Researchers led by the N.C. Department of Cultural Resources’ Underwater Archaeology Branch rest a recovered 2,000-pound cannon on the back of a NOAA research vessel from the wreck of the pirate Blackbeard's ship, which has been on the ocean floor off the North Carolina coast for nearly 300 years, Wednesday, Oct. 26, 2011 in Beaufort, N.C. (AP Photo/The Jacksonville Daily News, Chuck Beckley)

13th Blackbeard cannon raised
Associated Press

BEAUFORT A 2,000-pound cannon pulled Wednesday from the waters near Beaufort will give archaeologists and historians more ammunition for separating fact from legend surrounding the infamous pirate Blackbeard.

The Queen Anne's Revenge Project brought the massive gun ashore and displayed it to the public before taking it to a laboratory at East Carolina University. Onlookers cheered as the 8-foot-long gun was raised above the water's surface.
"The last people who saw this were pirates," project Director Mark Wilde-Ramsing told more than 100 spectators who later gathered in front of Beaufort's Maritime Museum for a closer look.

Dozens of local residents turned out, while some Blackbeard enthusiasts drove in from other parts of the state.

"We read about it last night, and I asked the kids, 'Are we going to skip school tomorrow and go see this?" " said Joy Herndon, who made the roughly 230-mile trek from Greensboro with her children, Lucy and Kevin.

Separating the Blackbeard legend from historical fact is one of the goals of the recovery effort, which so far has netted some 280,000 artifacts, said Joseph Schwarzer, director of the N.C. Maritime Museum.

"This is about as close to that particular point in American history, and to piracy, as anybody is ever going to get," Schwarzer said.

The recovery effort involves collaboration among the state departments of Cultural Resources and Environmental and Natural Resources, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, East Carolina University and other entities.

The gun recovered Wednesday was the 13th cannon raised from the shipwreck. Other items have included medical supplies, dishes, gold dust, prisoner shackles, African jewelry and small weaponry.

La Concorde

Schwarzer said researchers believe the ship was built as La Concorde, a French slave-trading vessel, but Blackbeard and his crew commandeered it six months prior to its grounding near Beaufort Inlet.

Historians theorize that Blackbeard intentionally scuttled the ship, then took off in a smaller boat because he could no longer afford the expense of four ships and a pirate following estimated at 400.

Neal Stetson, 58, said he and his wife drove a half-hour from Newport to see the recovered cannon.

"After we moved here, I became fascinated with Blackbeard, particularly all the tales and legends that surround him," said Stetson, who came to the area six years ago from Maryland.

"It's amazing and fortunate that they found the wreck."
An exhibit of the items recovered from the ship opened at the Beaufort Maritime Museum in June and already has attracted more than 100,000 visitors, N.C. Cultural Resources Secretary Linda Carlisle said.

**Goal: Finish by 2013**

Only about half the shipwreck has been examined so far, but Carlisle said the state has a goal of finishing the recovery effort by 2013.

"We're really concerned about the site itself," Carlisle said.

"We live through each hurricane season with trepidation."

**Funding**

The project could move more swiftly if additional funding was available. Carlisle said the recovery and lab work costs about $150,000 annually, but state funding has not kept up with the need.

Some flakes of gold dust are the closest to pirate's treasure yet discovered, but the project and museum exhibit has netted the state a valuable influx of tourism dollars, as well as drawn international attention to the state, Carlisle added.

The cannon will be preserved at the ECU lab while the research staff studies both the weapon and the cementlike shell of sand, salt and barnacles covering it, a process that could easily take five years, said Sarah Watkins-Keeney, chief conservator for the QAR project.

Blackbeard was an Englishman whose real name may have been Edward Teach or Thatch. After capturing La Concorde in the Caribbean, Blackbeard and his men blockaded the port of Charleston for a time. He was sailing north from Charleston when his ship went aground in what was then known as Old Topsail Inlet.

