THE DAILY CLIPS

September 9, 2009

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Budget cuts strike sour note for string programs at local schools

By Kim Grizzard
The Daily Reflector

Wednesday, September 09, 2009

A university strings program that was launched to work in harmony with area elementary schools is now having to perform solo.

The East Carolina String Project began last year to provide supplemental instruction to fourth- and fifth-grade students. Last year’s 40 project participants were required to be enrolled in their school orchestra programs.

But this year, young musicians can study at ECU with no strings attached. That’s because strings programs are no longer available to Pitt County’s elementary students.

"Last year when there was a fourth- and fifth-grade strings program at the elementary level, it was a nice complement," said Greg Hurley, an associate professor in ECU’s School of Music and director of the ECU String Project. "Unfortunately, this past year, with budget cuts, the fourth- and fifth-grade program was cut, so we will try to provide instruction that the string program in the schools was doing before."

For students like Kayla Andrews, who enrolled in orchestra last year as a fourth-grader at Bethel, the university program is the only way to continue studying violin. Last year, Kayla participated in both the school and the university programs.

"I can't play it (at school) this year," Kayla, a 10-year-old fifth grader, said. "I can play at the ECU String Project this year, but at school they canceled it."

In a letter sent in May to parents of fourth- and fifth-grade orchestra students, Pitt County Schools Arts Education Coordinator Jane Austen Behan announced that funding for their children’s programs had been redirected to middle school and high school orchestra programs.

ECU senior Deborah Ramos, who works with the String Project, said delaying strings instruction in elementary school will eventually affect performance at other levels.

"In a string instrument, it takes a few years just to get the basics down," said Ramos, a music education and cello performance major from Chesapeake, Va. "By the time they usually get to middle school, they have the basics. If they don’t have that, you’re going to have to start from scratch at sixth grade. Probably when they get to high school, they’re not going to be able to play some of the advanced pieces they play now."

ECU senior Christina Haake hopes the ECU project, the only one of its kind in the state, can help bridge that gap.

"Hopefully, we can keep pushing for the schools to get the strings back," Haake, a senior music education major from Cary, said. "I’m so glad we got this started and got this rolling before the schools had to let this (elementary strings instruction) go."

The university received a five-year grant for the project, funded by the Dana Foundation through the National String Project Consortium. The consortium, now in its 10th year, provides instruction to more than 2,000 children at 35 universities in 24 states.
The NSPC grew out of a program that was started more than half a century ago at the University of Texas. Hurley taught in the program while studying for his master’s degree.

“That’s where I felt like I really learned to teach,” he said, “because it gave me hands-on experience with kids before I ever set foot in a classroom.”

Training music teachers continues to be a goal of the NSPC, which has trained 250 public school strings teachers in the last five years.

“The idea behind starting these string projects was we needed to attract teachers to the profession,” Hurley said. “There’s been a national shortage of string teachers.”

The NSPC has more than 300 university students serving as teachers for young musicians. In the project’s first year at ECU, six student teachers participated.

Under Hurley’s direction, university students work with younger musicians once a week in a large ensemble. At other sessions, students receive small-group instruction.

“I think it’s a great opportunity both for the kids and for the students,” Ramos said. “I know I learned a lot last year.”

So did Miranda Boyd-Weakley, 11. Now a sixth-grader at C.M. Eppes Middle School, Miranda participated in the program last year as a fifth-grade violinist at Elmhurst.

“They’re interactive, at your school you only have one orchestra teacher,” Miranda said. “At ECU ... it’s almost individual.”

Miranda’s mother, Robin Boyd, said her daughter enjoyed the individual attention. She credits the program, in part, for Miranda’s being selected for All-County Orchestra.

“I think that she benefitted from it,” Boyd said. “I think it gave Miranda some more confidence in her playing. I think it taught her that she can do it.”

Project participants pay $45 a semester for the twice weekly sessions. The program does not provide instruments or books.

“Our fees are kept purposely low,” Hurley said, “so we can attract a variety of people.”

The project also has expanded to include sixth grade so that students enrolled last year have the option to continue their studies. Experienced students will be taught separately from those who have never picked up an instrument.

“Our role is kind of changing,” Hurley said. “We will be introducing some kids for the first time to the instrument.

