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English teaching instructor Andy Bates had cut off the tip of his thumb in a workshop accident at home and was sitting in the doctor’s office when he had the epiphany.

“I was sitting there feeling sorry for myself when suddenly it dawned on me that there are other people who have given so much for our country — they’ve lost their legs or their lives. It was then that I knew I wanted to do something along the lines of the Wounded Warriors project. And I had an idea about what I could do that might help.”

Bates is an accomplished furniture maker whose works already were scheduled for a November exhibition at Emerge Gallery in downtown Greenville. Bates decided that he would donate the proceeds from the sale of his work to a wounded soldier.

“So I contacted (ECU Assistant Vice Chancellor for Military Programs) Steve Duncan and asked him what opportunities he knew about where I could help. He said he had just learned about a recent ECU graduate who had lost both legs serving in Afghanistan, Nathan Rimpf.”
Army First Lt. Rimpf, who graduated from ECU in 2010, was injured on July 8 in Afghanistan just two months after arriving there. He was transferred to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Washington, D.C., where he continues to receive treatment.

“I knew then that because of this connection — Nathan is an alumnus and a wounded warrior — that he was who I wanted to focus on.”

Bates, who holds an undergraduate and a master’s degree from ECU, and Rimpf have never met but they correspond by email. “He’s already taking his first steps on his new legs, which is just amazing. His doctors have to slow him down, which is such a testimony to his own spirit.”

The exhibition of Bates’ creations will run throughout the month of November. The event kicks off with a reception on Nov. 2.

Will Rimpf be there? “They’ve said they’re treating that as a goal. That would cap off my year to have Nathan here, if only so he can see first-hand the support that the ECU community is showing for him.”

Friends and family of Rimpf also have created wristbands that sell for $5, with all proceeds going to the Nathan Rimpf Support Fund.

Rimpf recently was moved from his hospital room to live in the facility’s outpatient rehabilitation apartments.

**Five ECU students win textbooks in contests**

Five ECU students started this semester with free textbooks, thanks to Dowdy Student Stores. The campus bookstore, which is owned and operated by the university, awarded more than $2,500 for books to the winners of two recent promotions.

Jasmine Cruz of Farmville and Emily B. Stewart of New Bern had the cost of their required textbooks for the fall semester provided. Cruz, a freshman majoring in nursing, was the winner of the summer orientation drawing. All freshmen attending orientation during June and July were invited to enter their names in the drawing.

A 2012 graduate of J.H. Rose High School, Cruz is the daughter of Jose and Linda Cruz of Farmville. Her required textbooks for fall semester totaled $885.

Stewart was the winner of the August graduate student orientation drawing. She is a 2005 graduate of ECU with a degree in apparel merchandising and is pursuing a graduate degree in European history. Her required books totaled $178.
Stewart said she was shocked to learn of her luck. “I mainly entered for the free T-shirt because I never thought I would actually win the books,” she said.

The other students were selected by their academic departments to receive $500 textbook scholarships. Dowdy Student Stores sponsored a contest to reward ECU departments for having the highest percentage of faculty submitting their fall textbook orders on time.

Recreational therapy major Melissa Mingloski of Chester, Va., won the $500 textbook scholarship from the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, winner of the small department category (less than 50 courses).

“She hardworking nature is what stood out the most to faculty and made her a top candidate for this textbook scholarship,” said Jennifer Abbott, academic advisor with the College of Health and Human Performance. “While facing adversity, she has an unwavering spirit and works very diligently to meet her goals.”

The Department of Management Information Systems won the medium department category (50 to 100 courses) and chose Stephon A. Thomas of Wadesboro as its recipient. He is a senior majoring in management information systems and has maintained a 3.9 grade point average while being active in Alpha Kappa Psi and the Association of Information Technology Professionals.

“He is an amazing student and was highly recommended for scholarships by everyone in our department who has taught him,” said Laurie Eakins, teaching instructor in the department.

The Department of Chemistry — large department category (more than 100 courses) winner — recognized Monica Burton of Randleman with the $500 scholarship. She is a senior double majoring in biology and chemistry with an interest in medical and pharmacy schools.

“The Department of Chemistry sought to award this scholarship to a chemistry major with a GPA of 3.5 or higher, an excellent track record in chemistry courses, and a commitment to ECU,” Dr. Allison Danell, associate professor and director of undergraduate studies in the department said. “Monica is an enthusiastic Pirate, evidenced by her work with ECU Ambassadors, has balanced her achievements in her academic courses with productive research endeavors, and is employed by ECU Transit.”

Upcoming Events:
**Tuesday:** Opening of an exhibit of relief carvings, tools and chisels from the collection of Dr. Leonard G. Trujillo, associate professor and chair of the Department of Occupational Therapy in the College of Allied Health Sciences. Exhibit continues until Nov. 6 at Laupus Library. Free.

**Thursday and Friday:** Four Seasons Chamber Music Festival Opening Extravaganza, 7 p.m. Thursday, 8 p.m. Friday, A.J. Fletcher Recital Hall. Concert will feature Hye-Jin Kim, violin; Ara Gregorian, viola/violin; Raman Ramkrishnan, cello; Soyeon Kate Lee, piano. Call 800-ECU-ARTS or visit www.ecuarts.com for tickets.

See www.ecu.edu/cs-ecu/calendar.cfm for times, places and more information on these events and other ECU upcoming activities.
If the Mars rover finds water, it could be H2 ... uh oh!

If Curiosity locates H2O, a simmering NASA controversy will boil over. The rover's drill bits may be tainted with Earth microbes that could survive upon touching water.

By Louis Sahagun, Los Angeles Times

For all the hopes NASA has pinned on the rover it deposited on Mars last month, one wish has gone unspoken: Please don't find water.

Scientists don't believe they will. They chose the cold, dry equatorial landing site in Mars' Gale Crater for its geology, not its prospects for harboring water or ice, which exist elsewhere on the planet.

But if by chance the rover Curiosity does find H2O, a controversy that has simmered at NASA for nearly a year will burst into the open. Curiosity's drill bits may be contaminated with Earth microbes. If they are, and if those bits touch water, the organisms could survive.
The possible contamination of the drill bits occurred six months before the rover's launch last Nov. 26. The bits had been sterilized inside a box to be opened only after Curiosity landed on Mars.

But that changed after engineers grew concerned that a rough landing could damage the rover and the drill mechanism. They decided to open the box and mount one bit in the drill as a hedge to ensure success of one of the most promising scientific tools aboard Curiosity. The drill is to bore into rocks looking for clues that life could have existed on the planet. Even if a damaged mechanism couldn't load a drill bit, at least the rover would have one ready to go.

