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Global classroom sets stage for cultural exchange

By Kim Grizzard
The Daily Reflector

Tuesday, November 10, 2009

East Carolina University theater students had to do some digging to uncover their latest stage production, an adaptation of the Peruvian folk of "The Three Shovels."

Students used the Internet to locate a tale of the farmer who loses his shovel in a magical lake. But the story didn't come from Amazon.com. It came from the people near the Amazon region of Peru through a link between ECU and a university in Lima.

"We were actually talking to people in real time," said Patricia Clark, associate professor in ECU's School of Theater and Dance. "We're always trying to gather multicultural stories, and what better way to do that than to be able to link with other countries ... and for them to share their stories with us and for us to share our stories with them?"

A decade ago, such communication between a university in North Carolina and one in South America might have seemed like a tall tale. But in the last five years, ECU has begun conversations with students in 22 countries.

The award-winning Global Academic Initiatives project has helped more than 1,000 ECU students and 4,000 students around the world interact with other cultures without leaving the classroom. The global understanding course — developed by Rosina Chia, assistant vice chancellor for global academic initiatives, and Elmer Poe, the associate vice chancellor for academic outreach — uses live video and chat technology to give international exposure to students who might not have time or money to study abroad.

Since the course began in 2004, the university's use of the technology has broadened to include offerings in global health and software engineering that are taught by partnering professors on different continents. Other departments at the university have found ways to make their courses cross cultures.

The university offers workshops each semester for faculty members interested in learning more about the global classroom concept. Clark attended one of those workshops in the summer of 2008. By fall, her theater education majors were talking online with students from Russia and Peru, gathering multicultural tales for ECU's Storybook Theatre to use on its tour of area elementary schools. The Peruvian partnership also yielded a featured story for Storybook Theatre's stage production "All Aboard South America: Mighty Mysteries, Wonder and Mayhem!" (See related story in Look).

"You just give (faculty) a little bit of seed, show them you can do something like this, and there's no telling what they come up with," Chia said. "Without extra work, without extra money, we are just adding some international component to what they're doing, all across campus."

Poe said many of the university's partner countries are able to become a part of the global classroom for an initial investment of less than $500, including software. Universities need nothing more than a video camera, microphone projection screen and Internet capability.

"We've intentionally chosen to go that route because in many of our partnering countries, they're in the development phase," Poe said. "In the development phase, there's not a lot of money to invest in technology."

The program's accessibility has won the university praise from everyone from peers in academia to ambassadors in other countries. Last year, the Global Academic Initiatives project was recognized by the Institute of International Education. Last week, the project received the Nikolai Khaladjan International Award from the
American Association of University Administrators.

Similar initiatives have been launched at the University of Michigan, and schools throughout the country have begun to look at ECU.

"The program is so exciting," Poe said. "It's exciting to see students from eastern North Carolina sitting in a classroom, exchanging ideas, working with students in China, working with students in India."

Except for joint courses like global health, students are not necessarily paired with other students in the same discipline. Clark's theater students, for example, converse mostly with business and economics majors. Still, students share a common interest in things like movies and music.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that about 10 percent of students who enroll in the global understanding course gain an interest in studying abroad.

Christopher Timmons, a junior theater major from Raleigh, has never traveled internationally. But after linking with Peru, he would love to visit that country.

"I didn't really think that a few Fridays you'd really get to know the different students," he said. "There are multiple students in the classroom that I know their names when I see them now."

Throughout the semester, students in both countries have performed for each other, demonstrating songs and dances from their culture. Students from Peru introduced American students to the "handkerchief dance." ECU students reciprocated with the "Electric Slide."

"It goes a lot further than that," Clark said. "They talk about culture; they talk about what it was like to grow up in their countries. It's really exciting to see the exchange that goes on between the students.

"Peru becomes a very close place via Internet," she said. "That's what it's all about is really that friendship and that handshake across the world."

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Tree planted to recognize ECU win over Tulsa

The Daily Reflector

Monday, November 09, 2009

Perhaps East Carolina University's colors should be purple, gold and green.

The Pirate football team earned a new tree for downtown Greenville almost a year ago, and it was delivered Monday morning to its plot behind City Hall.

The Oklahoma red bud was a gift from Tulsa Mayor Kathy Taylor to commemorate ECU's victory over the University of Tulsa Golden Hurricane last December.

The two teams faced off in the Conference USA championship. Tulsa boasted the better overall record, but the Pirates prevailed 27-24 on Tulsa's home field for their first C-USA title.

If Tulsa had won the championship, Greenville Mayor Pat Dunn said the city would have delivered a North Carolina pine tree.

It's the right time of year for planting trees, Dunn noted, and the good-sized red bud should fare just fine in the eastern North Carolina climate.

