The ranking did not measure how much Harvard students learn, how much they read and write, or how many go on to graduate school or high-paying jobs. Much of that data, to be fair, is not publicly available. To Morse’s critics, it is a fatal flaw.

“This is the prime fallacy of U.S. News: They think they’re measuring excellence, but they don’t have measures of excellence,” said Paul Glastris, editor of Washington Monthly, one of several publications that offer alternative rankings. “They don’t deliver the thing they say they deliver.”

To its credit, U.S. News created a means for the public to compare institutions on matters of admission and completion — and did it two decades ahead of a surging national movement toward greater accountability in higher education.

U.S. News first ranked colleges in 1983. The editors were trying to break out of third place among newsmagazines (after Time and Newsweek) with a campaign of consumer-friendly “news you can use.” The idea was to list the best colleges in order of quality, the way Consumer Reports ranked automobiles and dishwashers.

Morse is neither a journalist nor a stereotypical East Coast snob. He has an economics degree from the University of Cincinnati, which his publication ranked 156th among national universities last year, with an overall score of 29. He has an MBA from Michigan State, which was ranked 79th.

He joined U.S. News in 1976 as part of its economics unit, a team of non-journalists who wrote studies to which journalists would append quotes. He moved to the rankings team in 1987 and has overseen the annual project since 1989.

The first rankings judged colleges on a single factor, academic reputation, as measured by presidents in a survey. Morse designed a more sophisticated survey that is still in use, with some tweaks, today.

Graduation and freshmen retention rates count for the largest share of the 100-point ranking, 27.5 percent, with extra points for schools whose
graduation rates exceed statistical expectations based on socioeconomic mix and other factors. Academic reputation counts for 22.5 percent, based on surveys completed by presidents, provosts, admission deans and high school guidance counselors. Faculty resources (including student-faculty ratio) count for 20 percent. Selectivity (including admission rate) counts for 15 percent, financial resources for 10 percent, and alumni giving for 5 percent.

The rankings have always mirrored the established order: Harvard, Princeton and Yale top the list of national universities; Amherst and Williams generally head the list of liberal arts schools.

Some former U.S. News employees say Morse and others have engineered the rankings to guarantee that the same schools come out on top, allegations laid out in a 2000 Washington Monthly article. Morse denies ever putting his thumb on the scales.

College presidents complain that schools near the top of the list never change. That’s not entirely true.

Since 1991, Columbia has risen from 10th to fourth among national universities; the University of Pennsylvania, another private institution, climbed from 13th to fifth; and Northwestern from 23rd to 12th. The University of California at Berkeley has dropped from 13th to 22nd and the University of Virginia from 18th to 25th.

Critics say the ranking undervalues public universities because it measures wealth and they are not wealthy. Since 1991, each of the five public institutions ranked highest on the U.S. News list has slipped at least seven places.

“Chancellors and presidents only quote rankings when their schools are doing well, and so I never quote U.S. News at all, ever,” said Robert J. Birgeneau, Berkeley’s chancellor.

Other publishing firms have followed U.S. News into the rankings business, including big names such as Kiplinger and Forbes. None has seriously challenged U.S. News, which has the advantage of being first and, critics say, of affirming the status quo.

Asked whether he remembers when U.S. News had its first competitors, Morse replied, “I’m not sure that we have competitors now.”

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Grad school deans: Don’t be ruled by U.S. News rankings

By Daniel de Vise

John Garvey remembers the day he met with Bob Morse, the man behind the U.S. News & World Report college rankings.

Garvey was perturbed not by how his school, Boston College, had fared in the rankings; he was worried about its law school.

Along with its signature Best Colleges rankings, U.S. News publishes another compendium called Best Graduate Schools. It’s prepared on a separate calendar, published on a different date and received with bated breath by deans across the land.

College presidents brace for backlash from trustees and alumni when their institution slips a spot or two in the premiere collegiate rankings. Within the smaller universe of professional schools, the effect is considerably more intense.

