THE DAILY CLIPS

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ECU: Bleachers to be repaired after season

The Daily Reflector

East Carolina University officials say it will be after this football season before the bleachers are replaced in the new east end zone section of Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium.

Officials are considering different options for the reinstallation of the bleacher benches, some of which failed at the first ECU home football game and left six people with minor injuries.

Officials initially indicated the seats would be replaced quickly.

A release Wednesday said plans call for beginning the installation immediately after the close of the football season because of time required for the design, approval and production process.

The broken bleachers have been removed from the 7,000-seat section. Students will be allowed to sit or stand on the concrete risers as they did at the game against Memphis on Sept.

See BLEACHERS, A9

BLEACHERS

Continued from A1

11, Bill Bagnell, associate vice chancellor for campus operations, said.

Several bleacher benches failed during the opening home game against the University of Tulsa on Sept. 5. Officials say the problem was caused when anchors that attached brackets to the concrete risers pulled loose.

Bagnell said the most likely option for replacing the bleachers will include a bracket change that will allow for both vertical and horizontal concrete anchor attachments.

The installation will include additional testing of the anchors before replacing the brackets or seats, Bagnell said.

There are four home games remaining in ECU’s football season.
William Earl ‘Bill’ Brinkley Jr.

NEW BERN — William Earl “Bill” Brinkley Jr., 68, of New Bern passed away peacefully Tuesday, Sept. 28 after a courageous battle against several health challenges, surrounded by his loving wife, Elizabeth and sons, John and Drake.

Bill was born Aug. 12, 1942 in Apex. After graduating from J.H. Rose High School and East Carolina University, both in Greenville, Bill spent his entire adult life in New Bern. He was a founding partner of Brinkley, Elam and Knott, CPA’s in New Bern. He practiced public accounting in New Bern for more than 40 years before his recent retirement.

He was active in a variety of civic activities, almost always taking on a leadership role in the organizations in which he participated. While at ECU, Bill was a founding member of the Kappa Alpha Chapter of Sigma Phi Epsilon Fraternity, later serving as its president. Bill’s civic engagements included his beloved East Carolina University Pirate Club, which he served as its president in 1978; the New Bern Jaycees (former president); the Eastern Carolina Yacht Club (president, 1978); and the Noon Rotary Club of New Bern, where he was honored as a Paul Harris Fellow. He was a member of Healing Grace Church in New Bern.

Bill is survived by his wife of 36 years, Elizabeth Allen Brinkley of New Bern; two sons, John William Allen Brinkley and wife, Christy, of Raleigh, and James Drake Brinkley, also of Raleigh; two granddaughters of Raleigh, Alexis Christian Brinkley and Ashten Leann Brinkley who absolutely adored their “Big Daddy”; one brother, Robert Gentry Brinkley and wife Amy, of Charlotte; brother-in-law Kenneth William Austin and wife, Kirt, of Greensboro; and numerous nieces and nephews upon whom he so enjoyed bestowing his ever present sense of humor. He was preceded in death by his parents William Earl Brinkley Sr. and Frances Lassiter Brinkley, formerly of Greenville, and by sister, Julia Brinkley Austin, formerly of Greensboro.

A funeral service celebrating Bill’s life will be held at Healing Grace Church, 3407 Red Fox Road in New Bern at 2:00 p.m. on Friday, Oct. 1. Burial will follow the service in New Bern Memorial Cemetery. The family will receive visitors tonight from 6:00-7:30 at Cotten Funeral Home, 2201 Neuse Blvd. in New Bern.

Bill’s out-sized personality and love of life infected everyone he came in contact with. He was an enthusiastic and life-long fan of ECU sports. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the ECU Pirate Club or to the charity of the donor’s choice.

Online condolences may be made to the Brinkley family at www.cottenfuneralhome.com.
To study greenhouse gas, researchers take the ferry

Hans Paerl, center, and Jeremy Braddy collect refrigerated water samples in the engine room of the ferry Floyd J. Lupton. Scientists have been using ferries to monitor water quality near the coast.

MOREHEAD CITY -- Clues about how the earth responds to climate change may soon emerge from the lower decks of the Floyd J. Lupton and other ferries sailing along the North Carolina coast.