Under the agency's procedures, the box should not have been opened without knowledge of a NASA scientist who is responsible for guarding Mars against contamination from Earth. But Planetary Protection Officer Catharine Conley wasn't consulted.

"They shouldn't have done it without telling me," she said. "It is not responsible for us not to follow our own rules."

Those rules required sterilization of any part of Curiosity that will touch the surface of the planet, including the drill bits and all six of the rover's wheels. The precaution was taken to preserve the ability to explore water or ice — even if the chances of finding it were remote.

Conley, a microbiologist, said she learned about the unsealing of the box shortly before the launch. By then, it was too late to fix.

Other NASA officials said the decision to open the box of drill bits was a calculated risk.

"Water or ice near the surface in Gale Crater was not a significant probability," said David Lavery, program executive for solar system exploration at NASA headquarters. "We weighed that against the risks of not having a bit mounted in the drill prior to launch, and the specter of not being able to drill any holes at all on Mars."

"Of course, there is always a possibility that Mars will surprise us," Lavery said.

The box containing the bits was unsealed in a near-sterile environment, he said. Even so, the breach was enough to alter aspects of the mission and open a rift at NASA between engineers and planetary protection officials.

Curiosity was first proposed in 2004 under a mission category that would have allowed it to explore a region with ice and water. That category called
for sterilizing portions of the spacecraft that would contact the surface of Mars to avoid contamination of moist areas where microbes — from Earth or from Mars — have the best chances of survival.

On Nov. 1, after learning that the drill bit box had been opened, Conley said she had the mission reclassified to one in which Curiosity could touch the surface of Mars "as long as there is no ice or water."

Conley's predecessor at NASA, John D. Rummel, a professor of biology at East Carolina University, said, partly in jest: "It will be a sad day for NASA if they do detect ice or water. That's because the Curiosity project will most likely be told, 'Gee, that's nice. Now turn around.'"

If water is found, Curiosity could still conduct tests from a distance with instruments including a laser and spectrometers.

About 250,000 bacterial spores throughout Curiosity are assumed to have survived the landing, officials said. Nearly all of them are believed to have perished within minutes of exposure to the harsh Martian conditions in Gale Crater — freezing temperatures, intense ultraviolet radiation and an atmosphere of mostly carbon dioxide.

But scientists have learned in recent years that some Earth life forms can live in space and in at least some of the conditions found on Mars. The European Space Agency discovered that lichens launched on a Russian Soyuz rocket in 2005 survived several days of full exposure to the vacuum of space and ultraviolet and cosmic radiation.

Just this year, Andrew Schuerger, a plant pathologist and expert on the survival of terrestrial microorganisms under Martian conditions, found a bacterium species capable of growing in conditions present on the surface of Mars, including air pressure of just seven millibars. Air pressure on Earth is 1,017 millibars at sea level.

NASA officials announced this week that one month into its two-year mission, Curiosity had made a scheduled pit stop while en route to Glenelg Intrigue, a tantalizing confluence of three types of terrain targeted for the first drilling experiment. The pause allows scientists to run tests on the mechanical joints of the rover's robotic arm and surface sampler, or scoop, and other instruments designed to help crack Mars' mysteries.

Sometime next month, NASA scientists are expected to select a rock at Glenelg Intrigue and bore into it with the drill, which will then transfer aspirin-size samples of powder from the rock into science instruments housed in the belly of the rover. Conley has no concerns that the experiment
will contaminate the site because she believes any surviving organisms will die swiftly.

Fear of microbial contamination of the Martian environment long ago moved NASA and a United Nations space advisory committee to divide the planet's surface into areas based on the probability of encountering ice and water. The group also recommended sterilizing spacecraft destined for areas with ice and water.

Contaminating another planet is an ethical concern for scientists, as well as a practical one.

"We keep learning more and more about Mars and the amazing durability of life," said Bruce Betts, a spokesman for the Planetary Society in Pasadena. "So wouldn't it be tragic if some future expedition were to discover life on Mars only to discover later that it had actually discovered life from Earth?"

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Editorial: Councilman has explaining to do
Sunday, September 9, 2012

Elected officials operate in the public arena and therefore shoulder a responsibility to uphold voters’ confidence in how they conduct themselves. Serving their constituents comes with an expectation to act with transparency — openly and honestly — since holding office is not a right of birth, a frivolous entitlement or an outlet to advance personal agendas.

With the revelation that he might have violated a section of municipal code he has recently led a charge to change, Greenville City Councilman Max Joyner has fallen short if measured by those obligations of office. The District 5 representative should be eager to explain how this came to pass and hope that his answers satisfy those constituents who feel Joyner has forsaken their trust.

Last month, the City Council voted to change a long-standing section of municipal code that limits to three the number of unrelated people sharing a dwelling in the neighborhoods surrounding East Carolina University. The so-called “three-unrelated” rule is not yet fully suspended — the change needs approval by the city’s Planning and Zoning Commission and another council vote — but it would represent a significant change to Greenville’s rental codes.

Leading up to that vote, the council solicited public opinion about the proposal and found widespread opposition, particularly in the Tar River-university neighborhood, where the change was targeted. Councilman Joyner, the leading proponent of this Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative, maintains that rental owners support the change and that it is the best course for the city.
There is no cause to question Joyner’s motivation for advancing this agenda. Operating on a tip, The Daily Reflector confirmed that a home located on 14th Street and owned by Joyner was home to four unrelated renters in apparent violation of the city code. The Greenville Police Department’s Code Enforcement Division is looking into the situation, as it is with a number of complaints filed after the council pursued its change to the “three-unrelated” rule.

It may be that Joyner believed he was in compliance with the rule since the home is located outside the Tar River-university neighborhood. It may be this was simply a misunderstanding. Or it may be something else entirely. Given numerous opportunities to comment or explain, Joyner declined.

That is an unacceptable response, both to his constituents and the larger community. If Joyner hopes to continue his service on the council, he can only do so with the confidence forged through a transparent relationship with the public. He must answer these allegations honestly and hope that residents find that sufficient to deserve their trust.
Johnstone joins staff at Brody medical school
Monday, September 10, 2012

Dr. William Johnstone, an obstetrician-gynecologist, has joined the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University and its group medical practice, ECU Physicians.

Johnstone is a clinical associate professor in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at ECU. He comes to Greenville from Pinehurst, where he was in private practice.

Johnstone has a medical degree from ECU and completed residency training in obstetrics and gynecology at ECU. He also has a law degree from Concord Law School in Los Angeles.

Johnstone is a fellow of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the American College of Surgeons. He is certified by the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

Johnstone’s clinical interests are vaginal surgery, urogynecology, pelvic relaxation and support, and hormone-replacement therapy. His research interest is bioethics.

