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Obese teens pack on more

By Sarah Avery, Staff Writer

Nearly 40 percent of obese teenagers are bound to become severely obese young adults, researchers at the UNC-Chapel Hill confirmed for the first time, and many gain a startling amount of weight.

Some packed on 80 pounds or more over the 13 years covered in the study.


Researchers will now explore why this is happening, but the message is clear: Early excessive weight becomes an almost insurmountable burden with troubling consequences.

"This study represents the first data that proves obesity gets worse from teen to adulthood. We knew that intuitively, but it's the first to show how severe it can be," said Dr. Sarah Armstrong, a pediatrician at Duke University who treats youngsters with weight problems at Duke's Healthy Lifestyles Program.

The UNC-CH researchers studied nearly 9,000 teenagers starting in 1996 as they became young adults. Gordon-Larsen said teens who began the study obese were 16 times more likely than their peers to become severely obese by age 30, meaning they weighed at least 100 pounds more than they should.

Other studies have shown that obese teens tend to stay obese into adulthood, but the UNC-CH research shows a dangerous progression of weight gain, potentially adding 1 million young people to the ranks of morbidly obese.

Likely results include more and earlier cases of diabetes, heart problems, asthma, kidney and liver diseases, cancer, arthritis and other ailments directly linked to excessive weight. The complications of obesity cost $147 billion a year in the United States, researchers at RTI International have found, and will likely rise as the epidemic worsens.

Health problems are already appearing in doctors' offices and hospitals across North Carolina, where obesity rates for both children and adults are higher than the national average, said Dr. David Collier, a pediatrician and director of the Pediatric Healthy Weight Research and Treatment Center at East Carolina University's Brody School of Medicine.
"There's more and more type 2 diabetes, and younger and younger kids," Collier said, adding that the early weight gain can often be harder to lose, as bad eating habits and a sedentary lifestyle become ingrained.

Young people may also not understand the health consequences of carrying excess weight. While vanity may be their primary concern, the health complications of being overweight are serious and can be debilitating.

'The price you pay'
Kathleen Dickson, 48, of Fuquay-Varina, said she has battled weight for most of her life and gained significantly in high school and beyond. Now, she said, she has health problems she never dreamed she'd suffer at her age.

Carrying more than 300 pounds, Dickson said her knees are a constant ache. But she's not eligible for knee replacement surgery because she's too heavy - and too young. The artificial knees wear out, so doctors won't implant them in younger people who are likely to require another new joint as they age.

"I never imagined when I was in my 20s and 30s that I would pay for it so much, so soon," Dickson said. "I think that's been the hardest thing."

Dickson said she has been on a weight-loss regimen for four months, and has dropped 40 pounds, but fights for every success.

"Kids don't realize the price you pay," she said. "It's really painful."

Effect on policy
Collier said the findings of the study should be a call to action for local, state and national leaders to redouble their efforts tackling the problem. She said that includes political decisions that affect what foods are sold cheaply, and community efforts to build parks and bike paths so people can be more active.

"The policies that promote a healthful environment are needed everywhere, whether preventing obesity or treating obesity," Collier said. "It's a very complex issue ... and it needs societal and political will."

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A rap artist who advocates marijuana use and his band were told not to bring the weed onto East Carolina University's campus when they came to perform Monday night, school officials said Tuesday.

Cameron Jibril Thomaz, 22, who performs under the stage name Wiz Khalifa, was arrested after his show at Wright Auditorium by university police and charged with trafficking marijuana, possession of drug paraphernalia, and maintaining a place for the sale of marijuana.

He was placed in the Pitt County Detention Center about 1:40 a.m. Tuesday. He and his manager were released after posting a $300,000 bond. Seven others connected with the band also were arrested by ECU police and released on $300,000 bond later in the day, jail officials said.

Officers near the band's bus noticed a strong odor of marijuana while the band was performing in the auditorium, said Assistant ECU Police Chief Dawn Tevepaugh. They waited for the concert to conclude, then an officer approached Thomaz as he and the band members returned to the bus and explained the situation, she said.

