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Financial aid forms botched

By Jimmy Ryals
The Daily Reflector

East Carolina University is repaying the federal government $935,000 for financial aid given without proper eligibility checks.

Financial aid employees "did not consistently adhere" to university and government standards for verifying applicants' household income, tax burden and other information on financial aid applications, according to a March 27 audit.


Judith Bailey, the university's senior executive director of enrollment management, discussed the repayment Tuesday with the Faculty Senate.

In their review, federal auditors surveyed 25 applications; three of them failed to meet verification standards. They ordered the university to find and correct other cases of poor confirmation. The subsequent probe showed 763 unverified grants and loans, totaling $1.47 million, Bailey said.

ECU students received nearly 25,000 federal aid awards during the 2005-06 school year.

In most of the cases, tax returns attached to applications lacked signatures from taxpayers or their accountants, Bailey said. ECU corrected the files where possible but still has to repay $935,135 over three years, she added.

"Once the school awards those (loans), we take it as our responsibility, even though it's the students who should have had all of the appropriate signatures before they applied," she said. "We did not catch that in our checking."

The verification problems are nothing new. In separate reviews, campus and state auditors previously detailed the same issues identified in the federal report. ECU previously returned more than $1,700 to the federal government for improper awards.

A move to a new financial aid records system has largely corrected the verification issues, Bailey said. The new software, Banner, requires users to enter the necessary information before they can finish submitting applications, she said.

"If you have not entered that you have the appropriate verification on a (federal application), then it will not award ... Banner will help us with the security of our financial aid system," Bailey said.

The financial aid office also has drawn criminal investigators' attention. Earlier this year, three people — including a former employee — pleaded guilty for their roles in a kickback scheme in the office.

There have been personnel changes in the financial aid office. Former Director Rose Mary Stelma left the university over the summer. Sheryl Spivey, a consultant with New Hampshire-based Financial Aid Services Inc., is the acting director. She previously led financial aid departments at the University of Minnesota and the University of Central Michigan, Bailey said.

A search for a new director will begin in late spring, Bailey said.

Jimmy Ryals can be contacted at jryals@coxnc.com and 329-9568.
Principal deserving of award

Accolades to Valerie Galberth being named Pitt County’s Wachovia Principal of the Year 2006. As a parent of a former as well as a current student at Farmville Central High School, I am truly thankful to have such a strong, Christian leader in our school.

That award was well deserved. Thankfully, you gave credit to your staff as well for your victory. You, Mrs. Galberth, are truly an incredible principal with an incredible staff and faculty backing you.

I have always appreciated seeing you and your staff out roaming the hallways and calling on the students by name. You are a tremendous role model to so many students, faculty and staff members. You enjoy and take pride in your job and that attitude overflows to your entire staff and faculty.

I greatly appreciate the time that you have sacrificed with your family, as your days are not exactly short. You have my utmost respect and I pray blessings over you, your family, your staff and Farmville Central High School. Go Jaguars!

MELANIE VANDERHORST
Greenville
Some students to benefit from tuition caps at UNC

The Associated Press

CHARLOTTE — Tuition caps will help many undergraduates in the University of North Carolina system next year, including those at UNC-Chapel Hill and three other schools that are barred from raising in-state tuition at all.

Tuition increases are limited to a maximum of 6.5 percent each year under a new policy approved by the system's Board of Governors. The board promised to lower that cap if the 16-campus system received better-than-average state funding.

State lawmakers did just that, approving a budget that provided the overall system with a 10.7 percent increase in state funding for the school year. The increase for each individual university varied.

The board's policy said tuition caps at each campus would drop if the school received more than a 6 percent increase in state funding. For example, if the university received a 7 percent increase, the school's tuition cap would be 5.5 percent.

UNC Chapel Hill's increase was 12.5 percent, which left it no room to raise in-state tuition for undergraduates. UNC Charlotte received 7.5 percent more per full-time-equivalent student, dropping its tuition cap to 5 percent, which means the $2,451 undergraduates paid this year can only increase by $123 next year.

