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ECU Police praised during re-accreditation process

By Ginger Livingston
The Daily Reflector

Tuesday, December 08, 2009

East Carolina University police earned praise from school administrators and Greenville's city police department during a Monday afternoon discussion related to its re-accreditation process.

ECU's Police Department first received accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies in 2007 and this is the first review it has undergone, said assistant police chief Dawn Tevepaugh. It started during the weekend when assessors conducted staff interviews and reviewed operational guides and reports, Tevepaugh said. They also saw firsthand how officers handled special events by observing the department's security activities during the university's win in the Conference USA championship game played Saturday at Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium.

The accreditation process helped align the department’s policies with national standards, said Annette Parker, accreditation manager. It also boosted the professionalism of officers and staff.

Greenville police Capt. Joe Bartlett said the mutual aid agreement between the university and city allows university police to assist with patrols in the downtown bar district, making the area safer for students.

"We work flawlessly with them," Bartlett said.

Tom Pohlman, the school's environmental manager, and whose office manages emergency operations, said ECU police supply initial emergency alerts to students. Other administrators praised the department's efforts to educate students about safety issues and their prompt responses to disruptions.

"At times we work with students who we view as being potentially dangerous, who might act out in our office," said Maggie Olszewska, director of the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities, which oversees student discipline. The presence of a police officer in their lobby keeps potentially volatile situations calm, she said.

Aaron Lucier, an adviser to the school's Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Student Union, said members of that organization feel comfortable discussing issues with officers. That's not always the case on other college campuses, he said.

The assessors will take information collected during its tour and prepare a report on the department's activities. The report will be reviewed in March and the re-accreditation decision will be made at that time, Tevepaugh said.

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Champs, again: East Carolina caps strong season with title

Tuesday, December 08, 2009

The No. 18 University of Houston Cougars came to Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium on Saturday featuring the most prolific passing attack in college football. However, defense wins championships, as a resilient East Carolina University team successfully defended its Conference USA crown to the delight of the Pirate faithful.

After a slow 3-3 start to the season, Coach Skip Holtz and his team showed grit and determination in winning their division and hoisting a second consecutive title. With a trip to Memphis and a bid in the Liberty Bowl secure, the Pirates can celebrate a remarkable season that ranks among the best in school history.

The 74th year of East Carolina football proved to be a tense one. From the tighter-than-expected opening game against in-state rival Appalachian State to the deflected final heave from talented Houston quarterback Case Keenum, the Pirates brought their fans on a roller-coaster ride of a season that saw a nightmarish start lead to a dream finish.

The championship game served as its microcosm, with the teams combining for 970 yards of offense in a back-and-forth affair. The Pirates trailed at the half before claiming a five-point lead heading into the final frame. The teams traded touchdowns before an East Carolina field goal staked them to an eight-point advantage.

Yet, Keenum tossed another touchdown — one of his five on the day — to set up a dramatic final three minutes. His performance was one of the most impressive witnessed in Dowdy-Ficklen, but his final pass — a high arcing throw that hung in the slate-gray sky — bounced off two players before finding the sure hands of Pirate defender Van Eskridge to clinch the title for East Carolina.

It was then — finally — that the purple-and-gold faithful could exhale and revel in victory.

As with the end of any season, there are questions about the future. Most center around Holtz as coaching vacancies with higher profiles and larger paychecks beckon. His success has made him an attractive option for other schools, though Pirates fans should be pleased to hear he remains committed to East Carolina.

Yet, however the coming weeks unfold, the Conference USA championship trophy resides once again in Greenville with the East Carolina Pirates. Another trip to the Liberty Bowl will follow and, perhaps, a win against the University of Arkansas.

Few schools complete their season on such a positive note, and all should be proud of this team and its remarkable accomplishments.

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Malpractice reports are easier to find

For the first time, consumers can easily check whether North Carolina doctors have settled or lost medical malpractice claims or been convicted of crimes.

The N.C. Medical Board announced Monday that it has expanded its Web site to include malpractice settlements or judgments and criminal records for its 35,000 licensed physicians and physician assistants.

The expansion comes in response to a law passed by the General Assembly in 2007 that requires the board to publish malpractice payments, misdemeanor and felony convictions, hospital suspensions and discipline by medical boards in other states.

About 3 percent of North Carolina doctors and physician assistants were required to report incidents under those new guidelines. Less than 1 percent, or 221, have reported malpractice payments since May 2008, which is when the reporting starts. The Web site, www.ncmedboard.org, allows consumers to search by a doctor's name, or by city.