She added it seems like the right time to call in a bet. The Pirates will travel to Tulsa this Sunday for an 8:15 p.m. conference matchup.

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Focus now on C-USA

Holtz, team take aim on Tulsa

By Nathan Summers
The Daily Reflector

Tuesday, November 10, 2009

Less than a week removed from their setback against Virginia Tech, the East Carolina football team and head coach Skip Holtz are thinking nothing but Conference USA for the rest of the season.

Holtz encouraged his team to not worry about league play until after the Pirates (5-4) staged a massive non-conference tilt against the Hokies, but that time has passed.

"It was a big-time college football atmosphere," Holtz said of Tech's sluggish 16-3 victory at Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium last Thursday. "The noise, the atmosphere and the support was really awesome. It was a great venue to play and it was exciting to play at home and expose this great university to thousands of people around the country."

Now, the Pirates face another of their toughest tests of the season when they travel to Tulsa for a Sunday night game, a rematch of last year's C-USA title game, which the Pirates won in a huge upset.

Not only will the Golden Hurricane enter the game with last year's result in mind — much the same way the Hokies did regarding their own 2008 upset at the hands of ECU — but Tulsa is now fighting for its life in C-USA West after losing a 46-45 heartbreaker to Houston over the weekend.

"It ended up scoring, I think, nine points in about the final 40 seconds to end up winning by one," Holtz said of the Tulsa loss. "Tulsa probably played one of its better football games of the year when you sit down and watch it on film."

Last season, the Pirate defense stormed Tulsa, then the national leader in scoring, in the first half of the C-USA title game, including a 72-yard interception return for a touchdown.

It was one of five interceptions the Pirates swiped off quarterback David Johnson.

Kass, Marshall out for season

Holtz confirmed that both junior defensive back Dekota Marshall (broken leg) and senior tight end Rob Kass (knee) have been lost for the season with injuries sustained in the Tech loss.

"It's unfortunate, especially anytime you're a senior and your career is cut short," Holtz said of Kass, a former quarterback who converted to tight end this season. "With Rob Kass and his unselfish attitude and the way he's worked and the things he's done for us, I hate what he's going through right now."

Marshall had surgery on Saturday, according to Holtz, and is facing what his coach called a very long rehabilitation process.

Junior defensive lineman Josh Smith (shoulder), senior wide receiver Jamar Bryant (shoulder) and junior running back Giavanni Ruffin (ankle) are all questionable for the trip to Tulsa.

Still out indefinitely are defensive linemen Antonio Allison (broken foot) and A.J. Johnson (knee), Darryl Reynolds (shoulder), linebacker Matt Thompson (elbow) and running back Jon Williams (knee).

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Tailgating at an ECU football game

Josh Barnes of Archer Lodge helps his father-in-law, Steve Keen of Goldsboro, remove steamed shrimp from the stove outside Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium in Greenville before the East Carolina-Virginia Tech football game. The seafood is an annual tailgate tradition for Keen and his family. "We do a bushel of oysters and about 20 pounds of shrimp once a year," he said Thursday.
NCCU band to march in Rose Bowl parade

The N.C. Central University Marching Sound Machine will march in the 2011 Tournament of Roses Parade.

Yes, this is a very big deal. Jorim Reid, the band's director, says it's one of the top three honors a marching band can snare, along with an invitation to the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade and the John Philip Sousa Foundation's Sudler Trophy given each year to the top college or university band in the nation.

By the way, the band from Western Carolina University won that Sousa trophy and will march in Pasadena as well.

Reid took over as the NCCU band director in 2001. Then, there were 32 members. Things have changed. Reid expects to bring 250 to Pasadena.

Though he's had success, Reid said he wouldn't have applied yet for the Tournament of Roses had not a parade committee member suggested that he do so.

"It was in the 15-year plan," he said. "I've only been here eight years, so we're ahead of schedule."

Next up for NCCU, a frantic fundraising campaign. The total cost of trip could run NCCU $500,000, no small task with public universities currently in budget-cut mode.

"What kind of fundraising will we have to do? Massive!" said Chancellor Charlie Nelms. "It's going to be a monumental task. But it's one that will embraced. It's a real honor for the state of North Carolina."

For many band members, the rose parade invitation came as a happy surprise.

"We didn't even know he applied for it," said Shannon Todd of Burlington, a 'dance girl' in the band. "We just try to do our best and then reap the benefits later. We want to be one of the best bands in the nation."

Read more on this story in Wednesday's Durham News.
2 pregnant women die from H1N1

RALEIGH -- Two pregnant North Carolina women died of pandemic H1N1 flu during the week of Oct. 25, state health officials confirmed Monday.

