ECU reaping benefits of seniors' work

By Nathan Summers
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Human nature suggests that if East Carolina makes the leap to one of college football’s elite conferences in the near future, it will be a bittersweet time for the team’s 2011 seniors and other recent graduating classes.

After all, it will mostly be their work that helped to get the Pirates there, but it will be the team’s younger players and future members who will reap the benefits.

ECU’s current cornerstones, however, will not likely be forgotten in the event the Pirates land a long-awaited berth in the Big East Conference or one of the other five leagues associated with the Bowl Championship Series. This year’s seniors seem to understand that.

“It’s a good thing, and you’re excited for the guys that are going to be able to play in a new conference,” starting cornerback Emanuel Davis said. “I’m sure they’re going to get the job done, whatever conference they’re in. We’ve got that Pirate attitude, and nothing is given to us, everything is earned.”
While one Davis has been a long-standing fixture in the Pirates’ rise to prominence in Conference USA — which included C-USA titles in 2008 and ’09 — another Davis has made his ECU impact in much shorter time.

Senior quarterback Dominique Davis began in the BCS, starting his college career at Boston College in the Atlantic Coast Conference before spending a year in Kansas at Fort Scott Community College and then enjoying a record-breaking junior season at ECU in 2010.

“I won’t be here when the time comes, but it’s going to be great if ECU gets into a BCS conference,” the Pirate passer said. “The recruiting we have and the strength and conditioning we have, it’s not going to be anything different. But we’ll have a chance to play in a BCS bowl.”

Storm brewing
There is no mistaking Greenville’s buildup to the arrival of the North Carolina Tar Heels for Saturday night’s 8 p.m. showdown inside Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium.

While it’s the ECU players and coaches who must carry out the on-the-field business, head coach Ruffin McNeill and his players can hardly shield themselves from the barrage of banter between the team’s two fan bases and the expectations of fellow students.

“On campus, I’m sure their classmates are talking to them when they’re in class,” McNeill said of his players. “I know when I’m walking, horns are blowing, and they’re telling me to do some things, and I’m going, ‘OK. All right.’ I just give them a thumbs up.”

The second-year ECU coach who locked horns with the Tar Heels three times as a Pirate defensive back is trying to remind his team what the in-state clash means above and beyond the usual game week chatter.

“The young men have a lot of pride in our school,” McNeill said. “I’ve tried to make sure they know what it means to play at East Carolina, what it means to be a student at East Carolina and what it means to put the purple jersey on.”

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Duke takes flu vaccine to workers

BY JAY PRICE - jprice@newsobserver.com

DURHAM A cheerful team of 15 nurses briefly transformed a small foyer outside a Duke hospital auditorium into an impromptu flu vaccination clinic Tuesday, snagging and inoculating dozens of medical residents as they entered and left a lecture.

Then the nurses packed up their hypodermics and vaccine on carts, along with urns of coffee they were using for bait, and rolled away to set another ambush.

Across the nation, employers have begun the annual fall ritual of encouraging workers to march off to a designated room and line up for flu shots. Duke University Health System, though, decided to bring the shots to the people Tuesday, with a 24-hour blitz aimed at reaching all 13,500 workers.

The foyer was among hundreds of offices, hallways, meeting rooms and other unusual settings used for injections across the system, which includes the Duke University Medical Center, Durham Regional and Duke Raleigh hospitals, and several other clinical sites.
"The strategy is to hunt people down and meet them where they are," said Michelle Frey, a clinical services director with Duke's children's hospital who was overseeing the vaccination team in the foyer and another team simultaneously at work in a nearby outpatient clinic. "These doctors and nurses are really busy, and standing in a long line isn't going to work for them. So we're going to their offices, clinics, wherever they're going to be."

Duke officials decided to try this peer-to-peer approach partly to boost the flu vaccination rate among its workers and partly as a drill for a major crisis such as a serious pandemic, when it could be vital to quickly inoculate front-line health care workers so they can remain healthy to help the rest of the region's population.

