ECU grad wins Bravo’s ‘Work of Art’

By Kelley Kirk
The Daily Reflector
Thursday, December 22, 2011

East Carolina University alumna Kymia Nawabi has 100,000 reasons to thank her sister Kathy. That’s how much money she won Wednesday night when she received the top prize for Bravo TV’s “Work of Art: The Next Great Artist.”

Kathy sent Nawabi, a multidisciplinary artist, an application for the show and told her that the deadline was the next morning. Nawabi stayed up all night filling out the questionnaire and was accepted as one of 14 contestants on the show’s second season which began Oct. 12.

Nawabi, 30, also will get a solo exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum of Art. The museum is housed in a 560,000 square-foot building and is one of the oldest and largest in the country.

Each week the show’s 14 contestants were given a challenge during which they had to create a piece of art within a specific time frame.
In the fourth episode, for example, the artists’ challenge was to make a companion piece to a child’s work. Nawabi’s work won that night.

She said that working with a young artist was no different than working with an adult.

She drew on her experience teaching young artists at the Ashcan Studio of Art in New York City and finds them to be a huge inspiration.

The show’s judges consistently rated Nawabi’s work among the best in the competition with the exception of episode seven, when she was in the bottom three. The artists had to utilize one car component from a Fiat 500 and transform it into a piece of art.

She said that the experience of being on the show gave her a chance to explore using different materials and scale and that she grew as an artist both conceptually and formally. While nerve wrecking, she loved being challenged and tested and found it invigorating.

Nawabi, who was raised in Durham, graduated from ECU in 2003 with a bachelor’s degree in fine arts. She earned a master’s degree in fine art with a concentration in painting and drawing from the University of Central Florida.
The NCAA cleared North Carolina receiver Dwight Jones to play in the Independence Bowl, Tar Heels coach Everett Withers said Wednesday.

North Carolina got word from the NCAA that Jones had been cleared before practice - the Tar Heels' final one here before they leave today for Shreveport, La., where they will play against Missouri on Monday.

North Carolina had declared Jones ineligible after he allowed his name and likeness to be used to promote a New Year's Eve birthday party in his honor at a club in Burlington, his hometown. By allowing his name and image to be used on a flier promoting the party, Jones had committed a secondary NCAA violation.

After the flier surfaced Monday on the popular sports website Deadspin.com, Withers and other North Carolina officials began talks with the NCAA about Jones' status. North Carolina announced on Tuesday that it had ruled Jones ineligible, and that it had applied with the NCAA for his reinstatement.

"It was very matter of fact," Withers said of the conversations with the NCAA. "But we felt like we could get something done pretty quick."

Jones, a senior, has been North Carolina's leading receiver for the past two seasons. Entering the Independence Bowl, he has caught 79 passes for 1,119 yards and 11 touchdowns.

Withers said he and his staff had started to plan to compete in the bowl without Jones.

"But thankfully we don't have to do that," Withers said. "... I'm very happy."

In a statement released by the university Tuesday, Jones apologized and said the party had been canceled.

"I apologize to my teammates, the coaching staff and the university for the poor decision I made to allow my likeness to be used in the promotion of a party given by a family member while still a part of the Carolina football team," Jones said in the statement.
UNC researchers hoping to cure rare genetic disorder

Researchers at the University of North Carolina Medical Center may be a step closer to finding a cure to a severe neurological disorder.

The disorder, called Angelman Syndrome, is considered by some to be part of the autism spectrum disorder.

It’s rare, occurring in one in 15,000 people, but causes severely impaired speech, intellectual disabilities and even sleep problems.

Dr. Ben Philpot, a neuroscience researcher, said there is a sunny side to the syndrome.

“They have this apparently happy disposition,” he said. “I like to think that they just find more humor in life.”

Caused by mutation in a single gene called UBE3A, Angelman Syndrome is inherited from the mother. Philpot says the disorder is tough to diagnose because the symptoms sometimes match up with other problems.

“They frequently have movement disorders,” he said. “Sometimes it’s been misdiagnosed in the past as cerebral palsy.”

Recently, Philpot and his colleagues found a way to awaken the dormant gene inherited from the father in genetically modified mice.