In the ferries' hot, noisy engine rooms, instruments for measuring the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide will join sensors and collection bottles that have been used for years to monitor vital signs of the Neuse River and Pamlico Sound.

Knowing how much gas Pamlico Sound absorbs and how much it gives off, when combined with all the other information collected about the water, will enhance the picture of how some of the most vibrant bodies of water on Earth react to climate change.

Hans Paerl, a professor at the UNC Institute of Marine Science, is leading an effort
to learn the value of the Pamlico Sound and other coastal waters in absorbing greenhouse gases. Data gathered about the Pamlico will be stored for scientists worldwide who want to see how the sound responds.

In the Pamlico, life thrives in the mix of saltwater and freshwater. The sound is rich in tiny plants that soak up carbon dioxide, a gas that in excess contributes to warming of Earth’s atmosphere, scientists say. Waterborne plants release greenhouse gases when they decompose.

Paelr compares the Pamlico and other coastal waters to the importance of rainforests in soaking up greenhouse gas.

Scientists are interested not only in activities that produce carbon dioxide, but in places such as forests and farms that absorb the gas. For years, research ships and commercial vessels have been used to measure how much carbon dioxide oceans absorb.

But not nearly as much is known about near-shore areas, where the immediate effect of human activities are felt most intensely on water quality, Paerl said.

"We know less about coastal systems and how important they are," he said.

Climate change is a hot research topic for the National Science Foundation, which gave grants totaling $500,000 to Paerl and other researchers to find out what's happening in the Pamlico.

"This is one of the new breaking stories in terms of research," said David Garrison, program director for biological oceanography at the National Science Foundation in Arlington, Va.

Way ahead of the feds

UNC had a head start getting a program going, Paerl said, because it's been using North Carolina ferries for nearly a decade to watch the water. The testing program started in 2000, the year after Hurricane Floyd inundated the Pamlico with freshwater runoff and sewage.

Instruments continuously record the water's temperature, saltiness, acidity, and levels of the pigment that makes plants green. Jugs collect water samples that are examined in Morehead City labs. The equipment travels three ferry routes: the short jaunt between Cherry Branch and Minnesott Beach, and the longer two-hour-plus trips between Ocracoke and Cedar Island, and between Ocracoke and Swan Quarter.

On a recent trip to Minnesott Beach, institute technicians put on ear protectors and headed into the Lupton's engine room, while passengers gazed at the shore, oblivious to the science happening beneath their feet.

Information about water conditions streams to computers in the boat's pilot house and at the Morehead City institute almost as soon as it's gathered. In-person visits are needed every week or two to retrieve water samples and to switch out the sensors that get clogged with gunk. The bundle of facts will eventually help scientists figure out what happens to gas uptake when, for example, pollution causes the overgrowth of the tiny plants.

Since June 2009, Joseph Crosswell, a graduate student at the institute, as been testing the carbon dioxide sensor by periodically taking it on trips up the Neuse River on a 25-foot boat.

The carbon dioxide gear will start its ferry rides in early November. Having equipment that measures carbon dioxide on the day and night ferry runs will produce a more complete picture than drawing water periodically from a few spots on the sound.
"The estuary is so dynamic from one point to another," Crosswell said. "This helps us see overall how the system breathes day in and day out."

The ferries don't cover the whole 80-mile-long sound. So Michael Wetzel, a marine scientist in Texas, plans to use satellite imagery and the ferries' scans to see what's happening in the entire sound. Wetzel, who used to work with Parel in Morehead City, also worked with scientists in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in Research Triangle Park on using information from satellites for water quality measurements.

Team members said discoveries about the Pamlico can be translated to similar water systems around the country. Through the National Science Foundation, their discoveries will be available to scientists around the world.

"I think that what we'll find will be applicable to other systems," Wetzel said. "The results will go beyond the Neuse-Pamlico."

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Players in line to face honor court

CHAPEL HILL -- North Carolina football players suspected of academic cheating will have to get in line with every other UNC student in a similar situation.

Right now, that line stretches to 70 students or more. That was the approximate number of cases on the docket of the university's student judicial system last week, university officials said. It isn't clear how many of the 10 Tar Heels football players still sidelined by the NCAA investigation of the program have been implicated in cases of potential academic misconduct. University officials have said, though, that it could take several weeks at least for the current student cases to be resolved.

