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E-mail to durhamj@ecu.edu  Web site at http://www.news.ecu.edu
252-328-6481
Erskine Bowles had difficult things to tell the UNC Board of Governors about the effects of budget cuts.

**UNC worst-cuts plan is grim**

By Eric Ferreri, Staff Writer

CHAPEL HILL—UNC system President Erskine Bowles painted a bleak picture Thursday of the UNC system if the more severe of two budget-cutting scenarios is necessary.

As many as 1,700 jobs could be lost, he said.

Bowles even suggested that if North Carolina's economic health doesn't improve, the UNC system may eventually have to close a campus - which he called a smarter strategic and fiscal move than simply chipping away at every university in the system.

"If we keep having cuts, cuts, cuts, we'll have to look at eliminating schools, campuses," Bowles told members of the UNC system's Board of Governors. "If it went on for several years, that would be the smart decision. The unfortunate, smart decision."

To be clear, the university's situation is nowhere near that dire yet. But the state is facing a $3.5 billion budget hole, including $1.3 billion in expiring
taxes and the impending loss of $1.6 billion in federal stimulus money. With all that on their plate, state officials have directed the university system to plan cuts of 5 percent and 10 percent for next year.

At 5 percent, the UNC system would have to cut $135 million in spending and would likely have to eliminate 800 jobs across the state. A 10 percent cut of $270 million would kill 1,700 jobs, officials said Thursday.

And unlike in past years when campuses were able to fall back largely on vacancies and administrative positions, the cuts would likely include academic programs and faculty members, Bowles said.

"We're really going to impact the academic side," he said.

The specter of budget cuts hitting the classroom is not new. For years, Bowles and other university officials have said extreme budget cuts will soon affect students directly through larger class sizes, the loss of course sections and the elimination of other resources.

In large part, the UNC system avoided a worst-case scenario a year ago. Though the state House proposed a $175 million budget cut, the legislature eventually approved a budget that pared UNC spending $70 million, or less than 3 percent of the overall budget.

**On the table**
This week, the UNC system's governing board is analyzing the spending plan for next year that it will eventually submit to state leaders. It hopes to add $105 million for several priorities, but leaders say the budget won't reflect the university's total needs. Along with continuing expenses such as salaries and benefits, the budget would pay largely for the nuts and bolts that keep campuses running - providing funds to open new buildings, pay utility bills, and replace vehicles and equipment.

"I think this budget is so much more responsible than some I've seen in my time," said Peter Hans, a board member since 2003. "Erskine and his team have clearly taken a realistic approach."

The spending plan also requests about $2.6 million for campus safety and security improvements. In the wake of the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting that left 33 dead, the state legislature appropriated $17 million to begin a broad series of security improvements on campuses. The system has received no
funding since, and the new money would pay for additional campus police and mental health workers.

"I don't think this group wants to look back after something bad happens and say, 'We didn't try to get this money,' " Bowles told a committee of the governing board. "This is smart money."

ECU more sanguine
Bowles is hoping for new money even while knowing the system will have to make cuts as well. At UNC-Chapel Hill, a 10 percent budget cut would likely mean another wave of layoffs.

"The jobs [Bowles] is talking about would be real people," Chancellor Holden Thorp said. "It would force us to really think about how we're doing things."

At East Carolina, the picture is rosier.

"At a 10 percent cut, I think we can reasonably manage it without a major loss of programs," ECU Chancellor Steve Ballard said. "Above 10 or 12 percent, jobs become more at risk. If we go to 15 percent, I don't think we can promise that everyone keeps their jobs."

eric.ferreri@newsobserver.com or 919-932-2008
NCSU to offer online MBA

By John Murawski, Staff Writer
RALEIGH—N.C. State University is defying the stigma of online distance learning by becoming the state's first major research university to offer an online MBA program.

N.C. State is targeting the degree, which will be announced today, to residents who don't have the flexibility to attend day or evening programs: military personnel, stay-at-home moms, managers with busy travel schedules and the like.