He sees patients at ECU Women’s Physicians. Appointments are available by calling 744-3850.
The East Carolina University Department of Athletics announced Tuesday that it has reached an agreement for U.S. Cellular to serve as the official wireless provider of the Pirates. The contract, negotiated through Pirate IMG Sports Marketing, will run through June, 2015.

“We are thrilled to have U.S. Cellular join our team as our newest corporate partner,” ECU Director of Athletics Terry Holland said. “It is partnerships such as these that allow us to continue the remarkable growth of our athletic facilities and for our athletes to continue to compete with an undaunted spirit.”

By entering into this sponsorship with East Carolina, U.S. Cellular, who rewards its customers with unmatched benefits and industry-leading innovations designed to elevate the customer experience, will receive official corporate sponsor status including category-exclusive use of ECU marks and logos.

Other elements of the sponsorship include presenting sponsorship of the ECU official Twitter and Facebook pages as well as presenting sponsorship of the Ruffin McNeill and Jeff Lebo television shows. U.S. Cellular will also have a presence at ECU football games and allow fans the opportunity to interact with their mobile devices in a fun an exciting atmosphere.

“U.S. Cellular is excited to partner with East Carolina University,” said Dee Taylor, U.S. Cellular Director of Sales in eastern North Carolina. “We’re proud to be a part of the Greenville community and we join the Pirate Nation in looking forward to a great 2012 season.”

IMG College has been ECU’s multi-media rights holder since 2006.
Tribe mourns death of UNC student

By J. Andrew Curliss - acurliss@newsobserver.com

HOLLISTER–A Native American community grieved on Sunday over the death of one of its brightest, recalling the joy of UNC-Chapel Hill student Faith Hedgepeth. She was a sophomore, Biology major at UNC-Chapel Hill.
Faith Hedgepeth in church sanctuaries, living rooms and at a solemn vigil held at dusk on the sacred grounds of the Haliwa-Saponi tribe.

Hedgepeth’s body was found at her Chapel Hill apartment on Friday. Police are treating the death as a homicide.

The news has left the tribe of about 4,000 members in a rural area roughly 90 minutes northeast of Raleigh without words to express the hurt, many said in interviews.

“It is a huge, huge shock – and that’s to say the least,” said Melissa Richardson, the tribal council’s chairwoman. “Our community is just reeling from this. Numb. How could somebody do this to Faith?”

There were tears on Sunday, and hugs. And some smiles, recalling the way Hedgepeth, 19 lived. Friends said that she planned to be a pediatrician, or perhaps a teacher, and that she wanted to return to the tribe’s area to practice.

Gabrielle Evans, 20, a cousin and a close friend, said they had dreams of working together to help their area.

“She was always thinking of someone else,” Evans said. “The sweetest person ever.”

**Gates Millennium scholar at UNC**

Hedgepeth and Evans both won scholarships from the Gates Millennium Scholars program, giving them a full ride to UNC system schools after “we both worked our butts off for it,” Evans recalled.

The award letters arrived on a Saturday. The next day, at the tribe’s annual powwow, tribal leaders announced the news to all. It was a moment of tremendous pride, many people remembered on Sunday, for the tribal community and for the students.

UNC plans a vigil Monday night, a gathering that comes four years after the campus grieved following the killing of student body president Eve Carson in March 2008.

At the Mt. Bethel Baptist Church in Hollister, a wake will be held Tuesday from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., and a funeral on Wednesday at 2 p.m. The church was a place that was a formative part of Hedgepeth’s life. Her Sunday school teachers spoke of Hedgepeth’s infectious smile. A deacon remembered that children always looked up to her – “the children stuck right to her,” McConnel Silver said.
“You send a child off to college and you think they will be safe,” Silver said. “This … this … this … throws your whole balance in life off.”

Hedgepeth will be buried in the church cemetery.

The church pastor, Willie Silver, recalled on Sunday that Hedgepeth was one of the first to be baptized in the church, rebuilt in 2000 after a fire.

Silver called worshippers to the altar on Sunday, and Evans was the first, embracing the pastor in a long hug as the congregation sang “Amazing Grace.”

“Lord,” the pastor said, “we need each other at times like this.”

Later, as an orange sunset melted into darkness, tribal leaders led a gathering to remember Hedgepeth. It came together in less than day. More than 1,000 people showed up, encircling the grounds and filling bleachers typically used for the annual powwow.

Drummers played and dancers joined in an intertribal dance as Hedgepeth’s family looked on. At one point, many of those in attendance danced in a circle around burning incense. Later, there was an “honor” song.

Hedgepeth’s sister, Rolanda, said Hedgepeth loved her ancestry and her church.

“She was very much loved, and we are very much hurt,” Rolanda Hedgepeth said.

Hedgepeth was especially close with her mother, Connie, and they were last together a week ago to celebrate her mother’s birthday.

**Questions surround death**

Marty Richardson, a doctoral candidate at UNC-Chapel Hill and a member of the tribe who knows much of its history, said he saw Hedgepeth on campus the day before she died.

She was working on a video project for an anthropology class, she told him, and would need his help. The project: She wanted to study the process tribes follow to receive state or federal recognition.

The pastor’s wife, Cynthia Silver, said Hedgepeth helped with mission work and an active teen group in the church.

“Native people are very clannish, in our families and our community,” she said. “You’d have to go 10 miles in any direction to find someone who didn’t know her, her mom, her sister. There’s just a lot of people affected, like we’re all in a tailspin.”
She said the tribe has dealt with sudden sickness, even car accidents.

“But when violence comes against a person – someone so special like Faith – you wonder what could ever drive a person to attack a child? It’s scary.”

Juliet Evans, a family friend who taught Hedgepeth in Sunday school, was like many here who wonder what really happened.

It was a common question, with police saying little to the public.

“Knowing Faith the way I knew her – she was like a lamb, so humble, so innocent – you can’t imagine who would ever want to hurt her,” Evans said.

Some arrived at Sunday’s vigil with “Justice for Faith” painted on their car windows. A collection was taken up, with word that it may be needed to increase reward money for information.

The tribe’s chief, Ronald Richardson, also wonders what happened. On Sunday, he said the moment now was to honor and remember. The tribal government lowered its flag to half staff in her honor.

“She was the epitome, the personification of love, laughter, joy,” he said. “She was just exploding with life and she had her whole life in front of her. So this is tough, no other way to say it.”

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**Haliwa-Saponi history**

The Haliwa-Saponi tribe is the third-largest Native American tribe in the state, after the Cherokee and Lumbee.

Members live close together – more than 3,000 are within a roughly 10-mile radius on mostly rural land along the Halifax County/Warren County line.

The tribe received state recognition in 1965 and is in the process of seeking full federal recognition, though it now receives some money from the federal government.