Blackbeard was granted a pardon from N.C. Gov. Charles Eden in June 1718. He was killed five months later at Ocracoke Inlet by members of the Royal Navy of Virginia.
Researchers led by the N.C. Department of Cultural Resources Underwater Archaeology Branch recover a 2,000-pound cannon from the wreck of the pirate Blackbeard's ship, which has been on the ocean floor off the North Carolina coast for nearly 300 years, Wednesday, Oct. 26, 2011 in Beaufort, N.C. (AP Photo/The Jacksonville Daily News, Chuck Beckley)

**Blackbeard's cannon raised, headed to ECU**
Thursday, October 27, 2011

BEAUFORT — A 2,000-pound cannon pulled from the waters near Beaufort on Wednesday will give archeologists and historians more ammunition for separating fact from legend surrounding the infamous pirate Blackbeard.

Today the cannon is set to arrive at the conservation laboratory at East Carolina University’s West Research Campus.

The Queen Anne’s Revenge Project brought the massive gun ashore Wednesday and displayed it to the public. Onlookers cheered as the 8-foot-long gun was raised above the water’s surface.

The cannon will be preserved in the lab at ECU while the research staff studies both the weapon and the cement-like shell of sand, salt and barnacles covering it, a process that could easily take five years, said Sarah Watkins-Keeney, chief conservator for the QAR project. ECU students are assisting in the preservation process.

“The last people who saw this were pirates,” QAR project director Mark Wilde-Ramsing told more than 100 spectators who later gathered in front of Beaufort’s Maritime Museum for a closer look at the 18th-century weapon.
Dozens of local residents turned out; some Blackbeard enthusiasts drove in from other parts of the state.

“We read about it last night, and I asked the kids: ‘Are we going to skip school tomorrow and go see this?’” said Joy Herndon, who made the roughly 230-mile trek from Greensboro with her children, Lucy and Kevin.

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An exhibit of the items recovered from the ship opened at the Beaufort Maritime Museum in June and has already attracted more than 100,000 visitors, N.C. Cultural Resources Secretary Linda Carlisle said.

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The project could move more swiftly if additional funding was available. Carlisle said it costs about $150,000 annually for the recovery and lab work, but state funding has not kept up with the need.

Though some flakes of gold dust are the closest to pirate’s treasure yet discovered, the project and museum exhibit has netted the state a valuable influx of tourism dollars, as well as drawn international attention to the state, Carlisle added.
Blackbeard's cannon salvaged from shipwreck

JANNETTE PIPPIN - DAILY NEWS STAFF

CARTERET COUNTY — It was a lucky day for C13.

A team led by the N.C. Department of Cultural Resources’ Underwater Archaeology Branch wasn’t sure they’d be able to free the one-ton, 8-foot-long cannon enough to raise it from its resting place on the ocean bottom. But they close out this year’s fall dive at the Queen Anne’s Revenge shipwreck site doing just that, raising C13, which is also the 13th cannon recovered from the flagship of the notorious pirate Blackbeard.

The cannon was raised Wednesday morning from the QAR shipwreck site in Beaufort Inlet about a mile-and-a-half off the coast of Morehead City.

“This has been giving us fits for almost two years now, last fall and this year, and I thought we wouldn’t get it up. I’m so happy to see it. It finally came out of the hole (Tuesday) and what a beautiful day,” said QAR Project Director Mark Wilde-Ramsing before a crowd gathered at the N.C. Maritime
Museum at Beaufort to view the cannon before it was taken to the conservation lab in Greenville.

Artifacts being recovered from the QAR site have been on the ocean floor for nearly 300 years and the stop in Beaufort gave the public the first glance at the newly recovered cannon.

“The last people to see this were the pirates on Blackbeard’s flagship, and it doesn’t get better than that,” Wilde-Ramsing said.

Fresh off the sea floor, the cannon is encased in a cement-like shell of sand, salt and sea life.

Five-year-old Finn Humphries of Morehead City watched in fascination as the cannon was uncovered and QAR team members explained that other smaller artifacts are likely to be uncovered inside the concretion as the cannon is cleaned and goes through the conservation process.

Inside the Maritime Museum, the Queen Anne’s Revenge exhibit includes many of the artifacts already recovered and on display for the public.