A search was conducted and officers found about 60 grams of marijuana and paraphernalia, Tevepaugh said. Marijuana use is a central theme in Thomaz' act, and university officials had expressed concerns to his agent about possible criminal activity during his visit to campus, they said.

An agent who negotiated the performance contract for the university expressed concerns to Thomaz' agent about his reputation.
The agent told the group's representative that illegal acts could not take place on the campus, according to Bobby Woodard, executive director of the ECU Office of Student Involvement and Leadership. The agent was further apprised that law enforcement agents would be at the venue and would be on alert for illegal activities, Woodard said.

“Students voted overwhelmingly to invite Thomaz to entertain at the university, based on the value of his celebrity and the relatively inexpensive cost of $10,000 to book him,” Woodard said. “A school official told his agent we would have police there and that he is responsible for his actions, as are all entertainers, regardless of the genre of entertainment.”

Tim Wiseman, assistant vice chancellor for enterprise risk management, said the university is responsive to the students' entertainment desires, so it has a process for carefully balancing student desires, first amendment rights and law and order issues when considering entertainment.

“Whether you have entertainment or academic speakers on campus, there is freedom of expression, and some of the expressions might be objectionable,” Wiseman said. “There is a fine line between expressing lyrics and executing conduct.

“We do the best we can to set the expectations ahead of time, look at the environment and assess the risks and then exercise some mitigation, such as the presence of law enforcement at events like this,” Wiseman said.

Entertainers are all notified of their responsibilities where the law is concerned, he said, regardless of the genre they represent.

“Each (entertainment) act is different. They are all individuals who make decisions, and some of those decisions have consequences. Our police handled the situation professionally and kept the situation from getting out of hand and interfering with the event itself,” he said.

The officers tried to maintain order and keep their actions as low-key as possible, Tevepaugh said.

“We take crime on campus seriously, and were concerned at the large gathering for the safety of the band members, officers and students,” Tevepaugh said.

“We saw that fans were upset about the search of the bus because he's a prominent person, so we asked the Greenville Police Department to assist with crowd control and keep things from getting out of hand,” she said.

The entertainer made a preliminary appearance in court Tuesday morning, represented by attorney Mark Owens Jr., who is representing all of the persons charged in the incident.

“The next court date is Jan. 27. They will be allowed to leave under pre-trial conditions, and when they return I think all the young men will enter pleas of not guilty,” Owens said.
The group was scheduled to perform tonight in Winston-Salem, and is expected to make that appearance, Owens said, before heading home to Pittsburgh, Pa.

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Student reaction was mixed over news Tuesday that a rap artist and his band were arrested on drug charges following a performance at East Carolina University.

Cameron Jibril Thomaz, known on stage as Wiz Khalifa, his manager and seven others in the band were charged with marijuana violations after police smelled a strong odor of pot coming from the band's bus and found about 60 grams of the drug on board, university police said.

None of the students interviewed Tuesday were surprised the entertainer had pot on the bus.

Senior Joseph Gbenjo was not surprised at the arrest, only that anyone would have to be told to keep drugs off campus, he said.

“He knew. He didn't have to be told. Everyone knows it's illegal,” Gbenjo said.

Sophomore Jef Farmer said even though Thomaz is a marijuana advocate, police should not have gone on board the bus.

“They shouldn't have invited him if they didn't want pot on campus,” Farmer said. “That's how he runs. They knew that. Now he'll never return and we might not ever get a rapper to come to the campus again.”

LaDamon Wallace admitted he isn't a Khalifa fan, but thought Thomaz' actions were just not smart.

“He knows it's against the law and he was told there would be police there, so if he was dumb enough to have it there, then he should have been arrested,” Wallace said. “If L'il Wayne can get arrested for the same thing, he should, too.”