Members are the descendants of three tribes who inhabited the area prior to European settlement and conflict. For many years, the members called themselves Indians, without a more specific tribal identity. They began using the Haliwa name in the 1950s – a derivative of Halifax and Warren.

In the late 1970s, tribal leaders added Saponi to the name in recognition of an ancient tribe from which many are descended.

In 2000, the tribe opened a school for its members, and it now serves grades kindergarten through high school. The tribe runs a day care and other
programs. But leaders here said they still hope for some other economic development in an area where high unemployment means that many must drive 30 or more miles for jobs. There is no grocery or commerce near the tribal government, other than a Dollar General.

Life for many revolves around churches and the tribal government, leaders said, and Hedgepeth was an integral part of both.
UNC’s Thorp promises faculty that university will learn from scandal

By Dan Kane - dkane@newsobserver.com

CHAPEL HILL—It was a promise UNC-Chapel Hill Chancellor Holden Thorp has made over and over in the three months since announcing one of the worst academic scandals in the university’s history.

But this time it was before a standing-room-only crowd of faculty who came to hear him address the years of no-show classes that predominately benefited athletes.

“No one is more upset about this than I am; no one is more determined than I am,” Thorp told the professors at the first Faculty Council meeting of the academic year. “We are going to use this as a learning experience, and we are going to be a stronger university as a result.”

It was the first opportunity for the full council to delve into the academic fraud scandal that involves at least 54 classes within the Department of African and Afro-American Studies, and dozens more independent study courses over a four-year period that ended with the summer of 2011.

Athletes took up nearly two-thirds of the enrollments in the classes that had little or no instruction, raising concerns they were intended to help keep them eligible to play sports. UNC officials have said the suspect classes are not an athletics concern because non-athletes were also enrolled and were treated the same.

Last week, the university released a statement saying the NCAA continues to think that the academic fraud did not violate NCAA rules. The NCAA later confirmed the statement, but neither it nor the university has explained why the problems did not trigger violations.

Jan Boxill, the faculty chairwoman, introduced two resolutions to the council Friday that drew unanimous support. One affirmed the need for an African and Afro-American Studies Department, pointing out that the investigation has shown only two individuals within the department are responsible for the scandal: the former chairman, Julius Nyang’oro, who was forced to retire July 1; and Deborah Crowder, the former department manager who retired in 2009.
Thorp and Boxill said the department is an essential part of the university and does not deserve calls from some to shut it down or fold it into another department. Kia Caldwell, a professor in the department, drew a standing ovation after reading a statement affirming the department’s mission.

The second resolution endorsed a special faculty committee report that said the university was in effect a campus of two cultures in conflict – academic and athletic. The most revealing detail from that report, released in July, was that some of the officials interviewed said athletes reported being steered by academic counselors to no-show classes.

Since then the director in charge of the academic support program for athletes has been reassigned to another job, though UNC officials said he did nothing wrong.

**All about athletics?**

Thorp spent much of his address talking about the various investigations and reviews that have been completed or are still under way, and noted roughly 70 reform recommendations have been proposed or implemented.

But one professor, Jay Smith, challenged Thorp on the university’s contention that athletics did not drive the scandal. While he praised the university for the reforms, Smith said the university has not been as forthcoming as it should have been.

He cited the last no-show class Nyang’oro taught, AFAM 280, which Nyang’oro created two days before the start of a summer 2011 semester and quickly filled with football players. News & Observer records requests revealed the athletes-only class, which prompted an ongoing criminal investigation.

“The existence of that course alone provides very powerful evidence that the Nyang’oro scandal was all about athletics,” said Smith, a history professor.

He also asked why the university declined to check a test transcript from 2001 that The N&O found on a UNC website that turned out to be that of Julius Peppers, a football and basketball player who is now an All-Pro defensive end for the Chicago Bears. The university had insisted the transcript was fake but did not check records to make sure.

“Instead of confirming the reality of the record and then moving to protect that student’s privacy, the university ignored The N&O’s questions and left that transcript on a publicly accessible website, where it was available for later plundering by N.C. State fans,” Smith said.
Airing dirty laundry

The transcript raises concerns that the no-show classes and questionable independent studies had been going on for at least a dozen years. Nearly all of Peppers’ good grades were in those classes, and without them he would not have been eligible to play sports. Peppers has denied taking part in academic fraud.

Smith said the university “should be doing all we can to get out in front of the press, and to pre-emptively air our dirty laundry, so that we can prove to the world – because we now need to prove it – that there are things more important to UNC than athletics success or the careers of individual faculty or administrators.”

His remarks drew applause from roughly 20 professors.

Thorpe said the university hasn’t done a “perfect job” in addressing the scandal, but federal and state privacy laws, along with “our logistical ability to get the information given the resources we have” played a role in limiting disclosure.

Thorp also said the latest investigation, led by former Gov. Jim Martin, has the authority to go anywhere Martin sees fit to get to the bottom of the scandal. That investigation is expected to be complete by mid-October.

Kane: 919-829-4861
Grads of UNC department say no-show courses not the norm

By Dan Kane - dkane@newsobserver.com

Sam Pride did not envision graduating with a degree in Afro-American Studies when he first stepped on to UNC-Chapel Hill’s campus, but as the history buff from Rocky Mount searched for classes to take, an introductory course within the department quickly put him on the path.

That class, and the subsequent ones he took from the department, broadened his understanding of the world. “It’s another retelling of history that you really don’t learn,” said Pride, who plans to graduate in December. “It just opened my eyes to a whole new world of history and possibilities.”

The curriculum did more than help him discover a part of American history that many have a hard time accepting, let alone understanding. It inspired him to start a mentoring program in which he and several other UNC-Chapel Hill students visit the C.A. Dillon Youth Development Center in Butner, a state facility for youths who have committed serious crimes, to talk about race, history and opportunities.

Many others who have graduated or taken numerous courses within the African and Afro-American Studies Department tell similar stories of enlightenment and inspiration. That’s why they are so disheartened by the scandal that originated within the small department and now has some calling for its end.

“I worked as an undergrad,” said Christina DeLane, a 2006 graduate now in a Washington, D.C., law school. “I had papers to write, things to read, a lot of studying. It was several books in a class. This was real, and to think it wasn’t real for other people is beyond me. You don’t major in African and Afro-American studies to get by. UNC is a hard school.”

A recent internal investigation of the department found 54 classes with little or no instruction over a four-year period, and dozens more independent studies offered with little accountability. Nearly two-thirds of the enrollments in the no-show classes were athletes, with football players representing the largest block.

The no-show classes are a small percentage of the 616 classes held in the department during that period. University officials say only two people in the department were involved in the suspect courses: Julius Nyang’oro, the
former longtime department chairman who was forced into retirement in July, and Deborah Crowder, the longtime departmental manager who retired in 2009.