The university's College of Management expects to enroll 30 to 35 students for the maiden semester next fall, representing about $500,000 in tuition revenue, with the students and revenue increasing exponentially thereafter. N.C. State will advertise the online MBA program at airports and on billboards, radio and the Internet.

"I wouldn't be shocked if 10 years from now we have 1,000 students," said Steve Allen, N.C. State's associate dean of graduate programs and research. Allen's prediction would mean $30.6 million in tuition revenue at today's cost: $30,600 for in-state students.

"There seems to be a pretty significant untapped market for high-quality MBA programs in the region," Allen said.

Online programs are gaining acceptance but still lack the cachet of traditional educational models. UNC and Duke University both include online participation for their MBA programs, but students are required to attend class lectures on campus.

At Duke, which doesn't offer an undergraduate degree in business, students in the executive MBA program do no more than half their course work online. Duke's MBA programs for executives and midcareer managers cost from $120,100 to $140,900.
"We have a commitment to a different educational model," said John Gallagher, Duke's associate dean for executive MBA programs. "These are highly conversational and dialogic educational experiences."

More than 80 universities in this country offer online MBAs, representing about 20 percent of all MBA programs accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, the leading accreditation group for business programs.

East Carolina University was the first in this state to offer an MBA program exclusively online in 2002. About two-thirds of ECU's 800 MBA students are in the online program. Fayetteville State University began offering an online MBA this year.

The key to a successful online program is to have the same admission standards, same courses and same professors as the classroom-based program, said Frederick Niswander, dean of ECU's college of business.

To prevent cheating, ECU has developed an extensive system of remote monitoring of exams. ECU's online MBA students must take tests at public libraries, community colleges, military installations or commercial testing centers that administer exams and supply proctors for ECU.

"How do you know the person online is the person taking the course?" Niswander said. "You have to be able to say, 'I have the same confidence in content, quality, rigor and security as I do in a face-to-face basis.'"

N.C. State plans to meet those standards, Allen said. Students should expect to spend 20 hours a week reading, studying and collaborating.

N.C. State's MBA courses will be taught through 5- to 10-minute podcasts and online discussion groups. Students will be expected to work with virtual teams for group projects. Professors will keep virtual office hours by phone, e-mail and online.

However, even N.C. State's online experiment will make some concessions to tradition. The online MBA students will be required to come to Raleigh for a four-day communications workshop in October. And they will be required to go on a 10-day study abroad trip, most likely in East Asia or South America.
The students will have to cover the costs of food, lodging and travel expenses, Allen said.

john.murawski@newsobserver.com or 919-829-8932
A capacity crowd is likely to fill Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium on Saturday as East Carolina University takes on the U.S. Naval Academy in the Pirates' final non-conference game this year. Rarely have those in the stands been more important since it emerged this week that the Big East Conference will likely pursue the expansion of its football membership in the coming weeks.

An invitation to that conference could prove a windfall for East Carolina, both for its football program and for the academic mission of the university, so this is a critical time. While all confidence should be with university officials as they chart the best course for the school, it never hurts for fans to demonstrate the special atmosphere of Dowdy-Ficklen with an enthusiastic display.

On Tuesday, the presidents of schools in the Big East announced their intention to add two schools for football, increasing from eight to 10 the number of programs competing in that sport under its conference banner. The move was widely expected after the conference informed Villanova University that it hoped to add the Wildcats for football if the school would move from the Football Championship Subdivision level. This was a natural choice since Villanova already played its other sports within the Big East and its addition in football would not disrupt existing alignment.

However, this week's announcement was followed with rumors that the conference intended to pursue Texas Christian University and the University of Central Florida as
well. The University of Houston and Temple University also were mentioned, though the conference concluded only two schools would be added with the vote on Tuesday.

If it is possible, the Pirates should be part of that discussion. While most college football fans, particularly in this area, long to see the Bowl Championship Series come to an end, it remains the pinnacle of the sport and the most lucrative field of play. The Big East is a member and Conference USA is not.