One student said that the school should have thought more about all that before inviting the entertainer to campus, believing the law enforcement actions were contrary to the students' wishes and now will bring a negative reputation to the school.
“We wanted him to come to the school. He shouldn't have gotten that treatment. Him being arrested ruined the special feeling of the whole night,” said sophomore Mia Marshall.

Other students agreed with Marshall, saying the university should know that marijuana use is widespread, including among the student population.
“I was there and the show was great. Weed is his theme, along with living life, feeling good and having fun. That's what he's about,” said freshman Beverly Ozoeneh. “I don't know how the police work, but everybody smokes weed. Sorry, but that's the truth. ECU is making future stars not want to come to the campus now. It's all over the Internet now; it's kind of embarrassing.”

Sophomore Chelsea Wallace thought the police might have gone overboard, but had no sympathy for Thomaz, saying he crossed the border.
“That was a lot of weed. He should not have brought that onto campus,” Wallace said. “C'mon,” Ozoeneh said to her friend. “Wake ‘n Bake. That's what he stands for,” she said.

Tim Wiseman, ECU vice chancellor for enterprise risk management, said he and vice provost Virginia Hardy will be reviewing contractual procedures to see if any changes should be made in the future to help them predict behavior and exercise more controls.

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Cameron Jibril Thomaz, who performs as Wiz Khalifa

'Smoke outs in Greenville' turn into a pot bust for Wiz Khalifa

By Deborah M. Todd and Jim McKinnon, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The aptly named "Waken Baken" tour will press on thanks to headliner Wiz Khalifa posting bail for himself and eight bandmates for charges related to marijuana possession Tuesday morning.

The 23-year-old Pittsburgh rapper, whose real name is Cameron Jibril Thomaz, was arrested shortly after stepping off of the stage at East Carolina University in Greenville, N.C., Monday night.

Police officers providing security for the sold-out show said they noticed the "prevalent odor of marijuana" backstage and near one of Mr. Thomaz's tour buses, and saw performers steadily "coming and going" from the bus before the concert, according to a news release from the university. Police found about 2 ounces of marijuana on board.

Arrested along with Mr. Thomaz were his manager, William G. Dzombak, and seven others. Each was charged with three counts of trafficking marijuana, maintaining a dwelling or motor vehicle to store or sell marijuana, and possession of drug paraphernalia.

Mr. Thomaz and Mr. Dzombak were released on $300,000 bond each and the remaining members of the crew were released on $20,000 bond each later in the day. An East Carolina student also was arrested.
The rap sensation and Pittsburgh Allderdice High School graduate has been on the 60-city tour since mid-September and is scheduled to perform in Richmond, Va., today. His single "Black and Yellow" is No. 43 on the Billboard Hot 100 and is receiving airplay on Top 40 stations, including Pittsburgh's Kiss-FM (96.1).

In an interview with ESPN The Magazine, Mr. Thomaz said the song is "for Pittsburgh or anyone who has black and yellow in their colors." He's scheduled to play sold-out shows at the new Stage AE venue on the North Side on Dec. 16 and 17.

While police were tipped off by the apparently overwhelming odor of smoke at the show, it's not as if Mr. Thomaz and his crew made any attempts to disguise their actions. Mr. Thomaz was reportedly overheard saying he liked to smoke marijuana before shows and that it's "not unusual" to spend about $10,000 per month on the substance.

Shortly before going on stage, he posted a Twitter message saying, "smoke outs in greenville nc tonite. Fall thru wit ur finest plant life."

John Durham, East Carolina University director of communications, said the university has higher expectations for its shows and performers than what occurred Monday night.

"We expect the performers we have contracts with to deliver a professional, entertaining event and to respect our students, community and facility," he said.

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Coaches meet Friends of Basketball
By Tony Castleberry
The Daily Reflector
Wednesday, November 10, 2010

There was a record number of friends at Tuesday's Friends of ECU Basketball meeting. Having East Carolina director of athletics Terry Holland and new women's and men's basketball coaches Heather Macy and Jeff Lebo there certainly helped boost attendance numbers.