More evidence suggests the no-show classes and loosely-monitored independent studies went back years beyond the 2007 to 2011 period reviewed by university officials. But Pride, DeLane and several other nonathletes interviewed by The News & Observer who either graduated with degrees from the department or took a high concentration of courses say they knew nothing about classes that offered little instruction or academic rigor.

“Everyone I talked to was shocked by it,” said Rob Stephens, 26, a staff member for the North Carolina State Conference of the NAACP, and a 2009 graduate.

The graduates’ comments about the department’s overall rigor raise more questions about who were the intended beneficiaries of the suspect courses. UNC-CH officials have said the academic fraud is not an NCAA matter because nonathletes were in the classes and were treated the same as athletes. So far, the NCAA has agreed, though other investigations into the fraud continue.

None of those interviewed said they had Nyang’oro as a professor, and some of them said they do not recall meeting him during their time on campus. Jason Warner, a 2006 UNC graduate who is now a doctoral student in African and African-American studies at Harvard University, said he defended his senior thesis paper before Nyang’oro and two other professors, and was impressed with the department chairman.

“I really remember him for his intellect and the questions he would pose to me,” Warner said.

He and other graduates say the small department of roughly 25 professors and instructors has top experts in their fields who are also gifted teachers. One of them, Reginald Hildebrand, was one of five professors this year to receive the university’s top undergraduate teaching award. He and other department professors, however, have declined to be interviewed about the department’s strengths and weaknesses.

**Extensive classwork**

A review of syllabuses shows courses with rich topics and extensive classwork. A syllabus for a 2006 class titled The African American in
Cinema required reading several books, watching more than a dozen films, producing two papers and completing two exams.

University officials say the department also plays an important role in the university’s study abroad programs in Africa, which also provide health care and other community-building services.

But the scandal has caused some people – including a student who published a recent letter in the campus paper – to say the department should be eliminated for being at the heart of the scandal. Others such as Jane Shaw, president of the Pope Center for Higher Education Policy, a conservative think tank, have questioned the need for a separate department that specializes in African and African-American studies, fueling a debate that has gone on at other universities untouched by scandal.

“While the investigations have implicated no one except the former department administrator and the former department chair, a cloud of suspicion seems to have settled over the entire department,” said Jan Boxill, the chairwoman of the university’s Faculty Council, in an email to her colleagues Friday morning. “In a few cases, indeed, some have suggested that two individuals’ misdeeds call into question the scholarly rigor and value of the department’s work as a whole. We must firmly reject such suggestions.”

With Chancellor Holden Thorp’s urging, the council on Friday passed with no dissent a resolution backing the African studies’ department and its mission. When Kia Caldwell, a department professor, read a statement asking for the council’s support she received a standing ovation.

The department has a new chairwoman, Eunice Sahle, and numerous reforms have been put in place to try to prevent a similar scandal. One planned change that might bring relief to the department’s graduates who are now worried about the scandal’s impact on their careers is a new name that better reflects the range of the department’s focus. It will soon be called the Department of African, African American and Diaspora Studies.
The NCAA has communicated with Duke after a New York jeweler filed a lawsuit against former Blue Devils starter Lance Thomas.

Thomas purchased $97,800 worth of jewelry with a $30,000 down payment at Rafaello & Company on Dec. 21, 2009, according to an Associated Press report.

Thomas’ purchase came while the Duke basketball team had dispersed for its holiday break after the Blue Devils’ Dec. 19 victory over Gonzaga in Madison Square Garden.

The team had a few days off before preparing for its Dec. 29 home game against Long Beach State. In that time, Thomas purchased five pieces of diamond jewelry at the Manhattan jeweler, not far from his Scotch Plains, N.J., residence just outside the city.

Now, Rafaello & Co. is suing Thomas for the remaining $67,800, which he agreed to pay within 15 days of his purchase. The lawsuit was filed in Texas in January.

Two pivotal questions could potentially impact Duke: How did Thomas acquire the cash for the down payment, and did he use his status as an athlete to get a loan for the remaining $67,800?
According to the NCAA bylaw 16.01.3, receiving a benefit “is not a violation if it is demonstrated that the same general benefit is available to the institution’s students, their relatives, and friends determined on a basis unrelated to athletics ability.”

Jon Jackson, Duke associate athletic director for media relations, declined to comment beyond his Friday statement that Duke was aware of the lawsuit and looking into it. The AP reported Friday that Duke and the NCAA have communicated about the issue. Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski was unavailable for comment Saturday.

If Thomas is found to have received an extra benefit, the NCAA could rule him ineligible, which could put Duke’s national championship at risk. Thomas played in 40 games that season. He played 35 minutes and scored six points in Duke’s 61-59 victory over Butler in the championship game.

If Thomas received an extra benefit, it might not matter whether Duke knew of his purchase. In 2009, the NCAA ruled that Memphis had to vacate its 2008 season, including its Final Four appearance, because Derrick Rose was retroactively ruled ineligible for a fraudulent SAT score. The NCAA coined the term “strict liability” and concluded that it didn’t matter that Memphis didn’t know Rose was ineligible.

“The institution’s assertion that, prior to the start of the 2007-08 season, it did not have sufficient information to conclude that student-athlete 1’s SAT test would be cancelled was not relevant under the circumstances,” the NCAA wrote.

The “strict liability” ruling broke from the precedent established in the NCAA’s handling of former Duke player Corey Maggette, a member of the Blue Devils’ 1999 Final Four squad. Maggette left Duke for the NBA draft after that season. In 2000, after a federal grand jury indictment was released, Maggette admitted to receiving cash payments from Myron Piggie, a summer basketball coach, before arriving at Duke.

The NCAA investigated and ruled in 2004 that Duke did not and should not have known about the payments, so there was no punishment.

NCAA added bylaw 11.1.2.1 in 2005. It states “a head coach is presumed to have knowledge of what is occurring in his program and therefore, can be responsible for the actions of his staff and individuals associated with the program.”
In the wake of the Memphis “strict liability” decision, the NCAA Division I Board of Directors proposed a change to the bylaw this August that’s designed to make head coaches more responsible for their programs.

“Rather than focusing on knowledge, or the presumption of knowledge, the bylaw is amended to presume only responsibility,” the board wrote. “Accordingly, if violations happen in a program, the head coach is presumed responsible (instead of knowledgeable, and therefore, responsible) for not promoting an atmosphere of compliance and/or monitoring his or her staff.”

The change is set to take effect Aug. 1, 2013.

Mike Bowers, the Dallas-based attorney for Rafaello & Co., said his client waited more than two years to file the suit against Thomas because the jeweler had been trying to collect its money.

