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Students and faculty at East Carolina University got a chance to talk with world-renowned author Sir Salman Rushdie on Wednesday before he delivered his keynote address on campus.

“It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to have Salman Rushdie at ECU,” said student Angie Mellor, a member of an English class set up this semester to study Rushdie’s works in connection with his visit.

The British Indian novelist sat down in the Bate Building with students in the class to discuss his books, which are fictional but based in history and religion. Rushdie also answered questions for faculty before delivering his speech, “Public Events, Private Lives: Literature and Politics in the Modern World,” in Wright Auditorium on Wednesday night.
Rushdie’s is the premier speech in the “Voyages of Discovery” lecture series hosted annually by the College of Arts and Sciences. The lecture, the class and several online teleconferences are part of Rushdie’s mini-residency at ECU this semester.

“I really appreciate how open and honest he is about his work,” said graduate student Chris Styron.

Most known for his 1988 novel, “The Satanic Verses,” about polytheistic lines stricken from the Koran and surviving the ensuing death threats from Muslim leaders, Rushdie is one of the world’s most outspoken intellectuals and an advocate for freedom of speech. He has authored 10 novels, his first in 1975, that have been published in more than 40 languages and won numerous prestigious international awards.

“Nobody anticipated the trouble (after Satanic Verses),” Rushdie said. “There’s always people that don’t like your book ... but I thought that would be the end of it.”

He told the students of “how differently books can be read” and that “the world can change your book without ever changing a word in it.”

International conflicts are also conflicts of narrative, Rushdie said.

“You find in many parts of the world, different descriptions of the world — Israel and Palestine, for example, two different narratives fighting for the same patch of earth,” he said. “What’s happening there is a clash of descriptions, one side is saying this is the history of this land, and the other side is saying no it isn’t, this is the history.”

In addition to history and current events, Rushdie also is interested in pop culture as a language people share.

“Whether its Greek Mythology or Jersey Shore, it’s a common experience, a shorthand exchange of information; that’s what shared culture means,” he said.

Writing is still important in a technological world, Rushdie said.
“We need to retain the ability to make an imaginative response to the world,” he said. “Actually great scientists are also imaginative, I mean take Steve Jobs, look at what he has imagined into being.

“Imagination is one of our greatest gifts as humans and whatever nourishes that is valuable.”

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E CU's Jeremy Grove works through a drill during football practice on Tuesday, Oct. 4, 2011. (Aileen Devlin/The Daily Reflector)

**ECU's improving D faces tough task**

By Nathan Summers
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East Carolina head football coach Ruffin McNeill and offensive coordinator Lincoln Riley came to Greenville in 2010 with a mind to outscore opponents, no matter how many points it took.

In their first season, the Pirates won manic Conference USA battles with Tulsa, Southern Miss and UAB, but because they yielded so many points late in the season, they also lost some of the same types of games, including crucial ones against UCF and SMU.

It turned a remarkable 4-0 start for ECU in league play into a modest 5-3 finish.

Now armed with a rapidly improving defense, however, some of the league’s slugfests that slipped away in 2010 might be won thanks to a unit that’s improved from 120th nationally at the end of last season to 71st this week.

“The defense has done great,” said redshirt freshman linebacker Jeremy Grove, who leads the Pirates with 52 tackles and is the C-USA front-runner with an average of 13 stops per game. “We still have a lot we need to improve on, but in this conference with these offenses, there’s going to be a lot of points scored, so the big thing is bend but don’t break.”
Defensive confidence that was sorely lacking last season is now brimming, thanks in large part to the meshing of ECU’s handful of veterans with a slew of relative newcomers asked to take on big roles like Grove, fellow linebacker Daniel Drake and safety Damon Magazu.

Where three BCS opponents have opted to grind it out on the ground in wins against the Pirates this year, Houston and NCAA total offense leader Kase Keenum will unleash an aerial attack similar to ECU’s, meaning a new challenge for the Pirates’ fledgling defense which has surged to fourth overall in C-USA (384.8 yards/game).

“They run the same offense as us, but the good thing is we’ve been practicing against that offense all through spring and throughout camp, so we’ve got an idea of it,” Grove said. “It won’t be a huge difference, even though we haven’t seen it in the last couple of weeks.”

The Pirates rank second in C-USA in pass defense, allowing just 183.8 yards, but the UH pass offense (451.2) and total offense (610.0) are the best in the NCAA.

**Hot hands**

Even when his star receivers aren’t necessarily playing like it during certain periods in a game, Keenum has the benefit of game-tested reliability.

UH senior offensive cogs Tyron Carrier and Patrick Edwards are both two-time 1,000-yard receivers and both boast career-long streaks of at least one reception per game every game.

So even if Keenum fails to connect with one of his main pass-catchers on a big third down, ECU defenders should be ready to see the ball thrown their way again and again.

“Every time, I’ll always go and tell whoever it is, ‘Hey man, I’m going to keep throwing you the ball,’” Keenum said of his faith in his receivers even after they don’t convert. “It doesn’t matter what’s going on or what the situation is. I’ll tell him, ‘The next third down and seven, I’m going to check the play and I’m still going to throw you the ball.’”

