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In his 12 years of teaching at Jacksonville High School, Nelson Hare said no student has compared to Isaac Morton.

That is why Hare was not surprised to learn Morton was one of four East Carolina University students to be accepted into the school’s inaugural dental program.

“Isaac is one of a kind,” said Hare, an anatomy, physiology and chemistry teacher at the high school. “He was always deliberate in his pursuit. He never wavered once and was always on task.”

The ECU School of Dental Medicine in Greenville is the nation’s youngest public dental school, starting its first class in August.

Given that only 20 students have been accepted out of more than 300 applicants, Morton, who graduated from JHS in 2007, said he is both excited and grateful — and maybe even a little relieved.

“My friends are telling me I look like a burden has been lifted off my shoulders — I walk different now,” he said. “I don’t know about that but I do know I have a lot less stress and am glad to have found out this early.”
His mother, Michelle Garrett, said her son worked very, very hard the last four years. “To be part of ECU’s inaugural class means that much more,” she said. “He has a lot to contribute to the school and is the kind of student they are looking for — he wants to do right by people and give back to the community. He has taken every opportunity ECU has given him and made the most of that.”

At 21, Morton, who is double majoring in biology and chemistry, already has an extensive resume that includes numerous academic scholarships. Carrying a 3.9 grade point average, he has been on the Chancellor’s list or Dean’s list every semester and remains involved in many activities at ECU.

As a federal member of AmeriCorps, whose members engage in direct service activities, Morton had done more than 900 hours of service work this year. Most of the time he volunteers at the Greenville Give to the Troops, which sends care packages and letters to deployed U.S. troops.

“By the time I finish college I will have over 2,000 hours of service work,” he said. He also works at N.C. Missions of Mercy Dental Clinic.

“This is something I look forward to doing and will continue to do even after I complete dental school,” he said. “Once a month we go to towns and do dental work for the underserved for free.”

Morton said all through high school knew he wanted to be in medicine. He said he would shadow doctors, dentists, chiropractors and others in the medical field whenever he could, and through those experiences he found out he enjoyed dentistry the most.

“I like science, art work, engineering and business; and with dentistry I get to do all those things,” he said.

He teaches biology through ECU’s Project HEART — High Expectations for At Risk Teens — aimed at reducing the dropout rate. He is involved in ECU’s student government association and is currently employed at the office of the student body attorney as a student advocate. He has also been involved in two academic research experiences — studying organic chemistry and genetics.

“I didn’t become a nerd until I came to college. At Jacksonville High School I played three sports,” he said, laughing. “I came to college and found out I was smarter than I thought I was.”

Morton, the vice president of member development of ECU’s Condo Board, is involved with ECU’s Delta Delta Sigma Honor Society and Alpha Epsilon Delta, a pro-health honor society at ECU. For the past two years, Morton said he has been working on a non-profit of his own he calls HopeLight.

“I want to bring general healthcare and dental care to Eastern North Carolina, mostly for the homeless,” he said.
When it comes to motivation, he said Hare was his biggest influence.

“When I need good advice or just someone to talk to, it’s definitely him,” he said. “When I’m on break or home he’ll meet me or take me to breakfast — he is the direct link to what I’m doing.”

During dress spirit week at JHS, Morton even dressed up as Hare.

“He said he always wanted to be like me,” Hare said, laughing. “I can’t emphasize enough how proud I am to have a graduate like Isaac, and I am proud to be a teacher of his and his mentor.
“I know he will do well.”

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East Carolina head football coach Ruffin McNeill speaks during a during news conference in Washington, Monday, Dec. 27, 2010, to promote the 2010 Military Bowl, presented by Northrop Grumman, to be played at RFK Stadium in Washington on December 29. (AP Photo/Susan Walsh)

**McNeill: Bowl appearance is 'first step’**

By Nathan Summers
The Daily Reflector
Wednesday, December 29, 2010

WASHINGTON — Today's Military Bowl marks the end of a long season for the East Carolina football team, but head coach Ruffin McNeill is just getting started.