Membership in the Big East would give East Carolina access to that revenue, as well as provide a greater spotlight for the university. While some would deign to admit it, those help the university's academic mission, bringing new funding and students to Greenville and Pitt County.

There is every reason for confidence in Chancellor Steve Ballard and Athletics Director Terry Holland to determine East Carolina's approach. But every fan should be eager to show the university in its best light, starting on Saturday.
Could you peel and eat a kiwi fruit in less than 16 seconds or pull a 188.83-ton airplane for 28 feet?

Probably not. Guinness World Records has tracked such feats for 55 years. But there's an easier way to be a part of record-breaking history than the feats mentioned above.

On Saturday, Guinness will be in Greenville for an attempt at breaking the current world's record for the Largest Gathering of Costumed Pirates.

The original date was Oct. 30 at Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium during East Carolina University's game against UCF, but some logistical issues arose that required the event to be rescheduled.

“(ECU Athletics Director) Terry Holland called me and we came to a compromise,” said event organizer Whitey Martin.

The record attempt will take place at 12:30 p.m. Saturday at Clark-LeClair Stadium prior to ECU's home game against Navy. More than 6,166 pirate-costumed Pirate fans are needed to assemble to break the record that was set in Hastings, England.

“I'd like it if everyone could arrive an hour early,” Martin said. The gates to the stadium will open at 11 a.m. Martin organized the event because of the ECU Pirates and eastern North Carolina.
“The home of Blackbeard. Where else should the record belong?” Martin said. Local businesses got involved, too. PIP printing handled the registration forms and Joni Brooks of Richard Cox Accounting will serve as the official auditor.

The ECU pirate, Steve Whetzel, will serve as the “Pirate of Ceremony” and Brian Bailey will emcee. Buddy Canady of Farm Bureau Insurance and Perry Swain of Mojo's Sportswear also contributed to making the event happen.

Any and all pirates are invited to participate in the record attempt, and participants do not need to be associated with ECU to join the skullduggery. The Guinness application registration will be held on site and participants will be checked for authenticity.

“They will be checking people as they come through the gates,” Martin said. “It would be helpful if people would fill out the registration form in advance of the day and bring it with them.”

To break the existing record all participants must be in position simultaneously and remain so for at least 10 minutes; a loud start and finish recognized by all participants must be used and all participants must wear their costume for the entirety of the attempt.

Costumed pirates must meet specific guidelines to be considered part of the Guinness attempt. Participants, must be dressed as a pirate and clearly resemble a pirate. Women can not wear a dress.

“Women pirates couldn't use their swords in a dress,” Martin said. “If women want to be sexy they can wear pantaloons.”

Martin also said that jeans are not allowed.

“It has to be pants or trousers,” he said.

Pirate costume guidelines are as follows:
Pirate-style hat, bandana or kerchief.
An accessory: sword, hook, musket, skull and crossbones flag, parrot or eye patch.
Appropriate shirt: striped shirt, white T-shirt or pirate-styled shirt.
Appropriate trousers: pantaloons, tatty trousers or rolled-up trousers.

Contact Kelley Kirk at kkirk@reflector.com or (252) 329-9596.
Racist graffiti mars NCSU expression wall

By Josh Shaffer and Amy Dunn, Staff Writers
RALEIGH—Bigoted messages scrawled in spray paint have again forced North Carolina's largest campus to wrestle with the boundary between free speech and hate speech.

The Free Expression Tunnel at N.C. State University has served since the 1960s as a space for any student with an aerosol can and an idea to express. Graffiti covers the walls and ceiling of the concrete tunnel, which goes under railroad tracks on the campus.

On Sunday night, a student reported what NCSU Chancellor Randy Woodson described as "racially charged obscenities and derogatory comments" directed at gay people, along with a drawing of President Barack Obama, inside the tunnel.

