There was a time when high school seniors felt safe as long as they had their college applications completed by the holidays. For the class of 2011, that holiday is Halloween.

An increasing number of high school seniors see November, not January, as the time to apply to college. The 2010 State of College Admission report, released last week, confirms it: nearly three quarters of colleges reported an increase in early action applications in 2009.

Bernetta Bradley, senior counselor at J.H. Rose High School, sees the biggest wave of student applicants in the fall.

“The early notification deadlines are such an attractive option,” she said. “You apply early and you get to know early whether you're in or not. Sometimes, that can alleviate the burden during your senior year.”

Ayden-Grifton High School senior Brittany Murphy is happy to have at least part of that load lifted. While she is still working on applications for the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and UNC-Greensboro, she has already completed her application to East Carolina University.

“The earlier you get the application in, the better your chances of getting in to the college,” Murphy said. “I don't want to be sending college applications off after January. Between December and January, I want to be finished with everything.”
A growing number of students seem to agree. Anthony Britt, director of admissions at ECU, said more than 90 percent of applicants admitted to the university last year submitted applications by the end of December.

“Part of that may be our fault,” Britt said. “We've encouraged students to apply early.” ECU has a rolling admissions process, in which applicants are given a large window of time to apply and are generally notified of their acceptance or rejection within a few weeks.

“It takes away the agony or the stress of waiting,” said Britt. “A lot of the students are very eager to get an answer.”

ECU’s on-site admissions program gives them an answer more quickly. The program, made available at area high schools, sends admissions counselors into schools to meet with students face-to-face. Those who have already completed online applications can make an appointment to meet with an admissions counselor and find out that same day if they have been accepted.

Karen Pumphrey, senior guidance counselor at D.H. Conley High School, said ECU’s on-site admissions program is becoming increasingly popular with Conley seniors. Nearly 50 have signed up to meet with an admissions counselor next week.

To gain an edge over their competition, some students have begun early applications through what is known as an early decision process. A student may choose only one college for an early decision application. Unlike early action applications, early decision plans are binding, in that a student agrees to attend the college if accepted and if offered an adequate financial aid package.

The National Association for College Admission Counseling reports that early decision applicants increase their chances of being accepted. For example, Duke University, receives about 10 percent of its applications under the early decision plan, admits about 30 percent of early decision applicants, compared with about 16 percent of other applicants.

While nearly half the colleges that accept early decision applicants reported an increase in such applications last year, some schools, including UNC-Chapel Hill, have discontinued the early decision plan.

“A lot of schools have dropped that,” said Kim Bryant, guidance counselor at North Pitt High School. Bryant believes the binding nature of early decision agreements make them an unattractive option for some top students. A student who makes an early commitment to one university may miss out on potential a scholarship opportunities at another school, she said.
“One of the most important things I tell (students) is you never give yourself only one choice,” Bryant said.
Ayden-Grifton High School counselor Boyd Pearson gives his students similar advice. Pearson tells students that most should apply to at least three colleges, including at least one that is well within academic reach.

He does not advise all of them to apply early. Some students, Pearson said, need to wait until January to give them time to retake the SAT or to have a prospective college look at one more semester of grades.

But for students who have no academic reasons to wait, Pearson said, the earlier the better.
Byron Whitaker and other seniors from North Pitt High School pick-up literature on attending college at North Carolina A&T during the Pitt County College Fair at the Greenville Convention Center on Thursday morning.

College fair open to high school juniors
By Jackie Drake
The Daily Reflector
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High school juniors in Pitt County are off to a good start on their college journey this year, as seniors near the end of their search.

More than 800 upperclassmen students attended the Pitt County College Fair at the Greenville Convention Center on Thursday morning. The fair showcased about 50 public and private colleges and universities in North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia.

This is the first year that juniors attended the event along with seniors, according to Travis Lewis, assistant superintendent for student services. Students who signed up were transported by bus in rotations between the fair and their school. The fair opened again for the public, parents and younger students Thursday evening.

