THE DAILY CLIPS

September 29, 2010

News, commentary, and opinion
compiled by the East Carolina University News Bureau from:

The Greenville Daily Reflector
The Raleigh News & Observer
The New York Times
The Wall Street Journal
USA Today
The Charlotte Observer
The Fayetteville Observer
The Greensboro News & Record
Newsweek
U.S. News & World Report
Business Week
Time

East Carolina University News Bureau
E-mail to durhamj@ecu.edu  Web site at http://www.news.ecu.edu
252-328-6481
Texas shooting underscores importance of ECU efforts

The University of Texas at Austin endured the nightmare scenario of every college on Tuesday morning as an on-campus gunman fired several shots before taking his own life. Early accounts indicate that the law enforcement response was swift and professional, and that the university community was kept informed through a technologically advanced alarm system.

Since the 2007 shooting at Virginia Tech, East Carolina University has upgraded its alert process and even conducted a "live shooting" drill to test its preparedness. As Tuesday's events in Texas prove, that investment of time and energy is more than justified, as schools like ECU must stay on a ready footing in case the worst should unfold.

Some 44 years after Charles Whitman killed 14 people from his sniper's perch atop the University of Texas's iconic tower, another tragedy unfolded on that campus as a student opened fire with an assault rifle on Tuesday morning. After shooting at least five times on campus, the man killed himself on the sixth floor of the main Perry-Castaneda Library.

UT Austin is an enormous campus, situated in the heart of the Texas capital. Minutes after shots were fired, however, a lockdown was announced through e-mail and text messages to students and faculty, and announcements were made over a campus speaker system to warn of the danger. Law enforcement was said to respond rapidly, perhaps helping to prevent further injury or loss of life.

Following the murder of 32 students and staff at Virginia Tech in April 2007, most campuses have conducted thorough reviews of their emergency response procedures. That is true at UT Austin as it is here at East Carolina, where improvements to the alert system have helped keep the university community well informed of potential threats. Earlier this year, East Carolina also conducted a drill involving a campus shooter scenario to test its response.

While these initiatives help serve overall campus safety, officials must remain vigilant and open to innovation as they seek ways to protect the university population. Tuesday's events in Texas offer a powerful reminder of how important that effort remains.
Early reviews positive on UT's notifications, response to campus gunman

*Text messages, Twitter, loudspeakers among methods employed to alert people.*

By Ralph K.M. Haurwitz

AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

Updated: 11:23 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 28, 2010
Published: 10:59 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 28, 2010

For Kathleen Mabley, the first warning of danger was a text message with irregular punctuation that came across her cell phone Tuesday morning as she was walking across the University of Texas campus:

"UT Alert: (Armed subject reported last seen at (PERRY CASTANEDA LIBRARY on 09282010 details to follow," the message said.

Shortly thereafter, Mabley, who works at UT's Graduate School, heard the long, deep, descending wail of the university's emergency alert siren, followed by a loudspeaker announcement advising people to take shelter.

UT used everything but carrier pigeons to let its students, faculty and staff know that a gunman was on campus and that they should stay indoors.

Officials employed e-mail, the school's website, video monitors in buildings and residence halls, Twitter and Facebook, beginning at 8:19 a.m., nine minutes after getting the first report that someone was firing a weapon. The text message system alone reached more than 53,000 people, officials said.

"They did a really good job," Mabley said of the notification effort.

An after-action review will examine what went right and what could be improved in terms of notification, emergency response and general preparedness for a crisis on campus, but the early reviews by university officials, campus and city police, city leaders and others were positive.

The American Council on Education, a Washington-based association of higher education institutions, expressed admiration for what it called UT's textbook response in alerting the community.

Francisco Cigarroa, chancellor of the UT System, said that, as a father of a UT-Austin student, "I know the level of concern parents had when they received word of this event.

"I want to emphasize that law enforcement officials at the campus, city, county and state level responded swiftly and effectively to the situation," Cigarroa said. "Emergency alerts were issued timely throughout the university community to keep individuals out of harm's way, while law enforcement officials worked diligently to secure buildings and public areas as the ordeal was brought under control."

Austin Mayor Lee Leffingwell described the cooperation between police agencies as unprecedented. That was no accident, said Bob Harkins, UT's associate vice president for campus safety and security.

Since the Sept. 11 attacks, the university has taken steps to improve emergency preparedness, response training and notifications, he said.