Early Thursday, 25 to 30 students held a vigil blocking the tunnel's entrance until about 7 a.m., when Woodson arrived to speak with them.

Later Thursday, the wall was painted over in black, and only a few messages were there. Among them: "Laundry is the only thing that should be separated by color."

Another invited students to wear black to combat racist thoughts.

"The question for all of us is are we going to practice the politics of hate and destruction, or are we going to be a force for respectful dialogue, even where there are differences of opinion," the chancellor asked.

Time to hash things out
Nobody is talking seriously about closing the tunnel or restricting students' access to it. Instead, campus leaders say they want to use this week's events to promote campus discussions about diversity.
"Although you can't completely regulate what happens in a free expression tunnel, even if you think some of the things said there are disturbing, you can use them to enhance the dialogue," interim Provost Warwick Arden said.

He met Thursday with Jose Picart, vice provost for diversity and inclusion, and two students who were particularly upset by the graffiti. Both students said they left feeling that conversation could help stem problems.

"The key to everything is education," said sophomore Shaneice Mitchell. She said she thinks those who left the offending graffiti, who haven't been identified, did it more out of lack of knowledge than meanness.

Sophomore Jasmine Brown agreed: "A lot of people here are from small towns, and they don't know about diversity. It's new."

This week's graffiti is not the first at the tunnel to spark outrage.

In 2008, shortly after Obama's election, graffiti appeared in the tunnel saying that he should be shot or hanged. There also were references to the Ku Klux Klan. The painting was examined by the U.S. Secret Service, which determined that it was not a serious threat against the president's life.

In 2009, a mural of former women's basketball coach Kay Yow, who died of cancer, was defaced with the words "cancer rules."

NCSU responded to those incidents by improving lighting outside the tunnel, which is monitored by cameras, and by posting signs that explain the tunnel's purpose. A campus culture task force also was appointed, and language was added to the student code of conduct making hate speech and bias an aggravating factor in offenses.

Dialogue continues through another task force aimed at bringing together a diverse student body of 34,000 students, Picart said. One strategy is for disparate campus groups to hold joint events.

New expressions
With the tunnel painted mostly black Thursday and talk of the graffiti swirling around campus, freshman Brian Coffin stood spray-painting an announcement about a meeting for Campus Crusade for Christ. His announcement had no relation to the racist graffiti or to the protesters who blocked the tunnel, he said.
"I don't think the tunnel should be about hatred," Coffin said. "But without that vent, it will come out in other ways - potentially more damaging ways than spray paint in a tunnel. Spray paint can be covered over in one morning."

With that, he went on painting.

josh.shaffer@newsobserver.com or 919-829-4818

Other incidents in tunnel

**February 2009** A mural of former women's basketball Coach Kay Yow is defaced with the words "cancer rules." Yow had died of cancer shortly before.

**November 2008** Racist graffiti appears after President Barack Obama's election

**February 2008** The tunnel is painted Carolina blue with the expression "Roy doesn't need a red suit!" after a Tar Heels basketball victory over the Wolfpack. Roy referred to UNC Coach Roy Williams, and the suit reference was to the red blazer worn by NCSU Coach Sidney Lowe.

**February 2003** Anti-Arab epithets are painted over antiwar slogans in the tunnel.
Thorp backs Heels football coach

By Eric Ferreri, Staff Writer

CHAPEL HILL North Carolina football coach Butch Davis did not appear to play a role in the violations currently being investigated by the NCAA and is not in danger of losing his job, UNC chancellor Holden Thorp said Thursday.

Thorp's statements Thursday morning were the chancellor's strongest yet in support of Davis, whose team has been the subject of NCAA scrutiny for more than three months. It was not a blanket endorsement, however, of Davis.

An NCAA probe that started this summer as an investigation into whether UNC football players had received improper benefits from agents has expanded to include possible academic violations involving a tutor.

