THE DAILY CLIPS

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East Carolina University News Bureau
E-mail to durhamj@ecu.edu  Web site at http://www.news.ecu.edu
252-328-6481 FAX: 252-328-6300
UHS surpasses $1 billion in revenue

This was the first time in the system's history that it reached this financial milestone.

BY TOM MARINE
The Daily Reflector

University Health Systems of Eastern Carolina surpassed $1 billion in system revenue for the first time in its history during 2008, UHS board members learned Tuesday at their November meeting.

The system's operating revenue reached $1.03 billion, according to the board's agenda, which was nearly 1 percent above projections. After overcoming a slow first quarter, the system's operating revenues outperformed projections during the rest of the fiscal year, ending with an operating income of $59.5 million.

"In the middle of these economic times, this system is fulfilling a very important service in eastern North Carolina," said Dave McRae, chief executive officer of UHS.

Despite the system's solid revenue numbers, the combined cash position for UHS was nearly $66 million below the plan, with negative investment returns being the primary reason for the decline in cash. In total, UHS's cash position at the end of the fiscal year was $358 million, according to the agenda.

"In summary, UHS had another solid year in 2008 from financial operating activity," the agenda states.

Also at Tuesday's board meeting:

Joel Butler, chief external affairs officer at UHS, presented the board with his legislative report to discuss the tax exempt status of the system and possible cuts to Medicare and Medicaid. In the future, he said, there will be a good debate on health care reform at the federal level.

"I would hate to see what happened to our financial 

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institutions happen to health care,” said Butler, referring to the recent economic crisis as a train wreck that some people saw coming but did nothing to stop. “We need to help frame this debate and we need to be engaged in the process.”

* Dr. Phyllis Horns, interim vice chancellor for health sciences at East Carolina University, introduced the dean of the new dental school to the board. Dr. James R. Hupp addressed the board, saying he wants to participate in the hospital in addition to being a colleague on campus.

“We are going to establish an excellent dental school on campus that interacts with the hospital,” said Hupp, who is also a professor of oral and maxillofacial surgery at ECU. “It’s such a pleasure to be part of this and I look forward to working with you as the years move along.”

* Board member Don Parrott submitted his letter of resignation, as a result of potential conflicts of interest that could arise between him serving on the board and his employment with a local accounting firm.

“Health care is one of our specialty industries,” Parrott wrote to the board. “We have tried to find a compromise that would allow me to continue to serve. That process has not been successful.”

* The board discussed the upcoming dedication ceremony for the East Carolina Heart Institute, which will be held Dec. 11. The 370,000 sq. foot facility is scheduled to open at the beginning of 2009.
The Day
ACROSS THE STATE

Ex-teacher donates $1 million to UNC

CHAPEL HILL — A former Virginia school teacher has donated more than $1 million to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, her alma mater.

The university said Tuesday the late Jane Iris Crutchfield left $1.1 million to the university's School of Information and Library Science. It's the largest gift the school has ever received.

Crutchfield died in 2006, at age 92. Her gift will fund scholarships for students admitted to a master's degree program in the school.

Crutchfield worked for the Virginia Public Schools system for almost two decades before becoming a school librarian in 1960. She graduated in 1955 from the University of North Carolina.
A long-lost bell goes home

Piece of Raleigh history was found on an NCSU rooftop

BY JOSH SHAFFER
STAFF WRITER

RALEIGH — Two years ago, Matt Robbins was poking around an N.C. State University rooftop when he stumbled on a half-ton bronze bell, hidden and forgotten.

It was a lucky accident for the graduate student, who is piecing together the history of NCSU's architecture for his master's thesis.

But it was a bigger prize for Raleigh, which will regain the 1870 bell that once rang atop the block-long Metropolitan Hall on Fayetteville Street and later at the city's first fire station. The university will officially give the bell back to the city at a ceremony this morning.

"For me, to have a piece of history back in its rightful place is absolutely fabulous," said Robbins. "It was forgotten, just absolutely forgotten."