Just last month, city and university police and other first responders participated in a so-called active shooter drill using a building on campus scheduled for demolition. Emergency responders practiced knocking down doors and
breaking through windows.

A tabletop exercise last month put representatives of other university units through the paces.

"I think we were lucky," Harkins said. No one was hurt besides the gunman, identified as UT sophomore Colton Tooley, 19, who police officials said took his own life in the library. "I think the training of the University of Texas Police Department and the Austin Police Department helped us be lucky."

Harkins said the after-action review would include an examination of how thoroughly the campus was locked down. About 70 of UT's 200 buildings have electronic locks that were activated from a central point, but the remainder should have been locked manually by building managers.

"We're not sure how well they took care of that," said Harkins, who added that managers in all of the buildings were supposed to watch for people seeking shelter. Communication and training can always be improved, he said.

Austin Police Chief Art Acevedo said some UT students played a commendable role, pointing officers in the direction of the suspect. Of course, the vast majority of the students, faculty and staff — spread across a campus of about 350 acres — never saw the gunman. Many members of the university community praised the notification system.

"I think it was pretty good," said Simon Kim, a graduate student in public affairs, who received a text message at 8:24 a.m. as he arrived for class at Sid Richardson Hall. "It was my first time dealing with this kind of stuff. It was very informative. I knew what to do. Since we couldn't go out of class, we just continued having a discussion."

Abigail Arons, another student at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, said: "We couldn't hear the sirens or loudspeakers in and around the LBJ building, but we were informed by other methods. I received two text messages before coming to school, but I came to school anyway because the messages didn't say I wasn't supposed to. Other than that, the whole thing went smoothly from my perspective."

Freshman Stafford Whittington was in an 8 a.m. calculus class in Waggener Hall when he and other students received the first text message. They initially kept the news to themselves. Then one student alerted the professor, who moved the class to another location. Police searched the building and sent them back to the classroom.

"Everyone was kind of freaked out at first," Whittington said. Then they calmed down. But when the police showed up, "it made it more real" and emotions peaked again, he said.

Dean Neikirk, a professor of electrical and computer engineering and chairman of the Faculty Council, said the university was wise to use multiple methods for getting the word out. He was at UT's J.J. Pickle Research Campus in North Austin on Tuesday morning, but he said the siren and loudspeaker system works well, based on his observation of testing that takes place the first Wednesday of each month.

"I know from personal experience — it's easily heard in a classroom," said Neikirk, who teaches in the Engineering-Science Building. "I like that system because you're not dependent on having to carry a phone."

Tuesday's incident brought back memories of 1966 when Charles Whitman opened fire from high on the UT Tower, fatally shooting 14 people and injuring 31 others. A woman who was pregnant lost her fetus in the shooting.

"In 1966, we held transistor radios up to our ears — that was the social network medium of that day," said Clif Drummond, an Austin attorney who was then president of UT's student body. "There was a great deal we didn't know at the time."

rhaurwitz@statesman.com; 445-3604

Additional material from staff writers Patrick George, Ben Wear and Cristina Peña.

UT's emergency response
University of Texas officials used a variety of methods to warn the students, faculty and staff that a gunman was on campus and that they should stay indoors.

8:10 a.m. First report of shooter

8:19 a.m. Text alert issued

8:25 a.m. Campus siren sounded (Siren and loudspeaker announcements went every 10 minutes.)

8:30 a.m. UT Police Department Facebook post

8:37 a.m. Campus-wide e-mail from vice president for university operations, who oversees UT police

8:41 a.m. Second text alert issued, 'be safe' posting on UT police site and update to emergency website

8:44 a.m. Emergency page update

8:50 a.m. Information displayed on flat-screen TVs around campus

9:05 a.m. Home page summary

9:07 a.m. Twitter update (public affairs and UT police provided updates)

9:25 a.m. Home page update

9:27 a.m. Twitter update

9:43 a.m. Home page update

9:48 a.m. Home page update

9:52 a.m. E-mail from President William Powers Jr.

10:08 a.m. Twitter update

10:12 a.m. Twitter update

10:18 a.m. Third text alert

12:06 p.m. E-mail from Powers

12:10 p.m. Fourth text update

12:23 p.m. All-clear announcement over loudspeaker

Source: University of Texas

Find this article at:
Safety tops concerns at town hall meeting

Most questions focus on policing, crime policies

BY KATHRYN KENNEDY
The Daily Reflector

Safety — on and off campus — remains the primary concern for a group of East Carolina University students and District 3 residents who gathered Tuesday night.