A spokesman for the state Department of Health and Human Services declined to identify where the two women lived.

In addition to the two pregnant women, three other people died in North Carolina from "influenza-like illness" during the week of Oct. 25.

Up through Sept. 26, North Carolina reported only deaths and hospitalizations attributed to the H1N1 virus. On Sept. 27, the state expanded its reporting to cover hospitalizations and deaths attributed to any influenza-like illnesses, whether seasonal flu or pandemic H1N1 flu.

A total of 12 deaths and 267 hospitalizations this year, through Sept. 26, were attributed to laboratory-confirmed H1N1 virus. Since Sept. 27, the state says 32 North Carolinians have died from influenza-related viruses, including H1N1.

The reporting change was ordered by the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to provide a fuller picture of the impact of flu, since the number of laboratory-confirmed pandemic H1N1 flu cases is much lower than the true number of cases.

Both pregnant women and children are considered high-risk groups for infection by the H1N1 virus and have priority for the vaccine.

News of the deaths came as Wake County ran out of the vaccine and shut down H1N1 flu clinics Monday afternoon. County health officials say they expect to reopen the clinics when they receive additional doses.

Many physician practices and pharmacies still have the vaccine available.
Legislators will review University of North Carolina job-hiring waivers

Legislators to review report on system’s hiring policies

By Jordan Schrader

The University of North Carolina system is asking its campuses how often they hire employees without conducting searches or advertising job openings.

Their answers will be reported to state lawmakers.

The attempt to compile the information was prompted by an Asheville Citizen-Times report showing universities have filled hundreds of jobs without searches in recent years.

All but one of the state’s 16 public universities told the Citizen-Times they had waived searches. For some, waivers were common.

The story “was kind of a heads-up for (UNC),” said Ray Rapp, a Mars Hill Democrat, “and I called, and they said, ‘We’re on it.’”

Report coming

Rapp asked the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee to hear a report from UNC at its meeting that starts today, but legislative staff said the agenda was full. The report could be heard at a future meeting, such as the one Dec. 8-9.

“We’re going to continue to do our analysis and make sure that we’re ready to go” for December, said Anita Watkins, UNC vice president for government affairs.

When the Citizen-Times sought the information from the university system in September, it was referred to the individual schools, which follow a patchwork of procedures.

Temp jobs

At some smaller campuses, the hiring waivers are mainly used as a way to fill jobs temporarily — although at least at UNC Asheville, some of those interim hires have eventually been made permanent, or simply stayed in their temporary posts for long periods.

Watkins said the survey of campuses has indicated some hires were adjunct, or nonpermanent, faculty hired for a semester.

The four largest campuses, though, don’t require waivers for interim employees, so it’s not clear how many temporary hires they have made.
The big schools use the waivers when making permanent hires without a search, something UNC Chapel Hill says it has done 386 times since 2007 and N.C. State University says it has done 337 times.

Some schools use waivers for faculty jobs; others only for administrative positions. They are not for the rank-and-file state jobs that must be advertised widely under state personnel laws.

Another member of the education oversight committee, Sen. Joe Sam Queen, said he’s open to some use of waivers.

“If you’re looking for a Nobel Prize winner, there’s not a big search,” the Waynesville Democrat said.

“You’re probably recruiting that person, and you’re probably asking for a waiver to do it.”

But there needs to be a good reason, he said: “Every one of these waivers should be explained.”

**Additional Facts**

**Skipping searches**

Numbers below reflect how many times WNC schools say they waived search and posting procedures since 2007:

- Appalachian State: 14.
- Western Carolina: 7.
November 7, 2009

Concierges and Marble Baths: For Some at Columbia, This Is Dorm Life

By LISA W. FODERARO

Last year, when Columbia University tried to interest Ben Cox, then a first-year M.B.A. student, in its new apartment building in the Riverdale section of the Bronx, he scoffed. It was too far from the campus in Manhattan, he thought, and the unit was a bit expensive. He did not even bother to look at it.

He and his family — his wife, Sasha, and their young boy — moved instead into an apartment in Manhattan. But at 500 square feet, it felt tiny, especially compared with the house they had owned back in Minnesota. When their second son arrived in April, the Riverdale building, called the Arbor, suddenly seemed more appealing. “We called and wrote letters and e-mailed for a month to get in here,” Mrs. Cox said. “Everyone who has a kid wants to be here because it’s the largest apartment you can get.”

Columbia, which provides housing for more than half of its 13,000 graduate students, owns dozens of apartment buildings, many with prewar charm and within walking distance of the university’s campus in Morningside Heights. Now it also offers students an apartment in the Arbor, a sleek building in Riverdale that was privately developed as a condominium.