The N.C. Medical Board had been criticized in recent years for failing to protect people from bad doctors. To increase public confidence, the board pushed for the new law, which would allow it to share more information.

Before last week, consumers could use the Web site to find a doctor's license status, address, educational background and disciplinary history in North Carolina. All public disciplinary documents from the board's files are also online.

But before the new law took effect, the board was prohibited from sharing information about malpractice suits and hospital discipline.

Malpractice claims and criminal records are already public in county courthouses and with law enforcement agencies.

But the medical board's expanded physician profile makes the information far more accessible to consumers.

Opposition to posting

The board's proposal to post malpractice data met opposition from doctors and hospitals, the insurers that write medical malpractice policies and the lawyers who defend doctor and hospitals against patients' lawsuits.

One of the main concerns opponents raised involved posting settlements from past years.

Initially, the board planned to publish all malpractice settlements and judgments going back seven years. But opponents said settlements are often made with secrecy clauses that both sides agree to and are
legally binding. Posting data from the past could breach those agreements, opponents argued. And some threatened litigation over the matter.

Board lawyer Thomas Mansfield said about 25 licensing boards across many states already publish malpractice information. Mansfield said he knows of only one state where there was a legal challenge over retroactively posting medical malpractice payments, and the effort failed.

The N.C. Medical Society, a private association that lobbies on behalf of 11,000 physician members, also questioned the dollar amount of settlements and judgments to be posted. At one time, the board planned to include all payments of $25,000 or more.

The opponents got the attention of legislators, who stepped in to change the board's plans.

The General Assembly passed a bill that directed the board to start publicizing settlements made on or after May 1, 2008. The threshold was set at $75,000.

The time frame for malpractice judgments is different. Judgments, which are decided by judges or juries after a trial, will be posted from seven years ago, starting with Dec. 1, 2002.

Payment amounts and information that identifies patients will not be published on the board Web site.

Information about felony convictions and medical board discipline will stay on the Web site indefinitely.

Medical society officials still have concerns that the board's Web site doesn't distinguish between "frivolous" lawsuits and cases that involve "quality of care." Spokesman Mike Edwards said the society thinks "there needs to be a little bit more substantive review" about which cases are publicized.

Many medical malpractice payments are made for reasons unrelated to poor medical care, he said. It can be cheaper to settle the claim than to litigate. Payments that are related to poor medical care should be published. "Consumers should know that," Edwards said.

The medical board Web site includes several disclaimers saying that malpractice payments don't always suggest negligence and that some specialties, such as obstetrics and neurosurgery, draw more suits than others.

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Masthead
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UNC-CH might sell beer, wine

CHAPEL HILL -- At UNC-Chapel Hill, tailgating traditionally takes place outside Kenan Stadium. But with an $80 million stadium addition in the works, athletics officials now want to move the party inside.

The university is adding about 3,000 seats in private suites and club boxes and wants to sell beer and wine in them as a marketing enticement to corporate honchos and wealthy alums.

No liquor would be sold and no beer or wine would be available in general seating or student sections of the stadium.

Still, the sale of beer and wine at the stadium would be a change for UNC-CH, where athletic venues have never sold any sort of alcohol. (The airplane bottles of whiskey that spectators sneak into games are, of course, unsanctioned.)

Across the nation, universities routinely sell beer and wine at sporting events, though many restrict it to private suites. In the Atlantic Coast Conference, only Duke and UNC-CH prohibit all alcohol use in athletic venues.

As budgets have tightened, some universities have loosened their booze restrictions to raise revenue. Critics say universities should stay out of the alcohol business.

"I acknowledge there's a philosophical issue, and I acknowledge it's a change in what our policy has been," said Dick Baddour, UNC-CH's athletics director. "I don't see it as out of step with what you find in arenas all across the country."

The university is planning 20 suites and other seating in Kenan's east end zone.

The project would include an attached academic support center for athletes, which replaces the old field house that is on the same site. A new strength and conditioning center is also planned.

Revenue from the sale of the suites and private boxes will pay for the expansion. Suites will sell for $50,000 per season, while the season-long lease of a club level seat - which includes access to a climate-controlled lounge with food and drink service - would run from $1,500 to $2,500 each.

Those prices don't include game tickets, which are also required.

Baddour said he isn't sure whether beer and wine would be sold in these private settings or given out as part of the ticket price. Another option, which N.C. State employs, is to restrict beer and wine to private suites and allow the suite's occupants to distribute it.