A town hall meeting was coordinated by Greenville City Councilwoman Marion Blackburn, along with Dean of Students Lynn Roeder, in an effort to promote avenues of communication between the city and students.

The approximately 50 people in attendance were given the opportunity to ask questions or express concerns about city policy. Many of those centered on policing and crime.

Graduate student LaTasha Jones mentioned a place on campus that lacks adequate lighting, and ECU Police Chief Scott Shelton said the department is looking at lighting as part of a long-range facilities plan.

GREENVILLE POLICE LT. TED SAULS JR. speaks about crime-free housing with the audience during a town-hall style meeting hosted by City Councilwoman Marion Blackburn.

POLL: Did you follow local politics when you were a student? Vote at reflector.com.

Student Government Association Secretary Kristina Dortschy asked what police are implementing to protect intoxicated people from becoming victims of violent crimes downtown. Blackburn said people must be vigilant and keep friends with them. Others stressed personal responsibility, too.

"You have to learn to protect yourself," Shelton said, noting that is part of community policing.

"There are police downtown," Roeder said. "There

See TOWN HALL, A9
are police everywhere. But there are more of you. Safety starts with us.”

City Manager Wayne Bowers said the city is seeking a grant to buy more surveillance cameras that can be accessed from patrol cars. Greenville Police Cpl. Richard Taylor added that police are educating bar staff to create “more eyes and ears” on the street and in the clubs.

Rosalyn Belisle, head of the Nathaniel Village residents association, said occupants of her complex are concerned by the hoards of students walking by to get home late after the bars close. She said residents are afraid to come outside as students pass in large groups, and in the morning there are sometimes young people passed out on the property.

Blackburn suggested a meeting with residents and some ECU representatives to discuss the issue. Greenville Police Chief William Anderson said Belisle can always call the department so police are aware of circumstances and can dispatch officers if needed.

Area B Commander Lt. Susan Bass provided numerous tips to students on how to keep their homes, vehicles and bodies safe. They ranged from installing deadbolts to taking an inventory of valuable property to not being distracted by texts when walking or driving.

Lt. Ted Sauls briefly explained a new crime-free rental housing program that is being explored to help abate crime in multifamily and single dwelling rental areas.

ECU alum and Greenville resident Van Brown spoke at length about how the city is handling crime downtown, stating that in 45 years a student has never shot anyone. He wanted to know why students are being punished and not protected.

Brown said the city needs better use of bicycle patrols, and manpower should be spaced out downtown instead of clustering together and leaving areas unattended.

The city would be nothing without ECU and the students attending, he said. Downtown bar owner Bennett LaPrade agreed, adding that students need to be more vocal about what they want downtown.

Anderson replied that police are always reviewing how to address the potential for crime downtown and that ECU police play a large role, too.

Kristi Rogers, a junior at ECU, said that while she feels safe downtown, many walking in the surrounding areas become victims.

“They’re trying to do the safe thing by not drinking and driving,” she said, then asked about the potential for the blue lights and phones to contact police extending off campus.

Bowers said the city would look into it.

SGA President Tremayne Smith asked about the potential for a downtown venue that focuses on entertainment rather than alcohol. The project has been under discussion by the city and ECU officials for several years, stemming from a suggestion made during a study of alcohol abuse at the university.

“It’s a great idea, and there are plans, but plans are vague and ... unfunded,” Blackburn said.

Virginia Hardy, vice provost for student affairs, agreed with Blackburn’s assessment. She emphasized that the university doesn’t want to raise student fees to make the idea a reality and noted that ECU also is looking at a larger student union under the same constraints.

Blackburn added that she thinks it’s important to have a venue off campus and envisions a theater or music venue.

Code enforcement officer A.J. Basil was one of the last staff presenters, listing trash and parking on improved surfaces as the biggest complaints about students. He also mentioned minimum housing codes, which can help students living in substandard rental conditions.

Questions about biking and walking, sidewalks and two bus systems running separately rather than in a comprehensive system also were posed. Responses plugged the proposed downtown intermodal transportation center grant money recently awarded to the city for the first-ever bicycle and pedestrian master plan.

Students were encouraged to get involved in that process as well, which will include a public interest meeting on Oct. 20.