“It's going great; transportation is a key piece,” Lewis said Thursday morning. “A lot of these kids wouldn't have a chance to see all these schools otherwise.”

While the public fair in the evening has been going on for years, this is the fourth year that students have had their own session as part of the school day.

“The whole fair has been going very smoothly,” said Chris Murphy, assistant director of admissions at East Carolina University, who helped plan the event. “They're finding which schools will be a good fit for them. That's what it's all about.”
College Foundation of North Carolina regional representative Amy Denton advised students to “start early, especially in search for scholarships.” She emphasized the importance of understanding deadlines and maintaining academic performance.

“We're excited to be here; we're always happy to see students come by,” said Christy Pratt with ECU admissions. “We've had a lot. They think they know all about ECU because they've grown up with it, but they learn more about what we're looking for in our students. They're asking really good questions, like our average GPA and SAT and our majors. They're definitely well-prepared.”

Questions about transferring to ECU from community college are increasing — a sign of the times, Pratt said, adding that ECU is one of most transfer-friendly schools in the state.

There also is a lot of interest in the new dental school.

The Pitt Community College table, manned by Athletics Director and recruiter Junior Bailey, ran out of materials at one point during the morning session. “We've had a lot of students,” Bailey said. “They're preparing themselves to make a good decision.” Rebecca Haislip, a junior at J.H. Rose, said she had been planning on applying to ECU and Campbell for pharmacy, but did see other schools she now wants to look into, like Meredith and UNC-Wilmington.

“I didn't know there were so many colleges in North Carolina,” said D.H. Conley junior Sentrel Lyles, who is interested in math and basketball at Livingstone College in Salisbury.

J.H. Rose senior Tracey Baker said Living Arts College, a school he hadn't heard of before, caught his eye because of his interest in graphic design.

“I thought the fair was a good opportunity. It gave me a lot of good information,” J.H. Rose junior Derrick Knox said.

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Media outlets sue for UNC records

BY ANNE BLYTHE - Staff writer

The News & Observer, The Charlotte Observer and other media organizations sued top UNC-Chapel Hill officials Thursday in an attempt to get records related to the two-pronged NCAA investigation of the football program.

The suit represents a collision between two legal arguments - while universities in North Carolina and elsewhere argue that federal student privacy laws prohibit them from releasing certain records, media organizations say they are overstepping their legal bounds to keep from disclosing particular documents.

The N&O and other plaintiffs believe the records being sought are public under North Carolina law, which states that records, documents and other information generated by state agencies and institutions such as UNC-CH should be - with limited exceptions - made public.

In the past week, national media associations have written letters to Congress and adopted resolutions citing concerns over the use of the student privacy law to withhold public documents.

"I think these issues are arising more frequently and we probably need to be on the record that it's bad business and we oppose it," Mac McKerral, former Society of Professional Journalists president and head of the organization's resolutions committee, said in a prepared statement about an Oct. 13 resolution.

In the case of UNC, officials have declined for months to turn over many documents related to the investigations into academic misconduct by football players and ties between former assistant head football coach John Blake and NFL agents, according to the suit.

"There is evidence here of serious violations - UNC players accepting benefits from agents and academic misconduct," said John Drescher, executive editor of The News & Observer. "UNC has said it wants to get to the bottom of these problems in its football program. The best way to do that is to release these records. Without that, there will continue to be a cloud of doubt about UNC's investigation and whether the university really got to the bottom of the wrongdoing."

Among the records being sought by The News & Observer and others, are:
Phone numbers from bills of telephones issued to and used by Richard Baddour, UNC-CH athletics director; Butch Davis, UNC head coach; and, Blake, the former assistant coach and chief recruiter who resigned under fire amid the probe.

Names, employment dates and salaries of all individuals employed as tutors and or mentors for UNC-CH athletes since January 2007, including any documents mentioning Jennifer Wiley, the former tutor and a focus of the probe.