“When I wrote the grant it was purposely decided that we would choose fourth- or fifth-grade students because that was the age they were starting in schools,” he said. “... Now we’re going to begin kids without them.”

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First Voyages of Discovery series to explore black pirates

By Josh Humphries
The Daily Reflector

Tuesday, September 08, 2009

A familiar topic with a twist will be the focus of the first talk in the Voyages of Discovery Lecture Series at East Carolina University.

Marcus Rediker, chairman of the Department of History at the University of Pittsburgh, will deliver “Black Pirates: The Curious Early History of the Amistad Rebellion,” at 7 p.m. Thursday at Wright Auditorium.

Tickets are $10 for the general public and free for ECU students, faculty and staff.

John Tucker, director of the lecture series, said he expects about 400 people at the lecture, the first in a series of six that will take place at Wright Auditorium this year.

“This is the opening lecture, the Lawrence F. Brewster Lecture in History, and it, in many respects, represents the diversity that will be part of the series as a whole this year,” Tucker said. “It speaks to the identity of so many who are associated with East Carolina University Pirates but from the unexpected angle of black pirates.”

Tucker said the lecture will delve into how slave captives on the Amistad ship took control of the ship from their captors, became what may be described as pirates and eventually free men.

Rediker was born in Owensboro, Ky., in 1951 to a working-class family with roots in the mines and factories of Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia.

He attended Vanderbilt University, dropped out of school and worked in a factory for three years before graduating in 1976 with a bachelor’s degree from Virginia Commonwealth University. He went on to the University of Pennsylvania for graduate study, earning master’s and doctorate degrees in history.


The Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences lecture series also will feature Gloria Steinem on Nov. 6, Mark Ravina on Oct. 6, Walter Brueggemann on Jan. 26, Trudier Harris on Feb. 17, and Theda Perdue on March 18.

Contact Josh Humphries at jhumphries@coxnc.com or (252) 329-9565.

Series Begins

What: Voyages of Discovery Lecture Series

Who: Marcus Rediker, chairman of the history department at the University of Pittsburgh


When: 7 p.m., Thursday

Where: Wright Auditorium at ECU
Community papers

News & Observer | newobserver.com | 2008 NCAA Men's Bracket
At UNC-CH, journals on the chopping block

Submitted by eferrer on 09/01/2009 - 05:45
Tags: Campus Notes | academic journals | Bill Marzluff | biochemistry | health sciences

Attention, UNC Chapel Hill faculty: that scholarly journal you like thumbing through from time to time may be on the chopping block.

So if you can’t live without the Belgian Journal of Botany, or the European Journal of Protistology, or the Journal of Cutaneous Pathology, or any of the other 800 or so titles the university is poised to cancel, you’d best write a strongly-worded e-mail.

In this era of budget cutting, the university stands to save hundreds of thousands of dollars by killing off subscriptions to hundreds of journal subscriptions, some arcane, some outdated, many very, very expensive.

The Health Sciences Library has identified 153 titles that alone will save $322,000. And the main UNC-CH library system has 640 more titles it is expecting to discontinue.

In deciding what to cut, library staffers have surveyed faculty and looked at usage. They know which journals are popular and which are rarely used, but rely as well on the surveys to find the titles that are used rarely but are still important.

"Sometimes, the audience for a journal is a small group, but it may be very important to them," said Christie Degener, with the health sciences library.

The health sciences library spends about $3 million a year on about 4,300 books and serials each year, so the 153 titles to be axed are just a fraction.

Still, Degener said she’d like not to have to do so.

"We are now down to issues people use," she said. "We’ve gotten beyond the fat."

Bill Marzluff, for one, is nonplussed by the cancellations. Marzluff is an associate dean in the UNC-CH medical school director of its molecular biology and biotechnology program.

Asked his reaction to the cancellation of several titles related to his field, including one, "Biotechnology and Bioengineering," which costs the university $6,352 for a one-year subscription, he said "That is an outrageous price."

"These are not anywhere near the top tier," he continued. "It doesn't mean they don't have some good stuff in them. But I didn't see anything on that list that made me think, as a scientist, that I wouldn't have access to something I needed."