About 75 ECU supporters showed up at Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium's club level to hear Holland, Macy and Lebo speak. Friends president Pete Balent, who founded the club two years ago, said the previous high was 45 and he's hopeful the turnout will continue to increase.

“There's a lot of excitement (for Pirate hoops),” said Balent, who helped form Friends two years ago when it was called Mack's Mates during the Mack McCarthy coaching era. “We've included the women this year on some of the meetings and got a great response. There are a lot of new faces. It's been wonderful.”

After Holland gave those in attendance an update on the progress of plans for the new $15-million practice facility, Macy and Lebo addressed the crowd and took questions. Macy, whose team begins the regular season Friday in Minges Coliseum against American, likened the gathering to a family reunion and described her coaching staff as her immediate family.

The 32-year-old, who compiled 113-41 record in five seasons at Division II Francis Marion, drew laughter from the crowd when she described herself. “I've learned that I'm a lot more than just a coach to these kids,” she said. “I'm a coach. I'm a teacher. I'm a fashion expert. I also am a choreographer and, (Tuesday) at practice I also have the ability to hypnotize. And I'm their mom in a lot of situations.”

Even though Lebo, whose team begins play against Erskine following the women's game Friday, is a Pennsylvanian native, he spoke about his North Carolina roots, including his collegiate playing days at North Carolina and his wife, Melissa, who's from Williamston. He went on to emphasize the importance of ECU's players not just committing to giving the school four years, but a lifetime. Lebo also pointed out that he has done everything he
can to spur interest in Pirate basketball and hopes more and more friends show up not just at the Friends of Basketball meetings, but at Minges for home games as well.

“We've got to think outside the box to get people here and interested in basketball,” Lebo said. “We've reached out to everybody. Every rear end that's moving, that's warm, we've tried to get them over there in Minges.”

**Fall Festival**
ECU will host a basketball Fall Festival to celebrate the start of the regular season Friday outside Minges at 3 p.m. Admission is free.

The festival will include a live musical performance by Jake Leg, games, food and beverages and appearances by the Pirate cheerleaders and dance team. A student dining hall location will be set up at Gate 1 in lieu of Todd Dining Hall. Meals will be free to students with a meal plan and available to the public for $6.

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Senior East Carolina running back Giavanni Ruffin will not face further discipline from head coach Ruffin McNeill after an order for Ruffin's arrest was issued Tuesday for his failure to appear in court last week.

Ruffin, a former transfer, left the team last week following the death of his uncle and subsequently missed a court date in Greenville stemming from a spring arrest for resisting a public officer.

Ruffin, whose mother is also dealing with a long-term illness, went home to Virginia Beach, Va., last Tuesday to be with his family and returned to ECU in time for the Pirates' game against Navy last Saturday.

According to McNeill, Ruffin has addressed the situation with his coach, has already faced internal disciplinary measures with the team and will be available to play in Thursday night's game at Alabama-Birmingham.

“Giavanni Ruffin has done a great job of obeying team rules,” McNeill said following Tuesday night's practice. “What he missed last week was due to a funeral, which I mentioned in my press conference on Monday, why he was not here.”

McNeill acknowledged his running back missed four weeks during spring practice due to his earlier arrest.

“He's going to handle it, he's already handling it,” McNeill said. “Last week, his mom lost her brother and Giavanni was attending his funeral and he missed it. That is the end of it. He's been punished for that, he is going to play (Thursday) and we're ready to go.”

Ruffin was set to appear in court Nov. 3 in connection with an incident last March in which he and former ECU running back Brandon Jackson were charged with public intoxication, resisting an officer and obstructing, court officials said. Jackson and Ruffin were arrested downtown after authorities said they caused a disturbance.