The 6-6 Pirates will take on 8-4 Maryland today inside Washington, D.C.'s RFK Stadium, ECU's fifth consecutive bowl appearance.

McNeill became the first coach in ECU history to steer the team into the postseason in his first year with the team. While that's an important first, McNeill said continuing the Pirates' bowl trend was merely an opening statement in what he hopes will be a storied coaching tenure at his alma mater.

“It's the first step,” McNeill said while taking shelter from the bitter cold after practicing at Eastern High School on Monday morning. “The kids laid the blueprint, the seniors especially, in what we want to do year-in, year-out.

“We hope it's us always doing these interviews in the cold. If we ever do an interview like this and it's the last game (of the regular season), it's not a good year.”

McNeill took on the challenge of adopting a team that lost 29 players from a squad that won two straight Conference USA championships.

A win over the Terrapins today also would mean five straight winning seasons for the Pirates, but even without that, McNeill senses his players understand they've made valuable strides just to get invited to another bowl game.

“They recognize the work they've put in, but they also know that they had to go through some adversity this year, and I think there's always some satisfaction in that,” said
McNeill, whose Pirates will try to snap a two-game losing streak today to finish the season. “To be asked to go to a bowl game is a reward. Ask those teams that are not in a bowl right now. Being able to practice in the cold means we've done something that's a great accomplishment.”

Approaching the one-year anniversary of his return to ECU, the head coach and former Pirate defensive back said it was important to uphold the winning standard begun by former head coach Skip Holtz.

But he also stressed that winning seasons should now be the bare minimum every year at ECU.

“We were one of the first ones to go to a modern-day bowl back in 1978,” said McNeill, who as a player for coach Pat Dye was a part of the Pirates' victory over Louisiana Tech at the '78 Independence Bowl. “In this business, to be invited to a bowl game is very special, and for East Carolina to be a bowl participant for a fifth straight year is very special too.”

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A pair of dynamic duos
December 29, 2010

BY EDWARD G. ROBINSON III - Staff Writer
WASHINGTON -- Often over Chinese buffet, East Carolina quarterback Dominique Davis and wide receiver Dwayne Harris tried to talk about anything but football. Yet they are football players, and the subject flooded even their casual conversations.

Endless exchanges about assignments - placement of passes or route running - set the foundation for the most productive quarterback-receiver combination in ECU school history.

"Communication is key," said Harris, who with 93 catches set a school season receptions record and became Conference USA's most valuable player.

The Pirates are counting on Davis and Harris communicating and connecting today during the Military Bowl against Maryland at RFK Stadium, just as the Terrapins expect quarterback Danny O'Brien to find wideout Torrey Smith.

Over the past six games, the Maryland tandem has emerged as one of the most electrifying duos in college football. They torched N.C. State in their season finale for 224 yards and four touchdowns.

As the Pirates and Terps meet for the first time, they will draw on the playmaking abilities of these featured offensive weapons.

Here's a look at what these duos have accomplished this season and why they've been so effective:
**Pirates' pride**
The combination of Davis and Harris forced first-year offensive coordinator Lincoln Riley to stretch his imagination this season with the Pirates' spread passing system.

"We opened some things up," Riley said. "We did some things we hadn't done before. We found ways to take advantage of their strengths."

With three-step drops, Davis has run a quick-strike offense that relies on short and intermediate passes. The Pirates are ranked seventh in the nation in passing yards per game (319.3).

Davis, a 6-foot-3, 215-pound junior transfer, set school season records for attempts (552), completions (358), passing yards (3,699) and touchdown passes (36).
It was an extraordinary season for Davis, who after earning the starting job in the fall closed out the regular season as the nation's leading point producer, responsible for an average of 22.7 points per game. He was named Conference USA's newcomer of the year and leads the nation with 29.8 completions per game.

"He gets rid of it quickly," N.C. State defensive coordinator Mike Archer said.

He's put the football into tight windows, drilling it or lofting it with accuracy. Davis has been most effective on second down, completing 62.9 percent of his passes for 66 first downs and 14 touchdowns.