Baddour has talked up the beer-and-wine idea on campus and there appears to be institutional support. Robert Winston, chairman of the board of trustees, said Friday that the move makes sense.

And McKay Coble, a dramatic art professor and chairwoman of the university faculty, said she has no
objections, either.

"For the kind of price these things are selling for, people buying them will want to continue their tailgate parties," Coble said. "The fact that they're in private boxes will keep it contained, philosophically and physically."

Bad message?

But the use of alcohol at university events is, in general, a bad idea given the level of drinking on college campuses, argues Henry Wechsler, the lead investigator at the Harvard University School of Public Health's College Alcohol Study.

"It's certainly legal," Wechsler wrote in an e-mail. "They are of age, but with alcohol presenting a problem at most colleges, what kind of message are they sending to students? You can't get through a football game without drinking?"

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RBC tough to fill

RALEIGH -- In its first two home basketball games this season, N.C. State drew an average attendance of 10,700, well below the RBC Center's 19,722 capacity.

Those figures are not surprising to former Wolfpack athletic director Les Robinson, who warned about the move off campus more than 10 years ago, when the decision was being made.

"In a perfect world, a slightly smaller place of about 17,000 on campus would have been better, in my opinion," Robinson said last week. "Any coach wants the best possible homecourt advantage, which usually means being on campus with a loud, crowded arena. Herb Sendek [then State's coach] felt the same way. ... But it just wasn't feasible at the time."

State left 12,400-seat Reynolds Coliseum after the 1998-99 season, Sendek's third after being hired as coach from Miami of Ohio.

Tom Fetzer, chairman of the state Republican Party and Raleigh's mayor during the building project, said during a recent visit to The News & Observer that Sendek and Robinson expressed serious concerns to him about the move.

According to Fetzer, Sendek predicted "an unmitigated disaster for our basketball program if you get us out there. Please. And don't build this thing bigger than 17,500 or we won't be able to fill it."

Efforts to reach Sendek for comment were unsuccessful, but Robinson confirmed that he and Sendek expressed their concerns at time.

"I told some people - so did Herb, I think - that playing in a place like Reynolds is worth five points a game, more than five in some of the tougher games probably," Robinson said. "It's the same at Duke. The home advantage changes some when you go to a big, big building. But there just weren't any realistic options at the time. Renovating Reynolds would have cost an absolute fortune, and there still wouldn't have been a way to add parking."

Funding opponent

At the outset of the 10th season in the RBC Center, the team generally draws impressive turnouts for ACC games but rarely turns big gates for nonconference games. In 18 home games last season, the average draw was 13,436, compared with 16,535 for the first season.

Wolfpack associate AD Dick Christy, who supervises box office operations, said the season-ticket sales total for 2009-10 is about 10,000, down from approximately 11,000 last season. Season-ticket packages range in cost from $192 to $800.

Fetzer said he did not reveal the earlier conversations with Robinson and Sendek, who resigned to become coach at Arizona State after the 2005-06 season, because he promised to keep the discussions private.
"I never told that story because I promised Les and Herb that I'd keep it between us because they would have been crucified by their donor base," Fetzer said. "I did a ton of research. ... I don't regret anything I did that whole time. I'm glad the building is there. I still think the building is a little too big."

The project - originally referred to as the Entertainment and Sports Arena - was a venture involving NCSU, Raleigh and Wake County. It was completed for approximately $160 million. The primary occupants have been the State men's basketball team and the NHL's Carolina Hurricanes, who partnered with the original funding group.

Fetzer said he never opposed the building but was against the amount of public funding and that the cost of the arena - projected to be about $70 million - kept increasing.

"We were being lied to about the cost of that building," Fetzer said. "That whole thing was being run by Steve Stroud and Charlie Bryant."

Bryant was director of the NCSU Wolfpack Club athletic boosters group, and Stroud, a Triangle developer and real estate agent, was chairman of the building's planning commission. Both rejected Fetzer's comment about the process.

"No one was being misled about anything, to my knowledge," Bryant said Monday. "Everything we did was out in the open at every step, and we sure as heck tried our best to keep everyone up to speed on costs, because we had to raise the amount of money we were talking about."

Stroud had a similar view.

"Nothing was hidden. All of our meetings were open," Stroud said last week. "The original plans were for a basketball-only arena, and those costs were compiled by N.C. State. The building we have now is not even close to what it started as, and this arena has paid for itself in spades. It's still one of the best in the country after 10 years in operation."

