THE DAILY CLIPS

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ECU News Services

Saturday, September 19, 2009

East Carolina University's bachelor of science in engineering program has been accredited by the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET), the recognized accreditor of college and university programs in applied science, computing, engineering, and technology. ABET accreditation demonstrates a program's commitment to providing its students with a quality education. ECU accepted its first freshman class in engineering in 2004 and had its first graduates in May 2008. The program has more than 300 students and offers concentrations in biomedical engineering, bioprocess engineering, industrial and systems engineering, and mechanical engineering. Mechanical engineering is a new concentration that started in this semester to meet the growing economic and industry demands in the region.

"This is a tremendous benchmark for ECU and the Department of Engineering," Chancellor Steve Ballard said. "Our faculty and staff strive to provide our engineering graduates with educational and professional development, as well as the necessary leadership skills for the 21st century marketplace. The most important implications of accreditation will unfold in the coming years as ECU plays an increasingly critical role in regional and state economic development."

Accreditation is a voluntary, peer-review process that requires programs to undergo comprehensive, periodic evaluations. The evaluations, conducted by teams of volunteer professionals, focus on program curricula, faculty, facilities, institutional support, and other important areas. One of the key elements of ABET accreditation is the requirement that programs continuously improve the quality of education provided. As part of this requirement, programs set specific, measurable goals for their students and graduates, assess their success at reaching those goals, and improve their programs based on the results of their assessment.

"The commitment of the university leadership, including the chancellor and the provost, has been particularly critical," said Dr. Paul Kauffman, Department of Engineering chair. "Most important will be the impact of the program graduates who will work as engineers and contribute to the competitiveness of our state. Engineering accreditation marks a significant milestone in the quality and range of degree options ECU offers to students."

Events mark ECU's literary homecoming

The region's literary traditions will be celebrated Friday and Saturday with the sixth annual Eastern North Carolina Literary Homecoming at Joyner Library.

The 2009 homecoming will bring people "back to the book" as participants engage in activities that merge, challenge and blur the lines between what is seen and what is read. This year, eight award-winning writers rooted in the history, literature, and culture of eastern North Carolina will share their work and their experiences with homecoming participants.

Reynolds Price, novelist and poet, will be in attendance to receive the Roberts Award for Literary Inspiration on Friday. NCSU professor and Southern literary scholar Barbara Bennett will present the award, which will be followed by a theatre production based on Price's works, directed by Tracy Donahue and performed by ECU School of Theatre and Dance students.
Allan Gurganus, author of “Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All,” will give a reading during the luncheon Saturday.

Also on Saturday, the Coastal Cohorts (Don Dixon and Bland Simpson with special guest Jamie Hoover) will perform selections from “King Mackerel! & The Blues are Running.”

A host of workshops — from playwriting and poetry to music making — will be offered. All events, except for the author’s luncheon, are free, but registration is requested. Visit the homecoming online at www.ecu.edu/lithomecoming, call 328-6514, or e-mail lithomecoming@ecu.edu.

**ECU Privateers host “Purple Pirate Party”**

In mid-August, a group of students from ECU’s Department of Psychology hosted a “Purple Pirate Party” at the Caswell Developmental Center in Kinston.

The Caswell Developmental Center is a state-funded residential center for adults in eastern North Carolina who have mental retardation and other developmental disabilities. During the event, residents of Caswell enjoyed activities that included pirate bowling, pin the eye patch on the pirate, digging for buried treasure, pirate arts, pirate dancing and treasure chest prize drawings.

The event was organized by students in the health psychology doctoral program at ECU, who created the volunteer service group, the Privateers, in 2008. Dressed as pirates, 10 doctoral students pitched in to create the pirate oasis.

“Over 80 Caswell Center residents participated in the event, and all involved had a swashbuckling good time,” said Sayward Harrison, doctoral student and co-leader of the Privateers.

The Privateers plan multiple community service projects throughout this academic year, according to Kari Kirian, doctoral student and the second co-leader of the group.