Jackson had a previous history of alcohol and traffic-related violations. In January, he was charged with intoxication, resisting, DWI, driving after consuming under the age of 21 and consumption under the age of 21. He also was charged with DWI in November 2008.
Jackson was dismissed from the team and Ruffin was suspended after the March incident. Ruffin is set to appear in court Jan. 26.

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More sunshine for state employees
A legal opinion issued Tuesday by the state Attorney General's Office says that the new law on personnel records requires that state and local governments release historical information on public employees' salary, employment and discipline.

The opinion comes after the Office of State Personnel and several local governments asked whether the new law should only be applied to records created on or after Oct. 1, the law's start date. They suggested that since the law did not specifically cite retroactive information, it should only be applied to newly created personnel records.

Chief Deputy Attorney General Grayson Kelley disagreed. He said the law clearly was intended to solve an open-government issue regarding the pay and performance of public employees.

Before this year, North Carolina was the only state in the nation that prohibited release of much of a public employee's work history. That meant past salaries, past positions and past disciplinary actions could not be released, even though those employees work for taxpayers.

"We believe the General Assembly intended, through the amendments in the Act, to clarify that public employers are required to maintain a public record of each employee's entire salary and position classification history with that public body," Kelley wrote. Kelley also said that the new law requires the release of dismissal letters but that it does not require state and local agencies to create them for employees who had been fired before the law's passage. The new law does require the letters to be generated for all dismissals on or after Oct. 1.

Kelley said the Office of State Personnel does not, however, have to augment its personnel database to include the historical information that is now public. What that means is the public will have to go to state departments directly for that information. State lawmakers this year overwhelmingly voted to open the state's 35-year-old personnel law after a three-part News & Observer series, "Keeping Secrets," showed that the law was among the most secretive in the nation. Kelley's opinion will make it harder for state and local governments to deny those records' release.

By staff writers Michael Biesecker, Dan Kane and Lynn Bonner
Editorial: Our View

Campus success
For the University of North Carolina system, expect a hard, cold rain when the General Assembly puts together the next state budget in the face of a colossal shortfall.

The new Republican legislative majorities will be desperate to cut spending, and long-time defenders of the universities such as Senate President Pro Tem Marc Basnight will see his and his remaining fellow Democrats' influence evaporate. The GOP knife could slice away at positions and programs throughout the system.

Republican Sen. Richard Stevens of Cary, a former chairman of the UNC-Chapel Hill Board of Trustees, can be counted upon to try to keep the damage from getting out of hand, but he also well knows where any fat is to be found.

It's with grim budget prospects in mind that system leaders are considering a significant change that could put the brakes on enrollment at some campuses while also creating incentives to move students along to graduation.

The UNC system for the past several years has stressed the importance of expanding enrollments, to accommodate a growing population and to give more of North Carolina's young (and not-so-young) people a competitive edge in today's ultra-competitive economy.

Enrollment counts figure heavily in determining how much state money flows to the system. There is now an appropriation of roughly $12,000 per student. Clearly the financial incentive is to expand.

The problem is that some of the 16 campuses do a mediocre job of making sure that students stick it out and earn a degree. Skeptics could wonder whether the bar for admissions sometimes is set too low, or whether students are given the kind of support they require to succeed. The new proposal backed by outgoing system president Erskine Bowles would counter that skepticism.

Campuses that met academic benchmarks would continue to receive funding for enrollment growth. Campuses that fell short would see their growth limited or possibly frozen. Benchmarks could include a school's retention rate - the share of students returning after their freshman year - its graduation rate and the length of time students take to graduate.
Plenty of attention already has been focused on helping students succeed in their transition to college, with UNC-CH and N.C. State among the leaders in that regard. But a move to enhance system-wide accountability for academic progress would be welcome. Allowances could and should be made for campuses with high proportions of students from disadvantaged or non-traditional backgrounds because it's important to continue providing those students with opportunities - so long as they're meeting reasonable expectations for achievement.

