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Panel discusses AIDS education, vigil remembers victims

By Tom Marine  
The Daily Reflector  

Wednesday, December 03, 2008

A lack of education and feelings of invincibility are the biggest threats to young adults contracting HIV/AIDS, a panel of speakers said Wednesday at East Carolina University.

Five speakers — the majority of whom are HIV positive — told their stories about becoming infected with the virus and how their lives changed as a result. The panel discussion was held as part of World AIDS Week, a five day schedule of events to promote awareness about the disease.

Dr. Dawd Siraj, assistant professor at the Brody School of Medicine, kicked off the evening with a presentation dedicated to reminding everyone HIV is a disease that affects a significant portion of the population.

HIV, which stands for human immunodeficiency virus, attacks the immune system and hampers the human body’s ability to fight infections, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention Web site. It is the virus that causes AIDS, acquired immunodeficiency syndrome.

Siraj said there were about 33 million people living with HIV worldwide in 2007, including 2.7 million newly infected individuals. In the United States, he said, more than 500,000 deaths have been reported due to HIV since the virus was discovered, and AIDS is even the leading cause of death among African-American women between the ages of 25 and 34.

"When you see the numbers, it is very surprising," Siraj said. "We live in the same world as everyone who is infected with HIV. This is worth the effort and money."

After the formal presentation, the remaining speakers took turns describing, in detail, how they were infected with HIV and their personal battles on the way to recovery.

Elizabeth Lancaster, who has been HIV positive for more than 10 years, said she became infected when a man beat, raped and left her for dead.

"I surrounded myself in a dark coma of despair," Lancaster said. "All I know is for the next couple of years I drowned in my fear."

After turning to drugs and alcohol, she said, she got healthy by taking the proper medication, exercising and paying close attention to her nutrition. However, what really made her healthy again was being able to tell her story, she said.

"The best advice I could give you, protect yourself and each other," Lancaster said. "Use condoms."

Esther Hines, peer health educator at the Brody School, said she was first diagnosed with HIV in 1993, but she does not know how became infected. She issued a challenge to the audience, nearly 200 people comprised mainly of ECU students, to get tested for HIV regardless of past sexual history.

"That is the message I want to leave, everyone is positive until proven negative," she said. "Get tested. If not for you, at least for someone else."

Following the panel discussion, the attending audience members were given candles for a candlelight vigil outside the Mendenhall Student Center. Free HIV testing will be offered Friday at the student center from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.
Program allows high school juniors to take college courses online

By Josh Humphries  
The Daily Reflector  

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High School students in Pitt County will soon be able to take classes at East Carolina University through the virtual world of Second Life.

ECU recently received the blessing of Gov. Mike Easley and UNC System President Erskine Bowles to pilot a program for an early college high school in the virtual world.

Students will be able to take classes online, with ECU professors, by logging onto a virtual ECU campus from their own high schools. The program will be the first of its kind in the state.

Officials are still determining how students will be picked to participate in the pilot program, but there will be three students from each of Pitt County’s six high schools.

The program is set to begin as a pilot in January with 18 juniors. By January 2010, officials hope to have the program fully up and running for likely more than 100 students in Pitt County.

“I’m excited about it,” said ECU Provost Marilyn Sheerer, who worked with Chancellor Steve Ballard and special projects director Shirley Carraway to get the program approved.

“I’m excited that we might try this new technology to engage in an early college high school. I think we can get more academic connections that we could in a regular campus.”

Pitt County Schools, ECU and Pitt Community College began working several years ago to develop an early college high school program on the ECU campus, but as the time approached for the school to open last year, ECU called it off due to space constraints.

There just was not enough room physically to house the students on the ECU campus, Carraway said.

Using Second Life, the students will remain at their regular high schools and log on in computer labs to attend virtual classes where they will be able to do anything they could in the real world, Carraway said.

Carraway said officials decided to pilot the program with juniors, because they are a little more mature and can be tracked for a year before they graduate.

The students will take two classes in the spring through the early college high school at ECU and take two regular high school classes.

“This year of planning will be important as we re-think the early college high school,” Carraway said. “In the long term, it means we could serve a far greater number of students because were not dealing with the constraints of space and transportation.”

Carraway said, ultimately, the school could be opened up for students in the east outside of Pitt County.

“This is in line with the times,” she said. “This whole issue of site and place in the 21st century is very different from what it was in the past. The possibilities are endless.”

The students may not be able to take as many classes in a virtual early college high school because officials do not want students sitting in front of a computer all day. However, officials are planning to incorporate visits to the ECU campus and hoping to hold programs on campus during the summer when more
space is available.

ECU opened its campus in Second Life in October 2007 for college students. Staff and student employees in the Academic Outreach department designed the online campus.

The 3-D rendition looks very similar to the real ECU campus.

Students will design a avatar, or character, to move about in the virtual world. Teachers will be able to track the students, give assignments, hold lectures, assign group projects and send students to other parts of the Second Life world for discussions or projects.

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City seeks treasure in students' year-ending trash

By Ginger Livingston
The Daily Reflector

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University and city officials hope local pirates will give away their booty, even if they think it's just trash.