As the oldest surviving artifact of the city's first fire station, it will likely one day stand in the new $226 million Clarence E. Lightner public safety building, which will start going up downtown next year.

"It needs to be cleaned up," said Fire Chief John McGrath. "There's pigeon poop all over it."

The bell's story begins in a Baltimore

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foundry, where it was cast and stamped with the letters “Metropolitan” and the date 1870. It was hoisted to the top of the new Metropolitan Hall, a combination city hall, police station, auditorium and farmer’s market.

“It was an edifice designed to shout that the city was on the rebound after the war,” reads Raleigh: A Living History of North Carolina’s Capital. “For forty years, it was the hub of Raleigh.”

The bell rang out to announce fires. But in 1914, when Raleigh built its first fire station near the corner of Morgan and Salisbury streets, the 1,000-pound bell moved with it.

There it stayed until 1938, when it ended up on the roof of Withers Hall on the NCSU campus. That’s when its story gets murky.

Robbins found it two years ago on the Withers Hall rooftop while shooting a panoramic picture of the campus below. The bell was up on a platform, in a cage.

Robbins immediately dug into its buried history. Today, he has a stack of bell-related documents as thick as a phone book.

He knows from a 1938 article in The Technician, the student newspaper, that it was meant to signal the end of classes and replace “the detested whistle” that came before.

But he can find no further reference to the bell until 1948, so the full explanation for why N.C. State placed Raleigh’s bell on a rooftop remains a mystery.

“I don’t know if it ever rang,” Robbins said.

This is his theory:

The bell was meant to fill the top of the Memorial Bell Tower, which was started in the early 1920s but stalled when funding went dry during the Depression.

Without money to complete the tower, Chancellor John W. Harrelson placed the bell on Withers Hall as a tribute to William Alphonso Withers, the building’s namesake and, like Harrelson, a Mason.

Robbins’ idea was to finally give the Bell Tower a real bell. Plans originally called for 54 of them, but a recording has always pealed from the N.C. State landmark.

But once NCSU had the bell tested acoustically, they learned it was untuned and unlistenable.

“It sounded flat,” Robbins said. “It sounded sharp. It just sounded bad.”

So the better plan, he thought, was to let the city have and restore it. Raleigh has contacted two artifact historians about getting it back in 19th-century shape, McGrath said.

Then one day, it might ring for a new generation’s ears.

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josh.shaffer@newsobserver.com
or 919-629-4818
UNC athletes were assaulted last year

BY ANNE BLYTHE  
STAFF WRITER  

HILLSBOROUGH - The Durham man accused of tying up two UNC-Chapel Hill football players and conspiring with two women to rob them will spend 23 years of his life behind bars.

A jury early Tuesday evening found Michael Troy Lewis, 33, guilty of first degree-kidnapping, conspiring with two women to commit larceny and kidnapping, common law robbery, misdemeanor assault on a law enforcement officer and resisting arrest.

The 10-woman, two-man panel found Lewis not guilty of one charge of assault on a law enforcement officer.

The verdicts ended a three-day trial in which two North Carolina Tar Heel football players and one former player described a night of drunken partying this past December that ended up with police being called to Chapel Ridge Apartments, where two of them lived, to investigate a string of crimes.

Lewis, who turned down a plea offer to take his case to trial, denied tying up the players as he addressed Judge Carl Fox before the sentencing.

"I apologize for the people I injured, but I can only apologize for things I've done," Lewis said. "Nothing happened intentionally other than me stealing. The tying up never happened."

Lewis is one of three people charged in a case that stemmed from a night of excessive drinking for three Tar Heel football players. Two of the players told police they were sexually assaulted by women that one of the players invited back to their apartment.

The News & Observer generally

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MONIQUE J. TAYLOR OF GREENVILLE

has been charged with resisting a
due to the apparent dangers.

Assistant District Attorney Morgan
White所述, Fox before Lewis
was sentenced. “He came over to
Chapel Hill with the intention of
robbing somebody.”

Russell Hollers, the defense
lawyer who did not put any wit-
nesses on the stand in defense of his
client, announced plans on Tuesday
evening to appeal the verdict.