During the 2008-09 academic year, the Privateers participated in Relay for Life, hosted several “Alex’s Lemonade Stands” to raise money for pediatric cancer research, provided Christmas presents for children at Greenville’s Little Willie Center and held a semester-long donation drive to benefit patients at Cherry Hospital.

For additional information about the Privateers and their events, contact Dr. Samuel Sears, faculty adviser, at 328-6118 or searss@ecu.edu.

**“Leadership guru” to speak Thursday**

The College of Business will host bestselling author and “leadership guru” Steve Farber as its seventh speaker in the Cunanan Leadership Speaker Series on Thursday.

Farber currently serves as president of Extreme Leadership, Inc., an organization devoted to the cultivation and development of Extreme Leaders in the business community. His latest book, “Greater Than Yourself: The Ultimate Lesson In Leadership,” was a Wall Street Journal and USA Today bestseller. Farber also serves on ECU’s National Leadership Advisory Council.

Farber’s presentation, titled “Greater Than Yourself: Three Steps to Attaining the New Gold Standard of Leadership,” is free and open to the public. It will be held in ECU’s Wright Auditorium at 3 p.m. Thursday.

Dr. Frederick Niswander, dean of the College of Business, said, “As a recognized national speaker, expert in business leadership, and frequent guest on news-talk shows around the country, Farber’s insight will shed light on how to be a leader of substance and influence. I believe anyone who hears his presentation will discover tools to deepen and expand their personal capabilities.”

Free campus parking will be available at the Carol Belk Park and Ride Lot, located at the intersection of Greenville Blvd. and Charles Blvd.

The Cunanan Leadership Speaker Series is made possible by a gift from alumni Steve and Ellen Cunanan of Richboro, Pa.

Matching funds are also provided by the Johnson & Johnson Foundation.

**Upcoming events:**

Thursday — Dr. Henderson "Jim" Cleaves from the Carnegie Institution for Science will discuss "Recent Insight into the Prebiotic Chemistry of HCN," 4 p.m. Room N107, Howell Science Complex. This lecture is part of biology professor Matt Schrenk's "Astrobiology: The Planetary Context of Life" course. Free.

See www.ecu.edu/cs-ecu/calendar.cfm for times, places and more information on these events and other ECU upcoming activities.

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DA not ready to decide on death penalty

By Michael Abramowitz
The Daily Reflector

Saturday, September 19, 2009

Further investigation is needed before deciding to pursue the death penalty in a June 30 double homicide in downtown Greenville, Pitt County's district attorney said.

District Attorney Clark Everett said he is considering whether evidence against James Earl Richardson shows "aggravating circumstances" existed during the shooting of Drew Kirby and Langdon Blackley outside The Other Place nightclub.

He can pursue capital punishment if his investigation determines that evidence will support the presence of at least one of 11 such factors outlined in state statues, he said.

"We're trying to determine if any aggravating circumstances exist and, if there are, whether they are sufficient to request the trial as a capital case," Everett said in an interview last week after Richardson was indicted on two count of first-degree murder.

Richardson is the lone suspect in the incident, according to police. Investigators say he fired a large number of shots at the club from white BMW driving on Fifth Street.

Kirby, a restaurant manager, and Blackley, an East Carolina University student, were among a crowd on the sidewalk near the club when the shots rang out.

The list of 11 aggravating circumstances includes factors such as the crime being especially heinous, atrocious or cruel; the crime being conducted during the commission of another crime; or the suspect knowingly creating great risk of death to more than one person.

Aggravating circumstances aren't always as clear as people might think, Everett said.

"Our decision will be based on the facts of the case, the strength of the case and the number and strength of the aggravating circumstances," Everett said.

Although he believes there are potentially aggravating circumstances, Everett said he will not rush to a conclusion.

"We still have to thoroughly investigate and discuss that possibility in an orderly fashion with everybody involved, including the police, the families and our staff," Everett said. "That's not just important for us, but for everybody involved. It's an investment in resources, and you don't seek the death penalty on a whim; we don't just arbitrarily say we're going to seek the death penalty. There has to be an orderly process toward that decision."

There are several possible aggravating circumstances on the list that could satisfy state requirements for seeking the death penalty, he said.