Harris enters today's contest with a catch in 43 consecutive games - a streak that is the second longest among Football Bowl Subdivision teams.

"He's a great route runner," Archer said of Harris. "He catches the ball in a crowd, and he's tough."

Davis has found the 6-0, 205-pound receiver for 1,055 yards and 10 touchdowns. Harris became the school's all-time career leader in receptions (260) and yards (2,933). While the only receiver in school history with 2,000 career yards, he could reach another plateau today by becoming the first 3,000-yard receiver.

The Pirates have used Harris across the line of scrimmage, from quarterback to running back to receiver.

"He's done about everything," Riley said. "He's smart, though, he can handle it."
Against North Carolina, Harris threw a touchdown pass. He's also been effective without the ball.

"He's a great blocker," N.C. State cornerback Brandon Bishop said. Still, his first job is to catch. Harris pulled in a 76-yard bomb from Davis against Central Florida but is just as comfortable going over the middle for his quarterback.
"Even though he gets me killed sometimes," Harris said. "It's cool. I'm willing to take those hits for him. ... I want to make him look good, and he wants to make me look good, it's natural feeling."

**Terps' threat**
Maryland's O'Brien and Smith combined to set a single-game school record with four touchdown passes against N.C. State in a 38-31 victory.

Over the past four games, the quarterback and receiver have teamed for 28 receptions, 450 yards and five touchdowns.

"They're both dynamic," ECU defensive coordinator Brian Mitchell said. "They're both playmakers."
O'Brien is only one of five freshmen to start in Maryland school history. He took over as signal-caller against Florida International on Sept. 25 and has excelled.

With patience, employing a five-step drop, the 6-3, 215-pound redshirt freshman has completed 179 of 315 attempts for 2,257 yards and 21 touchdowns. He's also scored a touchdown rushing and receiving.
He's 6-3 in his nine starts, owning a passing efficiency rating of 135.2 that is fourth-best in the ACC and fourth-best among all freshmen on FBS teams.

Using a combination of a multiple-receiver and a power running system, Maryland has distributed the football to 12 receivers for touchdowns. None of them, though, is as feared as the 6-1, 205-pound Smith.

"He's very strong," Archer said. "A lot of receivers aren't physical. ... When you try to jam him, he's going to push you. And he's going to get open."
The junior receiver has a team-leading 65 receptions for 1,045 yards and 12 TDs.
Those 12 touchdowns catches rank first in the ACC and top Maryland's season record list.

This season Maryland has produced 76 plays of 20 yards or longer - and scored 18 times on those plays.
Smith, while also known for his explosiveness as a return specialist, has contributed to those spirit-breaking plays, hauling in touchdown receptions of 60, 68, 71 and 80 yards this season.

He's averaging 16.1 yards per catch. One more touchdown reception today would move him into fifth place all-time on the ACC season list.
In his six wins as a starter this season, O'Brien has yet to throw an interception. He's found his man, often times it's Smith, open downfield.

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SYLVA, N.C. (AP) — Marching bands from two of North Carolina's public universities are hitting the road to perform in the Rose Parade on New Year's Day.

Hundreds of members of the Western Carolina University and North Carolina Central University marching bands were scheduled to leave Tuesday. The bands are among 22 from as far away as Japan to march in the annual, nationally telecast parade in Pasadena, Calif., on Saturday.

"I can't wait to see the faces on these kids when they turn down Colorado Boulevard" in Pasadena, Western Carolina athletic bands director Bob Buckner told the Asheville Citizen-Times.

The band from the university high in the Appalachian Mountains sought a Rose Parade invitation after winning the John Philip Sousa Foundation's 2009 Sudler Trophy, given yearly to the country's top college band.

Beyond traditional military and fight songs, Western Carolina's marching band performs rock and roll, hip-hop and even a little ska. The standard horns and drums are beefed up with an electric guitar and keyboards.

"It's very innovative," mellophone player Candice Boling said. "It's not like a traditional marching band."

N.C. Central's Marching Sound Machine is the first band from one of the state's historically black colleges to be invited to the Rose parade, The Herald-Sun of Durham reported.