Using a drug often used to treat cancer, researchers were able to awaken the male gene. It’s a big development that could one day cure Angelman Syndrome altogether.

More testing will have to be done before researchers move to clinical trials in humans. Doctors will need to know how much of the drug they need to administer and how often they need to do it.

Researchers also want to make sure that turning on the dormant male gene actually changed the symptoms.

Reporter: Allen Mask, M.D.
Producer: Rick Armstrong
Web Editor: Derek Medlin
Can the public Ivies be saved?

By Daniel de Vise

Higher education leaders have dreamed up two big, radical ideas that could potentially rescue the nation’s top public universities from the brink of fiscal oblivion.

Mary Sue Coleman, president of the University of Michigan, thinks they probably won’t work.

First, a bit of context:

I spoke to her Tuesday about her open letter to President Obama, in which she thanks the president for calling an unusual White House meeting this month to discuss affordability in higher education — and she asks him to take the lead in the battle to keep her own university, and others, affordable.

“The onus is now on all of us — elected officials, university presidents, business leaders, philanthropists and parents — to collaborate on effective answers,” she wrote.

It seemed a polite way of saying that the onus is on him. Coleman wants the president to take a leadership role “in elevating the issue and stimulating the conversation” about keeping college affordable — especially public colleges, and particularly for the students who can least afford to attend.

“I think his voice, the president’s voice, will be extremely powerful,” she said.

Coleman envisions the Obama administration leading the states back from their steady retreat in subsidizing public higher education. She thinks it will might take the personal leadership of the president, along with business leaders and other voices, to persuade legislatures that “states shouldn’t abandon their public institutions, because public institutions bring rewards back to the state.”
Coleman is one of several influential college presidents who are taking a stand in defense of the nation’s great public universities as “drivers of social mobility in this country.”

Together, the top eight public universities (arguably, Berkeley, UCLA, Michigan, the University of Virginia, the University of North Carolina, the College of William and Mary, Georgia Tech and either UC San Diego or Davis) educate many times more students than the eight members of the Ivy League.

“The privates are wonderful, but they’re small,” Coleman said.

The top publics, she contends, play an outsize role in preparing the next generation of leaders — and in keeping the nation competitive with ambitious higher-education agendas in other parts of the world.

“The Asian universities, it’s going to take them a while, but they’re going to catch up,” she said.

But states spend, on average, about one-fifth less per public college student than they did a decade ago. That, in a nutshell, is the root of the funding crisis that is gripping public higher education. State subsidies used to rise from year to year, and in a fairly predictable fashion. Over the past decade or two, they have zigzagged up and down — mostly down.

The collapse of state support to the University of Michigan began earlier than the retrenchment in most other states, because of the decline of the auto industry and overall malaise in the local economy. UMich has coped with an orderly retreat in state subsidies, phasing in tuition increases and cutting administrative costs over several years. The University of California system, by contrast, “dropped off a cliff,” Coleman said, sustaining massive cuts in 2009 and 2010 and raising tuition by one-third in a single year.

Michigan once ranked among the top five states in higher education support. It has dropped to 38th, Coleman said.

“We’ve lost a billion dollars in funding for higher education over a decade,” she said. “We’re not going to get it back in a year.”

There are no quick fixes. But leaders of academia have proposed bigger, long-term changes that could fundamentally alter the way top public flagships are funded.

Here, then, are two of those Big Ideas, and why the president of this top public Ivy doesn’t believe either one can fly.

1. Federalize the flagships.
In a 2009 op-ed in the Post, Berkeley Chancellor Robert Birgeneau proposed a new, hybrid model of funding for the very top public universities.

He suggested that “a limited number of our great public research and teaching universities receive basic operating support from the federal government and their respective state governments.”

The idea was that the federal government would step in to stabilize eroding state support for the schools whose academic output is most vital to the nation’s future.

But Birgeneau’s plan focused only on the elite, and, perhaps inevitably, it came to be seen as elitist. What about all the other public universities, the ones whose overall reliance on state funding is far greater than Berkeley’s, or Michigan’s?

Federalization would certainly help Michigan. The university has absorbed “a 40 percent cut in state aid over a decade in real dollars,” said Philip Hanlon, Michigan’s provost.

The state appropriation has dwindled from 78 percent of Michigan’s budget in 1960 to 17 percent today.