"The public often doesn't understand that simple intent to commit murder, no matter how clear or premeditated, is not an aggravating circumstance," Everett said. "It might clearly be first-degree murder, but without the presence of one of those aggravating circumstances, it is not a capital crime."

Efforts to speak to Richardson and his family have been unsuccessful. Thomas J. Moore and Damien L. Tucker, associates in a Rocky Mount firm, have been appointed by the state to represent Richardson, according to court
documents.

Administrative hearings are being scheduled to establish that his lawyers have no conflicts that prevent fair representation. The hearings also allow will attorneys to discuss plea possibilities that might arise and establish a scheduling agenda to proceed to trial.

A status hearing will then be conducted to discuss whether the case will be tried as a capital crime, Everett said.

Richardson and his attorneys will know well in advance if Everett intends to pursue the death penalty, he said.

"The death penalty statute is very structured, as is the entire trial process. It's not arbitrary," Everett said.

**Aggravating factors**

North Carolina requires prosecutors seeking the death penalty to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the crime included at least one of the following 11 aggravating circumstances:

- It was committed by a person lawfully incarcerated.
- The defendant had been previously convicted of another capital felony or had been in a juvenile proceeding for committing an offense that would be a capital felony if committed by an adult.
- The defendant had been previously convicted of a felony involving the use or threat of violence to the person.
- It was committed for the purpose of avoiding or preventing a lawful arrest or effecting an escape from custody.
- It was committed while the defendant was engaged in the commission of any homicide, robbery, rape or a sex offense, arson, burglary, kidnapping, or aircraft piracy or the unlawful throwing, placing, or discharging of a destructive device.
- It was committed for pecuniary gain.
- It was committed to disrupt or hinder the lawful exercise of any governmental function or the enforcement of laws.
- It was committed against a law enforcement officer, employee of the Department of Correction, jailer, fireman, judge or justice, former judge or justice, prosecutor or former prosecutor, juror or former juror, or witness or former witness against the defendant.
- It was especially heinous or cruel.
- The defendant knowingly created a great risk of death to more than one person by means of a weapon or device which would normally be hazardous to the lives of more than one person.
- The murder for which the defendant stands convicted was part of a course of conduct which included the commission by the defendant of other crimes of violence against another person or persons.

**Mitigating factors**

State law also says the following mitigating circumstances may be considered shall to argue against the death penalty.

- The defendant has no significant history of prior criminal activity.
- The capital felony was committed while the defendant was under the influence of mental or emotional disturbance.
- The victim was a voluntary participant in the defendant's homicidal conduct or consented to the homicidal act.
- The defendant was an accomplice in or accessory to the capital felony committed by another person and his participation was relatively minor.
- The defendant acted under duress or under the domination of another person.
- The capacity of the defendant to appreciate the criminality of his conduct or to conform his conduct to the requirements of law was impaired.
- The age of the defendant at the time of the crime.
- The defendant aided in the apprehension of another capital felon or testified truthfully on behalf of the prosecution in another prosecution of a felony.
- Any other circumstance arising from the evidence which the jury deems to have mitigating value.
NC employee health insurance plan wants cost cuts

The Associated Press

Sunday, September 20, 2009

RALEIGH, N.C. — North Carolina's state employee health plan got out of a deep hole last spring thanks to a $250 million cash injection from the state's rainy-day reserves, followed by higher dependent premiums and more out-of-pocket expenses for everyone.

So even though the State Health Plan is on better footing since the Legislature's bailout bill passed in April, the plan's challenges aren't over.

Plan officials told lawmakers last week they already paid out 8 percent more for claims than they had budgeted in July and August — although it could be a one-time blip caused as more of the 650,000 employees, retirees and their dependents covered went to the doctor before higher payment schedules took effect July 1.

An outside actuary now predicts the plan will lose $54 million this year, instead of making a small profit as predicted a few months ago.

With the rainy-day fund about out of money and tax revenues still dwindling, North Carolina is joining insurance plans for state employees nationwide looking for ways to cut expenses. North Carolina is joining a plan for members to quit smoking and lose weight, and trying to narrow administrative costs.