Stroud said the RBC Center is the state's only public building of its type that actually pays taxes.

"By the end of this year, about $20 million in taxes will have been paid," he said. "The investment by the Hurricanes shouldn't be overlooked either. They've put in $45 million in cash. Two weeks after the building opened, the Staples Center in Los Angeles opened at a cost of more than $400 million, and the two buildings are almost identical."

Continuing commitment

Lee Fowler, who replaced Robinson as athletic director in September 2000, said he and current coach Sidney Lowe are "completely happy" with the facility. And while Fowler thinks the RBC Center will serve State's needs for another 20 or so years, he would like to see the attendance gap bridged between league and non-league games.

"But if you look across the country, lots of schools have significantly smaller turnouts for early-season games than those later in the season," Fowler said. "The crossover between basketball and football games is a factor, but fans are always going to be more interested in games played against conference rivals."

"Our season-ticket sales in the RBC would take up almost every seat in Reynolds. Plus at the RBC, we
can make room for more students to see games. We have 3,500 tickets for students every game there.

Fowler said State has committed to investing more than $6 million over 15 years in RBC improvements.

"Unlike a lot of big arenas, the RBC will age at a slow rate," Fowler said. "I think it's turned out to be a terrific bargain. To build something like it today would cost I don't even know how much. But it would be very, very expensive, I do know that."

Since the 1989-90 season, State teams have had only five winning seasons in ACC regular-season play, including a 15-33 combined league record under Lowe. The program last landed an NCAA berth in Sendek's final season. The Pack is 6-1 this season.

"Once State gets it going again, attendance will not be an issue," Robinson said. "There probably won't be enough seats then. Winning is the key to attendance. That'll always be the way to fill the seats."

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Chapman U. to try puppy therapy

A student group will bring 10 dogs to campus next week to help everyone relax during finals, just one of the things the school will do to help students de-stress.

By My-Thuan Tran

December 4, 2009

A Chapman University student group wanted to find a way to relieve stress during finals week, so it came up with an innovative approach: puppies.

On Wednesday, in the middle of "cram week," a bunch of puppies will be stationed outside the university library for students to pet and play with. The event, called "Furry Friends for Finals," is being organized by the university's Active Minds club, which promotes mental awareness.

"It has been proven that having a dog helps relieve stress, so we thought it would be a cute idea if we brought some furry friends on campus," said Jennifer Heinz, a sophomore and integrated educational studies major who helped organize the event.

Heinz said her poodle-and-Maltese mix, Bindi, helps her relax.

"I love my dog," she said. "Dogs are always so happy and want to play, and that helps make you happier."

Heinz said she's received comments from other students expressing excitement about the cuddly canines.

"You can automatically see on someone's face when something happy comes to them, and little dogs are a cute way of doing that," she said.

"It's a nice way to step back from reality and just be stress-free for a moment."

Active Minds will also have pamphlets and resources available on how students can reduce stress and take care of themselves during finals, said Megan Brown, the group's advisor and a counselor for Student Psychological Counseling Services.
"The puppies are to draw them in and give them something fun and relaxing that will help them de-stress, but it also provides them with resources to help them through finals as well," Brown said.

Many students miss the pets they left behind at home, she said.

"Research has shown that animals can reduce anxiety and stress," said Brown, who is also a licensed marriage and family therapist.

The pooches -- 10 Malteses, Yorkies, pugs and dachshunds -- will be provided by Puppies & Reptiles for Parties, a Torrance-based company.

The 6,000-student campus in Orange also offers other functions to help students with the stress of finals, including a "Midnight Breakfast" where pancakes, eggs and coffee are served by the chancellor and professors.

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On Deadline: Breaking news and must-read stories

Hungarian brothers living in cave set to inherit $7B

Air Force drops ban on tattoos on saluting arms

Dec 04, 2009

Some Virginia Tech officials notified families of massacre before notifying campus

11:18 AM

33 Comments

USA TODAY's Kevin Johnson has been reading the updated and amended official report issued by Virginia Gov. Tim Kaine on the 2007 shootings at Virginia Tech and sends us this report:

Administrative buildings began shutting down nearly 90 minutes before the first campus-wide alert about the April 2007 shootings that eventually left 32 students and teachers dead.

According to the report, two unidentified university officials notified their own family members of the first shootings more than an hour before the first alert was issued at 9:26 a.m., April 16.

Campus trash collection was even canceled 21 minutes before students and teachers were warned.