When the spring and fall semesters end at East Carolina University, the city of Greenville ends up collecting an additional 200 tons of materials students decide is trash, said Wes Anderson, Greenville's public works director.

But, he said, a lot of the goods are usable household items — furniture, kitchen appliances, clothing, nonperishable food, lamps — stuff other people can use.

Today and Friday, ECU and the city of Greenville will launch Pirates Treasure, an opportunity for students who are moving to donate usable items to local charities.

"We hope this new partnership between ECU and the city of Greenville will help curb waste — in both our campus neighborhoods and in our landfills — and provide the area's needy families with much-needed items," said Lynn Roeder, ECU's dean of students, who is chairing the project.

The university is setting storage containers from Stallings Mini Storage at five drop-off locations from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. both days to accept and store items from students. The goods will go to a couple of local charities for distribution to people around town.

The donation sites are at the Willis Building, the corner of First and Reade streets; the corner of North Warren and Wyndham Court; the corner of North Harding Street and River Drive; Green Springs Park on Fifth Street and at the Kappa Alpha fraternity house at 11th and Charles streets.

Students with large items they can't transport can go to a site and make arrangements for pick up, said Lucia Brannon, interim coordinator for ECU Off-Campus Student Services.

The project stems from a group seeking a solution to an issue that has long annoyed permanent residents of neighborhoods immediately surrounding ECU's main campus; the piles of trash and furniture departing students leave at the curb to be picked up and the amount of time it takes to haul it away.

Bulky items such as furniture are picked up by the city once a week, Anderson said. In the Tar River-University neighborhood, Monday in the pickup day. When students start moving out, the city adds the area to Wednesday's route.

Given the volume of throwaways generated by students and staggered move-out dates, it can take the city up to three weeks pick up everything, he said.

The city implemented new rules that will cite individuals who move bulky items to the curb more than two days before scheduled pickup, Anderson said. While it should cut down on the unsightliness, people unhappy that usable items were being thrown away decided to make it easier for students to donate things they don't want.

"I always wondered if ECU would do something, because it is hard to recycle without a little help," said Casey Savio, a Washington, D.C.-area senior who is graduating in May.

Savio and her roommate, Jessica Rice, who is graduating next week, aren't moving out of the Student Street house until the spring. While they plan to take their furniture with them, they like the idea of having a place to drop off donations.
"I think it's a really good idea, especially for kids who have to travel far and would have trouble moving their things and can't sell them," Savio said.

Savio and Rice have lived in their rental house for three years and have seen the piles of furniture and trash that accumulate.

"It's not attractive," Savio said. "It is frustrating to go outside and see trash everywhere."

Even though the semester doesn't end until next week, Brannon said Student Government Association members recommended holding the drop-off this week.

"With so much going on next week with finals this seemed a better time," she said. It also made it easier to secure volunteers, she said.

The items will be collected by God's Love, Martin Pitt Partnership for Children, and other social services groups. Items remaining after Friday will be donated to the Salvation Army and Goodwill.

"This event is a great opportunity for students and community members to assist with the beautification of our city" Brannon said.

For more information and for a map of the drop-off sites visit: http://www.ecu.edu/studentlife/offcampus/ or call 328-2847.

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Students to hold vigil for Mumbai terrorism victims

The Daily Reflector

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A candlelight vigil is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. today to remember the people killed in the recent terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India.

The event will be held near the cupola on the East Carolina University Mall. It is being organized by members of the ECU Indian Bhangra Dance Team and the Asian Student Association.

Nipa Patel, vice president of the dance team, said members of the groups have family members who lived near the areas attacked. So far she know of no one who was hurt or killed.

"We felt that our community, especially on campus, is small, and we don't have a chance to do things on campus," Patel said. "When this happened, it hit close to home, and we decided we should do anything to show support and come together.

"The message we are aiming for is to stay united and show that no matter what happens we should stay strong," Patel said.
N.C. 1 of 49 states rated F on college affordability

UNC officials question use of data in U.S. report

By ERIC FERRERI
STAFF WRITER

An independent report on U.S. higher education that flunked North Carolina and 48 other states on affordability has some university officials here scratching their heads.

The biennial study by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, which evaluates how well higher education is serving the public, handed out F’s for affordability to 49 states, up from 43 two years ago. Only California received a passing grade, a C, in that category, thanks to its relatively inexpensive community colleges.

Former Gov. Jim Hunt is chairman of the center’s board of directors.

The report card uses a range of measurements to grade states from A to F on the performance of their public and private colleges. The affordability grade is based on how much of the average family's income it costs to go to college.

In North Carolina, the study found that poor and working-class families must devote 22 percent of their income, even after financial aid, to pay for costs at two- or four-year public colleges, which enroll 84 percent of the state’s college students.

Inifrah Gage, chairwoman of the UNC system’s Board of Governors, said public higher education is still a good deal in North Carolina but university leaders intend to pay attention to the challenges facing North Carolina families. This year the state is providing $117 million for need-based financial aid.