"These types of planning events really do pay dividends when a crisis strikes," said Dr. Ian Greenwald, chief medical officer of Duke's Preparedness and Response Center. "The ability to vaccinate large numbers of health care workers quickly and efficiently is just critical."

**Patient safety**

High vaccination rates among health care workers are particularly important because patients often are from among the groups most vulnerable to severe cases of flu: the very young, the elderly and those with weak general health.

"We're really tackling this as an issue of patient safety," said Dr. Cameron Wolfe, a member of Duke's faculty in the infectious disease division and part of a team charged with improving the system staff's vaccination rates.

Duke officials hoped to lift the rate above last year's, when 74 percent of staff either were vaccinated or got a valid exemption.

That was already 10 percent above the national rate for health care workers.

Because Duke is a major employer in the area, it's simply good public health practice to get such a large mass of people vaccinated, Wolfe said.

'A great idea'

There is a window of about a day when someone who has contracted flu can spread it, though the person doesn't yet feel ill, Wolfe said.

That heightens the value of vaccinations and means that other good tools for fighting the illness - such as staying home from school or work when you're sick, or avoiding people who appear sick - aren't always going to be enough.
The young residents who took advantage of the jiffy vaccination setup in the foyer Tuesday, which featured about 15 nurses with a time-saving assembly-line setup, said it made good sense.

Without having to wait at all, second-year pediatrics resident Kathryn Xixis of Greensboro doffed her white coat and bared her arm for nurse Ashley Moore to inject her.

The residents, Xixis said, had been inundated with emails and mentions about the blitz, and she was ready to take advantage of it.

"It's a great idea," she said. "It makes it easy for us, and we have the opportunity to get it done early in the season."

Then, as suddenly as they came, Xixis and the rest of the flood of residents were gone, off to their busy rounds, and the foyer was empty except for the vaccination team.

The foyer team had run through 280 doses, and the other team Frey was overseeing had done about 200.

"Not bad for a couple of hours, right?" she said.

Price: 919-829-4526

**Stay well during flu season**

Annual vaccinations are the one best way to prevent seasonal flu, but there are other measures you should take to prevent catching or spreading it.

1. Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
2. When you're sick, keep your distance from others to protect them.
3. Stay home when you're sick to prevent others from catching your illness.
4. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing to prevent the spread of illness.
5. Wash your hands often to help protect you from germs. If soap and water aren't available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
6. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated then touches his or her eyes, nose or mouth.
7. Practice other good general health habits: Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food.

Source: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
President honors NCSU professors

From staff reports

RALEIGH Two N.C. State University faculty members have been named recipients of prestigious national awards this week.

President Barack Obama on Tuesday named N.C. State professor B. Jayant Baliga as one of the five inventors awarded the National Medal of Technology and Innovation, according to The Associated Press.

That came on the heels of a Monday announcement by the White House that Dr. Michael Escuti, associate professor of electrical and computer engineering, would receive the Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers.

Baliga was honored for inventing and developing the Insulated Gate Bipolar Transistor. It's an energy-saving semiconductor switch that's extensively used in transportation, medicine, consumer goods and other industries, according to AP.

The IGBT improves energy efficiency by more than 40 percent in an array of products, from cars and refrigerators to light bulbs, and it is a critical component enabling modern compact cardiac defibrillators, NCSU officials said in a news release.

The improved efficiency of IGBT-enabled applications saved U.S. consumers $2.7 trillion, and saved $15.8 trillion for worldwide consumers over the past 20 years. Also, the efficiency of IGBT-enabled applications has produced a cumulative reduction in carbon dioxide emissions of 35 trillion pounds in the United States and 78 trillion pounds worldwide over the last 20 years. IGBT-based compact portable defibrillators are projected to have saved nearly 100,000 lives in the United States.

Baliga says it's an honor to be recognized for his work.

The award won by Escuti was established by President Bill Clinton in 1996. It honors researchers for working at the frontiers of science and technology, and serving the community through scientific leadership, public education or outreach.

Winners receive research grants of up to five years to support their work.
Escuti was honored for his pioneering optical research. The White House also recognized him for educating students through collaborations with international academic teams and industries, as well as for outreach work in underserved communities.