"Many state employee health plans are very concerned. Their available revenue is at least partly tied to state revenues," said Richard Cauchi, health program director for the National Conference of State Legislatures in Denver.

The belt tightening for North Carolina's health plan is largely due to meeting expectations for a change after it missed projections by a whopping $138 million for the year ending in June 2008.

State Auditor Beth Wood's office said last April the mistake occurred because health plan leaders underestimated the popularity of a preferred provider plan that offered more benefits and a cheaper premium than the traditional indemnity plan.

Lawmakers said the mistake, and failure by plan leaders to alert them to problems, led to the firing of plan administrator George Stokes last year and the rehiring of predecessor Jack Walker.

But Wood's audit also found expenses by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina, which processes claims and administers the program, were $36 million more than expected. While the state's contract allowed Blue Cross to pass along any costs, plus profit, to the plan, Blue Cross didn't have to explain how those costs were calculated, according to the report.

The $675 million bailout law has taken the plan on a cost-cutting spree. It got rid of the most generous tier of insurance because it lost more than $100 million. It eliminated coverage for routine eye exams starting this coming January.

But $32 million in higher-than-expected claims in July and August threaten to eat into those savings. Lawmakers are hopeful the higher claims were temporary.

"I think we're pretty well on track. The jump in June is certainly understandable. People knew that copays and deductibles were going up," said Sen. Tony Rand, D-Cumberland, co-chairman of the legislative oversight for the State Health Plan. "We'll see over time."
State Health Plan leaders have reworked their contract with Blue Cross and Blue Shield to have more control and participation in audits of the company's administrative expenses, said Mona Moon, the plan's chief financial officer. Plan leaders hope audits under way or about to begin will find cost savings.

Blue Cross said it earned only $480,000 on the contract in 2008, or a profit margin of less than 1 percent. But the State Employees Association of North Carolina, a frequent critic of Blue Cross, accuses the company of hiding revenues in the form of undisclosed costs.

A mailer sent to plan members explains how a new "Comprehensive Wellness Initiative" will shift smokers and excessively overweight employees and dependents to the less generous of two remaining coverage tiers.

The tobacco program, which will begin next July, will require smokers to quit or get into a cessation program if they want to keep the "standard plan" that requires patients to pay for 20 percent of a doctor bill after copayments and deductibles. Otherwise, the portion rises to 30 percent.

At least nine other states charge or soon will charge higher premiums for state employees who smoke, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Starting in July 2011, enrollees with a body mass index — a weight-height ratio that determines whether a person is considered overweight — below 40 can stay in the more generous plan. The standard becomes 35 in July 2012.

The plan believes it can save $13 million from the wellness initiative in the 2010-11 fiscal year.

The State Employees Association doesn't care much for the wellness initiatives, which also would include random employee and dependent testing for nicotine or body mass index at work. Those who fail would be forced to the lower-tiered insurance, along with their entire family, for at least a year.

"We want employees to get healthier, but we want that done with incentives, not punishments," said spokeswoman Erica Baldwin. "They're discriminating against those employees, it's an invasion of privacy."

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What happens next time?

By Bruce Henderson
bhenderson@charlotteobserver.com
Posted: Sunday, Sep. 20, 2009

We build stronger houses, prepare better for disasters and wield computer and communications technology that makes 1989's look quaint.

But all that, experts say, would only partially blunt the devastation of another Hugo-sized hurricane - one that might be increasingly likely to strike the Carolinas.

For every step forward in preparedness, they say, a vulnerability also grows:
A half-million more people to evacuate from the coast.
A rising sea lapping at thousands of square miles of low-lying land.
Eroding beaches, the first line of defense from an Atlantic storm.

Hugo left $7 billion in U.S. property damage, mostly in the Carolinas. Because development has intensified, with houses bigger and more expensive, state officials say a similar storm now could triple that amount.

Those calculations could be tested at any time. Atlantic hurricanes are growing stronger, possibly as part of natural cycles, and climate change models say their frequency and ferocity will only grow.

Eight Category 5 hurricanes roiled the Atlantic in the 2000s, more than in any decade since satellite observations began in the 1960s. North Carolina's coastline, jutting into the sea like a taunt, makes it the nation's fourth-most hurricane-prone state behind Florida, Louisiana and Texas.