One of the two officials also alerted a colleague in Richmond more than 30 minutes before the campus-wide alert, but cautioned the colleague "to make sure (the information) doesn't get out" because the university had not yet made an official announcement.

The first warning came more than two hours after the first shootings and just 14 minutes before Seung Hui Cho continued the rampage in a classroom building where some students were shot at their desks in the most deadly campus shooting in U.S. history.

"What happened at Virginia Tech is by its very nature inexplicable, and we may never fully understand the tragic events that transpired that terrible day," Kaine said in a written statement Friday. "However, the Commonwealth has remained committed to providing as accurate a factual narrative as possible."

**Update at 2:32 p.m. ET:** Among the report's most prominent "new findings" is that student Emily Hilscher, the first victim in the rampage, survived for three hours after the shooting but her parents were not informed about the incident or where she had been taken for treatment until after her death.
Here's some key moments from the time line of the early moments of the shootings.

5:00 a.m. In Cho’s suite in Harper Hall (2:21), one of Cho’s suite mates notices Cho is awake and at his computer.

About 5:30 a.m. One of Cho’s other suite mates notices Cho clad in boxer shorts and a shirt brushing his teeth and applying acne cream. Cho returns from the bathroom, gets dressed, and leaves.

About 6:45 a.m. Cho is spotted by a student loitering in the foyer area of WAJ resident hall, between the exterior door and the locked interior door. He has access to the mailbox foyer, but not to the interior of the building.

7:02 a.m. Emily Hilscher enters WAJ, her dorm, after being dropped off by her boyfriend, Karl Thornhill. (The time is based on her swipe card record.)

About 7:15 a.m. Cho shoots Hilscher in her room (4040) where he also shoots Ryan Christopher Clark, an RA. Clark, it is thought, most likely came to investigate noises in Hilscher’s room, which is next door to his. Both of the victims’ wounds ultimately prove to be fatal. Cho exits the scene, leaving behind bloody footprints and shell casings.

7:20 a.m. The VTPD receives a call on their administrative telephone line advising that a female student in room 4040 of WAJ had possibly fallen from her loft bed. The caller was given this information by another WAJ resident near room 4040 who heard the noise.

7:24 a.m. The VTPD officer arrives at WAJ room 4040, finds two people shot inside the room, and immediately requests additional VTPD resources.

7:30 a.m. Additional VTPD officers begin arriving at room 4040. They secure the crime scene and in effect lock down the dormitory, with police inside and outside. Police start preliminary investigation...
7:35 a.m. Police on the scene at WAJ say they need a detective.

7:40 a.m. VTPD Chief Flinchum is notified by phone of the WAJ shootings. Chief Flinchum tries repeatedly to reach the Office of the Executive Vice President.

7:51 a.m. Chief Flinchum contacts the Blacksburg Police Department (BPD) and requests a BPD evidence technician and BPD detective to assist with the investigation.

7:57 a.m. Chief Flinchum finally gets through to the Virginia Tech Office of the Executive Vice President and notifies them of the shootings.

8:00 a.m. Classes begin. Chief Flinchum arrives at WAJ and finds VTPD and BPD detectives on the scene ...

About 8:00 a.m. The Virginia Tech Center for Professional and Continuing Education locks down on its own.

8:05 a.m. At least two Policy Group members notify their families of the shootings.

8:10 a.m. President Steger is notified by a secretary that there has been a shooting. He tells her to get Chief Flinchum on the phone.

8:25 a.m. The Police group convenes to plan how to notify students of the double shooting.

Police cancel bank deposit pickup

8:45 a.m. A Policy Group member e-mails a Richmond colleague saying one student is dead and another critically wounded. "Gunman on the loose," he says, adding "This is not releasable yet."

8:49 a.m. The same Policy Group member reminds his Richmond colleague, "just try to make sure it doesn’t get out."

8:50 a.m. First period classes end. The Policy Group begins composing a notice to the university about the shootings in WAJ. The
Associate Vice President for University Relations, Larry Hincker, is unable to send the message at first due to technical difficulties with the alert system.

8:52 a.m. Blacksburg public schools lock down until more information is available about the incident at Virginia Tech. School superintendent notifies school board of this by e-mail.

The Virginia Tech Government Affairs Director orders the university president's office to be locked.

9:00-9:15 a.m. Virginia Tech veterinary college locks down.

9:01 a.m. Cho mails a package from the Blacksburg post office to NBC News in New York that contains pictures of himself holding weapons, an 1,800-word rambling diatribe, and video clips in which he expresses rage, resentment, and a desire to get even with oppressors. He alludes to a coming massacre...