The Queen Anne’s Revenge sank off Beaufort Inlet in June 1718. The shipwreck was located in 1996 by Intersal Inc of Florida by Operations Director Mike Daniel through research provided by late president Phil Masters.

Local resident Kevin Meadows of Jacksonville, vice president of Intersal Inc., said they continue to actively support the QAR project and there’s excitement with each artifact that is raised. Each one plays a part in telling the story of coastal North Carolina’s history.

“It’s important that we share what we have here along the coast of North Carolina; it’s important historically and culturally.”

For N.C. Department of Cultural Resources Secretary Linda Carlisle, Wednesday’s trip offshore to see the recovery of C13 was her first chance to go out on a dive expedition.

But she well familiar with the QAR project and its importance to North Carolina and she fully supports the recovery of the artifacts from the site.

“This is a priority for me within the division because I think that we’ve been given an incredible responsibility and that we have an incredible opportunity to bring up these artifacts and to capitalize on them for academics and science and as a resource for growing cultural and heritage tourism in North Carolina,” she said.
The goal is to complete the recovery of artifacts by 2013, with spring and fall dives in 2012 and 2013, and ongoing conservation efforts in anticipation of the 300th anniversary of the sinking of the Queen Anne’s Revenge.

With budget cuts, Carlisle said sharing resources and gathering private support is increasingly important.

“Our needs are supporting our dives over the next two years, during which time we hope to excavate close to all the artifacts, then to support the work going on in the lab in the ongoing years so we can present these artifacts to the people,” she said.

Carlisle said that ongoing collaboration between multiple agencies and organizations has made the QAR project possible.

Major partnerships with the N.C. Department of Cultural Resources on the latest dive expedition included the NOAA Monitor National Marine Sanctuary, N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries, East Carolina University, and the Town of Beaufort.

Ongoing partners have included Intersal, the U.S. Coast Guard, N.C. State Ports and Fort Macon State.

Contact Daily News reporter Jannette Pippin at 910-382-2557 or jpippin@freedomenc.com.
Archaeologists raised another cannon on Wednesday from the sunken wreck of pirate Blackbeard's legendary ship off the coast of North Carolina.

The eight-foot (2.4-metre) cannon, which had rested at the bottom of Beaufort Inlet since the ship Queen Anne's Revenge sank in 1718, was covered in a cement-like shell of sand, salt and sea life.

"It's like Christmas," project director Mark Wilde-Ramsing said in a statement.

Blackbeard, whose real name was widely believed to be Edward Teach or Thatch and who had a residence in North Carolina, captured a French slave ship in 1717 and renamed it Queen Anne's Revenge.

Blackbeard eventually received a pardon. But some experts say he grew bored and returned to piracy. He was killed by volunteers from the British Royal Navy in November 1718, five months after the ship thought to be Queen Anne's Revenge sank.

Researchers have spent the fall recovering artefacts from the shipwreck site, located in 1996 by Florida-based Intersal Inc.

The state's Department of Cultural Resources said the expedition had already retrieved a number of artefacts including shackles, concreted bar shot, a crystal wine glass fragment and various items associated with the ship's rigging.

In all, 12 cannons have been lifted and recovered through a cleaning process that can take up to five years.

"Four cannons were all found to be loaded, with cannon shot and wads in place ready to be fired," the project's chief conservator Sarah Watkins-Kenney said.
"Remains of rope wrapped around the muzzle of another cannon also are intriguing," she said. "Materials as fragile as rope rarely survive, so finding this vindicated the cleaning used to carefully excavate the concretion layers, rather than just knock it off to reveal the cannon."

The cannon raised on Wednesday will be transported to the Queen Anne's Revenge Conservation Lab at East Carolina University.

Some 50 percent of the site has been examined and about 280,000 artefacts found. Researchers are aiming to complete work at the site in 2013. (Editing by Colleen Jenkins and Cynthia Johnston)
Realignment dominates Holland talk
By Ronnie Woodward
The Daily Reflector
Thursday, October 27, 2011

East Carolina Director of Athletics Terry Holland addressed the Greater Greenville Sports Club on Wednesday, beginning his speech by discussing his basketball playing and coaching careers.