Winston Crisp, UNC's vice chancellor for student affairs, said there was no way to predict when the UNC football cases would be resolved.

"I think people have some unreasonable expectations," he said. "There isn't an easy answer to give people who want to know how long this will take."

UNC athletic director Dick Baddour said Wednesday that about 98 percent of his department's investigation into possible academic misconduct on the football team is complete (although the athletic department will be looking into other university teams, as well.) Results from that investigation have been sent to the student attorney general's office. If that office charges a student with cheating or with another violation of UNC's honor code, the accused has a hearing with the honor court, which issues rulings and decides on a punishment.

Baddour said he has an idea of when the honor court will rule on the football cases in front of it, "but I'm not at liberty to say [when]. I do have some sense of what the effort is, and how they're moving it along, but I think it would be unfair to them [for me] to publicly talk about that."

The university and the NCAA are investigating potential cases of academic misconduct within the football program, as well as reports of potential improper contact with sports agents. Thirteen players were held out of the Tar Heels' season opener against LSU; one, tailback Shaun Draughn, was subsequently cleared to play the following week against Georgia Tech.

Two other players from that group, starting defensive backs Kendric Burney and Deunta Williams, were ordered last week to repay benefits and serve suspensions of six and four games, respectively, for violating NCAA rules governing contact with agents and preferential treatment. (The NCAA will hear the school's appeals on those two cases Friday.)

Several UNC trustees asked last week whether the university could expedite the honor court process so that football players who may not be at fault could be cleared more quickly to play. But officials said they won't unduly affect the student-run court, and UNC Chancellor Holden Thorp said the university may still hold a player out of competition even after the NCAA cleared him if the honor court still has questions.
"We have had a student honor system for 130 years, and I can't imagine circumventing that process under any circumstance," Thorp said during a last week's meeting of the board of trustees. "I also can't imagine taking steps where we would knowingly play a student-athlete we know is ineligible."

Thorp and Baddour stressed that each player's case is unique, so it isn't likely that every player's case will be resolved at the same time.

**Case by case**

At UNC, the judicial system is run entirely by students.

Suspected violations of the honor code and student code of conduct are forwarded to the student attorney general's office, which has 30 days to decide whether a student should be charged. Often, the decision-to-charge process takes less time, Crisp said.

"It depends on the complexity of the case," he said. "So it's very difficult to say how long a process will take."

Once charged, a student has a preliminary conference to learn about the charges, rights and processes and is given time to plan a defense. The honor court then hears the case and rules and administers punishment, if needed, generally all in one day. Occasionally, the hearing process can stretch to two or three days, Crisp said.

The court hears six to 10 cases a week. Because each case is unique, it's difficult to say how long the entire process should take, said Jonathan Sauls, UNC's judicial programs officer.

"I don't know there is a typical or average case," he said. "It is influenced by so many factors. It is a bit disingenuous to say it will take 'X.' I'd say it's on order of weeks rather than days or months. But two? Four? Six weeks? It depends on the nature of the case."

The honor court has the power to administer punishments ranging from a failing grade in a course to probation, temporary or permanent suspension or, with the chancellor's approval, expulsion. (A student suspended permanently from UNC-Chapel Hill could still be admitted to another school within the UNC system. A student expelled from the university could not.)

If a student-athlete is suspended because of an honor court violation, the student-athlete could, under certain circumstances, claim the lost season as a redshirt year and preserve that year of eligibility, Baddour said.

The customary punishment for cheating is a failing grade for a component of the assignment, the entire assignment, or for the course, along with a one-semester suspension during which time the student must leave the university, Sauls said.

"Expulsion and [permanent] suspension are not common," Sauls said. "They are handed out sparingly."

Staff writer Robbi Pickeral contributed to this report.

[Contact Information]

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N.C. State athletic officials presented their case to students Wednesday for raising the school’s student fees for athletic operational costs in a meeting at the campus recreation building.

Athletic director Debbie Yow said her department is proposing a $33 increase that would raise the fee to $192.50 per year. N.C. State’s current student athletic fee of $159.50 ranks seventh among the eight ACC public schools, ahead of only Clemson’s, according to data N.C. State has compiled.