Butch Davis, the Tar Heel foot-
ball coach, said Tuesday he did
not know a great deal of the par-
ticulars about the case.

Testimony revealed the players
— one of them underage at the
time — consumed more than a
case of beer Dec. 16 to celebrate
the 21st birthday of Lowell Dyer,
a center who ended his first night
of legal age to drink with his arms
bound, his feet tied and his wallet
stolen by Lewis.

“There was a lot of stuff they
were advised not to share with
anybody because of the sensi-
tivity and the nature of whatever the
case was,” Davis said.

Staff writer Robbi Pickeral
contributed to this report.

anne.blythe@newsobserver.com
or 919-932-8741
State NAACP leader wants stronger response from N.C. State to racist graffiti

Only expulsion is proper, he says

BY MANDY LOCKE
STAFF WRITER

The head of the state’s NAACP chapter on Tuesday dismissed as "tepid" the response of N.C. State University officials to racist and hostile graffiti about President-elect Barack Obama.

In a release, William J. Barber Jr., president of the NAACP in North Carolina, said he wants to meet with UNC system President Erskine Bowles to demand aggressive action to incidents he has deemed "hate crimes."

amount to a threat on Obama’s life. The Wake County district attorney has determined that the graffiti did not meet the criteria for a hate crime.

Barber said he will request a meeting with District Attorney Colon Willoughby to better understand why these statements fell short of a hate crime.

He also said he will help organize a rally on campus after Thanksgiving.

Barber met briefly with N.C. State University Chancellor James L. Oblinger last week to discuss his concerns. At that meeting, Barber asked NCSU officials to increase security on campus, support rules that would make hate crimes and hate speech punishable by expulsion, clearly define "hate speech" and make a for-credit diversity course part of the freshman curriculum.

Racially charged graffiti were found painted on N.C. State University’s Free Expression Tunnel Nov. 5, a day after Obama became the first African-American to be elected president.

The graffiti included statements such as “Let’s shoot that n— in the head” and “Hang Obama by a Noose.” There also were references to the Ku Klux Klan. Four university students have admitted to painting the statements.

The students, who have not been named, are facing an investigation by university officials to determine whether they broke university codes.

Barber said that nothing less than expulsion would be satisfactory punishment for these students.

"It is not clear whether these officials understand the problem," Barber’s statement said. "Their decision to permit four students, with race-hatred spilling out of their hearts, to continue taking classes and engaging in social affairs on campus, by definition creates a racially hostile learning environment for students of color."

An NCSU spokesman did not return a call for comment.

The U.S. Secret Service determined that the graffiti did not

‘Their decision to permit four students, with race-hatred spilling out of their hearts, to continue taking classes and engaging in social affairs on campus, by definition creates a racially hostile learning environment for students of color.’

WILLIAM J. BARBER
NORTH CAROLINA NAACP PRESIDENT

mandy.locke@newsobserver.com
or 919-829-8927

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2008
Man charged with theft at NCSU labs

FROM STAFF REPORTS

RALEIGH - N.C. State University police charged a Charlotte man Tuesday with breaking into campus research labs and taking scientific equipment.

Sean Marlon Smith, 28, is charged with two felony counts of larceny and four felony counts of breaking and entering, according to warrants filed at the Wake County Magistrate’s Office.

Police say Smith stole hundreds of thousands of dollars in equipment on June 27, 2007, court records show. Smith had no affiliation with the university.

Police think Smith entered labs in the department of engineering and took a semiconductor parameter analyzer valued at $2,500 and a four-point network analyzer valued at $235,000, court records show. Police have also accused Smith of breaking into research labs at 890 Oval Drive and 2410 Campus Shore Drive, court records show.

Smith was being held at the Wake County Jail in lieu of $100,000 bail, court records show.
EDUCATION

Go Western, Young Man. The best relatively cheap university you’ve never heard of. (Hint: it’s only online)

BY KATHLEEN KINGSBURY

LET’S NOT WASTE ANYONE’S TIME OR MONEY. You won’t find that phrase emblazoned on a T-shirt, but it’s essentially the motto of Western Governors University (WGU), a private online school that has worked hard to prove it is anything but a diploma mill.

