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College policy rejects status of immigrants

Community colleges have an open-door policy and can't deny admission to individuals based on legal status, attorney writes.

By Gary D. Robertson
The Associated Press

RALEIGH — North Carolina's community colleges must admit illegal immigrants as long as they are 18 years old and high school graduates, a legal decision that reverses a 2004 rule that gave campuses the option to say no.

Leaders at 37 of the 58 community college campuses statewide already had agreed to permit undocumented immigrants to enroll in their schools.

But giving colleges the discretion to deny admission based on legal status in August 2004 runs counter to the system's open-door admissions policy, community college attorney David Sullivan wrote in a memo to all campuses earlier this month. Before 2004, undocumented people weren't supposed to enroll in degree programs at all.

"Colleges should immediately begin admitting undocumented individuals," Sullivan wrote.

Sullivan said in an interview the change was based on a 1997 letter by the office of then-Attorney General Mike Easley to a local campus that said the college couldn't set nonacademic requirements before a student can enroll.

The change is good news for the children of foreign workers brought to America while they were minors and want to contribute to North Carolina society, said Melinda Wiggins, director of the Durham-based Student Action with Farmworkers.

The admissions policy is largely in line with one for University of North Carolina system campuses, also approved in 2004.

North Carolina college campuses "have been providing educational opportunities for international students for a long time," Wiggins said. "This just allows folks who live in our community and work in our community to be educated here."

Conservative groups have complained that illegal immigrants shouldn't be allowed to enroll and receive the educational benefits set aside for U.S. citizens or other legally in the country. By training students to enter the work force, the state is encouraging companies to hire illegal aliens, one group said.

"Are we telling kids that it's OK to break the law," said Robert Luebke, an education policy analyst with the Civitas Institute, a conservative public policy group. "This new policy is asking our community colleges to ignore the fact that these students are here illegally."

Civitas called on Attorney General Roy Cooper to review the change and determine whether it's justified. Cooper spokeswoman Noelle Talley said she wasn't aware of the 1997 letter that Sullivan cited.

The community college system doesn't know how many

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additional undocumented workers will enroll as a result of the rule change, but spokeswoman Audrey Bailey said administrators don't expect a large increase because so few undocumented immigrants enroll now.

Only 340 undocumented individuals have been counted as students, compared to 268,400 students who are in degree programs, according to the state Community College System.

The students also will continue to be charged the higher out-of-state tuition and aren't allowed to receive financial aid.

The Civitas Institute, which reported the change in a news release Tuesday, said it may cost the state an additional $6 million to $8 million annually to implement the rule change.

Bailey said that full-time students paying out-of-state tuition rates actually pay about $2,100 per year more than what it costs to educate them.

Sullivan said he reconsidered the 2004 rule after reviewing an allegation that an undocumented immigrant was enrolled in an early college program operated by a local school district and in conjunction with community college campuses.

Some Duke University students researching the issue also questioned system officials about whether illegal immigrants could be denied admission, he said.
Our Views

Up and down

Shifting costs challenge ECU

East Carolina University students can welcome a year that sees only a modest increase in tuition and fees for their schooling. Given the escalating cost of attending college, a $38 hike for the Fall 2008 semester seems a paltry burden when the university could have imposed as much as a 6.5 percent increase in tuition and fees.

Enthusiasm for that measure may be tempered, however, as the school considers a health insurance plan that could add a $700 annual cost to the bill of many full-time students. Adoption of that proposal would represent a significant increase in the cost of attending school, and demands careful and thorough examination.

When it meets this week, the ECU Board of Trustees is expected to approve a $38 increase in tuition and fees for the start of the 2008-09 school year. The hike is intended to fund faculty salary increases, student financial aid services and an expansion in student services, and represents one of the smallest increases in recent memory.

UNC System President Erskine Bowles targeted rising tuition rates shortly after taking office, and has worked to curb the annual increases that are a hallmark of the state's public universities. The system now operates under a 6.5-percent cap on tuition hikes that will extend over four years in an effort to slow the growth in cost.