9:05 a.m. Classes begin for the second period in Norris Hall.

Virginia Tech trash pickup is canceled.

9:15 a.m. Both police ERTs are staged at the BPD in anticipation of executing search warrants or making an arrest.

9:15-9:30 a.m. Cho is seen outside and then inside Norris Hall, an engineering building, by several students. He is familiar with the building because one of his classes meets there...

9:24 a.m. A Montgomery County deputy sheriff initiates a traffic stop of Hilscher's boyfriend in his pickup truck off campus. He had heard there had been a shooting and was driving back to the campus...

A VTPD police captain joins the Policy Group as police liaison and provides updates
as information becomes available. He reports one gunman at large, possibly on foot.

**9:26 a.m.** Virginia Tech administration sends e-mail to campus staff, faculty, and students informing them of the dormitory shooting.

*(Posted by Doug Stanglin)*
December 6, 2009

OP-ED CONTRIBUTOR

Taking the Magic Out of College

By LAUREN EDELSON

Portland, Ore.

I DRINK in the tour guide’s every word as he shows my group around Middlebury College’s campus. He tells us about the school’s new science building and gives us the scoop on nearby ski mountains. Dreamily, I imagine my future self: a year older, strolling to class past this very same scene. I’m about to ask about science research opportunities when he points to a nearby field and mentions the sport students play there: a flightless version of J. K. Rowling’s Quidditch game — broomsticks and all.

Back when I was a junior, before I’d printed off an application or visited a campus, I had high expectations for the college application process. I’d soak up detailed descriptions of academic opportunity and campus life — and by the end of it, I’d know which college was right for me. Back then, I knew only of these institutions and their intimidating reputations, not what set each one apart from the rest. And I couldn’t wait to find out.

So I was surprised when many top colleges delivered the same pitch. It turns out, they’re all a little bit like Hogwarts — the school for witches and wizards in the “Harry Potter” books and movies. Or at least, that’s what the tour guides kept telling me.

During a Harvard information session, the admissions officer compared the intramural sports competitions there to the Hogwarts House Cup. The tour guide told me that I wouldn’t be able to see the university’s huge freshman dining hall as it was closed for the day, but to just imagine Hogwarts’s Great Hall in its place.

At Dartmouth, a tour guide ushered my group past a large, wood-paneled room filled with comfortable chairs and mentioned the Hogwarts feel it was known for. At another liberal arts college, I heard that students had voted to name four buildings on campus after the four houses in Hogwarts: Gryffindor, Ravenclaw, Hufflepuff and Slytherin. Several colleges let it be known that Emma Watson, the actress who plays Hermione Granger in the movies, had looked into them. I read, in Cornell’s fall 2009 quarterly magazine, that a college admissions counseling Web site had counted Cornell among the five American colleges that have the most in common with Hogwarts. Both institutions, you see, are conveniently located outside cities. The article ended: “Bring your wand and broomstick, just in case.”

I’m not the only one who has noticed this phenomenon. One friend told me about Boston College’s Hogwartsesque library, another of Colby’s “Harry Potter”-themed dinner party. And like me, my friends have no problem with college students across the country running around with broomsticks between their legs, trying to seize tennis balls stuffed into socks (each one dubbed a snitch) that dangle off the backs of track athletes dressed in yellow. Hey, college is all about experimentation, isn’t it?
In fact, most of us have grown up adoring Harry Potter and, through J. K. Rowling’s books, we’ve escaped many times into the world she created. But what I enjoy in fiction I don’t necessarily want to find in college. And, despite any wishes to the contrary, the real-life skills I hope to gain from college do not include magic.

What really matters to me as I prepare to make my decision? Well, I loved hearing about Williams College’s two-student classes called tutorials, and how Swarthmore lets students weigh in on almost every big decision made by its administration. I was really impressed by Middlebury’s student-driven campaign to save energy on campus. (For the sake of full disclosure, I just might be applying to some of these schools.) I care about diversity and need-blind financial aid — and, of course, the social life. But I don’t care about what percentage of the student body runs around on broomsticks.

Leaving home and beginning life in a new place is a nerve-racking experience, and nothing seems more reassuring than imagining that college will be the realization of a fantasy world I’ve been imagining since childhood. Obviously colleges have picked up on this. But they’re trying too hard. They’re selling the wrong thing. And my friends and I won’t be fooled. After all, Harry Potter is frozen in high school, and we’re growing up.

Lauren Edelson is a senior at the Catlin Gabel School.