Yow is seeking ways to increase N.C. State’s per-sport expenditures. A compilation of 2008-09 data provided by schools on their federal Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act forms shows N.C. State ranked 11th in the ACC in per-sport spending at $2,289,818 per sport.

N.C. State’s student athletic fee is the lowest in the UNC system. The University of North Carolina’s is next to last at $271 a year. East Carolina’s is $526 a year, according to UNC system records.

Nonetheless, N.C. State student body president Kelly Hook is wary of any fee increase.

"I understand the importance of athletics and how athletics is the front porch to our university," Hook said, "but at the same time, in lieu of last year’s $900 tuition increase and in light of what will inevitably be a tuition increase this year, I am uncomfortable with any fee increases at all."

In a meeting with The News & Observer and Charlotte Observer staff members Wednesday, Yow explained the economic pressures the athletic department is facing. Yow would like N.C. State’s per-sport spending to reach the ACC average, which was $2,625,809 in 2008-09.

The athletic department would have to add more than $7 million to the overall budget to do that. Yow said the ACC’s new television contract, which takes effect in 2010-11, will add a "badly needed" $3.9 million to the school’s athletic budget, with an escalation of 4 percent each year afterward.

But the other ACC schools will receive the same boost in TV revenue. Yow said additional revenue for N.C. State in the future could come from football, basketball and baseball tickets; apparel licensing; multi-media rights, and student fees.

She was asked if she was squeamish about asking for more money from students in a difficult economy.

"Sure, absolutely, no question," she said.
Yow said N.C. State also is going to offer the student body more tickets for football (750) and men's basketball (1,000) as it asks students for more money. Yow said Chancellor Randy Woodson eventually would make a recommendation to the school's board of trustees on the issue.

Despite the athletic department's financial difficulties, Yow said she doesn't foresee dropping any sports. An announcement Tuesday that California is dropping five varsity sports sent shock waves through college athletics.

That's not something N.C. State is considering, according to Yow, but she also doesn't foresee adding sports. She said she has heard from numerous fans interested in adding men's lacrosse in part because of Maryland's success in that sport during her tenure there.

"With the per-sport expenditure, we need to do a much better job of taking care of what we have, the current student-athletes, instead of adding," Yow said.

Yow said that her predecessor, Lee Fowler, left the school's athletic facilities in good shape but that an estimated $38 million in additional facilities improvements still need to be made.

After $120 million in building during Fowler's tenure, though, Yow said she is wary of "donor fatigue" among Wolfpack donors who have been asked to give a lot. So she will use a targeted donation approach.

For example, she said the N.C. State tennis program needs two additional courts. Yow envisions asking the school's tennis alumni to donate toward an improvement that would add two courts.

But Wolfpack Club members aren't the only ones suffering from financial fatigue. N.C. State students' tuition rose from $3,953 in 2009-10 to $4,853 in 2010-11.

Hook said she understands the value of athletics but said students are stretched financially.

"While I appreciate and respect where they're coming from, speaking for all students, we're all a little uncomfortable with a fee increase," Hook said.

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Elite Colleges, or Colleges for the Elite?

By RICHARD D. KAHLERBERRY

Washington

TODAY’S populist moment, with a growing anger directed at the elites who manipulate the system to their advantage, is an opportune time to examine higher education’s biggest affirmative action program — for the children of alumni.

At our top universities, so-called legacy preferences affect larger numbers of students than traditional affirmative action programs for minority students, yet they have received a small fraction of the attention. Unlike the issue of racial preferences, advantages for alumni children — who are overwhelmingly white and wealthy — have been the subject of little scholarship, no state voter initiatives and no Supreme Court decisions.

Among selective research universities, public and private, almost three-quarters employ legacy preferences, as do the vast majority of selective liberal arts colleges. Some admissions departments insist they are used only as tie-breakers among deserving applicants. But studies have shown that being the child of an alumnus adds the equivalent of 160 SAT points to one’s application (using the traditional 400-to-1600-point scale, and not factoring in the new writing section of the test) and increases one’s chances of admission by almost 20 percentage points.