The UNC system, with its promise of affordability, multiple entry points and overall quality, has been a bedrock of North Carolina's surge into the ranks of America's largest states, coveted as a place to live and do business. The system must never become so exclusive that capable people are denied the chance to show they are up to the challenge of college work. And this state still ranks in the middle of the pack - 29th as of 2007 - in the number of residents with at least a bachelor's degree, so campus doors must remain open.

Still, whatever the state's budget situation, the public is entitled to know that its higher education investment is being put to good use. Linking student performance to funding would be one way to demonstrate that, and it is an approach well worth exploring - to the benefit of taxpayers, employers, parents and students themselves.
Duke students party in the official Tailgate area before the Duke-Alabama game in September. The parties attracted from 300 to 2,000 people. At last week's event, a boy, about 15, passed out in a portable toilet.

Duke's Tailgate falls to school’s better judgment

BY MATT EHLERS AND ERIC FERRERI - Staff Writers
DURHAM--"Tailgate," Duke University's officially sanctioned pre-game football party, tried to corral boisterous, beer-drinking college students in a manner that was tolerable to campus administrators.

To no one's surprise, that really couldn't be done.

University officials have canceled Saturday's Tailgate after a teenager was found passed out in a portable toilet during last week's event.

Larry Moneta, Duke's vice president for student affairs, said the teen, whom he estimated to be about 15, was the brother of a student. The teen is fine, Moneta said, but the incident finally put an end to the current incarnation of Tailgate - an event that has long worried the administration.
"At some point you say, 'this particular version is not going to fly,'" Moneta said, adding that a revamped pre-game ritual will be unveiled before the 2011 football season.
Tailgate was held in an on-campus parking lot before home football games. Students did not have to be 21 to attend, but they did need to show a student ID to be admitted. Each student could bring one guest. The event's demise does not affect the less-formal tailgate parties organized by Duke alumni and fans.

On the Duke campus Tuesday afternoon, some students said Tailgate was an out-of-control event with little, if anything, to do with the football games it preceded. But others saw it is a beloved rite of passage, a way to blow off steam after a long week of classes. Some suggested that students might revolt this weekend and hold their own tailgate at another campus location.

"It's a little bit out of control, but students are used to it," said William Brathwaite, a junior from Atlanta. "It's definitely culturally entrenched. So there will be a backlash."

**Adding rules**

Although the party began spontaneously, the administration became involved in recent years as the event grew bigger. Students set up large stereo systems to blast music, and some wore costumes. Formal guidelines were added in an attempt to make the event run more smoothly, including rules that banned the throwing of beer cans, and standing or sitting on the tops of cars.

This football season marked the introduction of beer limits: each student group could have no more than 30 cases of beer. People walking to the party could carry no more than a six pack.

The beer, mixed with music, school spirit and hormones, created a rowdy atmosphere.

"The tendency is for it to morph into one big mosh pit," said Moneta, estimating that Saturday crowds could range from 300 young people to 2,000. Duke is home to 6,000 undergraduate students.

The university hired emergency medical technicians to monitor the event, as well as a private security company. Duke provided water for the students, as well as plastic cups into which partiers were supposed to pour their beer.

"No expense was spared to make this as safe as we humanly could," Moneta said, noting that the cups were intended to help prevent the throwing of beer-filled cans.

Once they were inside the party's perimeter, drinking students did not have their IDs checked, Moneta said. They were on the honor system.

Chris Brown, a Duke student government vice president who helped organize Tailgate, said the government decided not to challenge the administration's decision to cancel the event.

"We very narrowly escaped some extreme consequences," he said.
The cancellation of Saturday's Tailgate, scheduled before Duke's game against Boston College, effectively ends the tradition as students know it. Duke has one additional home game this season, against UNC-Chapel Hill on the Saturday after Thanksgiving, but Tailgate was not scheduled for the holiday weekend.

**What game?**
For many students, the party outshined the football game. Brown said the majority of students who attended Tailgates did not go to the games.