Established 11 years ago by the governors of 19 states, the virtual university—which is administered from Salt Lake City—has experienced a surge in admissions as more college students look for low-cost alternatives. Enrollment topped 10,000 last spring, growing at a rate of 40% in both 2006 and 2007. Some 4 million Americans sign up for a distance-learning course each year, whether at an extension of a bricks-and-mortar institution or at an online-only school. Although the latter category is populated mostly by for-profit companies, WGU stands out as a nonprofit funded mainly by tuition and the $20 million in seed money supplied by those 19 governors. To help bolster its reputation, the school obtained accreditation from both regional standard bearers and the National Council

for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the professional body recognized by the U.S. Department of Education for certifying teacher-preparation programs. (WGU remains the only online institution that has NCATE’s seal of approval.) Such moves were designed to “lend WGU more legitimacy as an educational institution,” says Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt, who helped found the school when he was governor of Utah.

Today WGU is the nation’s largest supplier of math and science teachers in urban school districts. And its alumni are hired by such Fortune 500 companies as Microsoft and AT&T. “[WGU] has earned a reputation for producing high-quality graduates, particularly in education,” says Kevin Kinser, a professor at New York’s University of Albany who studies online learning and is not affiliated with WGU.

The school’s success is owed in large part to its competency-based approach. Instead of requiring that students take specific courses or amass a certain number of credit hours—as most colleges do—WGU asks only that students demonstrate mastery of the subject matter via online exams or papers that could take a day or a decade, depending on the student.

WGU has no full-time instructors, at least not in the conventional sense. Course work for its four majors—education, IT, business and health care—is developed by and licensed from outside vendors. But WGU does have about 250 full-time faculty members who work as mentors, checking in with students by phone every couple of weeks to ensure they are making progress in their courses and to recommend additional resources. “I get to know each of my students much better than I did when I lectured to them once a week in class,” says Alisa Izumi, a business professor at WGU who lives in Granby, Mass., and used to teach at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

At $3,000 per six-month semester, WGU charges a sixth of the average annual tab at private four-year colleges and half as much as an online for-profit like the University of Phoenix, a mega virtual school that has some 200,000 students. And WGU lets you take as many courses as you can fit in a semester, which means some students are able to finish an undergraduate degree in as little as two years. “Before WGU, I would have had to drive almost two hours to Richmond,” says Sandy Newsome, a teacher in rural Virginia who is getting her master’s in math education. “Learning this all from home seems so much smarter.” Sure does.

REPORT CARD

10,000

Number of students enrolled at the online-only Western Governors University

1

WGU’s ranking as a supplier of math and science teachers in urban school districts

$6,000

Cost of two six-month terms at WGU, a sixth of the average annual tab at private four-year colleges
November 18, 2008

OP-ED CONTRIBUTOR

The Test Passes, Colleges Fail

By PETER D. SALINS

Stony Brook, N.Y.

FOR some years now, many elite American colleges have been downgrading the role of standardized tests like the SAT in deciding which applicants are admitted, or have even discarded their use altogether. While some institutions justify this move primarily as a way to enroll a more diverse group of students, an increasing number claim that the SAT is a poor predictor of academic success in college, especially compared with high school grade-point averages.

Are they correct? To get an answer, we need to first decide on a good measure of “academic success.” Given inconsistent grading standards for college courses, the most easily comparable metric is the graduation rate. Students’ families and society both want college entrants to graduate, and we all know that having a college degree translates into higher income. Further, graduation rates among students and institutions vary much more widely than do college grades, making them a clearer indicator of how students are faring.

So, here is the question: do SATs predict graduation rates more accurately than high school grade-point averages? If we look merely at studies that statistically correlate SAT scores and high school grades with graduation rates, we find that, indeed, the two standards are roughly equivalent, meaning that the better that applicants do on either of these indicators the more likely they are to graduate from college. However, since students with high SAT scores tend to have better high school grade-point averages, this data doesn’t tell us which of the indicators — independent of the other — is a better predictor of college success.