At many selective schools, legacies make up 10 percent to 25 percent of the student population. By contrast, at the California Institute of Technology, which has no legacy preferences, only 1.5 percent of students are the children of alumni.

Legacy preferences are often justified as a way of building loyalty among alumni, sustaining tradition and increasing donations. But there is no hard evidence to prove this. A study by Winnemac Consulting for the Century Foundation found that from 1998 to 2007, at the nation’s top 100 national universities, if one controls for the wealth of alumni, “there is no statistically significant evidence of a causal relationship between legacy preference policies and total alumni giving.” Moreover, the study found that at the seven universities that dropped legacy preferences during the time of the study, alumni giving didn’t decline.
Legacy preferences are “virtually unknown in the rest of the world,” according to Daniel Golden, a former reporter for The Wall Street Journal. The paradox is that while they are an American contrivance, they are also un-American, standing in direct contradiction to Thomas Jefferson’s famous call to promote a “natural aristocracy” based on “virtue and talent.” The Old World nature of hereditary preferences may explain why, in a 2004 poll by The Chronicle of Higher Education, Americans opposed such preferences by 75 percent to 23 percent.

Legacy preferences may also be illegal. Although in 1976 a federal court ruled in a passing mention that legacy preferences are constitutional, the issue has never been properly litigated. Today, new legal arguments have been advanced questioning legacy preferences at both public and private universities.

Steve Shadowen and Sozi Tulante, two lawyers in private practice in Pennsylvania, have argued forcefully that preferences violate the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment. While the amendment was primarily aimed at prohibiting discrimination against blacks, it also extends to what Justice Potter Stewart called “preferences based on lineage.” In the past, the Supreme Court has read the amendment to prohibit laws that judge individuals on their parents’ actions or behaviors, such as those that punish children born out of wedlock.

Legacy preferences at private institutions may also violate the 1866 Civil Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of “ancestry” as well as race.

Affirmative action policies are controversial because they pit two fundamental principles against each other — the anti-discrimination principle, which says we should not classify people by ancestry, and the anti-subordination principle, which says we must address a brutal history of discrimination. Legacy preferences, by contrast, advance neither principle — they simply classify individuals by bloodline.

Congress should outlaw alumni preferences at all universities and colleges receiving federal financing, just as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlaws racial discrimination at them. Or lawmakers could limit the tax deductibility of alumni donations at institutions that favor legacy children on the principle that tax-deductible donations are not supposed to enrich the giver. If legislators don’t act, it will fall to lawyers to bring suit to enforce the 14th Amendment and the 1866 Civil Rights Act and put an end to this form of discrimination in higher education.

Richard D. Kahlenberg, a senior fellow at the Century Foundation, is the editor of “Affirmative Action for the Rich: Legacy Preferences in College Admissions.”
For-profit colleges under fire over value, accreditation

Updated 10h 7m ago

By Mary Beth Marklein, USA TODAY

Chelsi Miller uses a stethoscope with her son Keige, 5, at their apartment in Midvale, Utah. Miller was accepted to a pre-med program, but her credits from a for-profit school will not transfer.

For Chelsi Miller, the wake-up call came when University of Utah officials said her credits wouldn't transfer from her old school.

Utah's flagship public university accepted her to its pre-med program last fall but said her courses at Everest College, a national for-profit institution with a campus in Salt Lake City, wouldn't count toward her bachelor's degree. That left Miller with a 3.9 grade-point average for an associate's degree that she says did nothing to advance her education and career goals. And, she has more than $30,000 in student-loan debt.

She says Everest misled her when it suggested her credits would transfer and misrepresented what it would cost her.

LAWSUITS: Students, employees, shareholders file against for-profit colleges

COLLEGE BLOG: Loan defaults highest among for-profit college students

"I feel as if I had been sold a college experience from a used-car salesman," says Miller, 26, of Midvale, Utah, who last week filed a class-action lawsuit in state court with two other students accusing Corinthian Colleges, Everest's owner, of fraud.

Miller's claim — which Corinthian disputes — is the latest in a string of actions raising questions about for-profit colleges, whose enrollments are soaring as many Americans beef up their education as a hedge in a tough job market.