"We are a bargain compared to other institutions," Gage said. "We’re the lowest of our public peers almost every year. But the area we need to examine very closely is that North Carolinians' ability to pay may have changed. If middle-class income levels have flattened over the last several years, it may have changed their ability to pay."

At UNC-Chapel Hill, officials are bothered by the report because it bases its grades, including the "F" for affordability, on data from both public and private institutions.

Shirley Ort, UNC-CH’s director of scholarships and student aid, questions the report’s methodology and points out that although tuition and fees have increased at her institution over the last several years, so too has aid — perhaps most notably with the creation in 2004 of the Carolina Covenant program for low-income students.

"I think [the report] is vague and not particularly helpful," Ort said. "This is not Chapel Hill’s story."

In other measurements, North Carolina earned a B-minus in preparing young people for college, a D-plus for college participation, a C-plus for college benefits and a B-minus on college completion.

The center’s full report is available at www.highereducation.org.
Colleges use more ‘contingent faculty’

Studies link part-time teachers to lower quality of education

By Mary Beth Marklein
USA TODAY

It’s no secret that colleges and universities are relying increasingly on part-time instructors or other faculty who are neither tenured nor on track for tenure. But a flurry of studies draw troubling conclusions about what kind of effect that has on the quality of a student’s education.

A study released today by the American Federation of Teachers, a faculty union, finds that such instructors — dubbed “contingent faculty” to reflect their limited-term appointments — are pervasive throughout public higher education. Not only do they teach many undergraduate courses, but they’re also teaching “significant percentages” of classes and students across multiple disciplines.

Meanwhile, other recent studies suggest that over-reliance on these instructors can erode the quality of education for many students. And a report to be released next week by the Modern Language Association is expected to raise concerns about what it calls a “rapidly accelerating trend” toward the use of part-timers in English and foreign-language departments nationwide.

The use of adjuncts is particularly robust at community colleges, where, the AFT study found, 57.5% of undergraduate courses in 2003 were taught by contingent faculty. That figure was 38.4% at public four-year schools that offer bachelor’s and master’s degrees, and 41.8% at public doctorate-granting universities.

The reports stress that contingent faculty are not the problem; rather, they argue that universities fail to provide adequate resources to support them.

“Part-time faculty, in particular, are miserably compensated and often have to teach at several institutions to patch together a living,” says AFT president Randi Weingarten. Such an arrangement “shortchanges students who may not have their professors as available as they would otherwise be.”

Last month, researchers similarly linked education quality with academic staffing:

▶ A study of California community college students found that as their exposure to part-time faculty increased, their likelihood of completing associate’s degrees significantly decreased. A similar pattern was found in a study of students pursing bachelor’s degrees in the University of North Carolina system, says Audrey Jaeger, associate professor at North Carolina State University in Raleigh. She was involved in both studies.

▶ When adjuncts accounted for a substantial share of instructors, full-time professors devoted significantly fewer hours to preparing for class and advising students. Author Paul Umbach, an associate professor at NC State, says full-time faculty at schools where part-time ranks are growing may feel less secure in their job, which “translates into lower levels of commitment and performance.”

Colleges typically say they hire contingent faculty to handle enrollment fluctuations, offer special expertise or fill gaps when full-timers are unavailable.

It’s not clear how state budget cuts will affect academic staffing at public universities. Arizona State University, for example, recently said it was ending contracts with about 200 adjuncts. But over time, colleges may turn to more part-time faculty as a hedge against uncertainty.

“Universities are going to be reluctant to hire full-timers until they’re reasonably certain they’ll have secure funding,” says David Shulenburger of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, a non-profit representing most large public institutions.
‘The world is moving past’ USA in higher ed

By Mary Beth Marklein
USA TODAY

The USA has made modest gains since the early 1990s in preparing students for college and providing access, a report says today. But other countries are advancing more quickly, and if trends continue, the picture is only going to get worse, the authors warn.

“The rest of the world is moving past us,” says Patrick Callan, president of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, the non-profit California-based group that released the report. “I don’t think the country has really fully come to grips with how competitive the world has become for us.”

Measuring Up 2008 is the fifth in a series of biennial state-by-state report cards on six key measures of educational performance: preparation for college, participation, affordability, completion, benefits and learning.

Since the early 1990s, this year’s report says, most states improved in the areas of college readiness, access and completion. But some gains are offset by declines. And 48 of 50 states have actually moved backward in the area of college affordability.

As in past years, the report raises concerns about persistent disparities in access and completion for low-income students and under-represented minorities. Those fast-growing populations are critical because they are poised to dominate the U.S. workforce as the nation’s 78 million Baby Boomers — the best-educated generation in U.S. history — moves closer to retirement.

International comparisons of college-going and completion rates suggest some erosion already.

Data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, whose members include the world’s most developed countries, show that between 2003 and 2006, the USA slipped from fifth to seventh in the percentage of adults ages 18-24 enrolled in college, and from seventh to 10th in the percentage of adults 25-34 holding an associate’s degree or higher.

The report doesn’t offer a prescription. But Callan suggests that the current economic crisis calls for state governors, legislatures and higher education leaders to make dramatic changes.

“I don’t think we can tweak our way out of this,” he says.