While faculty members rely heavily on journals, they have learned ways around the traditional subscription format. Often, the university library can find an issue or article at another university library. Or, a researcher can buy a single article rather than an entire issue or subscription. Some researchers even ask the author of an article directly for a copy if it's important.

Sharon Campbell, a UNC-CH biochemistry researcher, calls journals the lifeblood of her work, a "precious resource." And yet she too understands the need to trim costs.

"Understanding and having access to literature is critical; you want to know who is doing
what," she said. "But on the flip side, if the journals aren't being accessed much and the university is having budget cuts, there's always a [different] way to get them."

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Study tracks illness before symptoms surface

Duke keeps tabs on germs' spread

BY SARAH AVERY, Staff Writer

DURHAM - Hacking loudly but on the mend, Duke University freshman Sean Cadley emerged from two days of self-imposed isolation Tuesday sporting a new pair of "bronchitis flip-flops."

She bought the sandals with lucre she earned for participating in a large study that aims both to track how cold and flu viruses spread and to see how well a new diagnostic method that Duke scientists developed can detect illness before symptoms arise.

The researchers, financed by the Department of Defense, hope that by evaluating their diagnostic tool, they also can provide timely insights into the spread of H1N1 flu and the effectiveness of simple prevention efforts such as isolation and good hand hygiene.

"We can identify where there are hot spots on campus and where we need to reinforce the messaging that goes out," said Dr. Chris Woods, an infectious disease specialist at Duke and the Durham VA Medical Center who is leading the research.

Woods and a team of scientists launched the study on the heels of an announcement last month that they had developed a new way of detecting respiratory infections. The method identifies genetic markers that the immune system produces when faced with different pathogens. These markers are evident even before patients report symptoms, and detecting them early could curb the spread of disease and lead to quicker interventions.

The Duke scientists are developing a doctor's office test that can read these genetic markers in blood.

Findings now and later

The study, which aims to enlist between 500 and 800 students, will provide data about the
accuracy of the diagnostic tool. Those findings will be reported within a year after all the blood samples are analyzed, study leaders said.

But the information about how sickness is spreading through the student community will be monitored in real time, said Bradly Nicholson, who is leading the team collecting serum samples from students.

Students' job

The study recently began enrolling students in Duke dormitories, offering $25 gift cards to those who agree to give blood and post daily health updates that will alert researchers of any illness symptoms.

Students who report coughs, fevers, aches and other classic signs of respiratory ailments will be visited by a researcher who will draw more blood and run a nasal swab.

In addition, the researchers will get in touch with friends, roommates and others in close contact with the sick student, asking for their participation so that the researchers can track the concentric circles of infection.

For science (and money)

Cadley, from New York City, was an especially sought-after candidate for the study because she's been sick, giving researchers a good starting point.

And because she was already sick, she earned $75 for her participation -- enough money to buy a pair of flip-flops emblazoned with the Duke insignia.

"I still have money left over," she said.

Her close contacts got an even richer deal. Each was offered $150, because they were asked to give blood for five days.

Ten of her friends snapped up the chance.

The students, while enticed by the money, said they also appreciate the opportunity to advance science.

"It's a good cause," said Scott Rong, a freshman pre-med major from Sunnyvale, Calif.

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With Swine Flu Returning, Families Can Reduce Risk of Transmission

By Manoj Jain
Special to The Washington Post
Tuesday, September 8, 2009

Last winter, a few months before the first outbreak of H1N1 flu, my 13-year-old became ill, first with a cough and runny nose, and then with low-grade fever and nasal congestion. It was not severe enough to have her miss school, but we had her skip indoor soccer practice. A week later her older sister, who shares her room, had the same constellation of symptoms; then my wife and my youngest son. Over a three-week period I carefully tracked the passage of the virus within the family.

This is nothing new for me. I'm an infectious-disease doctor, and a standard question for my patients is: "Is anyone else in the family sick?" The home is always prime territory for sharing disease. But the resurgence of swine flu as summer ends -- already my hospital is admitting two or three cases a day -- has made me reexamine just how viruses spread, as well as what we can do about it.

The H1N1 flu virus, like the seasonal influenza virus and like most other cold viruses, travels by three major routes: close-contact respiratory droplets, the surface of inanimate objects and hand-to-face transfer.