Any parking tickets issued by UNC-CH to 11 players.

Any documents or records of any investigation conducted by the university related to any misconduct by a UNC-CH football coach, any football players, any sports agents, any boosters and any academic tutors. And the names of individuals and organizations that provided improper benefits to any UNC football players.

University officials have maintained that many of the records being sought are private, citing federal laws put in place years ago to prevent the public disclosure of student grades and other private records.

"The university is entrusted with lots of confidential information about our students," Leslie Strohm, UNC-CH vice chancellor and general counsel, said in a statement. "They and their families expect us to hold that information in confidence because it's required by federal law and because it's the right thing to do. A football player has the same basic privacy rights as any student on campus."

Chancellor Holden Thorp, one of four UNC-CH officials named in the suit, said he was disappointed. In a statement, Thorp noted that additional staff had been hired to help review and respond to public records requests related to the issue. One public records officer had spent more than 600 hours over the past three and a half months working to fill those requests, according to the statement including comments from Strohm and Thorp.

"The university is 100 percent committed to complying with our obligations under public records laws," Thorp said in his statement. "We recognize the media's legitimate interest in the football story, but we can't ignore federal and state law with regard to confidential student and personnel records."

The News & Observer and Charlotte Observer, both McClatchy newspapers, joined with the DTH Media Corp., which publishes the UNC-CH student newspaper The Daily Tar Heel; News 14 Carolina, a cable TV station operated by Time Warner Entertainment-Advance/Newhouse Partnership; WTVD Television; Capitol Broadcasting; The Associated Press; and, Media General Operations.

The suit names Thorp, Baddour, Davis and Jeff McCracken, head of the UNC-CH public safety department.
Baddour said Thursday that he, too, was disappointed by the suit, that he is willing to turn over any of his business phone records. He also added that despite the problems revealed about the football program and Blake, he stands behind Davis as head coach.

"I felt like when we hired him, he was a tremendous fit," Baddour said Thursday. "He is absolutely the right person for this job and to make the necessary fixes."

NCAA investigators have been looking at the UNC football program since this summer. Initially the probe focused on whether players had received improper benefits from agents. But the inquiry was expanded to include possible academic violations involving a tutor.

In all, 14 players have missed some or all of the season.

Three players are no longer eligible to play in college: Marvin Austin, Greg Little and Robert Quinn, all projected to be selected in next spring's NFL draft. Last week, the NCAA said that Little and Quinn had lied to its investigators and that the players took trips, jewelry and more worth a combined $10,000. The NCAA banned them from college play after receiving reports from UNC.

UNC said Austin accepted more than $10,000 in improper benefits and kicked him out of the program without submitting information about him to the NCAA.

Last Friday, after an earlier threat of lawsuit, UNC released heavily redacted documents that provided some insight into benefits being provided by agents to players, a practice forbidden by the NCAA. The agents, according to the documents, are accused of securing hotel rooms for players and providing wristbands that gave them access to a South Florida pool party.

Until the documents were released, the NCAA and UNC had declined to say who provided the benefits. UNC switched course after continued efforts by The N&O and the Observer to force their release.

In the documents, Chris Hawkins, a former UNC-CH player, was described as a "runner," or someone who introduces players to agents. Todd Stewart, who is believed to be from Washington, D.C., was described in one of the NCAA violation letters as a prospective agent because of "self-identified ties with a financial advising firm" and as someone who booked hotel rooms for players.

Also identified was Michael Katz, director of marketing and client services for Rosenhaus Sports, which has the largest number of NFL clients. Two of the NCAA violation letters said Katz provided the wristbands that granted access to a pool party. The documents did not say more about that, including specifically whether that action triggers a violation. Previous reports have shown Austin and Little at a South Florida pool party.
On Thursday, the university released documents that identified a jeweler in South Florida accused of providing one player with diamond "bling."