Speaking to members of the UNC system's Board of Governors, which sets policy for all of the state's public universities, Thorp said he still needs to understand why Davis was not more aware of the questionable behavior of some of his football players.

He added, however, that Davis did not appear to break any rules. "There's no information to indicate that he participated in or knew of any wrongdoing," Thorp said in an interview following his meeting with the governing board. "[Athletic director Dick] Baddour and I are not having meetings deciding his future. He's our football coach."

Fourteen Tar Heels players have missed some or all of the season because of the investigation; three - senior defensive tackle Marvin Austin, senior wide receiver Greg Little and junior defensive end Robert Quinn - are no longer eligible to play in college because of improper trips and gifts they received. A total of six players have been sidelined for the entire season. Those suspected of cheating have been sent to the university honor court.
"Some have had agent issues, and some have had academic issues," Thorp said. "And some have had both."

The status of two players, fullback Devon Ramsay and defensive end Michael McAdoo, has not been resolved.

Since the violations were first unearthed more than three months ago, the university has conducted more than 60 interviews with athletes, coaches and others, Thorp said.

The NCAA has visited UNC six times as part of its investigation, and the Secretary of State's office has logged two campus visits as well, Thorp said.

eric.ferreri@newsobserver.com or 919-932-2008
Over-the-top 'privacy' at UNC

By Jay Schalin

RALEIGH The recent lawsuit filed by The News & Observer and others to gain access to records involving football players and coaches at UNC-Chapel Hill did not surprise us at the Pope Center for Higher Education Policy. We have tried in vain for eight months to get information about articles published by Chapel Hill English professors. We were rebuffed in a way that reflects a similar disdain for transparency.

In February, the Pope Center was approached by Mark Bauerlein, a well-known author and English professor from Emory University. He wished to conduct research on UNC's English department. In Bauerlein's view, many faculty members (at all universities) conduct insignificant research that has little effect and therefore wastes taxpayer money.

(At UNC-Chapel Hill, tenured professors generally spend one-third of their time conducting original research or writing.) Because finding ways to reduce higher education costs is one of our primary objectives, we agreed to help him.

Bauerlein wanted to examine tenure-track professors' productivity and influence and therefore sought all of their published works over a four- or five-year period. Two sources contain sufficient information about faculty output: professors' curriculum vitae (CV), the academic equivalent of resumes, and Faculty Activity Reports (FAR), which tenured professors in the UNC system must file to prove they have fulfilled the terms of their contracts. Bauerlein preferred to use the FARs, so I requested them from university counsel Leslie Strohm in February.

I did not seek the entire FARs, in case they contained information that should remain private. I merely sought redacted lists of professors' publications, which the public is legally entitled to in North Carolina according to statute § 132-6(c):

"No request to inspect, examine, or obtain copies of public records shall be denied on the grounds that confidential information is commingled with the requested nonconfidential information. If it is necessary to separate confidential from nonconfidential information in order to permit the inspection, examination, or copying of the public records, the public agency shall bear the cost of such separation."

To make a complex story simple, Regina Stabile of the counsel's office informed me that the FARs were entirely confidential personnel records. She based her decision on North Carolina statutes § 126-23 and § 126-24, which state that only 10 items of personnel information - including hire date and salary - are public, and everything else is protected.
Initially, Beverly Taylor, the English department chair, told me that all of the information would be available in April on the English department's website. In August, after many repeated attempts to gain access to the information, many CVs were still absent from the website, and Taylor informed Bauerlein that the CVs were also completely confidential.

The school refused to redact either document simply to provide a list of professors' publications - clearly in violation of § 132-6(c).

I was bewildered. Isn't the purpose of publishing things to make them public? How could professors' published works at a public university be considered confidential?

As a final recourse, I wrote to Chancellor Holden Thorp on Sept. 28, asking whether he indeed stood by the legal department's determination. He has not responded.

What is it they don't want us to know? We did manage to learn that, while some English department professors produce much well-respected research, others do virtually no research and others' research is almost completely ignored. Still others do research that is substandard, bizarre or irrelevant.