In 2008, about 2,000 for-profit colleges eligible for federal student aid enrolled nearly 1.8 million students — an increase of 225% in 10 years. About 9% of all college students now attend for-profits; most attend schools owned by one of 15 large, publicly traded companies that each enroll tens of thousands of students. Last year, federal student loans and grants made up an average 77% of revenue at the five largest for-profits.

Advocates of for-profit colleges say their programs, which often operate online or in rented office space, serve a key role in educating students who juggle work and family demands. But the U.S. government has stepped up its scrutiny amid growing concern that for-profits are reeling in billions of dollars in federal aid by using aggressive — some say deceptive — practices to lure students to programs that might not yield a useful education.

The Education Department has proposed penalizing...
for-profits whose students graduate with more debt than they can afford, and Congress began a series of hearings this summer on whether federal aid to for-profit colleges — more than $24 billion in 2008-09 — is being put to good use.

"It is our responsibility to ensure that for-profit colleges are putting the needs of students before the needs of shareholders," says Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, chairman of a Senate education committee whose hearing Thursday aims to explore the magnitude of the federal investment in for-profits. "We need to learn more about whether students are succeeding at these schools and whether the taxpayer investment is actually benefiting students."

A question of standards

As the topic heats up in Washington, more than 1,000 students are expected to converge on Capitol Hill today in support of for-profit colleges. But for others, including Miller, the problems with for-profits start with concern about accreditation, a coveted assurance of educational quality.

Accreditation, a sort of third-party seal of approval designed to protect consumers and taxpayers from diploma mills, is important to colleges because the Education Department relies on it to determine which schools may get federal student aid. It's important to students because it can help them transfer credits from one college to another and can signal that a candidate's academic training has met certain standards.

It's also confusing because there is more than one type of accreditation.

Miller says she was "a naive single mother from a small farm town" when she responded to an ad for Everest's surgical technology program. When she asked if her credits would transfer to the University of Utah, she says, an Everest admissions official "assured me that the college was going through an accreditation change and would have full accreditation by the time I graduated."

In fact, Everest College is accredited by the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools, one of the more than 70 organizations recognized by the Education Department.

The problem: The organization is a national body.

Historically, for-profit colleges have been accredited mostly by national groups, which traditionally have focused on short-term college programs in fields such as the culinary arts, medical billing or business administration.

In contrast, most non-profit, degree-granting public and private institutions are accredited by one of six regional bodies. (To complicate matters more, some professional associations accredit academic programs in fields such as pharmacy or nursing at both regionally and nationally accredited institutions.)

Those historic distinctions are blurring as more for-profits offer degree programs, which make them eligible for regional accreditation. Types of accreditation differ because institutional missions differ, but most specialists in higher ed accreditation agree that regional accreditation, which takes at least two years for a college to earn and must be renewed every 10 years, is considered the most rigorous and most prestigious.

Kevin Kinser, an education professor at the State University of New York at Albany who studies the for-profit higher education industry, estimates that close to half of all for-profit enrollments today are in schools that have been regionally accredited. The credential serves "a legitimizing function," he says.

Colleges "promote that about themselves, often in terms (such as), 'We have the same accreditation as the University of Chicago.'"

It's up to institutions to decide whether to accept or deny transfer credits, but many use accreditation status as a guideline. The University of Utah, for example, requires students who want to transfer
from nationally accredited schools such as Everest to seek permission from its faculty to get credit for courses already taken at a different institution.

"Often those courses are found lacking in some way or another," says Suzanne Wayment, associate director of admissions at the University of Utah. For example, she says, an algebra textbook used by a nationally accredited school may be for an introductory course, while the university requires that students complete a higher-level course.

On the other hand, she says, the university tweaked its policy this summer, when it began allowing coursework from the regionally accredited University of Phoenix, the USA's largest for-profit college, to count as elective credits. Wayment says officials from the University of Phoenix — which enrolls about 476,000 students nationwide, either online or at one of more than 200 locations — recently requested a review because the original policy, in place since the 1980s, was outdated.

Manny Rivera, spokesman for the Apollo Group, which owns the University of Phoenix, says "it is the student's responsibility to confirm whether credits earned at University of Phoenix will be accepted by another institution."