Throughout this season, Duke football coach David Cutcliffe has called for increased support from students and fans. Cutcliffe has lauded the small contingent of students who gather in the stands to show their support. He acknowledged them again on Saturday after a 55-48 victory over Virginia.

Cutcliffe said he wasn't involved with the university's decision not to hold Tailgate on Saturday. Asked whether canceling the event would hurt the students' game-day experience, Cutcliffe said that would be up to the students.

"You have to ask them," he said. "Surely there's other things that you can do. I bet you if they want to find a way to get together a little bit, there'll be some crowds gathered."

The canceling of Saturday's event has no effect on the university's more famous sports party, Krzyzewskiville, where students camp out for days to get Duke basketball tickets. Although alcohol is present there as well, K-ville has not traditionally had the same problems as Tailgate, Moneta said.

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Grad rates aren't great on campus

For years we've been told the $12,000 or so that North Carolina taxpayers shell out annually for every student attending a University of North Carolina System institution is an investment in the future.

Fair enough. But the current return on our investment is questionable. The average four-year graduation rate of the UNC system's 16 campuses is 35 percent, a number greatly bolstered by the performance of UNC-Chapel Hill. Tar Heels graduate at a phenomenal 75 percent clip after four years. The School of the Arts comes in second at 54 percent, with UNC-Wilmington at 44 percent.

Given that more students are coming to campus with family and economic responsibilities, expecting a student to graduate in four years is a bit on the idyllic side. Six years may be more realistic. But by even that generous standard, 42 percent of students who enter the UNC system fail to get that prized sheepskin.

No doubt, a person benefits from spending time on campus. But for taxpayers, a student without a degree is little more than an expense. Employers aren't likely to be impressed either. Without a degree, higher wages are lost to the student, as are increased taxes to the public coffers. College graduates also benefit the taxpayer because their social costs are lower. Comparatively speaking, few grads are in prison or on public assistance.

Subsidizing the cost of college makes economic sense only when a degree is the usual outcome of the investment.

That's why the state's $3 billion budget crunch provides the UNC system and its new president, Tom Ross, a golden opportunity to right-size higher education based on productivity, rather than accessibility to every region of the state. Outgoing President Erskine Bowles floated the idea last week that, under a worst-case scenario, the system might close a campus instead of making cuts at everywhere. But based on graduation rates, closing a campus or two - or three or more - would benefit the state even in good times, if those resources are redirected to universities that actually graduate a good percentage of their students.

I suspect, however, that few officials have the political will to bring up, much less confront, the lowest-performing universities in the system. With the exception of UNC-Pembroke, the struggling campuses are historically black colleges and universities, or HBCUs. Here are their six-year graduation rates: Fayetteville State (31.5 percent),
Winston-Salem State (36.5) North Carolina A&T (37.2), N.C. Central (44.4) and Elizabeth City (45.8). UNC Pembroke's rate is 34.1 percent.

Some will say there are benefits to keeping HBCUs open, but graduation for most students isn't one of them.

The UNC system should take this opportunity to determine the modern-day relevance of HBCUs and whether they should be subsidized at the expense of campuses that provide a better return.

N.C. Central Chancellor Charles Nelms argues - and he's backed up by research from the Thurgood Marshall Fund - that HBCUs should be measured by a metric that takes into account that they serve students who are poorer, less prepared for college work and who often hold a job to get through school. Given these realities, Nelms argues that HBCUs should be getting more resources, not fewer.

There's no denying the greater academic hurdles, but are HBCUs the best institutions to address them? According to a 2009 Associated Press survey, the answer is no. The survey showed blacks who attended non-HBCUs had a higher graduation rate than those who did.

A firestorm would greet any proposal to close a poorly performing UNC system HBCU. But we should brave it, to redefine the HBCUs' purpose and relevance. At the least, consider consolidation around the strongest HBCU campuses.

Economic crises are never easy, but they do provide historic opportunities for rejuvenation and growth. The question is whether North Carolina's HBCU community and the UNC System have the courage and vision to seize it.