But as expected, the talk eventually shifted to conference realignment, and Holland reaffirmed his stance that the Pirate football team gaining automatic qualification to the Bowl Championship Series is a high priority for him.

One possibility that has emerged is schools from Conference USA — ECU’s current conference — the Mountain West Conference and the Big East joining forces in a division-based, football-only league that could exceed 30 teams.

Holland said the idea was supposed to be presented at a meeting of conference commissioners in New York on Wednesday, but ESPN later reported that the meeting was cancelled by the Big East, which has the BCS automatic qualifying status and corresponding big-money television contracts that teams from C-USA and the MWC are seeking.
“We’ll just have to wait and see what happens. I know that our guys are committed to it and our conferences have as much interest in helping the Big East keep its (automatic qualifying status) as the Big East does almost,” Holland said. “Particularly if they embrace the concept and bring everybody into the fold.”

Holland reiterated that the conference realignment situation is extremely fluid and ECU is trying to keep all of its options open. If the aforementioned football-only merger does happen, non-football teams would continue play in their current leagues.

Conference USA and the Mountain West have already revealed that they are planning a merger in football.

East Carolina has applied for Big East membership, but it has been widely reported that the Big East is pursuing Boise State, Air Force and Navy as football-only members, and C-USA schools Central Florida, Southern Methodist and Houston to join in all sports.

But the Big East has yet to make any official additions and current members West Virginia and Louisville are regarded as possible candidates for the Big 12. At the moment, the Big East has six football members — West Virginia, Louisville, Rutgers, South Florida, Connecticut and Cincinnati.

More losses by the Big East could eventually force a merger.

“The circumstances may dictate that and they may be feeling that strain right now,” Holland said of the Big East.

Holland also discussed how conference realignment has affected his job, in and out of the office.

“I wake up every morning about 2 a.m. and I spend a couple hours on this, and sometimes I’ll get up and actually go to the computer,” he said. “That’s part of it and as a coach you’re sort of conditioned to that kind of lifestyle at times of the year. We’re in season right now, which I guess is the best way to put it.”

Contact Ronnie Woodward at rwoodward@reflector.com or 252-329-9592.
WINTERVILLE - Dr. William Richard "Rick" Bamberg, 57, passed away Monday, Oct. 24, 2011. A memorial service will be conducted Friday at 4 p.m. in the Wilkerson Funeral Chapel.

Dr. Bamberg, a native of Jacksonville, Fla., had been a resident of Pitt County for the past 12 years. A graduate of Florida State University, he received his Ph.D. in Education Administration and was a member of MENSA. He served as Chair of Clinical and Laboratory Sciences in East Carolina University's College of Allied Health Sciences where he was appointed Professor Emeritus. Dr. Bamberg was an Associate Editor of the National Health Science Journal, and over the span of his career, he had over 90 academic publications. He was the owner of Pinewood Plantation in Bamberg, S.C., which he had recognized in the National Historic Registry in 2010. An avid animal lover, he was a member of ASPCA and Best Friends Organizations.

He was preceded in death by his parents, W.S. and Eleanor Morris Bamberg.

He is survived by his son, Christopher Ryan Bamberg and wife, Julie, of Chesapeake, Va.; friend and caregiver, John L. Armstrong Jr., of Winterville; aunts, Edith Bamberg and Cam Eubanks; and cousins, Robbie Eubanks, Kathy Ayer and Bambi Bamberg, all of South Carolina.

Memorial contributions may be made to ASPCA, 424 East 92nd Street, New York, NY 10128.


Published in The Daily Reflector on October 27, 2011
Media request access to NCAA hearing

From Staff Reports

The News & Observer, The Charlotte Observer and six other N.C. media organizations have requested the University of North Carolina to formally demand that the NCAA make public Friday's hearing on nine alleged major violations committed by the UNC football program.

UNC Chancellor Holden Thorp, athletics director Dick Baddour and other officials are scheduled to represent the university at the NCAA Committee on Infractions' hearing in Indianapolis.

The NCAA delivered its Notice of Allegations to the university in June, charging North Carolina with nine major violations involving academic misconduct and improper benefits received by Tar Heels football players.