As the Mary Easley scandal at N.C. State and the football scandal at Chapel Hill have shown, universities do not always take the high road. They need oversight, not by politicians with vested interests in presenting a superficially pristine image, but by the public. To start, all public records and e-mails necessary should be revealed to learn the full extent of the Chapel Hill football mess.

But we shouldn't stop there. During its upcoming session, the General Assembly should rewrite the public records laws to eliminate conflicts or loopholes and provide real transparency. All faculty CVs and course syllabi should be made available online for anybody to see, perhaps along with university financial records.

As long as UNC schools can hide behind a wall of ambiguity and obstinacy, scandals will continue and academic quality will suffer. Let's get everything out in the open.

*Jay Schalin is senior writer at the John W. Pope Center for Higher Education Policy.*
Learning in Dorm, Because Class Is on the Web

By TRIP GABRIEL
GAINESVILLE, Fla. — Like most other undergraduates, Anish Patel likes to sleep in. Even though his Principles of Microeconomics class at 9:35 a.m. is just a five-minute stroll from his dorm, he would rather flip open his laptop in his room to watch the lecture, streamed live over the campus network.

On a recent morning, as Mr. Patel’s two roommates slept with covers pulled tightly over their heads, he sat at his desk taking notes on Prof. Mark Rush’s explanation of the term “perfect competition.” A camera zoomed in for a close-up of the blackboard, where Dr. Rush scribbled in chalk, “lots of firms and lots of buyers.”

The curtains were drawn in the dorm room. The floor was awash in the flotsam of three freshmen — clothes, backpacks, homework, packages of Chips Ahoy and Cap’n Crunch’s Crunch Berries.

The University of Florida broadcasts and archives Dr. Rush’s lectures less for the convenience of sleepy students like Mr. Patel than for a simple principle of economics: 1,500 undergraduates are enrolled and no lecture hall could possibly hold them. Dozens of popular courses in psychology, statistics, biology and other fields are also offered primarily online. Students on this scenic campus of stately oaks rarely meet classmates in these courses.

Online education is best known for serving older, nontraditional students who can not travel to colleges because of jobs and family. But the same technologies of “distance
“learning” are now finding their way onto brick-and-mortar campuses, especially public institutions hit hard by declining state funds. At the University of Florida, for example, resident students are earning 12 percent of their credit hours online this semester, a figure expected to grow to 25 percent in five years.

This may delight undergraduates who do not have to change out of pajamas to “attend” class. But it also raises questions that go to the core of a college’s mission: Is it possible to learn as much when your professor is a mass of pixels whom you never meet? How much of a student’s education and growth — academic and personal — depends on face-to-face contact with instructors and fellow students?

“When I look back, I think it took away from my freshman year,” said Kaitlyn Hartsock, a senior psychology major at Florida who was assigned to two online classes during her first semester in Gainesville. “My mom was really upset about it. She felt like she’s paying for me to go to college and not sit at home and watch through a computer.”

Across the country, online education is exploding: 4.6 million students took a college-level online course during fall 2008, up 17 percent from a year earlier, according to the Sloan Survey of Online Learning. A large majority — about three million — were simultaneously enrolled in face-to-face courses, belying the popular notion that most online students live far from campuses, said Jeff Seaman, co-director of the survey. Many are in community colleges, he said. Very few attend private colleges; families paying $53,000 a year demand low student-faculty ratios.

Colleges and universities that have plunged into the online field, mostly public, cite their dual missions to serve as many students as possible while remaining affordable, as well as a desire to exploit the latest technologies.

At the University of Iowa, as many as 10 percent of 14,000 liberal arts undergraduates take an online course each semester, including Classical Mythology and Introduction to American Politics.

At the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, first-year Spanish students are no longer offered a face-to-face class; the university moved all instruction online, despite internal research showing that online students do slightly less well in grammar and speaking.