Toward that end, East Carolina's proposed $38 increase in tuition and general fees should exceed even Bowles' expectations, falling far below the 6.5-percent rule. And it represents a demonstrable move by Chancellor Steve Ballard and the East Carolina administration to keep costs manageable.

Yet, East Carolina faces a daunting challenge to provide health insurance coverage for students as the costs of care increase. Between 10 percent and 40 percent of students might be required to purchase $700 policies each year under a plan the Trustees will review this week.

The school is under an edict to control health care costs, and East Carolina has lost money insuring students in two of the last six years. Still, the imposition of this rule could impose an untenable burden on low-income students, offsetting the gains achieved by limiting tuition hikes.

The rising cost of tuition and fees poses a threat to the dream of education as a societal equalizer. If attending college is priced beyond the reach of the poorest qualified students, their hopes of completing a degree program without a crushing mountain of debt will be dashed. The spiraling cost of a college education in North Carolina moves the state further from its constitutional edict of keeping higher education as free from expense as possible.

East Carolina should be commended for its efforts this year in limiting tuition increases, but must be careful that the progress in that arena is not compromised by rising costs elsewhere.
Prep sports eject more players

BY JAVIER SERNA
STAFF WRITER

CHAPEL HILL — Ejections for bad behavior in high school sports have more than doubled so far this year statewide, thanks to stricter enforcement of sportsmanship rules.

The number of ejections jumped from 138 last year to 337 as of Nov. 19 this year according to a report released by the N.C. High School Athletic Association.

Unsportsmanlike conduct — which can include fighting, on-field celebrations, diving into the end zone and taunting opponents — has become a greater concern in North Carolina partly because of increased emphasis on improving athletes' behavior by the National Federation of High School Athletic Associations, which sets the rules that the state association must play by.

Mark Dreipelbis, the association's head of officials, cited "the brazenness of our young people" during winter board meetings Tuesday. "We don't want to take spontaneous celebration out of the game," he said. "But we have to make our students accountable."

Stricter enforcement of the rules comes as college and pro sports also grapple with fighting, excessive on-field celebrations and off-the-field legal problems. High

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ORANGE COUNTY

Small chemical blast injures two students

CHAPEL HILL - Two students were taken to UNC Hospitals with minor injuries Tuesday afternoon after "a small explosion" in a UNC-Chapel Hill laboratory.

The students were discarding two chemicals in Keran Labs when the explosion occurred at 3:53 p.m., said university spokeswoman Lisa Katz. One student had a cut above the right eye. The other had no visible injuries, she said.

Katz did not know what chemicals were being discarded but said the explosion was contained and the building was evacuated.
Colleges must admit illegal immigrants

BY MARK JOHNSON
THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER

RALEIGH — North Carolina’s community college system has ordered the state’s 58 campuses to admit illegal immigrants, overturning a policy of letting the heavily enrolled schools set their own rules for handling undocumented applicants.

David Sullivan, the system’s top lawyer, dispatched a memo this month telling the community colleges that state regulations require the schools to admit illegal immigrants who meet the schools’ basic requirements of being either a high school graduate or an adult in need of skills training.

“That’s just wrong,” said Sen. Richard Stevens, a Raleigh Republican and co-chairman of the higher education committee. “I can’t believe North Carolina taxpayers would be be asked to pay for the education of people who are in this state illegally.”

Rep. Winkie Wilkins, a Democrat from Person County who is the head of the House committee

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"Subsidizing the education of students who can only work using a forged or stolen Social Security card is absurd."

ROBERT LUEBKE, EDUCATION POLICY ANALYST WITH THE CIVITAS INSTITUTE

"By denying them an education, we're really creating an underclass of folks here in the state who cannot contribute to society."

MELINDA WIGGINS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF STUDENT ACTION WITH FARMWORKERS

IMMIGRANTS

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on community colleges, said he was "blindsided" by the news.