The NCAA has refused to release records on the agents, saying it doesn't have jurisdiction over them. The N.C. Secretary of State's office enforces a state agent-registration law, and the state agency has acknowledged opening a criminal probe that could lead to felony charges.

Staff writer Ken Tysiak contributed to this report.
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Florida jeweler gave to UNC player, records show

A South Florida jeweler who has acknowledged recruiting future NFL draft picks provided diamond jewelry that led to a UNC-Chapel Hill football player's banishment from college sports, new records show.

Anthony "A.J." Machado of Cutler Bay, Fla., "provided impermissible benefits to at least one of our student-athletes by giving jewelry to him," UNC athletic director Dick Baddour said in a letter to Machado obtained by The News & Observer and Charlotte Observer.

It's not known which player received jewelry from Machado.

Machado, who is known as a major provider of high-end jewelry to pro football players, could not be reached Thursday.

He did not return two telephone messages left at AJ's Jewelry, his business 20 miles south of Miami, while an assistant said he was at the office. The assistant later said Machado had then left for the day, and the messages seeking comment would be forwarded to him.

The new document provides another glimpse into the world that surrounds elite college players who are projected to be high draft picks and receive big-money contracts. The NCAA has been investigating UNC-CH since summer about allegations related to improper benefits provided to players.

Coaches and others across the country have brought more attention to the issue, describing how agents, financial planners and other types of runners swarm around players, who are forbidden to accept benefits because of their athletic abilities. The NCAA this week said it has formed a wide-ranging group of NFL executives, agents, state enforcers and others to try to limit improper agent activity.

Baddour said in the letter to Machado, dated Monday, that UNC had developed information confirming Machado as giving jewelry to at least one player. "Specifically," Baddour wrote, "your recent involvement with our student-athletes has led to the NCAA declaring one of our student-athletes permanently ineligible."

The letter was sent by FedEx and apparently included the jewelry in the package. "We are returning the jewelry you provided," Baddour wrote.
Baddour also said it was taking formal action to order that Machado have no contact with any athletes or others associated with the athletics program.

UNC-CH would not release information about which player was involved, citing federal student privacy law.

But the NCAA has banned only two UNC football players who it said also received jewelry as improper benefits, actions that compromised the players' status as amateurs. Former receiver Greg Little accepted diamond earrings, as well as travel accommodations for the Bahamas, Washington, D.C., and two trips to Miami, among other benefits, according to the NCAA. His benefits were valued at $4,952.

Former defensive end Robert Quinn accepted two black diamond watches, a pair of matching earrings and travel accommodations for a trip to Miami, among other benefits, the NCAA said. Quinn's benefits were valued at $5,642.

Machado's current and previous websites play up his ties to football players. Biographical information on the site says that his business opened in 1993.

"It was only a short time before his name was synonymous with the University of Miami draftees," his website said in 2005. It is not on the site now. At the time, the site said he had designed jewelry for more than 90 NFL players.

Three months ago, Machado was the subject of a profile in the South Florida Sun-Sentinel that described how he "brings the bling" for NFL players, describing rings, necklaces and other pieces he had designed that each cost $50,000 or more.

He said he was up to more than 200 NFL clients, with a player on all 32 NFL teams. The article quoted Machado saying that future draft picks and their agents or business managers start making jewelry orders in January "so they can sparkle" during their TV interviews at draft time, which is held in April.

He said he attended a draft day party this year for one first-round pick, Jason Pierre-Paul of the University of South Florida, at the Fontainebleau Hotel in Miami Beach. The player was wearing a gold bracelet, diamond watch and necklace he had received from Machado.