Let's consider the droplets: You've probably seen one of those high-speed photographs of a person coughing or sneezing, emitting a spray of viral particles resembling the Milky Way. A percentage of those droplets remain in the air long enough to find their way to the nasal passages of anyone within three to six feet of the sneezer. The percentage varies with temperature and humidity: Peter Palese of the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York says that close-contact studies using guinea pigs -- which are susceptible to infection from human flu viruses -- found that the flu virus was transmitted almost 100 percent of the time in situations where the temperature was below 41 degrees and the relative humidity was below 50 percent.

That's a good reason to sneeze and cough into our tissues, elbows or shoulders, even though the infection rate drops in warmer, more humid environments.

The droplets can also land on shared surfaces such as a dining table, sofa or computer keyboard. How long the virus remains infectious depends on several circumstances: It lasts longer on a stainless-steel tabletop than on cloth or tissue, for example.

"Because there are a number of factors, such as temperature and presence of mucus, involved, there is a wide range of time that a virus can persist outside the body," said Matthew J. Arduino of the coordinating center for infectious diseases at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Generally speaking, influenza viruses can persist for 24 hours to seven days on a nonporous surface."

At my hospital, an infectious-disease doctor was convinced he caught a virus from the keyboards in the intensive care unit. So at our house, once the viral illness hit, I routinely wiped the keyboard clean with an alcohol swab.
The other route for viral infection is the hands touching the eyes, nose and mouth. Most of us frequently touch our faces: We put things in our mouths, rub our eyes or noses, lick a finger to turn a page, adjust our glasses. I was unable to find any data on how often we do such things, so at a recent meeting with five people at my local medical society, I decided to keep a private tally. Over a five-minute period I counted 17 hand-to-face touches, a rate of about 40 touches per person per hour. At another time, during a hospital training session, I did spot checks on 10 people every 10 minutes. I noticed that at any given check, three or four people were touching their hands to their face. Obviously, our hands are key to transmission of viruses and bacteria.

But what can we do about it? In the hospital, I use sanitizer on my hands and wear gloves for every patient encounter. At home, during the viral outbreak, I was meticulous in my hand washing and insisted on the kids' doing the same. I know you're tired of hearing about hand washing, but there is strong evidence that it works: In one Detroit study, schoolchildren who washed their hands four times a day had 21 percent fewer sick days due to respiratory illness than did students in general, and 57 percent fewer days lost due to upset stomachs.

Once someone in the home has the flu, CDC guidelines suggest that, among other precautions, that person should wear a mask "if available and tolerable."

There are two main types of masks: the common, soft surgical or dust mask, and the tight-fitting N95 mask, which screens about 95 percent of small droplets. At the hospital, where we use N95s, we find them effective but uncomfortable and even suffocating after a few minutes. I don't recommend them for household use.

The soft surgical masks, though less protective, also offer some clinical benefit. In a 2009 study involving sick schoolchildren in Australia, the use of soft masks reduced the risk of acquiring infection by 60 to 80 percent. Given that the soft mask does not screen all the viral droplets, I suspect some of the protection from the masks came from preventing hand-to-face contact.

If H1N1 or a severe flu virus got into my home, I would not hesitate in masking myself or members of my family. But during our viral infection earlier this year, I decided against it, mainly because the disease was quite mild.

I did choose to practice "social distancing." I slept in the guest bedroom for a few nights when my wife was ill; she understood. We banned our 10-year-old son from crawling into bed when he was coughing; he pouted. All hugs were on hold, which did not sit well with our teenage daughters. We didn't share drinks.

Taking precautions reduces, but does not eliminate, the chance of infection. Ironically, as the disease went through my family, the fact that I remained healthy began to make me feel guilty and a little left out. After three weeks, I began to wonder: Was I not really close to these people I love? Or, with a little bit of magical thinking, was the virus avoiding me out of some kind of professional courtesy?

A few days later I woke up with a sore throat, nasal congestion and a low-grade fever. It actually felt good to feel bad.