His work has resulted in a National Science Foundation CAREER Award, three awarded patents and nine pending patents. He has also received $4.3 million in external research funding from NSF, and many other federal, state and private sources.

Baliga and Escuti will formally receive their awards at White House ceremonies later this year.
Motivated 16-year-old enters NCCU law school

BY LANA DOUGLAS - ldouglas@newsobserver.com

One look at Ty Hobson-Powell and you may think that he is an average teenager.

He likes to play basketball and video games; he even occasionally wastes time on Facebook and Twitter.

But Ty isn't the average 16-year-old.

He began classes at N.C. Central University Law School in August after he became the youngest person to graduate from the University of Baltimore at age 15, finishing a four-year degree in two.

The average age of a day-time student at NCCU is 24 years old, according to Linda Sims, associate dean for student services at NCCU school of law.

"I wouldn't say that I always knew that I wanted to get finished early," Ty said. "I can say that from a young age I was driven."

When he was 3 years old, he learned how to read, write and speak Chinese.
"He's always been a very above-average kid, but normal," said Edwin Powell, Ty's father. "The word 'why' was always in his vocabulary," he said.

His mother, Liz Hobson-Powell, describes him as always being "very inquisitive."

Ty credits his success to motivation and having a semi-photographic memory. After briefly studying a chart or graph he can remember it verbatim.

Ty's three siblings are also accomplished.

His older sister graduated from high school at age 17 and college at age 19. His two younger siblings, Quinn and Reid, also show promise in their areas of interest.

"[There was] no pushing force from our parents," Ty said. "They just reinforced our passions and did everything in their power to help us achieve our goals."

Ty's father is a professor at Howard University and his mother is a commander with the U.S. Public Health Service.

"I would have to say that we've encouraged them and with all the strengths that they have and given them the tools to go out and do what it is they feel they would like to do," Hobson-Powell said.

"I've always said to my kids, putting letters behind your name does not define success, but leaving behind a legacy and looking behind saying 'I've helped somebody,' that's how you define success," Powell said.

Ty chose to go to school to become a defense attorney after he met someone from the Innocence Project, which works with people it believes have been wrongfully convicted.

"I want to advocate for those who cannot advocate for themselves," he said.

He also has a passion for public speaking.

His message encourages students to capitalize on every opportunity they get and parents to help their children achieve success in whatever path they choose.

"I think it's reasonable to believe that a lot more people could be where I am right now," Ty said. "Hopefully, I can instill values in youth and even adults to go out and strive to be as good as they can."
"In a non-cocky way, I want to make sure that there are more stories like mine, because there's a lot of people like me and a lot of people with potential to be like me, but for whatever reason, be it lack of support at home or lack of drive from within, are not where I am currently," he said.

After he graduates from NCCU, Ty says he may attend medical school or get into politics.

You can follow Ty Hobson-Powell on Twitter @TyTheOriginator.
University of New Hampshire considers banning energy drinks

By Jenna Johnson

In its quest to become the “healthiest campus community in the country by 2020,” University of New Hampshire dining officials eliminated trans-fats from most food served at the school and took salt shakers off tables. On Monday, officials announced the ban of another product: energy drinks.

Students protested. Twitter and Facebook lit up. And within hours, UNH President Mark W. Huddleston stopped plans to pull energy drinks from the liberal arts college’s convenience stores, dining halls and vending machines in January.

“I want to be sure we respect our students’ ability to make informed choices about what they consume,” Huddleston said in a statement. “I have asked my colleagues to defer implementation of the intended ban until we can further explore the relevant facts and involve students more directly in our decision.”

When many of today’s college students were born, in the early 1990s, energy drinks were just starting to gain popularity overseas. Red Bull hit U.S. shelves in the late ’90s, and today energy drinks are a multibillion-dollar industry with hundreds of brands with names, such as Monster, NOS, Full Throttle, AMP and Rockstar. From 2010 to 2011, sales of energy drinks...
in the United States grew 15.4 percent, according to Mintel, a market research group.