Five schools were able to use the maximum 6.5 percent cap: North Carolina State University, East Carolina University, Elizabeth City State, Fayetteville State and UNC Pembroke.

N.C. State had the highest in-state undergraduate tuition for the 2007-08 school year at $8,760, followed closely by the $3,705 tuition at UNC Chapel Hill, according to the UNC system. The lowest tuitions were at Elizabeth City State at $1,587 and Winston-Salem State's $1,701.

Fee increases still face a 6.5 percent cap, except those for debt service.

In pushing for the new policy, UNC system President Erskine Bowles said each university has a responsibility to keep tuition low. Bowles also said state leaders must adequately fund public universities.

Paper noose nettles NCSU

Chancellor James Oblinger says the toilet paper symbol found in a bathroom stall is unacceptable.

BY JOSH SHAFFER
STAFF WRITER

RALEIGH - Campus police are investigating a noose made of toilet paper found hanging from a restroom stall door Thursday at N.C. State University.

An employee found the 10-inch noose inside the Sullivan Shops building and reported it at 8:30 a.m.

NCSU Chancellor James Oblinger called the incident an unacceptable racist symbol but urged students not to overreact.

"This could be someone's idea of a prank, or it might constitute a crime," Oblinger said in a statement. "In either case, it is inappropriate. This is an act that has become symbolic of racial hatred."

The Sullivan building, which houses a maintenance shop for school vehicles, is on a far-western edge of campus off Gorman Street and draws little if any student traffic.

"It's well-removed from the core of campus," said NCSU spokesman Keith Nichols. "It's a good distance from the nearest residence hall, even further from a classroom."

Campus police were talking to employees who work in the building, Nichols said, and department managers were discussing the incident in general to let workers express any anxiety. There hadn't been much anxiety by Thursday afternoon.

A rash of noose incidents has occurred nationwide since the Jena Six case drew attention in September.

Thousands traveled to the Louisiana town of Jena to support a group of black teens charged with attempted second-degree murder in the beating of a white student last year. That fight stemmed from nooses draped from a tree at a local high school after a black student sat there.

In September, police in High Point investigated four nooses hung on the campus at Andrews High School, one at the top of a school flagpole.

Students in the NCSU Brickyard on Thursday were sure the noose was left on campus as a joke, but they said they still felt disturbed.

"N.C. State is a conservative community, and we're predominantly white, but I wouldn't expect this of us," said Billy Gehling, a sophomore studying business. "It has to be a prank."

Others guessed news of nooses left across the country, including in New York and Houston schools and other public places, had spawned a sick trend.

"That's really shocking," said Sarah Elsayd, a senior political science major. "They all seem like copycats."

Oblinger said anyone found responsible would face discipline from NCSU and possibly criminal charges. "There is no room for this kind of action on the N.C. State campus," he said. "Even if it is intended as a prank, it is disruptive and an offense to a safe learning and working environment."

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BILLY GEHLING
NCSU SOPHOMORE

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Attorney General Roy Cooper went to Chapel Hill on Thursday to endorse the work of the UNC system's safety task force and to argue for new safety measures in the aftermath of the Virginia Tech tragedy.

Parents expect their children to be safe at a state university campus, Cooper told the UNC Board of Governors. Campuses have to prepare for the worst possible catastrophic events.

"You never know when someone will come on one of our campuses and start shooting," he said. "You'll never know when someone comes with a bomb. You'll never know if someone drives a vehicle on a campus and starts to try to run over people. You just never know, and we have to be ready."

The UNC board is reviewing an extensive set of recommendations by a task force that has worked for six months. In January, another statewide panel appointed by Cooper will issue a report that takes a broad view of campus safety across public universities, community colleges and private colleges. That panel is likely to recommend changes in mental health treatment and rules around gun permits, Cooper said.

"We want to do things that are reasonable," Cooper said. "We don't want to overreact, but at the same time, we need to make certain that we're prepared."