A ribbon of sand and mud, the Outer Banks, holds some of the state's most expensive real estate. The Banks are also among the places most vulnerable to sea-level rise and erosion on the East Coast.

A big storm, or several smaller ones, could wipe the barrier islands clean, said Stanley Riggs, a North Carolina University geologist who has studied the N.C. coast for four decades.
"When that mass of water comes across," he said, "it's like a bulldozer blade."

The N.C. Department of Insurance estimates that a Hugo-strength storm that makes landfall near Wilmington would cause at least $5 billion in insured losses to residential property. South Carolina's emergency officials say Hugo today would leave $16 billion to $20 billion in wreckage there.

Hugo's memorable lesson, of course, was that even Charlotte isn't immune.

Forecasters never expected Hugo to cross the Mecklenburg County line, 175 miles from where it made landfall, with near hurricane-force winds. But Duke Energy will attest that Hugo was no fluke.

Just a year ago, Hurricane Ike barreled up from the Gulf of Mexico and - also unexpectedly - chewed up Duke's Midwestern territory. Repairing Ike's damage cost Duke $55 million.

Regardless of where they land, hurricanes strike all taxpayers.

Tax dollars pay for emergency responses and rebuilding flood-damaged roads and bridges. They also subsidize the federal flood insurance program that helps coastal property owners rebuild after storms.

Such policies, critics say, only draw more people to build on beaches that hurricanes will whack hardest.

"It's crazy," Riggs said. "And they're there only because the government subsidizes them."

Rising sea level

The N.C. coast faces another threat that could magnify the impact of future storms.

Sea level is expected to rise up to 2.5 feet on the northern coast by 2100, East Carolina University researchers say, in part because portions of the coastal plain are slightly sinking.

More than 2,300 square miles - an area four times bigger than Mecklenburg County - are less than 5 feet above sea level, making them especially vulnerable to storm surges.

Despite that, repeated hurricanes have done little to dissuade people from building on the beach.

"Hurricane Hugo was nothing but urban renewal for the S.C. coast," said Rob Young, director of the Program for the Study of Developed Shorelines at Western Carolina University. "It wiped out a lot of older homes and allowed them to be replaced by bigger new structures. People don't build 1,200-square-foot homes anymore; they have to have 5,000 square feet."

About 8,400 structures, mostly single-family homes, line the 326-mile N.C. ocean shoreline.

The paradox of beachfront development is that it builds permanent structures on ground that doesn't want to stay put. Barrier islands like the Outer Banks continually roll inland like slowly rotating wheels.

"These things are moving, they've been moving throughout their history," said Riggs, the ECU
geologist. "The way they move is in these bad storms. A storm is nothing but a big energy machine."

Beach communities face an increasingly desperate need to build up their eroding beaches with sand pumped from offshore or inlets. It's a hugely expensive process that has to be regularly repeated.

N.C. communities are lining up to renourish 125 miles of beach, about 10 times the renourishment needed in the Hugo era.

Nancy Vinson of the Coastal Conservation League, an S.C. advocacy group, says the states could discourage unwise development - and save taxpayers' money - by buying up storm-prone property.

"At some point, you've got to exercise some common sense on those things, move things that you can move," she said. "I think there will be some hard choices down the road, and the faster we do that, the better."

Learning from storms

Every hurricane - Hugo, Andrew, Floyd, Katrina - becomes a learning experience for the people trained to respond to them. Hugo offered a textbook full.

Rural communities in South Carolina remained isolated, and on their own, for days. Then-Gov. Carroll Campbell squabbled with state emergency management officials. Miles of bumper-to-bumper traffic slowed evacuations out of Myrtle Beach and Charleston.

In the Charlotte area, nearly 700,000 customers were left without power for up to 18 days. Some 80,000 trees were uprooted. Debris lined city streets in head-high heaps.

"Hugo was a real eye-opener for us - having the personnel you needed, having response packages that are mission-ready," said Doug Hoell, director of the N.C. Division of Emergency Management.