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Road for Ross

A man who has accomplished much for the institutions of which he has been a part will today set his goals for his latest job and biggest one yet. Tom Ross, the 61-year-old president of the University of North Carolina system, has been in Chapel Hill for nine months but today, in Greensboro (his home town) he will go through the ritual of formal installation. In his inaugural address, Ross will set out his aims, and his thoughts, for the future of the 17-campus system.

And though times are tough enough to have resulted in funding cuts for the UNC system - substantial budget reductions that amount to 15.6 percent overall - Ross is not lingering on the problems. In a recent interview with reporters and editors of The News & Observer, he made it clear his goals will be lofty and his standards of excellence no lower.

Ross has long been, particularly in the eyes of his friends, one of those people who demands of himself excellence in all things, whether it's fly fishing in the mountains or working as a high school football official or serving as a Superior Court judge or a foundation director or a university president.

Priorities take shape

Former Gov. Jim Hunt, who had an eye for talent, appointed Ross to the Superior Court bench when the Davidson College grad was just 33. Ross later became the head of the state's Administrative Office of the Courts, then moved to the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation as executive director. From there, it was back to Davidson as president and then to Chapel Hill.

Ross already has taken charge, of course. He has an understated sense of humor, a wide array of interests and an ability to get along with persons of all backgrounds and political persuasions.

If Ross today echoes some of what he said in that recent meeting at The N&O, he will emphasize several priorities:

Though tuition at UNC campuses has increased in recent years, he worries about affordability and wants to follow a low tuition-good financial aid model, leaving students with as little debt as possible.
A stormy time

Taking over as a scandal in the football program at UNC-Chapel Hill was unfolding, Ross did not duck the issue but recognized that as president he couldn't, and shouldn't, take over an athletics program. Rather, he believes that all system schools should be competitive at their respective levels of sports, but must not compromise academics. He should use his influence as president to hammer home the principle that academic standards must be upheld.

He stands firmly against enrollment caps, and he is right. Public institutions should not admit all applicants, as it's fair to set high admission standards, but they shouldn't be in the business of limiting enrollment based on numbers alone. Ross also believes that campuses should work more closely together to avoid duplication and to expand offerings to students at all campuses.

He notes that, after all, a college degree is what a high school degree used to be in terms of job and earning prospects. Beyond that benefit, however, the president thinks higher education has a value in and of itself. It enlightens people, shapes them, stimulates their interest in the world beyond their immediate surroundings and makes for a better society.

President Ross has a solid view of the ground, the reality, on which the university system sits, and of the sky, the horizons for which it must aim. Right here, right now, he is the right leader.
WASHINGTON One hour can spell the difference between life and death for victims of severe injury, but about a quarter of Americans now have to travel farther to reach the nearest hospital trauma center, a study published Wednesday concludes.

The reason: Hundreds of trauma centers have closed over the past two decades.

Sixty-nine million people had to travel farther to reach a trauma center in 2007 than in 2001, according a study in the journal Health Affairs.

The median - or midpoint - increase in travel time was 10 minutes. But for nearly 16 million people, travel times increased by 30 minutes or longer.

Most of the trauma centers that closed were overwhelmed by financial problems from a combination of treating many uninsured patients who couldn't pay, and having to maintain high-level, life-saving capabilities on round-the-clock alert.

The greatest impact from diminished access has been on people in rural communities and in areas with high shares of African-American residents, low-income people and uninsured. The trend exacerbates disparities in health care.

Lead researcher Dr. Renee Hsia, an emergency room doctor at San Francisco General Hospital, said the study points to a need for state and regional coordination to reduce travel time to trauma centers. In rural areas, more resources may have to be devoted to air transport.

The researchers obtained longitude and latitude coordinates for every trauma center in the United States. They then measured driving distances and times between trauma centers and area ZIP codes, factoring in Census population data. They compared the results for 2001 and 2007, the latest year for which data was available.

Hsia said researchers were surprised. "A quarter of the population is significant," she said.
In 1990, there were 1,125 trauma centers around the nation. Fifteen years later, 339 had closed, or about 30 percent. That compares to 66 closures between 1981 and 1991.

Designed and equipped to handle complex injuries, trauma centers are not the same as emergency rooms. A person with a broken leg should go to the emergency room; a victim with multiple fractures belongs in a trauma center. A patient with a concussion can be treated in the emergency room; someone with a brain injury should be taken to a trauma center.

Time is of the essence. Medical experts agree that a severely injured victim's chances of surviving and returning to a normal life are greatest if they can get the right treatment within an hour. It's called the "golden hour," a concept derived from military medicine during the Vietnam War and still guiding medical units in Afghanistan and Iraq.

"A 30-minute increase means half that time is wasted on driving," said Hsia, who also teaches emergency medicine at the University of California, San Francisco.

The study found that some vulnerable groups, notably the elderly as a whole, have not seen an increase in the time it takes to get to a trauma center.

Also, the impact of trauma center closures in urban areas has been lessened because metro regions tend to have more than one such facility. The researchers estimated that more than two-thirds of residents in urban areas live within 10 miles of a trauma center, while in rural areas only a quarter have a trauma center within that distance.

"We're not saying that we should build a trauma center on every street corner. That would not be cost-effective," said Hsia. "But we do have evidence that access for certain populations is already pretty bad, and it's getting worse."

Hsia now plans to investigate whether the longer travel times to trauma centers have cost lives.