UMich has raised tuition steadily to bridge the gap, and the university has found enough operational “efficiencies” to trim more than $200 million from its annual budget.

An infusion of federal dollars could rescue Michigan from further cuts. But Coleman thinks it’s politically unfeasible.

“If there were a way to get a serious discussion of this issue, count me in,” Coleman said. “I try to think, though, about how you would get that through the current Congress. And this is probably a nonstarter.”

2. Enact progressive tuition

The top private universities have adopted massive need-based aid programs that effectively charge tuition on a sliding scale according to each family’s ability to pay.

The same system is creeping into public universities. Michigan, Berkeley, the University of Virginia and their peers already charge double or triple tuition to out-of-state students and admit them in comparatively large numbers, using their wealth to subsidize the cost of educating everyone else.

All of those schools have enacted large tuition increases over the past decade. But typically, some large percentage of that tuition revenue is
recycled as need-based aid, and students from needy families pay minimal expenses to attend.

Presidents, faculty groups and others have proposed various ways of taking this progressive fee model further: allowing the top flagships to set higher tuition rates than other schools, and reinvesting ever larger sums into need-based aid.

At least one prominent public university, Miami University in Ohio, has attempted progressive tuition, setting one high rate for residents and non-residents alike and then awarding scholarships to state residents in proportion to their need.

It didn’t work. Miami University quietly reverted to a traditional structure of (lower) resident and (higher) nonresident tuition.

Tuition increases are not popular. Voters and lawmakers in Virginia, California and other states have protested double-digit tuition increases. Needless to say, state legislators might have a hard time lining up behind a proposal that would effectively double or triple the price tag of a public university.

“I don’t think politically, even though we have constitutional authority in Michigan, that I could charge $36,000 to the richest of students,” Coleman said. “There’s a political dimension here . . . You could make the case that it would be fair. But I think that’s a big stretch.”
Study Links Winning Football and Declining Grades

When a college football team is successful, students put down their books and pick up some beers.

At least, that is the case made by three University of Oregon economists whose study was released this week by the National Bureau of Economic Research.

In examining the grade-point averages of the Oregon student body and the performance of the Ducks’ football team, the researchers found a relationship between declining grades and success on the field.

“Our results support the concern that big-time sports are a threat to American higher education,” the paper’s authors — Jason M. Lindo, Isaac D. Swensen and Glen R. Waddell — wrote. They said their work was among the first to take a look at the “nonmonetary costs” of college sports.

Male students were more likely than female students to increase their alcohol consumption and celebrating and decrease studying when a team fared well, resulting in lower grade-point averages, according to the study.

Women also showed a decline in academic performance, though smaller than their male counterparts. For both sexes, the slack in studying and pop in partying was present only in fall quarters, aligning with the football season.

“The gender gap widens as the football team succeeds,” said Waddell, an associate professor.

“I teach these students,” he said. “And I know that on Thursdays there’s this subtle distraction in the classroom, and the game isn’t even until Saturday.”

The economists looked at Oregon undergraduate transcript data of 29,737 nonathlete students from 1999 through 2007. Over that period, the football team had a winning percentage that ranged from 45 to 92 percent and averaged 68 percent. (This season, the Ducks are 11-2 and bound for the Rose Bowl on Jan. 2.)

From the historical data, the researchers found the relationship between lower grade-point averages and wins for the football team. To try to learn
what was driving the findings, they conducted a survey of undergraduates who attended Oregon for two or more years.

Some 24 percent of male students said that the success of Oregon’s football team definitely or probably decreased the amount of time they spent studying for classes, compared with 9 percent for women. Both men and women reported that they were more likely to consume alcohol, skip class or party in the wake of a win compared with a loss.

Relative to female students, “we observe a decrease in male academic time investment and an increase in distracting or risky behaviors in response to increased athletic success,” the researchers wrote.

David Williford, a University of Oregon spokesman, said about the study: “I would like to try and understand the factors involved to coming to that conclusion. Statistics can prove anything. But that’s my personal opinion and not necessarily the university’s.”

Students at other universities may not be affected by the fortunes of the football team in the same way. Consider Akron: the football team went 3-9 in 2010 and 1-11 this year — while the student body’s G.P.A. declined as well.