“There were efforts taken by my client to secure payment,” Bowers said. “Obviously the lawsuit was an option that unfortunately came to pass when arrangements could not be made to secure payment.”

John Spencer, Thomas’ Durham-based agent, referred comment to Joe Crews, Thomas’ Austin-based attorney. Crews did not return a voicemail left Saturday.

Spencer began representing Thomas in April 2011. Thomas signed his first 10-day contract with the New Orleans Hornets in December 2011 and appeared in 42 games, starting 10, last season. He has a non-guaranteed contract for next year that would pay him $762,195.

“I was not aware of anything going on before that time,” Spencer said when asked about Thomas’s 2009 purchase.

The Associated Press contributed.

Keeley 919-829-4556
DODGING CREDITORS Amanda Cordeiro of Clermont, Fla., owes $55,000 in student loans. She has changed her phone number about four times in a year to avoid being found.

Debt Collectors Cashing In on Student Loans

By ANDREW MARTIN

At a protest last year at New York University, students called attention to their mounting debt by wearing T-shirts with the amount they owed scribbled across the front — $90,000, $75,000, $20,000.

On the sidelines was a business consultant for the debt collection industry with a different take.

“I couldn’t believe the accumulated wealth they represent — for our industry,” the consultant, Jerry Ashton, wrote in a column for a trade publication, InsideARM.com. “It was lip-smacking.”

Though Mr. Ashton says his column was meant to be ironic, it nonetheless highlighted undeniable truths: many borrowers are struggling to pay off their student loans, and the debt collection industry is cashing in.

As the number of people taking out government-backed student loans has exploded, so has the number who have fallen at least 12 months behind in
making payments — about 5.9 million people nationwide, up about a third in the last five years.

In all, nearly one in every six borrowers with a loan balance is in default. The amount of defaulted loans — $76 billion — is greater than the yearly tuition bill for all students at public two- and four-year colleges and universities, according to a survey of state education officials.

In an attempt to recover money on the defaulted loans, the Education Department paid more than $1.4 billion last fiscal year to collection agencies and other groups to hunt down defaulters.

Hiding from the government is not easy.

“I keep changing my phone number,” said Amanda Cordeiro, 29, from Clermont, Fla., who dropped out of college in 2010 and has fielded as many as seven calls a day from debt collectors trying to recover her $55,000 in overdue loans. “In a year, this is probably my fourth phone number.”

Unlike private lenders, the federal government has extraordinary tools for collection that it has extended to the collection firms. Ms. Cordeiro has already had two tax refunds seized, and other debtors have had their paychecks or Social Security payments garnisheed. Over all, the government recoups about 80 cents for every dollar that goes into default — an astounding rate, considering most lenders are lucky to recover 20 cents on the dollar on defaulted credit cards.

While the recovery rate is impressive, critics say it has left the government with little incentive to try to prevent defaults in the first place.

Though there are programs in place to help struggling borrowers, the companies hired to administer federal student loans are not paid enough for lengthy conversations to walk borrowers through the payment options, critics say. One consequence is that a government program called income-based repayment has fallen short of expectations. Under the program, borrowers pay 15 percent of their discretionary income for up to 25 years, after which the rest of their loan is forgiven. But participation has lagged because borrowers are either not aware of the program or are turned off by its complexity.

“If people were well informed, how many defaults could be averted?” asked Paul C. Combe, president of American Student Assistance, a loan guarantee agency based in Boston. “We are hurting people here.”
For borrowers, the decision to default can be disastrous, ruining their credit and increasing the amount they owe, with penalties up to 25 percent of the balance.

Ms. Cordeiro, a single mother, dropped out of Everest College, a profit-making school, 16 credits shy of a bachelor’s degree. She said she could not get any more loans to finish. “I get these letters about defaulting, and I get them and throw them in the bin,” she said.

Jake Brock, who graduated in 2008 from Keuka College, a private liberal arts school in upstate New York, defaulted in May on a federally guaranteed loan of $8,000. With penalties and accumulated interest, the loan balance is now $13,000, he said. “I just fell behind and couldn’t dig myself out,” said Mr. Brock, who is 29 and owes a total of $100,000 in student loans.

There is no statute of limitations on collecting federally guaranteed student loans, unlike credit cards and mortgages, and Congress has made it difficult for borrowers to wipe out the debt through bankruptcy. Only a small fraction of defaulters even tries.

“You are going to pay it, or you are going to die with it,” said John Ulzheimer, president of consumer education at SmartCredit.com, a credit monitoring service.

The New Oil Well?

Business is booming at ConServe, a debt collection agency in suburban Rochester. The company recently expanded into a neighboring building. The payroll of 420 is expected to double in three years.

“There is great opportunity,” said Mark E. Davitt, the company’s president and founder.

Where some debt collection firms have made their fortunes collecting on delinquent credit cards or hospital bills, ConServe is thriving because of overdue student loans, a large majority of its business.

With an outstanding balance of more than $1 trillion, student loans have become a silver lining for the debt collection industry at a time when its once-thriving business of credit card collection has diminished and the unemployment rate has made collection a challenge. To recoup unpaid loans, the federal government, private lenders and others have turned to collection agencies like ConServe.

Mark Russell, a mergers and acquisition specialist, writing in the same trade publication as Mr. Ashton, the consultant at the N.Y.U. protest, suggested
student loans might be a “new oil well” for the accounts receivable management industry, or ARM, as the industry is known.

“While the Department of Education debt collection contract has been one of the most highly sought-after contracts within the ARM industry for years, I believe it is now THE most sought-after contract within this industry, centered within the most sought-after market — student loans,” Mr. Russell wrote last October.

In 2010, Congress revamped the student loan program so that federal loans were made directly by the government. Before that, most loans were made by private lenders and guaranteed by the government through so-called guarantee agencies.

Of the $1.4 billion paid out last year by the federal government to collect on defaulted student loans, about $355 million went to 23 private debt collectors. The remaining $1.06 billion was paid to the guarantee agencies to collect on defaulted loans made under the old loan system. That job is often outsourced to private collectors as well.

The average default amount was $17,005 in the 2011 fiscal year. Borrowers who attended profit-making colleges — about 11 percent of all students — account for nearly half of defaults, while dropouts were four times as likely as graduates to default. A loan is declared in default by the Department of Education when it is delinquent for 360 days.

Borrowers are most often declared in default when they cannot be found. That is when the collection agencies take over. While some in the industry, like Mr. Ashton, worry about public revolts over aggressive collection tactics, there is no holding back at this point.

At ConServe, in a room of cubicles with college pennants lining the walls, collectors comb through databases and public records hunting for contact information for borrowers. If ConServe reaches a borrower who refuses to cooperate, the company considers garnisheeing wages or withholding a government check, which requires approval from the Department of Education.