The university snapped up the Arbor, a nine-story building at 235th Street and the Henry Hudson Parkway, in July 2008 for $67 million after the developer struggled to sell the condominiums. (Prices started at $400,000.) Robert Hornsby, a spokesman for Columbia, said the decision to buy the Arbor, which has 127 apartments, was part of a strategy of “opportunistic purchases.” It was chosen, he said, because it “offers apartment layouts that are conducive to families.”

Other colleges have taken advantage of the real estate slump to push expansion plans. The City University of New York recently decided to move its law school from a cramped former junior high school in Flushing, Queens, to an underused Citigroup office building center in Long Island City, also in Queens. CUNY will pay Citigroup $155 million for six floors in the two-year-old building, far less than the cost of new construction.

In Providence, R.I., Johnson & Wales University signed a lease this year on a four-story condominium building with river views and granite-and-stainless-steel kitchens. The three-year lease, with an option to renew, allowed the university to house 300 additional students this fall, when the demand for housing was “significantly higher” than usual, said Lisa Pelosi, a spokeswoman. The developer had tried to market the building, opposite the train station, as the economy went into free fall.

Columbia’s purchase of the Arbor also reflects the increasing diversity of graduate students, who are often in midcareer, married with children or both. The Coxes, who moved into a two-bedroom apartment in September, are still adjusting to the luxurious touches not found in most university-owned housing:
oversize picture windows, individual washers and dryers, stainless-steel appliances, marble bathrooms, a 24-hour concierge, a fitness center, even a colorful playroom with a slide and toys.

“This is pretty extraordinary,” Mr. Cox, 29, said as he waited out front for a shuttle van that would take him to campus. “I’ve never had a kitchen this nice before. It has a full convection oven.”

The university owns housing in one other location outside Manhattan: a dozen apartments in Palisades, N.Y., that are reserved for postdoctoral fellows at Columbia’s Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory in Rockland County.

Most of the Arbor’s residents are graduate students, many of them from other countries, but some faculty members and administrators live there, too. Ross A. Frommer, associate dean for government and community affairs at Columbia University Medical Center, had signed a contract to buy a two-bedroom unit on the seventh floor of the Arbor before the developer decided to sell the building to Columbia.

He and his wife, Connie Dong, were able to rent the same apartment they had planned to buy. “We love our apartment,” he said. “We certainly feel we’re getting good value.”

But some residents say there are drawbacks to living a borough away from campus.

Even though the shuttle operates frequently throughout the day, the small vans are sometimes so crowded that residents are forced to wait until there is room. On weekends, there is no shuttle. Residents without cars must walk to the No. 1 subway stop — a good 20-minute trek — or take a bus and transfer if they need to get to campus. The walk to the station is downhill, but coming home can be a workout, especially with a stroller.

“You definitely trade the convenience of being right next to Columbia for more space,” said Steve Little, 34, who is pursuing a master’s degree in public administration. His two-bedroom apartment has two roomy bathrooms with marble counters.

Unlike the Coxes, Mr. Little, who is from England, said the university simply assigned his family to the Arbor, whose brick-and-tinted-glass facade stands in contrast with some of the neighborhood’s older buildings. “We could have said no if we didn’t fancy being here, but it suited us,” he said.

Alexandra and Alex Petrasincu, who have an 8-month-old daughter, were also drawn to the suburban feel of the neighborhood, where a Starbucks coexists with a shoe-repair shop and a traditional kosher delicatessen. The couple is from Germany, and Mr. Petrasincu, a lawyer, is enrolled in a one-year international law program. They pay Columbia $2,200 a month for their two-bedroom apartment.

“With a child, there’s no question that I prefer this,” said Ms. Petrasincu, pausing in a small plaza at the back of the building, which was planted with ornamental grasses and hostas and was free of the din from the Henry Hudson Parkway. “You have loads of children and playgrounds, and everything is within walking distance. And it seems very reasonable.”

Robert Wachsman, a real estate broker who owns the Riverdale Homes agency, says that $2,200 for a two-bedroom in that building is, in today’s market, “probably bordering on the higher side, but it’s in line.”
Mr. Hornsby declined to comment on the rents at the Arbor, but he said that Columbia's focus was not to make money. "Unlike other entities, we're not a commercial landlord, so our goal is to provide housing," he said. "We don't have a profit motive."

There are occasional droll reminders of the market originally envisioned for the building, which sits a few blocks from Riverdale's business district, in a neighborhood with a distinctly Jewish culture. The appliances, for example. "The oven has a kosher function," Mr. Little said as his 1-year-old daughter ambled around the living room and his 3-month-old son slept in a stroller.

"They also said the dishwasher has a Sabbath setting," chimed in his wife, Deborah Muylle, "but I don't know what that means."