Contact Kathryn Kennedy at k.kennedy@reflector.com or (252) 329-9566.
ECU defense gets back to basics

Pirates coming off bye week

By Edward G. Robinson III
Staff Writer

Greenville — East Carolina football coach Ruffin McNeill speaks from experience about playing North Carolina.

The former ECU strong safety played in three football games against the Tar Heels under former coach Pat Dye, from 1976-1979. Back then, he said, there wasn't much need for inspirational speeches or trash-talking as the in-state rivals expressed themselves with their pads.

"It was always a very hard-hitting football game," McNeill said. "It was not a place for the faint of heart."

As the Pirates (2-1, 2-0 Conference USA) prepare for Saturday's trip to Kenan Stadium to face the Heels (1-2), McNeill expects no less in what will be the 13th meeting between the schools.

The Pirates used an off week to gather themselves after a 49-27 loss to Virginia Tech on Sept. 18 and correct some defensive miscues that factored into their implosion during the second half of a game where the Hokies scored 28 consecutive points.

McNeill, a former defensive coordinator at Texas Tech, said his staff emphasized fundamentals, technique and execution for a young team that fall back on a technique in your tool box. That comes from game experience and going through it time and time again and understanding that the technique coach teaches me works."

ECU senior defensive tackle Josh Smith said the opportunity to practice live during the off week helped players not only improve angles and leverage key in tackling but hone the footwork associated with their positions.

In addition, he said players used the off time to study video of missed assignments and review playbooks — part of the execution emphasis McNeill stressed.

"One missed assignment, you're playing with 10 guys," Smith said. "Two missed assignments, you're playing with nine guys. So when those types of things happen, mental breakdowns and taking plays for granted, that's when you start messing up."

McNeill wants his team sharp for a game he knows comes with built-in enthusiasm. The Heels, who defeated the Pirates last season 31-17, own a 9-2-1 advantage in the series.

"There will be some emotion early because of the excitement," he said. "But it has to come back to execution, fundamentals and focus on technique. That's where my big job comes in."
Under the Dome: Our blog is your inside source for the latest on North Carolina politics

Rallies are miles apart; so are opinions

Daniel W. Smith of Raleigh, center, joins a chorus of applause calling for the ouster of U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi at a 'Spending Revolt' rally at the Fairgrounds.

The frantic final stretch before the midterm elections hit high gear Tuesday as a “Spending Revolt” bus tour sponsored by national conservative groups made several Triangle stops and President Barack Obama appeared - albeit by television - at a campus event in Durham aimed at energizing young voters.

Obama was speaking from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and his remarks were the featured event at more than 100 campus “watch parties,” including one at N.C. Central University, where about 300 people packed a room in the Pearson Cafeteria. He urged students to get out and vote. The televised president dispatched one of his point men, U.S. Trade Rep. Ron Kirk, to stand in for him at the NCCU event.

On another tip of the Triangle, Obama also made an appearance. His face flashed across a projector screen in Kerr Scott Building at the N.C. State Fairgrounds, as about 250 people gathered to bemoan government spending and call for reform.

Americans for Prosperity, whose members have come to be called part of the tea party, crisscrossed the Triangle on Tuesday in a bus bound for Washington. Those at the Raleigh event signed their names on the bus, a sort of stamp of approval for a simple message: Stop spending our money.

At both events, participants eyed Nov. 2 with anticipation. Americans for Prosperity hopes to shake the footing of entrenched Democratic representatives from the area.


Price is facing a challenge this year from Republican B.J. Lawson of Apex, whose campaign said this month that its polling shows Lawson running a tight race with Price among registered voters.

Price spoke briefly at the NCCU event but long enough to attack Lawson, who he said would try to abolish federal student loans and the U.S. Department of Education.
A wave of murmurs swept the crowd.

"It sounds extreme, but there's some stuff out there that's pretty extreme," he said.

The campus events, put together by an offshoot of the Democratic National Committee, called Organizing for America, were part of a coordinated effort by the Democrats to counter the conservative tide that threatens their control in the House and Senate.

Appealing to students

In a speech that hit several emotional peaks, Obama ticked off a list of accomplishments including health care, banking and education loan reform and said that the students had to get out and vote or Republicans would try to erase everything that his administration had done in the past two years and return to the policies that had put the economy in jeopardy.

"If everyone who voted to empower change in 2008 shows up in 2010, we will win," he said, urging the students to vote and get their friends and families to vote, too.