North Carolina got no out-of-state help after Hugo. Now every state belongs to an emergency assistance compact. The state also has created teams devoted to assessing disaster damage, rebuilding public infrastructure and helping disaster victims put their lives back together.

Following the slow evacuations from its coast before Hugo, and again during Floyd, S.C. officials overhauled their evacuation plans. Now I-26 can carry four lanes of traffic from Charleston to Columbia.

But some newcomers might not know they should evacuate. The population of Carolinas' coastal counties grew 37 percent, to 2.1 million, between 1990 and 2008.

"It's possible that half the population in a coastal county would not have gone through a Hurricane Hugo," said Jon Boettcher, chief of preparedness for the S.C. Emergency Management Division.

Experts worry especially about the people - sick, disabled or without cars - who can't leave before
wind and water rise. And one in five U.S. households relies solely on cell phones that, while handy for their ability to send text messages, can't easily be recharged when power's not available.

"We certainly feel we're going to be hit by a big one sooner or later, and probably sooner rather than later to be honest about it," Hoell said.

"We adhere to the philosophy that it only takes one."

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Illegal immigrants can pursue degrees

Community colleges will admit them, but stringent rules apply, such as out-of-state tuition rates.

BY KRISTIN COLLINS, Staff Writer

RALEIGH - Illegal immigrants will again be able to get two-year degrees in North Carolina, the State Board of Community Colleges decided Friday.

Board members hailed the decision as a move that puts North Carolina in line with most other states and restores hope to a small group of motivated students.

"These students were brought here by their families; they didn't have a choice," said board member Allen Wellons, a Johnston County lawyer. "Education is a gift to everyone. If somebody grows up in the United States, they ought to be educated."

All but one of the 18 board members present, Lt. Gov. Walter Dalton, voted to allow undocumented students in at out-of-state tuition rates, about $7,700 per year. They will not be eligible for financial aid, and will be enrolled in classes only after legal students get seats.

Dalton, a Democrat, was silent before the vote. Afterward, he declined to speak with reporters but released a written statement, which said the colleges should use their stretched resources to help legal residents cope with the recession.

"Now is not the time to increase the demands on our already-overburdened community college system," Dalton said in the statement.

Community college system officials said that, during years when illegal immigrants were allowed, they made up about 110 of the system's more than 800,000 students.

The new policy won't take effect on the state's 58 campuses until the next academic year, at the soonest. The colleges will continue a ban on undocumented students, in place since May 2008, until the new rule wends its way through a six- to 12-month administrative review.

Still, some Hispanic leaders called the decision a victory.

Marco Zarate, head of the N.C. Society of Hispanic Professionals, said he was "thrilled" with the new policy. He said that, while it will be difficult for many students to afford out-of-state tuition, "We feel that we can find a way and find resources."

The decision touched off political sparring among state party leaders.

Since 10 of the board's 21 members are appointed by the governor, Republicans said that the vote was evidence that Gov. Beverly Perdue had reversed her position on the issue.

During her campaign last year, when Perdue was a member of the community college board, she
argued for a ban on illegal immigrants.

"Now that the election is over, she has reversed course on this issue and many others," state Senate Republican leader Phil Berger said in a statement.

Perdue released her own statement, saying she continues to oppose allowing illegal immigrants to attend college.

Other Republicans, including state House minority leader Paul Stam and U.S. Rep. Sue Myrick, said they opposed the board's decision.

Community college leaders, however, said the new policy was "the right thing to do."

System President Scott Ralls said the policy is still more restrictive than those of most other states. And he said it opens the door to hard-working students with a drive to succeed.

Ralls said the new policy "maintains that all-important hope for those students."

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Army ROTC ranks grow, promise more 2nd lieutenants

By WILSON RING (AP) — 13 hours ago

NORTHEFIELD, Vt. — Burgeoning ranks of Army ROTC students are filling college classrooms around the nation this fall as the Army seeks to beef up its officer corps with its generous scholarship program that pays the college tuition of students who are commissioned as 2nd lieutenants when they graduate.