In addition to having as much caffeine as a strong cup of coffee (if not more), many energy drinks contain a concoction of energy-boosting or focus-sharpening ingredients such as taurine, guarana, vitamin B, ginseng or ginkgo. You can buy these products in pocket-sized shots, tiny cans or large aluminum bottles. Many are sugar-free or have reduced calories.

Energy drinks have long been aggressively marketed to college students. Red Bull hires teams of students to roam campuses and hand out cases of free drinks. One of the company’s messages, as stated on a poster I spotted at a Virginia Tech convenience store this month, is: “Nobody ever wishes they’d slept more during college.”

Are energy drinks unhealthy? It depends on whom you ask.

When UNH announced the possible ban, the assistant vice president for business affairs said in a statement that although the products are legal, they can become unsafe when over-consumed or mixed with alcohol. A UNH student was recently hospitalized in “an incident on campus involving energy drinks,” according to a statement.

News of the possible ban prompted Red Bull to send the Associated Press a statement emphasizing that its products meet federal safety requirements.

“These drinks have a similar caffeine content as coffee and do not contain alcohol. Since it would not be right to ban the sale of soda, coffee, or tea on a college campus, it’s also inappropriate and unwarranted to single out and restrict the sale of energy drinks,” the statement read.

When I e-mailed questions to Red Bull, an employee identified only as “Guffey” responded: “We are confident in the safety of Red Bull, as more than 4 billion cans were safely consumed worldwide last year. In addition, there has never been a link between Red Bull and any health issue.”

The e-mail touted the vitalizing “physical and mental benefits” of Red Bull and wrapped up with this message: “So pop open a cold can for your very own set of wings!”

Mixing alcohol and energy drinks can be a dangerous combination, researchers at Northern Kentucky University and the University of Maryland found last year. Often the intense caffeine keeps a drinker awake and drinking when he or she should go to sleep. It can also give people a false
sense of alertness and confidence that can lead to drunk driving or daredevil antics that result in injury.

The Food and Drug Administration banned commercial alcoholic energy drinks last November. The action came after several college students were hospitalized after drinking Four Loko, which had been nicknamed “blackout in a can.”

But what about when alcohol is not involved? Is drinking a can of sugar-free Monster worse for you than chugging several high-calorie, sugary coffee confections? Or high-caffeine sodas such as Mountain Dew?

In an editorial this morning, the student newspaper The New Hampshire called the proposed ban irrational, hypocritical, foolish and an overreaction. If university leaders cared about the health of students, the editorial said, they wouldn’t be finalizing plans for a Dunkin’ Donuts on campus.

“Dining tried removing energy drinks from shelves to become a healthier campus. But they were ready to turn their heads the other way as Dunkin’ Donuts and its 770-calorie tuna melt sandwich moves in,” the editorial says. “There is a problem with that.”

Last night, I e-mailed back and forth with the UNH student body president and vice president, who both generally supported the idea of a ban. (Neither is a regular energy-drink consumer, although both drink coffee several times a week.)

A.J. Coukos, the president, called the ban “understandable and reasonable” and said students could still buy energy drinks at convenience stores within walking distance of campus.

Jessica Fruchtman, the vice president, said she thinks the amount of sugar and caffeine in energy drinks is what makes them unhealthy. Plus, students drink them for different reasons than they drink soda.

“Energy drinks come with a different purpose,” she said. “Students drink energy drinks for a boost, and soda because it tastes good.”

Both student leaders said coffee is more popular on campus. If there is a ban, here’s Coukos’s prediction: “I expect the amount of coffee sold on campus will increase noticeably.”

What do you think UNH should do? Should it ban energy drinks? Are the beverages unhealthy for college students? Let me know in the comments section below or on Twitter, @wpjenna.