Charlotte freshmen Lauren Holsey and Jordan Hancock, both 18, applauded Obama vigorously from the back row. Both said they had already planned to vote, but Holsey said she was doubly determined after listening to the president.

"I'm not really into politics, but he explained the issues really clearly," she said.

Call to conservatives

At the other end of the Triangle, a mostly graying crowd digested a litany of numbers as speakers from Americans for Prosperity and local conservative groups such as The John Locke Foundation and John W. Pope Civitas Institute detailed government spending rates. The latter two are Raleigh-based groups started by millionaire businessman and conservative activist Art Pope. They advocate for smaller government, lower taxes and other conservative causes. Pope is a director of Americans for Prosperity.

"We have a tax problem, not an income problem," said Dallas Woodhouse, North Carolina director of Americans for Prosperity.

Participants cheered when speakers demanded restraint. They booed when he mentioned Obama and Washington bureaucrats.

"Out of control"

Karleen Gross of Raleigh said she started paying closer attention to government spending in the past few years.

"Our government is way out of control," she said. She criticized government, saying it is trying to compete with work that private corporations can handle, such as health care, student loans and mortgages.

Mike Gautier, who moved to Raleigh from New Jersey about a year ago, blamed the government's high taxes for loss of his job. He was laid off from a casino more than a year ago.

"Taxes have spiraled out of control," he said. "If people weren't having to pay so much, they'd have more to spend."

jay.price@newsobserver.com or 919-829-4526

Get the biggest news in your email or cellphone as it's happening. Sign up for breaking news alerts.
Cal-Berkeley Cuts 5 Athletic Programs

By JOE DRAPE

The University of California, Berkeley, eliminated five of its intercollegiate sports programs Tuesday, two of which, baseball and men’s rugby, had become particular points of pride over the years.

The move comes at a time when athletics have faced strong criticism at Berkeley because money-losing sports have been subsidized while the academic departments have been forced to make severe cuts. The men’s and women’s gymnastics and women’s lacrosse teams will also be dropped from intercollegiate competition after this academic year.

By going to 24 programs, the university will save an estimated $4 million a year.

“Clearly, this is a painful outcome after months of deliberations, analysis and the examination of every viable alternative,” Cal’s athletic director, Sandy Barbour, said in a statement. “I deeply regret the impact this will have on so many valued members of our community.”

The men’s rugby team has won 25 national championships since 1980. But now it will be designated a varsity club sport, which officials say will allow the team to continue playing and competing on campus but force it to become financially self-sustaining.

University administrators said the cuts would affect 163 of the university’s more than 800 student-athletes and 13 full-time coaches. They vowed to honor promised scholarships to those students or help them transfer to other universities if they want to continue their athletic careers.

Only 14 of the 120 athletic programs in the Football Bowl Subdivision — the highest level of college sports — made money in the 2008-9 academic year, down from 25 the year before, according to the N.C.A.A.

Still, overall spending on sports has increased among universities with big-time programs, according to the N.C.A.A. In 2008-9, programs in the Football Bowl Subdivision increased their spending by nearly 11 percent over the previous year. At the same time, universities also increased their contribution to athletics by 28 percent. That spending came even as the
economic recession forced institutions to make painful cuts.

Chancellor Robert J. Birgeneau vowed that Cal would still field one of the most broad-based and successful athletic programs in the nation. Last year, Cal finished eighth in the Directors’ Cup, which has become a benchmark for the success of athletic programs. It has also become a lucrative milestone as dozens of athletic directors and coaches have bonuses tied to their standings in the competition.

“We will retain, at 24 teams, one of the larger programs in the country at an annual cost fully consistent with the levels of support provided to our peer institutions for programs that are often smaller in size,” Birgeneau said in the statement. “This is not a coincidence; the leaders of this country’s best universities have long understood the value of high-quality athletics programs and the extent to which they are an integral part of what defines institutional character and identity. In my opinion, the benefits of collegiate athletics, both tangible and intangible, far outweigh the cost. Although the program has been reduced in size, our commitment to Cal athletics has not.”
September 26, 2010

Obama’s University Visit Was Not Simple

By DAN BARRY

MADISON, Wis.

Would it be all right if the Leader of the Free World stopped by your campus for a little while?

He wants to surround himself with hordes of enthusiastic young people, toss out a few oratorical gems — as you know, he’s got the gift — and reinvigorate his anxious political party. The Secret Service has the usual security concerns, of course, but we’ll pay for any inconvenience. Interested?