Supporters of both schools had to raise vast sums of money to make participation possible at a time public universities are stretched by tight state budgets. Western Carolina band members sold sponsorships and ran fundraisers to collect the estimated $650,000 needed to send nearly 400 band members and staff to California.

"It's a hell of a lot of money," Buckner said.

Three tractor-trailers were needed to haul all of the band's equipment. NCCU anticipated it would cost $500,000 for the 250 band members to take part. Fundraising efforts included the donated use of two 18-wheelers, which a division of Wal-Mart is using to cart the band's instruments, equipment, luggage and uniforms from Durham to California and back.
Sometimes mood swings and fatigue aren't just a part of being pregnant. For some women, those symptoms can mask something more serious.

Up to half of pregnant women experience depressive symptoms, and about 13 percent develop antepartum depression, according to a researcher at East Carolina University who recently received a grant to study interventions that might help women through those emotions.

Early intervention is important because as much as 50 percent of women who suffer antepartum depression during their pregnancy also will have postpartum depression after delivery, said Elizabeth Jesse, an ECU associate professor of graduate nursing science and assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology in the Brody School of Medicine. Jesse, who also is a certified nurse midwife, received a nearly $641,000 grant from the National Institute of Mental Health to study the issue and run a program for low-income pregnant women at risk for depression.

For the project, she will collaborate with colleagues at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Vanderbilt University and the University of Virginia.

As part of the three-year grant, participating women in Pitt County will meet with a social worker and an assistant called a "resource mom" to identify and solve stress and emotional problems during their pregnancy to see if the interventions are beneficial. Jesse's program, dubbed Insight Plus, is intended to help the women reduce stress, set goals and improve self esteem.

"It is my theory that by decreasing risks and increasing resources these women will improve," Jesse said in a statement. "Should the Insight Plus program prove to be feasible and effective, it will be a model for delivering care by public health staff and lay helpers."

A review panel from the NIH said findings from Jesse's study would be relevant for public health beyond the site because "the intervention is integrated within rural prenatal clinics, including the local health department, where access to mental health resources for treating and preventing antepartum depression is limited," a press release stated. Read more at Pulse.Blogs.StarNewsOnline.com.
The state's budget crisis is real and immediate. Its needed remedies will inevitably have damaging effects on state services and programs, but those effects should be minimized to the extent possible.

The task of the governor and the General Assembly is to eliminate $3.5 billion to $4 billion in expenditures from a budget of about $19 billion, beginning July 1. The only available source of funds of that scale is state government payroll outlay.

To dismiss enough employees to reduce the salary outlay for 2011-12 by $4 billion would wreak havoc on services and programs on a scale that would take a decade or more to overcome, once the economy rebounds. There would be countless charges of unfairness in selecting employees to be dismissed. Some dismissals undoubtedly would be judicially challenged and thus could be made effective long after July 1. Other negative impacts are obvious.

I propose in the alternative that the governor order the reduction of all state employees' state salaries not constitutionally immune by a percentage sufficient to produce a total saving of $4 billion in 2011-12. No furloughs are intended; employees would be expected to maintain their current work schedules despite pay reductions.

That pay cut should be effective July 1 and should be continued, year by year, as long as necessary. The budget to be recommended by the governor to the General Assembly should embody that cut.

The governor should follow the 1929 example of Gov. O. Max Gardner and reduce her own salary by the same percentage as state employees generally. She should challenge the state officers whose salaries are constitutionally protected from reduction during term (Council of State members, all judges and members of the General Assembly) to follow her example.

These actions are preceded by several such across-the-board pay cuts of as much as one-third during the early 1930s.

That approach, in contrast to the suggested personnel dismissals, would have the effect of spreading the sacrifice evenly over the state workforce, while leaving programs and services less impaired than would wholesale dismissals. It would also be capable of adjustment, up or down, as financial circumstances might warrant in the future. And it could be terminated when the financial crisis passes, as it will.
There would be cries of pain from many of those affected and their advocates, no doubt. But they would be less poignant than the complaints that would come from thousands of dismissed state employees.

