ECU police investigating rape in dorm

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East Carolina University Police are investigating a reported Saturday morning rape inside Tyler Hall.

The 18-year-old victim, a freshman at the university, said she was in a male friend's dorm room when the assault happened between 1-3 a.m., according to ECU Assistant Police Chief Dawn Tevepaugh. The friend was not involved in the attack.

The woman told police she had seen the suspect previously, but Tevepaugh declined to say when or where, citing the ongoing investigation.

It's unknown if the suspect is an East Carolina University student, she said. A safety alert wasn't issued because authorities do not think the suspect poses a continuing threat to the campus, Tevepaugh said.

The student had been drinking prior to the attack, Tevepaugh said. It's unknown if the suspect had been drinking. Part of the investigation is determining how the suspect entered the residence hall, Tevepaugh said.

The young woman was taken to Pitt County Memorial Hospital for medical treatment. While she was there, a university victim's advocate counselor was contacted along with university police.

Investigators are interviewing people who may have been on the hall prior to or during the assault, Tevepaugh said.

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Wider access is key to mending system

Editor's note: This fall, The N&O is talking to people about the nation's health-care system, what works, what doesn't and what should be done to fix it.

By Matt Ehlers
CHAPEL HILL - Ask Rebecca Chasnovitz why she wants to become a children's doctor and she will say that she enjoys working with kids.

Talk with her a little longer and the fourth-year UNC School of Medicine student will reveal an experience that helped edge her toward her choice: As a child, she spent months in the hospital after being diagnosed with a rare kidney disorder. In later years, she switched doctors as her family switched insurance companies, something she keeps in mind as she thinks of reforming the nation's health-care system.

"When you're constantly changing insurance companies," she said, "it's really hard to figure out what's covered and what's not."

Chasnovitz wishes health insurance were not tied to employers, but sounds resigned to the fact that it will be. "That's the system that we have," she said. But she would like to see a government-run option to compete with private insurers.

Chasnovitz grew up in Cary. Doctors diagnosed her kidney disorder when she was 6, and she spent three months in Rex Hospital. The lifelong condition causes recurring kidney stones.

She graduated from Enloe High School and UNC before starting medical school. "I'm just one of those students who just always wanted to be a doctor," she said, as medicine allows her to solve problems while helping people.

She was inspired, too, by the relationship she had as a child with her kidney specialist.

Now, as a medical student, she's approaching health care from a different angle.

"It's a confusing topic," she said, "even for someone in medical school."

In an effort to educate students on possible reforms, and to provide a venue for sharing ideas, the UNC medical school is hosting a series of forums. The first provided an overview of the reform process, said Dr. Warren Newton, the medical school's dean of education, and future forums could delve into particular aspects of the proposals.

Changes in the nation's health-care policy could touch all parts of a doctor's job, Newton said, from the types of research conducted to the types of records that are kept and the ways doctors are reimbursed.

"We've tried to frame the discussion around what happens to patients as opposed to what happens to doctors," Newton said. "Ultimately, I think that's what the decision needs to be, not what makes doctors happy, but how will we improve the health of patients?"

Bring in the feds

Chasnovitz has ideas.

In addition to an optional government-run insurance program, she hopes the government spends more money on basic, clinical research. She believes the implementation of electronic medical records, with some guidelines and oversight from the federal government, could improve efficiency among care providers.

The bottom line, though, is that she hopes more people will have access to affordable coverage.

"I'm hoping that my patients will have better coverage," she said, "and that helps my job."

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High-flying tales spark a book on Wright brothers

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If you live in North Carolina, you must know about the Wright brothers' first powered flight in 1903. It's the one memorialized on your auto license plate, the airplane picture with the words "First in Flight."

Yeah, that one.

But most of us don't know the brothers returned to Kitty Hawk for more flights five years later.

In his new book, "Conquering the Sky: The Secret Flights of the Wright Brothers at Kitty Hawk" (Palgrave MacMillan; $25), East Carolina University's Larry Tise gives the first detailed account of those 1908 flights, which brought Orville and Wilbur international fame.

The Wright brothers had returned to Kitty Hawk in 1908 to fine-tune their flyer. They needed a machine reliable enough to fly for at least an hour with two passengers. That's what the U.S. military required before it would buy the technology.

They chose Kitty Hawk partly because it was isolated. They could perfect the plane in secret, without worrying about competitors stealing their designs. (Also, the sand softened hard landings.)

Here's the irony: Their flights ended up being about as secret as Michael Jackson's demise.

The brothers didn't realize that folks living on the Outer Banks would eagerly spread news of their visit. And any scoop about flight was hot news.

"You have to imagine if you picked up any major world paper, hardly any issue... would appear without some story about flying," Tise says.

Nifty historical note: The very first news that Wilbur and Orville had returned to the Outer Banks was published in The Charlotte Observer. And it was accurate, Tise says.