The offer by the Democratic National Committee to the University of Wisconsin-Madison would seem like a no-brainer, conjuring images of university officials ostentatiously checking their calendars before saying: It just so happens that the Badgers of Wisconsin are free that day.

The offer, though, forced the university’s chancellor, Biddy Martin, to weigh the many benefits of a visit by a sitting president against the naked political purpose of that visit. After all, the event would be a kickoff rally for Democrats as they approach the midterm elections, and Barack Obama would be appearing as a party leader more than as a president.

In the end, the university said: Yes!

Tuesday afternoon, thousands of students crammed cheek-by-jowl into the university’s Library Mall, both to see a world leader up close and to provide that same world leader with a photo-op backdrop exuberant enough to offset reports of his flagging popularity.

But his visit wasn’t an easy call. Before the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System and the Democratic National Committee signed a contract last week, in which the committee agreed to pay $10,500 to cover expenses, Ms. Martin had to satisfy herself that it was the right thing to do.

“There was never a question whether we wanted President Obama to come to our campus,” Ms. Martin said. “That was clear. But the question was how to do this in a way that was fair to everyone in the community.”

Over the decades, two other sitting presidents have visited the campus of this famously liberal, progressive university in this famously liberal, progressive city. They, too, had their reasons.

In the fall of 1932, President Herbert Hoover, a Republican, spoke at an event that a university fact
sheet says was “somewhat marred by the president’s tired voice and a faulty amplifier.” The Depression would tire any president, especially one who probably sensed that in days he would be soundly voted out of office.

And in May 1950, President Harry S. Truman delivered a “peace” address in which he said that only together can nations build a strong defense against aggression. A few weeks later, the Korean War broke out.

Now, 60 years later, a third president was offering to visit, not to deliver a policy speech on the weak economy or the quicksand war, but to begin a four-city effort to rally Democrats in key states. Why Madison?

Derrick Plummer, a spokesman for the Democratic National Committee, provided this answer by e-mail: “President Obama has always had a special place in his heart for the city of Madison. And, as you know, President Obama visited the city in 2008 and is glad to be a part of the enthusiasm and activism that has been a strong tradition of the University of Wisconsin.”

True, President Obama may well remember that night in February 2008, when a series of wins in state primaries all but ensured that he would be the Democratic candidate for president, and thousands wildly cheered during his victory speech in Madison.

He may also have heard how, on election night, throngs of University of Wisconsin students spontaneously gathered in the streets to celebrate. Ariel Shapiro, a junior who works for one of the student newspapers, The Daily Cardinal, remembers how hundreds of students climbed Bascom Hill to serenade the statue of Abraham Lincoln with “God Bless America.”

“It was ridiculous,” she says, still smiling at the sweet memory.

Finally, the president may also have taken note of the relatively low unemployment rate in Madison, which stands at 5.5 percent. In Racine, a little more than 100 miles to the east, unemployment is at 14.1 percent, while in Beloit, 55 miles to the south, it’s at 15.3 percent.

So, Badgers, how about it?

Ms. Martin, who has been chancellor since September 2008, was thrilled by the chance. You couldn’t buy this kind of educational experience, or, quite frankly, this kind of publicity; it’s an honor. But she worried about the fairness of having campus life disrupted by a political event. A day or so of fretting followed.

Then, amid the many documents and manuals that provide guidance in the administration of a campus of 42,000 students and 21,000 faculty and staff members, someone uncovered a written policy called “The Use of University Facilities for Political Purposes.” Among other things, it said that each major political party can hold one event on campus during an election period.
And don’t forget: Library Mall, where the Democrats wanted to hold their rally, is a vibrant nerve center for the university and the city, with a rich tradition of political events and free speech.

Ms. Martin and the Board of Regents signed on, then received validation of that decision in the plans of students and faculty members to gather after the political rally to debate everything from the economy and the wars to the political process itself. The only dissent has come by e-mail from a couple of alumni, objecting to the use of the campus for the rally.

“This is a campus that values political speech,” Ms. Martin said.

But political speech comes at a cost. It meant the complete or partial closing of several buildings, from the University Bookstore to the spectacular State Historical Society building. It meant a day off for all the food vendors in Library Mall. It meant the cancellation of the 5 p.m. Mass at the St. Paul’s University Catholic Center.