After Friday's closed meeting, the NCAA will issue a ruling on an unspecified date concerning penalties for North Carolina.

The NCAA and the location of Friday's hearing are outside the jurisdiction of North Carolina courts and beyond the reach of North Carolina's Open Meetings Law.

But in a letter delivered to UNC vice chancellor Leslie Strohm, media lawyer Amanda Martin wrote that the citizens and taxpayers of North Carolina "have no ready means to ensure that the hearing is conducted fairly and openly except to turn to you and the duly appointed University representatives to speak up for them."

"In the spirit and tradition of what Charles Kuralt called 'the University of the people,' we ask you and Chancellor Thorp to (1) formally demand, on behalf the University and the people of North Carolina, that the NCAA open Friday's hearing to the press and public "" Martin wrote.

The media coalition, which also includes News 14 Carolina, WNCN 17, WRAL, The Associated Press, The Hickory Daily Record and The Winston-Salem Journal, also requested of UNC that it not participate in the hearing if the NCAA declines to open it Friday.

"We've worked closely with the NCAA throughout this review, and we'll continue to do that," UNC spokeswoman Nancy Davis said in an email
Wednesday. "This is the NCAA's hearing, and we won't ask them to treat us any differently than they do other universities."

In a statement, the NCAA defended holding a closed meeting.

"NCAA Committee on Infractions hearings are closed to ensure the committee can garner all facts and perspectives needed to reach a fair, thorough decision. Limiting the proceedings to those directly associated with the case best enables the Committee to do so."
Editorial

Right all along

Sometimes, in fact rather often these days, people all over the country call William C. Friday and the Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh to say: You guys were right about college athletics. You should say, "We told you so."

But Friday, president emeritus of the University of North Carolina system, and Hesburgh, former president of Notre Dame, are 91 and 94 respectively, and gentlemen of the old school not given to boast or gloat.

So let us say it, to the founding co-chairmen of the Knight Commission on college athletics: You told us so, and everyone should have listened when the commission was formed 22 years ago.

Now, after more than two decades of resistance by many university leaders to the commission's recommendations on tightening the reins on college athletics, the new head of college sports' governing body, the NCAA, says it's time to pay attention to what the commission has said, and what it may yet say about reform of out-of-control athletics programs that have this year seen resignations and scandal all over the country.

That includes, in an especially disappointing moment for Bill Friday, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where tomorrow an NCAA panel will consider sanctions in the school's first athletics scandal in half a century.

Football Coach Butch Davis was fired, an assistant resigned and the program was alleged to have been mired in academic misconduct and various problems with players benefiting from improper contacts with agents. Ohio State's coach resigned after allegations that players got cash and tattoos from a business owner. A Miami booster was alleged to have gifted many a Hurricanes player.

Mark Emmert, president of the NCAA and former president of the University of Washington, told the Knight Commission recently that he and other presidents were ready to listen to the group's recommendations once it studies all the issues surrounding college sports, from the athletes' scholarship systems to post-season bowl games that have become creatures of the TV networks.
Let's hope the commission is tough. Under Friday and Hesburgh, it was. Its initial report in 1991 shamed some engineers on the runaway college athletics train into reform. For one thing, presidents of universities asserted their control over the NCAA, which had been run by athletic directors.

But many of the commission's recommendations have been put on the back burner by university leaders afraid to disturb the flow of multimillions of dollars to university sports programs, and also afraid to upset big-money boosters who rate the quality of their own schools in some cases by the wins and losses of their football and basketball teams.

In this year of so many disgraces, perhaps the commission will succeed in demanding higher and consistent admissions standards, or in holding coaches responsible for the academic integrity of their programs, with serious penalties for failing to live up to that responsibility. And there must be transparency on where every athletics dollar, public or private, comes from and where it goes.

They told us so. And it's embarrassing that it has taken several scandals to get the attention of those in leadership positions who should have known better.
Clearing Up Some Confusion About the New Federal Student Loan Rules

By RON LIEBER

On Wednesday, President Obama introduced two changes to the federal student loan program that could affect several million borrowers. The broad outlines of his plans to encourage loan consolidation and assist people who are struggling financially are reasonably clear.