Dwight Vigna, director of the department’s default division, says the government does not give up easily. If a vendor like ConServe has not found a borrower in six months, the department turns the case over to another collection agency.

In fiscal 2011, the department wrote off less than 1 percent of its loan balance, for such things as death or disability of a borrower.
“We never throw anything away,” Mr. Vigna said.

**Lying in Wait**

Arthur Chaskin, a disabled carpenter, can attest to the government’s long memory.

Since he left college in the late 1970s, Mr. Chaskin has largely ignored his student loans — until June, when a federal judge ordered him to turn over $8,200.

Mr. Chaskin had borrowed $3,500 in federally guaranteed student loans to attend Northwestern Michigan College, a community college. He did not graduate. The federal government sued him in 1997, but over the next 15 years he made only five payments.

Last January, a lawyer in Michigan working on contract for the government was alerted to a credit check for Mr. Chaskin. The lawyer filed a garnishment order and discovered a brokerage account with nearly $20,000 that Mr. Chaskin said he had opened with disability checks.

By the time the government caught up with him, Mr. Chaskin owed more than $19,000 in accumulated interest and penalties, but the judge reduced the amount to $8,200 after Mr. Chaskin pleaded for a break.

“If you wait long enough, you catch people when their guard’s down,” said the lawyer, Charles J. Holzman, who was rewarded with more than 25 percent of Mr. Chaskin’s payment.

Government officials estimate they will collect 76 to 82 cents on every dollar of loans made in fiscal 2013 that end up in default. That does not include collection costs that are billed to the borrowers and paid to the collection agencies.

While the government’s estimates take into account the uncertainty of collecting money over long periods, some critics say they don’t go far enough.

A 2007 academic study, for instance, estimated that the recovery rate was closer to 50 cents on the dollar.

“The reporting standards that the government imposes on themselves are far weaker than what they require of private institutions,” said Deborah J. Lucas, a finance professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and an author of the study.
Over all, collections on federally backed student loans were $12 billion in the last fiscal year, 18 percent higher than the previous year. Of that, $1.65 billion came from seizures of government checks like tax returns and $1.01 billion was collected by garnisheeing borrowers’ wages. More than $8 billion of defaulted loans, however, were consolidated or rehabilitated.

Some borrowers say they do not see a path out of default, because they are sick, unemployed or facing so much debt they cannot imagine any way to pay it off. Some have defaulted on private student loans, too.

Patrick Writer of Redding, Calif., received a certificate in computer programming in 2008 from Shasta College, a community college. But he graduated in the midst of the financial crisis and has not been able to find a job as a programmer. He defaulted on $12,000 in federally backed loans in 2009.

“If you can’t make your utilities and your rent, your student loan payments are almost goofy, inconsequential,” said Mr. Writer, who is 57.

But Mr. Writer said he had come to realize what it meant to have a student loan that was guaranteed by the federal government. “It’s the closest thing to debtor prison that there is on this earth,” he said.

A Bias Toward Default

Jill Shockley, 36, of Rockford, Ill., owes more than $50,000 in federally guaranteed and private student loans, some of which are in default. A nursing school dropout, she said her loan servicer, Sallie Mae, asked her to come up with $600 a month to keep three of her federal loans from going into default. But she said she did not have enough money.

“I barely clear $30,000 a year,” she said. “I have rent, a car payment, insurance. They say maybe I should borrow from relatives.”

On paper, there are few good reasons struggling borrowers should go into default, or stay there, since there are many programs to help them keep up with payments. In addition to income-based repayment, there is forbearance for temporary financial woes and different types of deferment for issues like unemployment, military service and economic hardship. But the challenge of creating the right incentives — and getting collectors and debtors to embrace them — has bedeviled Congress and the Department of Education.

Critics say the result has often been contradictory incentives that provide little help to struggling borrowers. For instance, loan servicers are paid $2.11 a month for each borrower in good standing, but only 50 cents a month for
borrowers who are seriously delinquent, too little to devote much time to them.

Guarantee agencies are paid a default aversion fee, equal to 1 percent of the loan balance, if they prevent a borrower from going into default. But the same agencies get paid much higher fees for collecting or rehabilitating a defaulted loan.

And debt collectors are rewarded primarily for collecting as much as possible, not for making sure a borrower can afford the payments, critics say.

Introduced in 2009, income-based repayment was supposed to help change that by allowing borrowers with high levels of debt but modest incomes to make relatively small payments over a long term. But many borrowers were never told about the income-based option, and many others have been frustrated by the onerous requirements. So far, 1.6 million borrowers have applied for income-based repayment; 920,000 are active participants and another 412,000 applications are pending.

In a June memo, President Obama wrote that “too few borrowers are aware of the options available to them to help manage their student loan debt.”

Education officials say there are changes in the works that could help struggling borrowers and perhaps reduce the default rate, which they attribute to the sluggish economy and dismal results among profit-making colleges.

Under proposed regulations, debt collectors would be required to offer borrowers an affordable payment plan. And, the department vows to do a better job of publicizing income-based repayment, including telling borrowers about the plan before they leave college.

In addition, borrowers will be able to apply for income-based repayment online rather than going through their loan servicer. Monthly payments will be reduced to 10 percent of discretionary income, down from 15 percent.

But efforts to change the incentive structure for guarantee agencies have stalled. And the Obama administration’s efforts to impose new regulations on profit-making colleges were initially watered down and then significantly weakened by a federal court judge.

“We’re trying to balance two priorities, working with students who have fallen on hard times while trying to be good stewards of the taxpayers’
dollar,” said Justin Hamilton, a Department of Education spokesman. “We’re always going to be in a process of continuous improvement.”

Lindsay Franke, of Naugatuck, Conn., is among the borrowers taking advantage of income-based repayment. While her monthly payment is now lower, Ms. Franke, who is 28 and has a master’s degree in business administration from Albertus Magnus College, said the program had not changed a crushing reality: she still owes too much money and makes too little to pay it off. A marketing coordinator for a law firm, she filed for bankruptcy last year because she could not afford her mortgage, car payment and student loans. She lost the house, but still owes $115,000 in student loans, both private and federal. Under income-based repayment, she pays $325 a month on her federal loans; she also pays $250 a month on her private loans.

“I will never have my head above water,” Ms. Franke said.
MACON, Ga. — From the rattling cicadas at twilight to the willow trees bending in the late summer heat, the lush campus of Mercer University seems like the last place to find one of the nation’s boldest journalism experiments.

This fall, Mercer, a 179-year-old former Baptist school, is starting an ambitious $5.6 million project to try to save local journalism by inviting both the Macon newspaper and a Georgia Public Radio station onto its campus.

Reporters and editors for the 186-year-old paper The Telegraph and the radio station will work out of the campus’s new journalism center, alongside students whom the university expects will do legwork for newspaper and public radio reports, with guidance from their professors and working journalists.