“You have X amount of money, what are you going to do with it?” said Larry King, chairman of the Romance languages department, where budget cuts have forced difficult choices. “You can’t be all things to all people.”

The University of Florida has faced sweeping budget cuts from the State Legislature totaling 25 percent over three years. That is a main reason the university is moving aggressively to offer more online instruction. “We see this as the future of higher education,” said Joe Glover, the university provost.
“Quite honestly, the higher education industry in the United States has not been tremendously effective in the face-to-face mode if you look at national graduation rates,” he added. “At the very least we should be experimenting with other modes of delivery of education.”

A sampling of Florida professors teaching online found both enthusiasm and doubts. “I would prefer to teach classes of 50 and know every student’s name, but that’s not where we are financially and space-wise,” said Megan Mocko, who teaches statistics to 1,650 students. She said an advantage of the Internet is that students can stop the lecture and rewind when they do not understand something.

Ilan Shrir, who teaches developmental psychology to 300, said that he chose his field because of the passion of a professor who taught him as an undergraduate. But he thought it unlikely that anyone could be so inspired by an online course.

Kristin Joos built interactivity into her Principles of Sociology course to keep students engaged. There are small-group online discussions, and students join a virtual classroom once a week using a conferencing software called WiZiQ.

“Hi, everyone, welcome to Week 9. Hello!” Dr. Joos said in a peppy voice recently to about 60 students who had logged on. She sat at a desk in her home office; a live video feed she switched on at one point showed her in black librarian’s glasses and a tank top. Ms. Hartsock, the senior psychology major, followed the class from her own off-campus home, her laptop open on the dining room table. As Dr. Joos lectured, a chat box scrolled with students’ comments and questions.

The topic was sexual identity, which Dr. Joos defined as “a determination made through the application of socially agreed-upon biological criteria for classifying persons as females and males.”

She asked students for their own definitions. One, bringing an online-chat sensibility to an academic discussion, typed: “If someone looks like a chick and wants to be called a chick even though they’re not, now they can be one.”

Ms. Hartsock, 23, diligently typed notes. A hard-working student who maintains an A average, she was frustrated by the online format. Other members of her discussion group were not pulling their weight, she said. The one test so far, online, required answering five questions in 10 minutes — a lightning round meant to prevent cheating by Googling answers.

In a conventional class, “I’m someone who sits toward the front and shares my thoughts with the teacher,” she said. In the 10 or so online courses she has taken in her four years, “it’s all the same,” she said. “No comments. No feedback. And the grades are always late.”

As her attention wandered, she got up to microwave some leftover rice.
The Choice: 
Fill in the Blanks

By JACQUES STEINBERG

FOR college applicants who haven’t engaged in many extracurricular activities, turning to the section of the Common Application where they are encouraged to list such pursuits can cause a bit of a flutter in the stomach. This year’s application includes 12 blank fields set aside for “Extracurricular Activities & Work Experience.” What of the applicant who has done only a few things, however intensively?

“The perception is that you have to fill in all the blanks,” Jennifer Delahunty, the dean of admissions at Kenyon College in Ohio, told me recently. “What we hate to see,” she said, “is when students do things like check ‘9th, 10th, 11th and 12th grades’ and then write ‘personal reading.’ Yes, we’re glad you’re a reader. But it looks decidedly like filler.”

Instead, Ms. Delahunty and her counterparts say, students should feel free to leave some white space, and at no risk to their chances of admission. In fact, on this year’s online version of the Common Application, clicking on the oversize yellow question mark in the activity section will open a popup box under the statement, “I am concerned that I will be at a disadvantage if I do not complete all 12 activity fields.” It is followed by a soothing message from the administrators of the application, assuring applicants that “the availability of 12 fields is not intended to imply that you should list 12 activities.”

As Monica C. Inzer, the dean of admissions at Hamilton College in New York and a member of the Common Application board, explained: “We’d rather see depth than a longer list. I think students think we want well-rounded kids. We do. But we really want a well-rounded class. That could be lots of people who have individual strengths. Distinction in one area is good, and better than doing a lot of little things.”