But if the questions sent to our Bucks blog from indebted people are any indication, any change in Student Loan Land almost inevitably leads to enormous confusion. Many questions had to do with whether private loans, the kind that come from banks and often have higher and variable interest rates, are part of these changes. Nothing is changing with those loans.

This is crucial, since many of the people in the worst sort of trouble — the ones you’ve read about with six-figure balances — often have both private loans and federal loans.

Instead, only those with different kinds of federal loans — an estimated 5.8 million borrowers — will be able to consolidate them into one loan under the new plan and also save themselves a bit of money.

Borrowers also remain befuddled about the confusing eligibility requirements of a two-year-old program that limits the monthly payment for certain federal student loan borrowers based on their income and then forgives any remaining debt after 25 years.

Starting sometime next year, the limit will be cut by a third for certain borrowers, and that will lower payments. Also, loan forgiveness will happen after 20 years. (The income-related changes were already scheduled to happen in 2014, but they will occur sooner now.)

Today, at least 450,000 people participate in the federal income-based repayment program that started about two years ago, though there are probably many more borrowers who are eligible but don’t know about it or haven’t figured out how to sign up.

I’ve answered as many of the reader queries as I can below, and will answer more on the Bucks blog in the coming weeks.
Q. *Who is eligible?*

A. People with at least one federal loan that they borrowed directly from the federal government and at least one that originated with a bank or other lender. If you have a bunch of bank-issued federal loans but no loan directly from the government, you can consolidate them under an older federal program, but it won’t save you as much money.

The PLUS loans that some graduate students have taken out in recent years are eligible. Perkins Loans and many federal loans for people entering health professions are not eligible. And again, private student loans are not part of the mix here either.

Also, if you’re in default on the loans, you won’t be eligible.

Q. *How do I know what kind of loan I have?*

A. Don’t be embarrassed to ask, since many people have forgotten or never knew in the first place. Call your lenders now and ask them. The Education Department plans to inform all eligible borrowers in January as well. If you haven’t heard from them by the end of that month, call them at 1-800-4FEDAID (1-800-433-3243) and ask.

Q. *Is there a limit to the number of federal loans I can consolidate?*

A. No.

Q. *What will I save if I consolidate under the new program?*

A. It depends, and the formula for calculating your new interest rate is complex.

First, you’ll subtract 25 basis points (a quarter of a percentage point) from the interest rate of your federal loan that a bank or other lender originated. You can also subtract another 25 basis points for both those bank loans and any loans that came from the federal government directly if you agree, once the loans are consolidated, to let the federal government (which will be the new lender of record) pull the payment automatically from your bank account each month.

The new rate will then be a weighted average of the two (newly discounted) rates from the two different types of loans, based on the balances of each loan.

Q. *When can I sign up, and for how long?*

A. Enrollment should begin in January and is scheduled to end on June 30, 2012.
Q. Can this help me make more of my federal loans eligible for forgiveness if I work in certain public service jobs?

A. Yes. The only federal loans that are eligible for that forgiveness plan are ones in the federal direct program, which is where you end up when you consolidate your federal student loans in this fashion. By consolidating, older federal loans that banks originated for you would then become eligible.

Q. What if I recently consolidated? Can I unconsolidate to take advantage of this new discount?

A. No.

Q. Who is eligible for these income-based repayment plans in the first place?

A. Eligibility is based on something known as “discretionary” income, which the federal government defines as anything above 150 percent of the poverty level. The poverty level depends on your state and the size of your family. The big idea here is to only allow people to qualify whose income makes it hard to afford their full federal student loan payments. (Private loans do not factor into income-based repayment.)

All of this is outlined in plain English on IBRinfo.org, a Web site maintained by a nonprofit group called the Project on Student Debt. Your lender or the company servicing your loan will decide whether you’re eligible.

Q. What is changing with these programs as a result of Wednesday’s announcement?

A. Currently, people who qualify pay no more than 15 percent of their discretionary income toward federal student loan payments each month. You only have to make payments for 25 years, even if there’s still a balance left.