It also meant enough logistical challenges to spawn a doctoral dissertation on time management, or homeland security, or Kafka. Setting up magnetometers. Removing all bikes. Establishing a plan for protesters. Banning laptop computers, drink bottles, sharp objects, and bags or purses larger than a sheet of paper.

Oh, and portable lavatories. “Specifically, about the number of porta-potties,” Ms. Martin said.

“There’s a potential difference of opinion of how many will be needed.”

This and other matters were ultimately resolved. By 3 p.m., a line a mile long and three and four people deep was disappearing into the distant horizon of University Avenue, an assertion that at least here in Madison, the president still rocks. Campus police estimated an overflowing crowd of 26,500.

As the crowd waited, political ideas and conspiracy theories bounced among them like so many beach balls.

Suddenly, the signal was given and the crowd rushed, thwarting many who had waited patiently in line. They passed through the banks of magnetometers and poured onto the Library Mall, where the leaves on the trees were turning and the sharpshooters on the roofs were watching.

They played music. They recited the Pledge of Allegiance. They cheered earnest student speakers. Then, shortly after 6, President Obama appeared in shirtsleeves and no tie, taking his place in front of a collection of students adorned in Badger red. A sustained roar, or release, followed.

“Hello, Wisconsin!” the Leader of the Free World said.
The Forum

Yes, college is worth the price of admission

By Barry Glassner

It's a story that people in my new city keep recounting to me since my selection as president of Lewis & Clark College this summer. The story originated a year ago in a Portland newspaper, Willamette Week, the grim case of the graduate of our law school who found herself on food stamps. More than $120,000 in debt and unable to get a job, she was vexed by incessant phone calls from creditors — precisely the kind of fear-inducing scenario that seems to cloud so many conversations about higher education these days.

As I reply to anyone who asks, I feel badly about young people struggling to find work and pay back loans in today's difficult economy, and all the more about someone from my new home. Yet I have yet to meet a graduate of ours or any college who professes regret about having achieved that education, or who feels he or she would be as competitive in the job market, and as equipped for life, without that degree and all that went into it.

As the nation's high school seniors begin the process of applying to college, many cash-strapped students and parents are no doubt asking themselves whether the return on investment will be worth it. I have a simple message for them: Higher education remains the most rewarding investment they are likely to make in their lifetimes.

Missing the whole story

Politicians, interest groups and many news media people throw around terms such as "out of control" and "skyrocketing" when they talk about tuition trends. "The price of college is skyrocketing into the stratosphere," declared the Cato Institute, a Washington-based think tank, last year. Increasingly common, too, are horror stories such as the one reverberating in the news media and around the Internet this summer about Alexandra Jarrin, an unemployed corporate worker and onetime business school student on the verge of homelessness, who owes $92,000 for an education she now calls "basically worthless."

No one would minimize the burdens of debt and the sacrifices people make for education, and I believe that our institutions need to do everything possible to minimize cost increases. But anecdotes like that one, and about students paying more than $50,000 a year and graduating into six-figure debt, could hardly be more misleading.

Colleges in that $50K club numbered just 58 in the last academic year, according to The Chronicle of Higher Education — a tiny percentage of the nation's...
Don't believe the claims about 'skyrocketing' tuition costs and a 'worthless' education. The investment in higher education is the safest bet around.

roughly 1,700 private four-year colleges. And the most expensive colleges tend to offer the most generous financial aid packages — mostly in the form of grants, not loans. The majority of America's students attend public institutions, where the average tuition is about $7,000 per year for students at four-year universities in their state of residence, according to a 2009 report by the College Board.

Here's something else to lower our collective blood pressure: Average loan debt stood at just over $23,000 for college seniors who graduated in 2006, according to a report released last year by the Project on Student Debt. Nothing to be cavalier about, to be sure. But the figure is a fraction of the $120,000 waved about, and hardly out of line with the debt many Americans take on for a new car. The rhetoric about stratospheric tuition and student debt has its uses, of course — motivating people to vote a certain way, for example, or to stay tuned for the next segment on a news program. But it comes at a cost. The exaggerated horror stories obscure situations that are worthy of serious attention.

Long-term costs

Take, for example, America's downward trajectory in the rankings of nations with the highest percentage of college-educated citizens, a trend that bodes ill for the country's economic competitiveness. Frightening people about costs can only exacerbate this real problem by encouraging would-be students to assume that higher education is not worth the price or is beyond their ability to pay.