The article described Machado as a "pseudo sports agent" who recruited players for his business. The article said that agents, business managers and banks often lend Machado's NFL-hopeful clients money for pre-draft purchases. It also said he watches the draft predictions to keep up with which draft picks need to increase or dial back their orders. Documents from UNC-CH have previously identified three other people, including a sports agent and two people tied to financial planners, who were involved in providing benefits to players.
In two instances, for example, it appears that players received wristbands that allowed access to a pool party from Miami-based agent Michael Katz, according to the UNC documents. Katz's boss, sports agent Drew Rosenhaus, denies that his employee provided benefits to college players.

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Beyond ABCs of Lady Gaga to the Sociology of Fame

By KATHARINE Q. SEELYE

Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta may not sound famous, but the University of South Carolina is offering a course next spring devoted to her — and the sociology of fame.

Apparently one secret to becoming famous is to change your name. Ms. Germanotta now goes by Lady Gaga.

What else accounts for the soaring popularity of the 24-year-old global phenom? The question has intrigued and inspired Mathieu Deflem, 48, a sociology professor at the University of South Carolina at Columbia, who plans to teach a course called “Lady Gaga and the Sociology of Fame.” He believes it is the only such full-time college course in the country.

He wants to explore what makes a person famous and what being famous means in today’s culture. Or, as the course description puts it: “The central objective is to unravel some of the sociologically relevant dimensions of the fame of Lady Gaga.”

This course could also be called “Obsession.” Mr. Deflem said he was instantly entranced with Lady Gaga when he saw her on “The Tonight Show” in January 2009. Then he went to a concert in Atlanta. That led to his traipsing after her around the world to more than 28 shows. He owns more than 300 of her records on vinyl and CD, most of which are international releases. He has started a Web site, gagafrontrow.net, a respectful and adoring fan site with pictures and audio downloads of rare Gaga songs.

Mr. Deflem has met Lady Gaga five times, which was easy in the old days (last year), but now he warns on his site: “Do not contact me about how to meet Lady Gaga. I don’t know. I met her during meet and greets that were organized at the concerts (during the Fame Ball tour and the early Monster
Ball tour), and once, per chance, at an airport. I am not in touch with her nor with her management.)”

Still, he harbors hope that she might visit his class. “I will get the word out to her that I’m doing the course,” he said, “but it might be logistically too difficult for her to come” because she will be on tour for most of the spring semester.

Her tour includes Atlanta, however, which is about a three-hour drive from Columbia. Perhaps the course will include a class trip.
The starting pay of certain liberal arts majors generally clocks in well below that of graduates in engineering fields, according to a Wall Street Journal study.

Graduates with engineering degrees earned average starting pay of $56,000 in their first full-time jobs out of college, topping other majors. Communications and English majors only earned $34,000 in their first jobs.

The survey, which was conducted by PayScale.com between April and June of this year, was answered by about 11,000 people who graduated between 1999 and 2010. The reported starting pay was adjusted for inflation to make the salaries of graduates from different years comparable.

The clear career path of engineering and computer science degrees means students often feel pressure to move into those fields, said Katharine Brooks, director of liberal arts career services at The University of Texas at Austin and author of "You Majored In What?"

The pay advantage of graduates with technical degrees often persists throughout their careers, said Fort Collins, Colo.-based career counselor Katy Piotrowski. Although liberal arts majors have a wide range of salaries, Ms. Piotrowski said that mid-career liberal arts majors she works with in northern Colorado make between $60,000 and $70,000. Those with technical degrees make at least $10,000 more.

Technical majors even have an advantage in fields that are typically hotbeds for liberal arts majors, she said. "Technical degrees are valued in all fields. I've seen a [company] communications department actually prefer that someone have an engineering degree rather than a communications degree," she said.

In the study, among the highest-paying liberal arts majors in the study was economics, at $42,000. The most successful liberal arts majors either go to grad school or begin to develop their career through internships while still in school, Ms. Brooks said.

The PayScale survey was done as part of The Wall Street Journal's Paths to Professions project, which looked at a selection of jobs in careers deemed satisfying, well-paid and
with growth potential. PayScale surveyed people who hold jobs in industries such as health care, finance and government.

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