But after that, many newspapers published wild tales that apparently came from Outer Banks lifesavers and fishermen. The Virginian-Pilot, for instance, reported a flight that hovered at takeoff and just before landing and covered 20 miles over land. The story ran before any flight had taken off.
As news spread, reporters converged at Kitty Hawk and ultimately witnessed a world record for an observed flight: 71/2 minutes. Though on the scene, they still bungled facts.

Still, their stories brought the Wright brothers newfound fame.

Tise, East Carolina's Wilbur and Orville Wright distinguished professor of history, has been interested in unanswered questions associated with the Wright brothers since he was a boy growing up in Winston-Salem.

These days, nearly everything written about the Wright brothers is derived from other works, he says.

Not this book. It's the result of research from letters and newspapers in the U.S. and Europe. "I'm very, very proud to say this is based on all original stuff," he says. He should be.

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College Officials Brace for Hit From Economy

By JACQUES STEINBERG and THEO EMERY

BALTIMORE — The talk this week at an annual gathering of college admissions officers and high school counselors included the usual topics, like how to deal with “difficult” parents and the names of hot student prospects. But the conversations — in panel discussions, in hallways and over crab cakes — always seemed to circle around to one subject: the economy.

High school counselors said that some parents who in other years worried mostly about whether their children could get into a particular college were now concerned about whether they could afford the price tag.

Admissions officers said they feared further price increases and cuts in university budgets, perhaps even in classes. They wondered whether this would create significant dips in yield, the number of accepted applicants who then choose to attend. For those at private colleges, one anxious worry prevailed: Will students even apply?

“We’re fearful,” said Paul M. Driscoll, the dean of admissions of the University of Redlands in California, a private college that already had a 3 percent drop in applicants for the new freshman class, and an increase in families seeking financial aid.

Both college officials and high school counselors here said the full brunt of the economic crisis was not felt in the most recent admissions cycle — because families had long ago set college plans in motion, and had largely held to that course. In many instances, colleges reported this past spring that they received roughly as many applications in 2009 as they had in 2008, and that there were no significant dips in yield.

But as the 5,000 officers and counselors moved among various panel discussions here — including a packed session on changes in the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or Fafsa, the government’s main financial aid form — the conference expressed concern that this latest admissions cycle could be much grimmer, for colleges and some families alike.

Ann Bowe McDermott, director of admissions at the College of the Holy Cross in Massachusetts, said the economy and its many ripple effects were the main subject of a meeting on Wednesday attended by admissions officers from more than two dozen Jesuit colleges.

“Affordability is something everyone is concerned about,” said Ms. McDermott, whose institution’s tuition, board and other fees already exceed more than $50,000 annually for full-paying students.

And yet, Ms. McDermott noted that recently in Westchester County, N.Y., 200 high school students and their parents turned out for a Holy Cross information session at a Catholic prep school, far more interest than the college could recall having previously received in the area.
“We’ve had this conversation in past years,” she said, in reference to concerns about a dip in applications and enrollment, “and then it didn’t happen. I guess I’m an eternal optimist.”

Among the high school advisers at the conference, which ends Saturday and is formally known as the National Association for College Admission Counseling, was Frank Tatro of Fairfield Ludlowe High School in Fairfield, Conn.

Mr. Tatro said that a financial-aid information night at the school in December had drawn 350 people, more than triple the number in past years, and that he was particularly struck by the number of students (some of them juniors, who were included for the first time). “I think it’s an added dynamic that the kids are having to contend with that they might not have had to in the past,” he said.

He added that, instead of asking where they might be admitted or what constituted a good fit, “Now, it’s: ‘Will I be able to afford it and what’s my debt going to be?’”

John Dunphy, a school counselor at Horace Greeley High School in Chappaqua, N.Y., said he had seen perhaps 20 percent more students this year applying to the State University of New York system, which he called a significant spike. Applications for out-of-state public universities, like Michigan and Delaware, are also on the rise, Mr. Dunphy said.

“Chappaqua is an affluent community, and quite a few of our kids look at selective private schools,” he said, “but the affordability of public schools is definitely being considered more than ever.”

Not that state colleges are necessarily a refuge. As the conferees huddled here Thursday, thousands of students and faculty members were marching in protest 3,000 miles away, at the University of California, Berkeley. Their quarrel was with steep tuition increases and sharp cuts in offerings throughout the state system.

On Friday afternoon, in what is always a high point of the conference, representatives from nearly 550 colleges took their places behind long tables draped with their institution’s banners. In front of them, several thousand counselors moved past like slow-moving barges, some docking occasionally to chat.

Representing the University of California, Davis, was Gregory W. Sneed, associate director of undergraduate admissions, who said he felt the protesters’ pain. From now until June, he will have 18 unpaid furlough days.

“As admissions officers,” Mr. Sneed said, “it does make our jobs tougher.”