But Harris Miller, president of the Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities, which represents about 1,800 for-profit institutions, suggests that many more non-profit schools follow blanket policies that waste students' — and taxpayers' — time and money because students have to retake a course "over and over."

"Even when a school does become regionally accredited, other schools will often take a discriminatory attitude simply because they're for-profit," he says. "The stratification of the higher-ed system is incredibly elite."

Confused students

Recent lawsuits, and a probe by the Government Accountability Office, suggest that some nationally accredited colleges may be exploiting confusion about accreditation by omitting or glossing over relevant details.

The GAO report, for example, said a representative for the nationally accredited Kaplan College in Florida told an undercover government investigator who was pursuing an associate's degree in criminal justice that the college was accredited by "the top accrediting agency — Harvard, the University of Florida, they all use that accrediting agency." But that was not true.

A class-action lawsuit filed in August against the for-profit Westwood College in California noted that the college's website said the school was a candidate for regional accreditation but failed "to disclose that it has been a candidate for two years and was passed over for accreditation during its first evaluation."

And Chelsi Miller's lawsuit argues that Corinthian is "aware of prospective students' ignorance of, or confusion about, this important distinction."

Kent Jenkins, vice president of public affairs communications at Corinthian Colleges, declined to comment on Miller's case. But, he said, "we are very straightforward and direct with our students and prospective students about what they can expect from their diploma or degree. We have detailed processes and procedures that require our admissions counselors to disclose whether credits are or are not likely to transfer to other institutions.

"We work very hard to treat our students honestly and fairly, and we don't tolerate deception, period."

In a development that has captured the interest of the Education Department, a growing number of for-profits have taken a shortcut to regional accreditation: buying an already accredited non-profit college. At least 11 non-profits have been converted to for-profits that way in recent years, Kinser says.
In 2004, for example, investors purchased Grand Canyon University, then a small, financially struggling Christian college in Phoenix that has been accredited since 1988 by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, which accredits more than 1,000 institutions in 19 states. Today, Grand Canyon enrolls 40,000 students, most of them in its online program.

Regional accrediting associations, facing a policy development that didn't exist until for-profit colleges began to proliferate, have since tightened their reins or are re-examining rules regarding ownership changes. In February, the Higher Learning Commission told Chancellor University in Cleveland, which was acquired in 2008 by a for-profit company, that it would withdraw accreditation unless the school could show that it met certain criteria. In June, it denied re-accreditation for Dana College in Blair, Neb., which was in the process of being purchased by a for-profit company. The college has since closed.

"This is the type of thing we want to keep a close eye on," says James Kvaal, a deputy undersecretary of education.

But federal officials and lawmakers are not just watching for-profit colleges.

The Education Department's inspector general, who investigates compliance problems, threatened in December to strip the Higher Learning Commission's authority because it approved accreditation of the for-profit American InterContinental University despite an agreement among commission members that the school had an "egregious" policy of giving more credit for certain graduate and undergraduate courses than was "common practice in higher education."

This summer, lawmakers grilled officials of regional and national accreditors during hearings about whether colleges found to engage in questionable practices — such as encouraging students to lie on their financial aid forms or pressuring students to sign legally binding contracts — should be allowed to keep their accreditation. Sen. Michael Enzi, R-Wyo., ranking member of the Senate's education committee, has said he wants any investigation of problems in the for-profit higher education industry "to also include a review of all institutions of higher education."

Those developments worry many leaders of traditional college and universities, who comply with a host of federal regulations but for decades have fought to keep federal regulators out of classroom matters. Accreditors say they're taking the government's concerns seriously.

"The absence of credibility for accreditation means the absence of credibility for our colleges, universities and programs," says Judith Eaton, president of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, a membership organization of degree-granting colleges that advocates for self-regulation of academic quality.

Harris Miller, head of the association of for-profit schools, says he would welcome wider federal oversight to ensure quality. He says his schools, and particularly their completion rates, would stack up favorably when compared with community college systems, the for-profit sector's main competitors.

But Chelsi Miller, who has put more schooling on hold until she can save more money, says something has to change so more students aren't duped.

"I received misleading guidance and answers that led me to sign my life away," she says. "I can't speak to other colleges, but as far as Everest goes, they really have taken advantage of people that cannot afford to be taken advantage of."