The state's community colleges focus on training and retraining the work force, usually through skills and trade education. Melinda Wiggins is executive director of Student Action with Farmworkers, which helps children of migrant agriculture laborers get into high school and college. She said barring illegal immigrants from community colleges penalizes youths who were brought to the United States as children.

"North Carolina is their home. It's where they've been raised and lived," Wiggins said. "By denying them an education, we're really creating an underclass of folks here in the state who cannot contribute to society."

State public schools must accept children of illegal immigrants under federal regulations. The University of North Carolina system admits undocumented applicants, but a bill to provide in-state tuition to some was quickly shot down in 2005.

Out-of-state tuition

Community college executives said the admissions guidelines won't cost the state. Illegal immigrants must pay out-of-state tuition, $7,465 for a full class load, which is more than the actual cost of providing the education, $5,375, the officials said.

They also emphasized that under the old policy, with most schools admitting undocumented applicants, 340 of the 270,000 students last year — or about 1/10 of 1 percent — were illegal immigrants. If that figure quadrupled, the system could handle it. Sullivan said.

"Colleges should immediately begin admitting undocumented individuals," Sullivan wrote in the Nov. 7 memo.

It is unclear how many schools prohibited illegal immigrants from enrolling.

A study this year by Duke University graduate students listed 22 campuses as having written or unwritten policies to bar undocumented applicants. The Observer contacted the three schools nearest to Charlotte: McDowell Technical, and Cleveland and Stanly community colleges.

All said they had no such policy and had been admitting illegal immigrants.

Central Piedmont Community College in Charlotte has admitted illegal immigrants. So have Durham Tech, Central Carolina, Johnston, Piedmont and Vance-Granville community colleges, according to a report this year based on a survey in April of 2005.

Wake Technical Community College was among the schools that had to change its policy after the recent memo.

"We had just always required appropriate documentation" including legal residency, said Laurie Clowers, the school's public relations director.

Roots of policy review

The new policy memo came after an unverified complaint that an illegal immigrant was dismissed from one of the colleges and after the study by Duke students. The study was prompted by an unrelated research request from the community colleges.

The community colleges are required to keep an open-door admissions policy but were allowed in 2004 to set their own regulations on illegal immigrants. Sullivan said administrators reviewed that practice this year. They discovered a 1997 letter from then-Attorney General and now Gov. Mike Easley that, while not addressing illegal immigrants specifically, said the community colleges cannot impose nonacademic criteria for admission.

"We thought through the policy again," Sullivan said, and concluded they were wrong to let schools reject undocumented applicants.

Easley's current staff deflected any comment on whether the community colleges were correctly interpreting the 10-year-old letter.

"You're going to have to ask the current attorney general that," said Sherri Johnson, Easley's communications director.

An ongoing debate

Robert Luebke, an education policy analyst with the conservative Civitas Institute in Raleigh, said the new community college directive forces the schools to ignore the fact that the prospective students are breaking the law.

"These students cannot legally work in North Carolina," Luebke said in a prepared statement. "Subsidizing the education of students who can only work using a forged or stolen Social Security card is absurd."

Sen. Fred Smith and Salisbury lawyer Bill Graham, both Republican candidates for governor, said they oppose admitting illegal immigrants.

"People can't pick and choose which laws they're going to follow," Smith said, "and which laws they're not going to follow."

Mike Taylor, president of Stanly Community College, said out-of-state tuition effectively excludes illegal immigrants because many cannot afford it.

"We're putting a rock and a hard place on this," Taylor said. "These same people we can't admit without paying out-of-state tuition can graduate as valedictorians from any high school in Stanly County."

News & Observer staff writers Ryan Beckwith and Jane Stancill contributed to this story.
Some parents place added college costs on themselves

USA TODAY's story decrying the high cost of attending college establishes that in-state costs are about 44% lower than out-of-state costs ("Lawmakers take aim at college costs, Money, Cover story, Nov. 20").