By Jenna Johnson | 11:34 AM ET, 09/27/2011
How Brazil Is Sending 75,000 Students to the World's Best Colleges
By Andrew Downie / São Paulo Wednesday, Sept. 21, 2011

With their economy booming, their currency at a level that makes even London prices seem cheap and their foreign policy one of the world's most ambitious (President Dilma Rousseff this week will to be the first woman ever to open debate at the U.N. General Assembly), Brazilians have gotten used to going abroad for tourism, business, shopping and diplomacy. Now their students are finally getting an incentive to see the world, thanks to a major government program that aims to award 75,000 scholarships to attend the world's top universities. Available only to Brazilians studying subjects of strategic national importance, like engineering, they reflect "an effort by the government to take a quantum leap in the formation of a scientific and technological elite," says Aloizio Mercadante, Brazil's Science and Technology Minister.

That's a long-overdue agenda, not just in Brazil but all of Latin America. During the 2009–10 academic year, for example, Brazil, a nation of almost 200 million people, had fewer than 9,000 students at U.S. universities; China, by contrast, had more than 127,000, India 100,000 and South Korea 72,000. That's a big reason that more than a third of the world's research and
development takes place in Asia today while less than 3% of it goes on in Latin America. As a result, countries across the region are working to get more of their best and brightest into top-flight institutions like Harvard, Stanford, Oxford and the Sorbonne. Ecuador last month announced its largest scholarship program yet, hoping to send more than 1,000 students overseas, while Colombia in 2011 will place more people abroad than in the past 18 years combined. Chile is expanding its own program to offer 30,000 scholarships by 2018, and even tiny El Salvador now has a study-abroad project. (See photos of São Paulo.)

Brazil's effort, dubbed Science Without Borders, involves the federal Agency for Support and Evaluation of Graduate Education (CAPES), which will fund 40,000 scholarships, and the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development, which will fund 35,000. The country's private sector is expected to bankroll another 25,000. "It's an ambitious plan," says Denise Neddermeyer, CAPES' international-affairs director. "But this cannot be achieved alone — it requires increased international collaborative effort."

That was a major impetus for U.S. President Barack Obama's visit to the South American giant last spring. He and Rousseff agreed to work more closely on vital education issues, student exchanges and increased R&D cooperation, especially in what are known as the STEM fields of science, technology, engineering and math. U.S. colleges and universities as a result are set to enroll half of Science Without Borders' grant winners, who will pursue studies in engineering, hard science, math, energy, sustainable development, the environment, biotechnology and health.

The increased scholarship investment is possible because Latin American nations are flush with cash from the global commodities boom of the past decade — much of which has been driven by China's voracious demand for everything from oil to steel to soybeans. At the same time, their economies have largely avoided contagion from the economic collapse in Europe and the U.S. It's no coincidence that Brazil, the world's biggest producer of iron ore, soybeans, sugar and beef, and Chile, the biggest exporter of copper, are offering the largest number of grants — or that Paraguay and Peru, which grew 15.3% and 8.8% respectively last year, are among the new study-abroad investors. (Read about Brazil's new President, Dilma Rousseff.)

Experts back the scholarships plan, but they warn that governments have to take additional steps to reap the full benefits. One potential obstacle is
foreign-language proficiency. (Brazil has acknowledged this issue and is considering expanding grants to include training.) Another is ensuring that students return home to apply and share their knowledge. And the student traffic shouldn't be just one-way: "This should be part of a broader program, and that means bringing in students from outside and having a true exchange," says Geraldo Nunes, coordinator of international agreements at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. "Right now [Brazilian universities] don't have the means or infrastructure to do that."

That raises yet another key issue: improving primary, secondary and higher education in Latin America. Students in countries like Brazil continue to score at the bottom of international math, science and reading tests; and their universities, still too often steeped in the archaic pedagogy of the region's colonial era, produce far too many psychology majors and too few engineers. That reality makes it harder for Latin American economies to move from commodities to computers, from soybeans to solar panels. Brazil, for example, has made significant strides lately in areas like aerospace, evidenced by its world-class regional jet corporation, Embraer. But the region is still years, if not decades, behind Asian tigers like South Korea.

Still, the new trend is a welcome if fledgling sign that Latin American governments are giving new priority to education — to finally "advancing sustainably toward innovation, competitiveness and business leadership in strategic sectors," says Mercadante, the Brazilian Science Minister. With all that cash in hand, now is the time.