Garvey met with Morse a decade ago, in a year that had seen the Boston College law school drop about five places in the rankings and “it seemed like the sky was falling.”
U.S. News rankings of law, medicine, business and education schools largely define the pecking order in each of those disciplines, according to deans. There’s little movement at the top of each list; farther down, smaller programs with tiny statistical fluctuations can rise or fall five or 10 positions in a single year, setting off a firestorm among fretful alumni and a round of heartburn among administrators.

Garvey, who is now president of Catholic University of America, was then dean of Boston College Law. He sought a meeting with Morse to talk about why the school had fallen so precipitously.

He suspected, and Morse confirmed, that the program had fallen largely because of a single metric, the share of graduates who had found jobs. That statistic makes up a healthy share of the rankings; many good programs boast employment rates near 100; a program whose employment rate drops a few points can plummet in the rankings. Boston College Law currently ranks 27th on the U.S. News list.

“If you have two fewer people who get a job in a year,” Garvey recalled, “you can drop 40 places in the ordinal ranking in that category.”

He and Morse had “a very pleasant and useful conversation,” Garvey said. The dean humbly suggested Morse might consider using a three-year average of employment rates to soften the impact of a single down year. Evidently, Morse did not concur; the current survey methodology page suggests the publication still bases its rankings on one year’s data.

“I’m sure I was just one in a long line of deans who queued up to talk to him about why they weren’t doing as well as they thought they should in the rankings,” Garvey said. “Deans worry about it, because prospective students attach way too much significance to minor differences in the rankings.”

Michael J. Feuer is the new dean of the George Washington University education school, which ranks 35th on the U.S. News list. He, too, worries about rank.

“Yes, the rankings matter to me. And most of my fellow deans here say the same thing,” he said.

The rankings have their origins “in a very healthy human instinct, which is to hold institutions accountable for their performance and their quality,” he said. But the high statistical gloss of the publication creates the impression “that these rankings have real scientific meaning. And they don’t. And that’s the rub.”

Feuer has sat in conference rooms filled with ed-school deans who have tried very hard to convince Morse that ranking education schools is not a good idea. But the rankings endure, and they sell, and they ultimately influence the behavior of the deans.

“I’m trying hard to not let the rankings dictate what we do here,” Feuer said.
Doug Guthrie is dean of GW’s business school, ranked 52nd by U.S. News. Guthrie is a relatively new dean. “And, actually, I think a lot more about them now than I did before,” he said, “because as a dean, you have to think of these things.” There is talk across academia of college administrators playing to the rankings: investing in improvements designed to raise an institution’s rank. That’s more easily done in a small professional school, where it is theoretically possible to create big gains simply by engineering each year’s entering class. One easy way is to admit fewer students, favoring those with the highest test scores and grades. A business school dean who does that can improve the numbers across several categories: GPA, GMAT score, acceptance rate and, indirectly, graduation and employment rate.

“You kind of have to pay attention to the rankings and you have to kind of build your school around the rankings,” Guthrie said. “And that’s deeply problematic.” Phoebe Haddon is dean of the University of Maryland law school, which ranks 42nd in U.S. News. About a decade ago, she served on a panel with Morse, and she took his rankings to task.

“His response was, ‘I sell magazines. No one has to accept the way I use information to rank law schools. That your colleagues use them is something you ought to talk to them about,’” Haddon said.

Some in academia argue that ranking professional schools is far more credible than ranking colleges: professional schools are, after all, much smaller and more homogeneous than entire colleges. Haddon disagrees: She thinks the professional school rankings “tend to generalize about things that are not generalizable.” She wishes the law-school community disregarded the rankings. “But the sad reality is that my alumni do say, ‘Where do we stand in the rankings?’ And my students are concerned about whether we move up in the rankings or we don’t, and so are my faculty.”

This year, Haddon successfully raised a $30 million gift from a foundation, the largest in her school’s history. She did it for the good of the school - - and also for its ranking.

“I can say that anything I do that has in mind the rankings also serves the other things I think are important,” she said. “That’s my principled way of doing it.”