At the hillside campus of Norwich University, the nation’s oldest private military college, more than three times as many Army ROTC students are enrolled this year over last. Most of the nation’s 273 colleges and universities with ROTC programs report similar increases as the Army grows its officer corps.

“The Army is a growth industry,” said Col. Stephen Carney, head of the ROTC detachment at Norwich. “You would think OK, it’s enlisted soldiers and (noncommissioned officers) that really make the Army run, but we need officers, too.”

U.S. Army Cadet Command, which provides most of the Army’s second lieutenants through ROTC, is being asked to produce more 2nd lieutenants, said spokesman Paul Kotakis. In 2001 the requirement was 3,900 new officers. In 2006 the number went up to 4,500. Next spring the number will be 5,100 and by 2011 5,350.

The increase in the past decade has been more than sevenfold: In the 1999-2000 school year the Army offered 430 ROTC scholarships. Last year the figure was 3,179. It’s all part of the accelerated expansion of the Army approved in 2007, according to the U.S. Army Manpower and Reserve Affairs office in Washington.

The Army is short about 3,000 majors and captains, said Col. Paul Aswell, chief of the Army’s Officer Division, the officers needed to staff the Army’s brigade combat teams. Producing them can take years.

“You want officers (who) are experienced, (who) understand what they’re doing professionally,” Aswell said. “There’s no way to produce them except by bringing them in as lieutenants.”

The total of 87 ROTC students who enrolled at Norwich last month was up 60 over the number who enrolled in the military arm of the Northfield college in 2008.

At Texas A&M, the largest of the nation’s six senior military colleges, Army ROTC scholarships jumped from 35 in the class that entered two years ago to 115 last year, although the figure is expected to be about 70 this year, said retired Col. Jake Bettey, the chief of staff in the office of the commandant in College Station, Texas.

North Georgia State College and University, another of the senior military colleges, awarded 61 scholarships this year, up from about a dozen five years ago, said spokesman Kate Maine.

And it’s not just at typical military colleges. Ivy League Dartmouth College in Hanover, N.H., had five ROTC scholarship students last year, said spokeswoman Lataarha Gatlin. This year there are nine. While they study at Dartmouth, the ROTC students get their military educations by working with the Norwich program, about 55 miles to the north.

In addition to the ROTC increases, more officers are coming out of the Army’s Officer Candidate School and from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, Aswell said.

The Air Force ROTC program has been steady for the past few years, producing about 1,850 to 1,950 second lieutenants a year, said Air Force Col. John Emich, the registrar for Air Force ROTC at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama.

The Marine Corps, which gets some officers through the Naval ROTC program, is growing, but the numbers are a fraction of the Army’s numbers. Nationally, in the class of 2009, there were about 275 second lieutenants commissioned through NROTC, said NROTC director Jill Stein. In 2010 the number will be about 300 and in 2011 about 360, where current plans call for the numbers to stay, Stein said.

The Navy has commissioned about 740 ensigns this year through NROTC. Next year the number will be 680, but it is then supposed to jump to about 800 a year, Stein said.

ROTC scholarships traditionally attract high school students who want to follow in family footsteps or serve their country during a time of war, officials at Norwich say. But in a time of economic uncertainty, the government scholarships are a big draw.

"The economy potentially has had an impact on that," said Betty. "There may have been funds available for those scholarships the last couple years, but because the economy was better some of these kids didn’t take those scholarships."

Despite the strains of multiple deployments from fighting wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, officers aren’t getting out of the Army in large numbers.

"You would think that would generate attrition, but in fact, our retention is better than it has been over the last 10 years," Aswell said. He said the poor economy and a variety of incentive programs are keeping officers in the Army.

The Army’s structure is changing, Aswell said, and it needs more officers for its changing brigade combat teams.
September 19, 2009

Earning Her Stripes in College Football

By JOE DRAPE

NEW ORLEANS — Mike Henry could not get comfortable in his stance. He knew the line judge was watching him. This was only a scrimmage, but Henry, a 6-foot-5, 289-pound freshman, was trying to move up the depth chart for the Tulane Green Wave. The whistle blew and a blur of black and white stripes came running his way.