The new plan will lower the cap to 10 percent of discretionary income and waive any balances after 20 years of repayment. (Again, better deals are available for people who are working in certain public service jobs.)

Q. Any other catches?

A. Yes. This new income-based plan is not available to people who graduated in 2011 or earlier and have no plans to take out any new federal loans. Instead, you must have at least one federal loan from no earlier than 2008 and also take out one more in 2012 or later to qualify.
Graduate students are eligible, too, but you have to have taken your first loan out no earlier than 2008 to qualify, in addition to taking out at least one more in 2012 or later. So if you’re a sixth-year doctoral student, this might not work for you. That said, you might be eligible for the older, less generous plan.

Also, here too, your loans can’t be in default. This was disappointing to Robert Applebaum, the founder of forgivestudentloandebt.com. His two-year-old movement along with the petition he started on the White House’s Web site helped inspire the adjustments to the federal loan programs.

“Income-based repayment is fantastic if all you have are federal loans and are current on your repayments,” said Mr. Applebaum, 37, who lives on Staten Island and is current on his own student loans. “But people are drowning in debt and penalties, and the government has made it so that first you have to get your head above water. Another step could have been to eliminate that requirement, and they didn’t.”

Q. What if I still have questions?

A. The financial aid ace Mark Kantrowitz of finaid.org has posted his take on the announcement on the Choice blog. Otherwise, call the Education Department and keep an eye on studentaid.ed.gov and the Project on Student Debt’s Web site for more details as they become available.
St. Mary’s College to put displaced students on a cruise ship

By Daniel de Vise

Jessie Ditillo, a student at St. Mary’s College of Maryland, paddles her kayak in the St. Mary’s River. The river and St. Mary’s students are about to become better acquainted. (Photo by James A. Parcell/For The Washington Post)

An outbreak of mold at St. Mary’s College of Maryland this fall presented a logistical nightmare: There was nowhere to put the students. Hotels are scarce around the remote campus.

Then, an alumnus of this sailing-intensive school had an idea: Put them in a cruise ship.

The Sea Voyager, described on this Web site as having three bars, a restaurant and a gift shop, was on the block, and it was being moved from Maine to Virginia.

St. Mary’s President Joseph Urgo made some phone calls. The Sea Voyager is now headed to his campus, where it will serve as off-shore dormitory space for 250 students until the end of the semester.
“Over the years we have often joked, Wouldn’t it be great to have an off-shore residence hall,” Urgo said.

The ship is entering the Chesapeake Bay this morning and should reach historic St. Mary’s by Friday morning. Then there is the matter of docking it. A small college dock may prove inadequate, but a larger dock maintained by Historic St. Mary’s City should suffice. If all goes well, students will board the vessel Friday night.

Students complained of mold from the start of the fall semester. A close inspection revealed a systemic problem with the heating, ventilation and air-conditioning system, which was leaking water into pipes, spawning mold. A physician declared the buildings unsafe. Repairs will take as long as a month.

Urgo evacuated the students from the buildings a week ago and put them in three nearby hotels. But there are few hotels near campus; the farthest is at Solomon’s Island, nearly 20 miles away, across an imposing bridge. The school offered round-the-clock shuttle service, but many students went home to get cars. Half of them are freshmen, relatively new to driving.

“There was a lot of late-night driving back and forth,” Urgo said. “I was really worried about them.”

Negotiations are not yet complete, but it appears that renting the cruise ship will cost about the same as the hotel rooms, which are setting the college back $20,000 a day. The funds will come from the school’s reserves.

A few students are fretful about the move amid preparations for papers and exams, but the overall reaction has been “jubilation, for the most part,” Urgo said.

“Theyir rooms will be a little bit smaller, but they’ll have full use of all the amenities on the ship, the ball room, the state room, the shuffleboard,” and linen service every three days.

This is still a ship, and some rooms are much nicer and larger than others. Urgo said some sort of lottery system may be devised to sort students fairly into rooms.

“As tempting as it is,” Urgo said, “we will not be taking the ship for a ride on weekends.” That would cost extra.