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Running back Chris Johnson, who starred at East Carolina, says he isn't concerned about his rushing totals.

Johnson welcomes Moss
Ex-ECU star figures addition of receiver will help running game

BY TERESA M. WALKER - Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. Chris Johnson isn't close to being on pace for his stated goal of 2,500 yards rushing this season nor the 2,000 yards he had last season.

The Tennessee running back, hampered by a sore thigh the past month, said he's really not focused on that 2,500-yard goal right now. He's still the NFL's fifth-leading rusher with 721 yards, which hasn't been easy with opponents worried about stopping him at all costs.
"We're 5-3 and winning," Johnson said. "We're not having a losing season. I can't really come in here very frustrated. I know we could be way better than we are in the run game. I know we still have time to fix this. Hopefully, by the end of the year, we'll be OK."

Now Johnson has had a bye week to rest up his sore thigh, and he also will have new addition Randy Moss on the field when the Titans visit Miami (4-4) on Sunday.
Johnson believes Moss will help, seeing the receiver as the playmaker to help him find more room to run.

"I know for a fact they can't put all those guys in the box with that guy out there," Johnson said.

Coach Jeff Fisher is a bit more reserved on how much adding the receiver with 153 career touchdown receptions helps the run game.

"That remains to be seen. If you're going to get some rotation to Randy, then they eliminate the unblocked defender in the box and that certainly helps," Fisher said.

Johnson and the Titans' run game pales when compared to last year. The Titans rank 10th in the NFL, averaging 123 yards. It's a big drop from second a year ago when Johnson ran for 2,006 yards as just the sixth man in NFL history to reach that mark.

His preseason boast that he still wanted to top Eric Dickerson's league rushing mark of 2,105 yards and run to 2,500 simply made him an even bigger target.

Johnson has reeled off nice runs but nothing like 2009 when he was The Associated Press NFL Offensive Player of the Year. That's when he became the first player in league history to score three touchdowns of 85 yards or longer in a career, and he did it all in a single season.

His longest TD run this season was a 76-yarder in the opener against Oakland. An 85-yarder in a loss to Pittsburgh in Week 2 was erased by a holding penalty. Since then, Johnson hasn't run for longer than 42 yards, not with defenses stacked up to stop him. He hasn't run for more than 66 yards in the past two games.

His longest run in the last game, a 33-25 loss at San Diego, came when Johnson ran to his right and found a wall of defenders. He ran all the way back across the field and up the sideline 29 yards for a TD.

Tennessee had been trying to give defenses other players to think about and take advantage of the one-on-one coverage of their receivers. Kenny Britt had a career day with 225 yards receiving on Oct. 24 against Philadelphia, and Nate Washington had his best day as a pro with 117 yards in San Diego.

Then Minnesota waived Moss, the 6-foot-4 receiver who ranks fifth with 14,778 yards receiving, and only Hall of Fame receiver Jerry Rice has more TD catches (197). The Titans, the only NFL team to put in a claim, won him off waivers in a move Fisher says was no risk at all.

The Titans, tied with Indianapolis atop the AFC South, agree.
"It should definitely help our offense, especially in the running game, being able to take away some extra guys in the box from C.J.," left tackle Michael Roos said.

How much remains to be seen. Moss joins the NFL's highest-scoring offense with the Titans averaging 28 points. Moss won't be on the field for 60 or 70 plays per game, especially not early as he learns the offense. Fisher said it wouldn't be fair to put Moss out on third down when offensive coordinator Mike Heimerdinger can call anything from the playbook.

Still, the Titans installed Moss immediately as a starter opposite Nate Washington while Britt heals from a right hamstring injury that will keep him out at least against Miami. That should only help with the Dolphins ranked 16th against the run, giving up an average of 107.1 yards.

With eight games left, Fisher is expecting at least a couple long TD runs out of Johnson this season.