The space for activities on this year’s Common Application, which is accepted by more than 400 colleges and universities, is greater than in past
editions. For the first time, the application combines extracurricular activities (previously seven lines) and work experience (previously four) into one 12-line section.

One reason for the revision: “So there would be no implied hierarchy of importance between extracurriculars (formerly listed first) and work experience,” Rob Killion, executive director of the Common Application, wrote in an e-mail.

The change is intended to benefit applicants like the one to Kenyon a few years ago “who had no activities, save 25 hours working at the family gas station each week,” Ms. Delahunty said. “We know that’s all that the student could do.” He was admitted.

Moreover, the combined work-and-play section permits students to rank all their activities “in their order of importance to you”; in such a way, a job might take precedence over work on the school yearbook.

Ultimately, what are admissions deans hoping to see in this section of the application?

“We’d rather see a marathon than a bunch of sprints,” Ms. Delahunty said — and no, for those of you who run track and cross-country, she wasn’t speaking literally. “We’d rather see a student who has been engaged over a couple of years in an activity rather than someone who goes to 12 different meetings in a month and doesn’t really dig deep into one activity.”

While colleges know that students are going to try things that don’t work out, they ultimately hope to find evidence that “something seized you and you stayed with it,” said Ms. Delahunty, the editor of a recently published series of essays for parents, “I’m Going to College — Not You.”

While leadership is prized, rank-and-file participation counts, too. “Not everybody is going to be president of a club or captain of a team,” Ms. Inzer said. “We’re looking for signs of commitment, a purpose to what you do.” Just as significant may be how students respond to the request that they “briefly elaborate on one” activity or work experience in four lines or less.

Eric J. Furda, the dean of admissions at the University of Pennsylvania, said he hoped to glean from the answer what a student learned from that experience.
“They’re not going to differentiate themselves by listing that they were on the student newspaper and were editor in chief; there are other editors in chief of the student newspaper,” Mr. Furda said. “Talking about that experience on the application is a way the student is going to differentiate himself or herself.”

It may demoralize some applicants to hear that the extra space was motivated partly by those students who not only filled in all the lines allotted for their non-academic lives, but also attached a résumé with even more details. Still, giving too much information to admissions officers already on information overload — remember, they may read upward of 1,000 applications in just a few weeks — can backfire.

“It’s our hope,” Mr. Killion said, “that some students will no longer feel the need to send a résumé.”
Colleges Restrict Four Loko, As Health Concerns Rise

Little Rhody's big state school is banning Four Loko, the caffeine-boosted alcohol drink that's often called "blackout in a can."

With the move, the University of Rhode Island becomes the latest school to warn about or restrict access to the beverages that combine the punch of alcohol with the stimulating effects of caffeine.

At a concert on the URI campus last month, more than 30 people were treated for illnesses or injuries related to alcohol, the Providence Journal reports. No alcohol was available at the arena, but students apparently got hammered ahead of time.

URI's Dan Graney told the paper the students call it "pre-gaming or front-loading." Four Loko, and other drinks like it, are inexpensive and potent. They pose a real "danger," according to Graney.

Last month, dozens of students at Central Washington University were sickened and nine wound up in the hospital after drinking Four Loko. Phusion Projects, maker of the beverage, said the incident was "inexcusable" but also said its product wasn't solely to blame.

All the warnings about the drinks may be boomeranging. The student paper at Kansas State University reports that sales of caffeinated alcoholic drinks are up at liquor stores near campus.

"Some customers have seen (the drink) on the news and see it in the store and then want to buy it to try it," one liquor store employee told the paper.

Phusion Projects, founded in 2005 by three college pals from Ohio State University, defends its drinks, saying:
People have safely combined caffeine and alcohol for years: rum and colas, Red Bull and vodkas and Irish coffees are standard fare in bars and restaurants everywhere.