Troubling, too, is the apparent ascendancy of the idea that people are better off forgoing college. ABC News put it like this in a headline last year: "Some Debt-Laden Graduates Wonder Why They Bothered with College." In my experience, graduates almost universally tell us their education prepared them for long-term success in their careers while broadening their minds and enriching their lives. They are glad that they "bothered."

Back to our recent law school graduate who has been held up as Exhibit A. The alumnna, Emily Jackson, recently contacted several of us administrators at Lewis & Clark and expressed resentment about the way her story has been told and used. She is off food stamps and in a judicial clerk position, she explained. Although she is still struggling to make her student-loan payments, she stresses that she does not blame the school for the tight job market, is proud of her legal education, and appreciates her law school experience.

I am confident that the economy will improve. When it does, Jackson, and most other students and alumni from the nation's campuses, will make their way into the kinds of positions they had in mind when they invested in their education.

For them I will be happy. The young people who fell for the scare tactics and forsook their educations? They're the ones I worry about.

Barry Glassner is the president-elect of Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Ore., and the author of The Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things.
First weeks can be tough for college kids

A student’s view

Ashley Kaser, 20, thought a tiny Chicago design school was everything she wanted. But "within a week, I knew I had to transfer," she says. "Every day, I was trapped with the same 20 students."

After a miserable semester, she moved to the 50,000-student University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. "I hated it here the first semester, too," she says. One factor: She was isolated in an off-campus apartment.

But today, Kaser is a happy second-semester sophomore. The key, she says, was getting involved in student groups.

During that rough first college year, she says, "dropping out definitely passed my mind." She spent many weekends at home in Rogers, Minn. Her parents helped just by listening, she says.

Her advice to struggling freshmen: Join something. If it doesn’t work? "You can look elsewhere."

Next: Do older teens need online supervision? E-mail kpainter@usatoday.com.

A couple million sets of U.S. parents just realized a dream: They sent sons and daughters off to college. Most immediately set their sights on a new dream: attending graduation ceremonies at those colleges.

But right about now, some are getting the first clues that might not happen. A few know it won’t — because their kids have already dropped out.

"I had a student leave the first week," says Marcus Hotaling, a psychologist who directs the counseling center at Union College in Schenectady, N.Y.

"It does happen," says Marjorie Savage, parent program director at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities.

In fact, surveys by ACT (the non-profit company behind the ACT test) show one-third of freshmen do not become sophomores at the colleges where they started.

ACT doesn’t track how many students drop out in less than a year, transfer to another school or return later. But just under half get degrees from the colleges where they first enrolled (within three years for associate degrees or five years for bachelor’s degrees).

"The numbers are dreadful, and the freshman year is key," says James Boyle, president of College Parents of America in Arlington, Va.

That might strike panic into parents already getting distress signals:

► A drumbeat of negativity, via calls, e-mail, online status updates and other communications. A little homesickness is normal. But a student calling home “multiple times a day, crying or angry, overreacting to little things” is in trouble.

Hotaling says. Savage says struggling freshmen say things like: "I can’t sleep. I hate the food here. I don’t like the people. It’s not what I expected."

► No communication. "There’s a lot of pressure to succeed," Hotaling says. So when things don’t go well, students often don’t want parents to know.

► Bad grades. Those are almost a rite of passage, “a reality check that typically comes in the first four weeks,” Savage says. But if the bad news is still coming four weeks after that, she says, "you might start to worry more."

College students who live at home can show many of the same signs, Savage notes — and are at high risk for dropout because of the competing demands of school, home and, often, a job.

Also at high risk: students who came to school with a disability or a mental illness such as depression. Hotaling recalls one bright young man with a form of autism who came 3,000 miles and “didn’t last the semester because he couldn’t handle the social aspects.” And sometimes leaving is the right thing, he says.

But, often, parents can help students stay put, without jumping in and taking over. “Stay in touch and provide coaching,” Boyle says. Remind students that academic advisers, counselors and others are there to help, he says.

Encourage students to get involved in campus clubs, teams and activities, Savage says.

"Typically, if you give them a few weeks, they are going to adjust," Hotaling says. But, he adds, if you are concerned about safety — and, especially, suicide — don’t hesitate to call the campus counseling center and ask for help.

Kim Painter has written about health and wellness for USA TODAY since 1987. She is the mother of two teen boys.

Parenting: Part II

By Kim Painter