Instead, we need to look at the two factors separately. And we can, thanks to the recent experience of the State University of New York, America’s largest comprehensive university system, where I was provost from 1997 to 2006. SUNY is blessed with many different types of campuses, mirroring most of the collegiate options (other than small elite private institutions) that characterize contemporary higher education. The university also collects a gold mine of student data, including statistics on pre-admission academic profiles and graduation rates.

In the 1990s, several SUNY campuses chose to raise their admissions standards by requiring higher SAT scores, while others opted to keep them unchanged. With respect to high school grades, all SUNY campuses
consider applicants' grade-point averages in decisions, but among the total pool of applicants across the state system, those averages have remained fairly consistent over time.

Thus, by comparing graduation rates at SUNY campuses that raised the SAT admissions bar with those that didn't, we have a controlled experiment of sorts that can fairly conclusively tell us whether SAT scores were accurate predictors of whether a student would get a degree.

The short answer is: yes, they were. Consider the changes in admissions profiles and six-year graduation rates of the classes entering in 1997 and 2001 at SUNY's 16 baccalaureate institutions. Among this group, nine campuses raised the emphasis they put on the SAT after 1997. This group included two prestigious research universities (Buffalo and Stony Brook) and seven smaller, regional colleges (Brockport, Cortland, New Paltz, Old Westbury, Oneonta, Potsdam and Purchase).

Among the campuses that raised selectivity, the average incoming student's SAT score increased 4.5 percent (at Cortland) to 13.3 percent (Old Westbury), while high school grade-point averages increased only 2.4 percent to 3.7 percent — a gain in grades almost identical to that at campuses that did not raise their SAT cutoff.

Yet when we look at the graduation rates of those incoming classes, we find remarkable improvements at the increasingly selective campuses. These ranged from 10 percent (at Stony Brook, where the six-year graduation rate went to 59.2 percent from 53.8 percent) to 95 percent (at Old Westbury, which went to 35.9 percent from 18.4 percent).

Most revealingly, graduation rates actually declined at the seven SUNY campuses that did not raise their cutoffs and whose entering students' SAT scores from 1997 to 2001 were stable or rose only modestly. Even at Binghamton, always the most selective of SUNY's research universities, the graduation rate declined by 2.8 percent.

The change is even more striking if we compare experiences of three pairs of similar SUNY campuses that, from 1997 to 2001, took sharply divergent paths. First, Stony Brook and Albany, both research universities: over four years, at Stony Brook the average entering freshman SAT score went up 7.9 percent, to 1164, and the graduation rate rose by 10 percent; meanwhile, Albany's average freshman SAT score increased by only 1.3 percent and its graduation rate fell by 2.7 percent, to 64 percent.

Next, Brockport and Oswego, two urban colleges with about 8,000 students each: Brockport's average freshman SAT score rose 5.7 percent to 1080, and its graduation rate increased by 18.7 percent, to 58.5 percent. At the same time, Oswego's freshman SAT average rose by only 3 percent and its graduation rate fell by 1.9 percent, to 52.6 percent.

Finally, Oneonta and Plattsburgh, two small liberal arts colleges with 5,000 students each: Oneonta’s freshman SAT score increased by 6.2 percent, to 1069, and its graduation rate rose 25.3 percent, to 58.9 percent. Plattsburgh’s average freshman SAT score increased by 1.3 percent and its graduation rate fell sharply, by 6.3 percent, to 55.1 percent.

Clearly, we find that among a group of SUNY campuses with very different missions and admissions standards, and at which the high school grade-point averages of enrolling freshmen improved by the same modest amount (about 2 percent to 4 percent), only those campuses whose incoming students’ SAT scores improved substantially saw gains in graduation rates.

Demeaning the SAT has become fashionable at campuses across the country. But college administrators who really seek to understand the value of the test based on good empirical evidence would do well to learn from the varied experiences of New York’s state university campuses.

Peter D. Salins is a professor of political science at the State University of New York at Stony Brook.