I find it interesting that two of the three families cited in USA TODAY's story as being burdened by high college costs send their children to out-of-state colleges, despite living in states with highly regarded public universities. Such decisions are part of the reason that the United States spends the world's highest proportion of gross domestic product on higher education.

It is difficult to feel sorry for parents who could have avoided much of the financial burden by sending their children to less expensive but still high quality colleges.

Gerry Swider
Sherman Oaks, Calif.

High costs shameful

In the many discussions and articles about college costs, little is mentioned of needed improvements and better priorities for the college educational experience.

Perhaps colleges will continue to funnel millions of dollars into athletic departments while shortchanging the academic experience, increasing class sizes and sending parents, taxpayers and other students the bill.

Colleges will probably also continue to pay basketball and football coaches exorbitant salaries, as well as provide tutors, grant more generous scholarships and give other preferential treatment to athletes.

Meanwhile, regular students who actually might attend college for primarily educational reasons bear the brunt of the costs.

Particularly galling is that businesses and alumni can get educational tax deductions for paying thousands of dollars to athletic departments for special rights to football and basketball tickets. And then parents and students cannot get the same kind of deductions for college expenses? Maybe that is what the lawmakers ought to change. They helped create the monster of disparity and the misuse of education institutions for sports entertainment.

Mary Collier
Beavercreek, Ohio

More enforcement

Here's a partial solution to skyrocketing college tuition: antitrust enforcement. Each year, many colleges wait for Harvard and Yale to set their tuition fees and then raise their fees accordingly. British Airways was recently fined $300 million for attempting to collude with Virgin Atlantic on fuel surcharge price-fixing. The collusion among major universities has been a much greater assault on the consumer and should be prosecuted.

John W. Steinmuller, Jr.
Coral Springs, Fla.
Students join GOP debate via YouTube

Nebraska teacher encourages his class to submit questions to the candidates for debate Wednesday

By Kathy Kiely
USA TODAY

When eight Republican presidential candidates meet Wednesday to answer questions coming from citizen videos, the audience will include political activists, local VIPs and Ray Keller, a Nebraska teacher.

Keller, 36, got his coveted ticket to the St. Petersburg, Fla., event because executives of YouTube, co-sponsor with CNN of the debate, see him as an exemplar of what they hoped to achieve with the forum's innovative citizen-driven format.

According to Steve Grove, head of news and politics at YouTube, Keller is among scores of teachers who have encouraged students to submit questions to the candidates via the online video-uploading service. The student questioners run the gamut "all the way from middle school to graduate school," Grove said. One entry is from a class of Harvard University medical students.

The student questions helped fuel a big surge of interest in the debate, which drew nearly 5,000 video questions by Sunday's deadline, CNN spokeswoman Edie Emery said. That's up from approximately 3,000 submissions for the Democratic debate in July.

Keller, who teaches government at Papillion-La Vista South High School in suburban Omaha, said that debate gave him the inspiration to use the GOP sequel as a project for his 120 students. "I thought, man, that's a really cool way to get kids interested," he said.

He said he proposed making GOP debate videos on the students' first day back at school and "it really sparked their interest." The students are juniors and seniors, and Keller estimates that at least 30% will be old enough to vote in next year's election.

The students' enthusiasm for the participatory video format is in contrast to the initial reaction from some in the GOP political establishment, who were cool to one of the clips used in the Democratic debate. That clip featured an animated snowman who asked a question about global warming.

"I think the presidency ought to be held at a higher level than having to answer questions from a snowman," Mitt Romney told the New Hampshire Union Leader.

Romney plans to participate tomorrow. His campaign spokesman, Kevin Madden, said scheduling issues were the only reason his appearance was ever in doubt.

David Bohrman, CNN's executive producer of the presidential debates, said candidates are "a little out of their comfort zone when it comes to this debate." Organizers, who plan to come up with a list of about 80 potential questions, promised the candidates that the selected videos "would be respectful," Bohrman said. There were 39