“You need to get down, and stay down,” the official said in a voice that swiveled Henry’s head and widened his eyes. It was not the tone but the timbre of Sarah Thomas’s voice.

It was soft and lilting and grounded in the rhythms of her native Mississippi. With her long blond hair tucked beneath a black hat swirled in stripes, Henry had no idea the zebra was actually a woman.

Thomas, 35, is big-time college football’s only female referee. She has grown accustomed to startling players and coaches on Saturdays but says it does not occur as often as one might think.

“Most of the time they are so focused on what they are doing, they don’t notice me,” Thomas said. “And that is what every other official strives for. Our best games are the ones that no one knows we’re there.”

Neither Thomas nor those who work with and supervise her believe it is odd that she has found her avocation amid big games and marching bands. She always loved sports and became the first athlete ever at Pascagoula High School to earn a letter five times in a sport, softball. She received a basketball scholarship to the University of Mobile, helped the team make the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics tournament and earned academic All-American honors.

So it felt right when she accompanied her older brother, Lea Bailey, to a meeting of the Gulf Coast Football Officials Association in 1996. Thomas was immediately intrigued by the team aspect of an officiating crew and how much she did not know about the rules and the game of football.

She started as everyone else did, officiating for youth leagues and studying for tests as she worked her way through middle school and junior varsity games until reaching the high school level in 1999. She married Brian Thomas, and worked the game clock while pregnant with their sons, Bridley, now 8, and Brady, 5.

“The spouses of my crew made me a maternity referee shirt,” Thomas said, blushing. “Standing out there, big and in stripes has been the only time I’ve ever felt out of place.”

In 2006, Thomas decided to leave the football field. Her career in pharmaceutical sales was taking off, and her sons were beginning to participate in sports and other activities. But before Thomas hung up her whistle, she came to the attention of Gerald Austin, an N.F.L. official for more than 25 years who is now the
coordinator of football officials for Conference USA.

An officiating scout, another former N.F.L. official, had been impressed by Thomas’s work in a high-pressure playoff game, and called Austin to tell him so. Austin, in turn, invited her to an officials’ camp in Reno, Nev.

“She made one tough call after another and nailed every one of them,” Austin said. “There was no reason not to hire her.”

Brian Thomas, who sells medical equipment and coaches a travel baseball team, told Sarah that she had plenty of football seasons left.

“I wasn’t going to stand in her way,” he said. “We’ve figured out a way to make our schedule work for the kids. I’m hustling in the fall, and she is in the spring and summer.”

After two seasons of easing her into the rotation, Austin scheduled Thomas for a full load this year. She and her fellow officials say that her sex has never been an issue. At Tulane, Thomas scrutinized the line of scrimmage and ran the field in concert with the six other officials. Coach Bob Toledo and his staff shook hands and exchanged pleasantries with her as they did all the crew members.

“There’s a lot of camaraderie among officials because for a couple of hours at least you’re not on the same page as the rest of the world,” said Wayne Winkler, a line judge who is a retired Louisiana state trooper. “The teams and the fans are in the heat of battle, and it is a pressurized setting. So we have to take care of each other on and off the field. Sarah makes that easy because she is an excellent official who has a nice way, but also is there for her crew as well.”

Thomas said she blends easily into the sideline and is hardly noticed by coaches or players.

“As a former athlete, I understand that they are focused and intent on what they’re doing,” she said.

She understands intensity can give way to some salty language.

“What is funny is on those rare times they notice that I’m a woman, they get very embarrassed, and my kids could stand there without hearing anything inappropriate,” Thomas said.

She has apparently has inspired other women to reach for their whistles. This weekend, the Southwestern Athletic Conference’s first female football official will work a game. The Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference has three women among its officiating crews.

Thomas has also worked at the New Orleans Saints camps, and her name comes up as the most likely contender when the N.F.L. decides to add a female referee.

“They have got to look at her,” Austin said. “She’s too good.”

Thomas said she is no hurry to break down another barrier. On Saturday, she will be in Fort Worth, where Texas Christian hosts Texas State. And she said she would be a better official on Sunday than she was the day before.
“I am learning something every week,” Thomas said. “I just can’t imagine not being on a football field in the fall.”