Manoj Jain is an infectious-disease specialist in Memphis and an adjunct assistant professor at the Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University in Atlanta. Comments: health@washpost.com.
Colleges find juicy titles swell enrollment

Many opt for courses like ‘Economics of Sin’

By Peter Schworm, Globe Staff | September 8, 2009

Boston College German studies professor Michael Resler went searching for a way to boost flagging interest in his “German Literature of the High Middle Ages” class a few years ago, and settled on the idea of simply giving the course a sexier name. The resulting “Knights, Castles, and Dragons” nearly tripled enrollment.

Resler then replaced his class on “The Songs of Walter von der Vogelweide,” a great German lyric poet, with “Passion, Politics, and Poetry in the Middle Ages.” Again, enrollment swelled.

“I suppose the moral of the story is that we live in an age where everything has to be marketed in order to find a willing audience,” Resler mused.

As schools compete for students and faculty come under pressure to boost enrollment in their classes, colleges from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst to Wellesley are jazzing up course catalogs to entice a generation of students drawn to the dramatic. This year’s offerings include crowd-pleasing topics like massacres, superheroes, and sin.

“The titles are much more playful than before, no doubt about it,” said Bob Cluss, a biochemistry professor and dean of curriculum at Middlebury College. “I think it has to do with a younger generation of faculty who understand it’s an opportunity to catch students’ eyes.”

Jessica Holmes, a 38-year-old economics professor at Middlebury, is part of the younger wave. This fall, she will teach Economics of Sin, a titillating title that has sparked sharp interest, with even faculty, staff, and community members looking to audit the class.

“In what other economics class will they have the opportunity to explore pornography, prostitution, crime and punishment, drugs and drug legalization, the sale of human organs, and gambling?” Holmes asked.

The trend toward more inventive, provocative course names reflects a broader movement of professors using more creative teaching methods to capture students’ interest, Holmes and other academics say.

“As you can imagine, it is a lot easier to get students to debate the economic arguments for and against the legalization of prostitution than to discuss the latest employment estimates,” Holmes said.

In that way, the catchy titles go beyond savvy marketing, a shorthand way to show students raised on text messaging and Facebook that the course has a contemporary edge. They also signal a shift away from stuffy lectures and abstruse textbooks to discussion-based, multimedia classes, and winkingly suggest the class might be entertaining.

“The title is just to be fun because the course is supposed to be,” Alice Cheung, a biochemistry professor at UMass-Amherst, said of her forthcoming course, The Light Fantastic: Wonders of Biology Under the Microscope.

As a freshman seminar, the class is designed to be general, and Cheung said an overly scientific name might scare students off.
Cheung isn't the only UMass-Amherst professor to indulge in a bit of whimsy. Future economists, along with poets and paleontologists, are invited to the freshman seminar Dinosaur Tracks, Communes, Massacres & Poets, and a classics course is dubbed Achilles to Batman: Where are the Heroes?

Not to be outdone, Suffolk University offers freshmen an array of tantalizingly titled seminars, including the sprawling Sacred Hoops, Sneaker Pimps, and Hoop Dreams: Race, Gender, and Consumerism in 20th Century American Basketball.

The professor, Rich Miller, said the course has filled up quickly, and that several students told him it was the intriguing title that grabbed their attention.

"It creates a buzz," he said. "It gives it some street cred."

Miller, 40, said that while teaching English 101 is his "bread and butter," the seminar gives him a chance to experiment a bit. Students pick up on that, he said.

While the class takes a serious look at basketball's cultural influence, Miller said the trendy title has drawn a bit of good-natured derision from his scholarly colleagues.

"You definitely get a little razzing in the hallways," he said.

Yet many professors are following Miller's lead in hopes of coaxing more students into their classrooms. Students have a lot of options, faculty members say, and a little sparkle doesn't hurt.

"The dean's office monitors enrollment, and humanities tend to suffer," said Nicolas de Warren, philosophy professor at Wellesley College who is coteaching The Stars and the Sages: Philosophy and the Cosmos. "With such a rich offering of courses, there's a kind of competition, and titles that speak immediately to students can make a difference."

Naming courses is a delicate craft, de Warren and others say. Ideally, they are catchy but not campy, fun but not frivolous. They can't be overly long, to fit in the course catalog and student transcripts, but still have to convey the gist of the subject matter.