It’s a plan born in part of desperation. Like many newspapers, The Telegraph has lost circulation and advertising revenue in the last decade, and
the public radio station was forced to trim down to one staff member during the recession.

William D. Underwood, Mercer’s president, expects that by applying what he calls a medical residency model to journalism, all of these players may give the struggling industry a chance to stay alive.

“I want young people to be able to practice journalism ethically and competently the day they graduate,” Mr. Underwood said. “I have a concern about the future of local print journalism. There’s nothing more vital to a functioning democracy.”

Mercer’s is one of several such collaborations across the country. A 2011 study by the New America Foundation called on journalism schools to embrace the model of an “anchor institution” and do what they can to help local media outlets.

Three universities in Ohio joined together to provide content for local news organizations with a company called the News Outlet. The Miami Herald worked with WLRN 91.3 FM to have print reporters prepare and provide news for the local station. But the Mercer project is believed to be the first venture among a university, newspaper and public radio station. Groups like the Knight Foundation, which financed most of the Mercer experiment, are closely monitoring Mercer’s success.

“This could be a new model for journalism education,” said Beverly Blake, a program director for the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, which provided a $4.6 million grant. “We thought about what it could do for journalism education and to strengthen our community.”

There have been some growing pains. University officials housed the radio station in a space that has the distinct smell of a nearby wings joint. The newspaper offices are just three noisy stories below student dorms known for their Friday night dance parties. A recent Friday deadline was accompanied by what reporter Joe Kovac Jr. joked sounded like “a wild game of Twister.”

On a recent election night, newspaper editors who were already short-staffed neglected to plan with professors in advance to have students help out. Telegraph editors and reporters who have previously worked with interns and students are concerned about working with inexperienced staff.

“Some reporters think they’re going to be unduly stressed,” Mr. Kovac said.
There’s no shortage of material. Macon — a city with 91,000 residents in the throes of gentrification — is filled with enough political battles and economic disparity to occupy flocks of enterprising student journalists. It’s rich with old Southern grandeur: it has an opera house, enough stately homes on the National Historic Register to rival Charleston and Savannah and an imposing Beaux-Arts 1916 train station where preservationists kept the “Colored Waiting Room” sign etched into the facade. But Bibb County, where Macon is, has a 22.4 percent poverty rate that is equally visible as residents linger on the front porches of decrepit homes that local community groups have been working to help clean up.

At a recent morning editorial meeting, Oby Brown, the senior editor of local news for The Telegraph, ran through a long list of story ideas. With many of the paper’s 20 staff journalists out on mandatory furloughs and maternity leave, he said there’s “not a lot of room for throat-clearing.”

Mercer students, who say they depend heavily on the Internet for news, will be used to fill the gaps. On a recent evening, nearly two dozen students, many dressed in candy-colored fraternity and sorority pledge shirts, herded into a classroom at Mercer’s new Center for Collaborative Journalism. They ate pizza slices and listened to Timothy Regan-Porter, a newly minted professor and the program’s director, nervously walk them through a slide show of his plans.

“Practical experience won’t be something we want you to have,” said Mr. Regan-Porter to the crowd of students. “It will be required.”

The vision for the Macon program was conceived three years ago by George McCanless, publisher of The Telegraph and a magician of sorts at keeping The Telegraph profitable through circulation and advertising declines.

Data from the Audit Bureau of Circulations shows that The Telegraph’s Monday to Friday circulation shrank to 43,100 from 58,522 in the last five years. So Mr. McCanless outsourced the printing of the paper and tried to find The Telegraph a smaller work space. Through these largely discouraging cuts, he found that he felt inspired when he talked to university students about how much they wanted to work in journalism.

“I got a lot of energy from being around the youngsters,” Mr. McCanless said.

In 2009, he called Mr. Underwood while he was stuck in traffic driving from Atlanta and asked him whether he would welcome The Telegraph onto Mercer’s campus. Ms. Blake, whom he knew through the Rotary Club,
helped the pair brainstorm how to pay for the venture. After two years of
meetings, the Knight Foundation offered a five-year grant to build out space
for Mercer’s Journalism and Media Studies department and for Georgia
Public Broadcasting to expand its programming. The Peyton Anderson
Foundation provided an additional $1 million to pay for The Telegraph’s
newsroom at Mercer.

Mr. Underwood recognizes that he is trying to save an industry that many
wise businessmen have failed at before, especially since so many students do
not read newspapers.

“I acknowledge the possibility that it might fail,” said Mr. Underwood. “But
there are really good people working on it.”

Those “good people” were drawn to Macon for its reporting opportunities
and homes that cost slightly more than a Manhattan parking space. Mr.
Regan-Porter, the program’s director and a founder of Paste magazine, cut
short the interview process for a job at Condé Nast to move to Macon and
buy a nearly 6,000-square-foot Victorian for $180,250.

Adam Ragusea, who previously worked on a local news program called
Radio Boston for WBUR, relocated with his wife and bought a 1917
Craftsman bungalow for $145,000. Both Mr. Regan-Porter and Mr. Ragusea
say they love being part of a community and the kind of journalism they can
do.

“I missed doing small-city journalism,” said Mr. Ragusea as he sat in his
new studio where he hosts a three-hour morning program.

But editors and professors recognize that the best way to understand the
future of journalism lies in learning from and working with students. Mr.
Brown said that he learns a lot about online journalism trends from his
daughter who works on graphics for the Harvard Crimson. Jay Black, a
Mercer journalism assistant professor, said this program gives more of his
students a chance to gather professional clips that will land them jobs after
graduation.

“I can only take my students so far,” he said. “We’re trying to define what
journalism is in the future. Nobody knows how to be a journalist anymore
because nobody knows the direction journalism is going to go.”

In the first few weeks of classes, Mr. Regan-Porter said that a Telegraph
photographer had invited a student with experience shooting live video to
live-stream the sentencing at a closely watched murder trial. Mr. Black has
been finding students to help a business reporter on an investigative project.
Erica O’Neal, a sophomore, published an article in The Telegraph about nearby bike trails.

“I wanted to be a vet. I completely did a back flip and I went into writing,” said Ms. O’Neal, who typically reads her news online. “Maybe I’ll end up being a journalist.”

Mr. McCanless is unfortunately the last to benefit from his vision. Since the newsroom moved to the university, Mr. McCanless is one of the few people left at the Telegraph’s half-abandoned offices in downtown Macon. When he wants to be inspired about journalism’s future, he heads back to Mercer. On a recent evening, he stared out at a room of students and aspiring journalists, hesitated and then smiled.

“Y’all what we were hoping for,” he said. “It’s been three excruciating years.”