When it came time to name his philosophy seminar last year, Jeffrey Bernstein, an associate professor of philosophy at the College of the Holy Cross, went the highbrow route with Iconoclasm and Theogony: A Tale of Two Transgressions. Like Miller, he got some chuckles, but for the opposite reason. "They all said, 'Students are really going to flock to that one,' " he recalled with a laugh. Searching for a peppier, pithier tone, he chose Images of Divinity: Limits. This year, he went further, naming a similar course about concepts of divinity Oh God 1: Concepts.

"It's an invitation," he said. "And it will allow me to elaborate."
How do college students build credit history as rules change?
By Sandra Block, USA TODAY

Some aspects of college life never change. Late-night study sessions. Uninspired cafeteria food. No place to park, ever.

But next year, a familiar site on many campuses will disappear: the tables strategically placed in high-traffic areas, offering free iPods, T-shirts and other goodies to students who sign up for a credit card.

Legislation signed into law in May will prohibit credit card companies from offering gifts to college students who agree to fill out a credit card application. The legislation also prohibits lenders from issuing credit cards to individuals younger than 21 unless they can prove they can afford payments or get a parent or other older individual to co-sign.

Consumer advocates say these reforms are long overdue. However, the provisions don’t take effect until February. In the meantime, credit card companies can continue to market their cards, and some advocates worry that this year’s campaigns will be more aggressive than ever.

“We’re calling it the last open season on credit for college students,” says Gail Hillebrand, attorney at Consumers Union.

Having a credit card can help a student build a good credit history, making it easier to qualify for a car loan or other types of credit after graduation. But the reverse can happen if the student runs up charges he can’t afford to pay, Hillebrand says.

“Building credit is a good idea, but a credit mistake stays on your credit report for seven years, and those seven years can really hurt you,” she says.

So how can a college student build a credit history without getting into trouble? One alternative is to become an authorized user on a parent’s credit card, says Gail Cunningham, spokeswoman for the National Foundation for Credit Counseling. A student who is an authorized user can use her parent’s credit card, and her use of the card is reported to the credit bureaus in her name.

Adding a child as an authorized user allows parents to keep track of the child’s credit card spending, Cunningham says. If the student isn’t abiding by the rules, the parent can remove him as an authorized user, she says. That gives parents a level of control they wouldn’t have if the child had the card in his own name, she says.

Keep in mind, though, that the card holder — not the authorized user — is legally responsible for the credit card debt. For that reason, Cunningham says, parents should establish clear guidelines before adding a child’s name to a card. Otherwise, their own credit score could suffer.

If a student has demonstrated that she can handle the responsibility, it’s appropriate for her to get a credit card in her own name, Cunningham says. Suggestions for selecting the right card:

-Forget about the free T-shirts. Don’t automatically sign up for a card that’s being marketed on campus, “because it’s probably not going to be the best deal out there,” says Ben Woolsey, director of marketing and research for CreditCards.com.


-Forget about rewards cards, too. Who can resist free airline miles or cash back? Well, you should, if you don’t have much money and are trying to use your card responsibly. Rewards programs are designed to encourage card holders to use their cards frequently, which shouldn’t be your goal if you’re a student trying to build a credit history, Woolsey says.

-Don’t be misled by low teaser rates. Some credit card issuers offer a low introductory rate to induce customers to sign up. But if you’re carrying a balance and make a late payment — even by a day — the interest on the money you owe could double or even triple, Consumers Union says.

-Consider a secured credit card, but be aware of the drawbacks. Lenders that issue these cards require you to deposit an amount equal to your credit line. For example, if you want a card with a $500 credit, you would need to deposit $500. These cards are often used by individuals who are trying to build their credit.

-The advantage to secured credit cards is that you can’t run wild, because you can never spend more than you have deposited. But some secured credit cards have high fees, Cunningham says.

Many credit unions offer secured credit cards with low interest rates and fees. You can also search for secured credit cards at www.bankrate.com.

Sandra Block covers personal finance for USA TODAY. Her Your Money column appears Tuesdays. Click here for an index of Your Money columns. E-mail her at: sblock@usatoday.com. Follow on Twitter: www.twitter.com/sandyblock

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