John L. Sanders
Chapel Hill
The writer is professor of public law and government, emeritus, at UNC-Chapel Hill. The length limit on letters was waived.
NCCU professor bids to lead Liberia

BY ERIC FERRERI - Staff Writer

DURHAM -- From afar, N.C. Central University Professor James Guseh has watched with gritted teeth as his native Liberia, rife with corruption, has become what he considers a largely lawless society.

Poorly educated and underemployed, Liberians are struggling to regain a footing seven years after a civil war ended. Half a world away, Guseh thinks he can help. So he's running for Liberian president.

"I'm deeply concerned about my country," Guseh said. "We really have little to show to the world. It's under-developed and impoverished. There's been no direction."

It might seem a long shot - a university professor in North Carolina seeking to head the West African nation. But Guseh insists he's not just looking for attention. First, he has a history in Liberian government, having spent seven years in the country's ministries of economics and justice. And he views the current president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, as ripe for a challenge. The problem, he says, is that no challenger so far has inspired voters.

"There seems to be no credible alternatives," said Guseh, who has taught public administration at NCCU for 13 years. "And that gives me a chance."

Guseh is taking a one-year leave of absence from NCCU starting Jan. 1. If all goes well in Liberia, he won't be coming back. He has already registered a political party and expects to start campaigning as soon as he returns to Liberia. The election is in October. The T-shirts have already been printed.

Credible or not, the field of challengers promises to be crowded. Several Liberians have declared their candidacy, including the popular George Weah, a former professional soccer player voted the world's best in 1995. Weah narrowly lost the last election, in 2005, in a runoff. Twenty-two candidates ran in that election.

The incumbent
Sirleaf, the incumbent, may prove tough to topple, said Stephen Smith, who covered Africa for the Reuters News Agency and European newspapers and is now a visiting
professor at Duke University. Sirleaf is well-spoken and popular and has a deep well of support in the United States, where she raises a lot of her campaign money, Smith said. And Guseh's credentials may work against him, Smith said.

Educated in the United States, Guseh held several economic posts in Liberia before coming to the United States to pursue an academic career. Guseh's time in Liberian government came during the rule of then-President Samuel Doe, who assumed power through a bloody coup in 1980 and held office until his assassination in 1990. Doe's is not a tenure many Liberians remember with fondness, Smith said.

"Anyone associated with Samuel Doe does not have a head start," he said. "It is definitely not an advantage."

Guseh wants to boost Liberia's literacy rate, which hovers around 55 percent, and employment rate, which is just about 15 percent, according to U.S. Department of State data. But the key issue, he insists, is corruption. Rid government of its corrupt mindset, he said, and improvements can trickle down. He promises a crackdown on bribery.

**Guseh's standing**

Guseh acknowledges he may have a name-recognition hurdle with younger Liberians. But the country is small, with about 4 million people wedged into a geographic area slightly larger than Ohio. Many older voters will remember him, and a smart campaign should help, he insists.

Guseh hasn't been a stranger since moving to the United States two decades ago. He returns often, and every summer since 2006 he has taken graduate students in his public administration class to Liberia for internship training.

By nature, Guseh is quiet and reserved, so a run at high political office might seem out of character, said Ron Penny, who chairs NCCU's department of public administration. But Guseh's passion for his native land has pushed him into it, Penny said.

"All the shaking hands, talking to people, talking to the press isn't natural for him," Penny said. "But he's willing to get outside his comfort zone."

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It could be a Zen koan: if everybody in the class gets an A, what does an A mean?

The answer: Not what it should, says Andrew Perrin, a sociologist at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. “An A should mean outstanding work; it should not be the default grade,” Mr. Perrin said. “If everyone gets an A for adequate completion of tasks, it cripples our ability to recognize exemplary scholarship.”

As part of the university’s long effort to clarify what grades really mean, Mr. Perrin now leads a committee that is working with the registrar on plans to add extra information — probably median grades, and perhaps more — to transcripts. In addition, they expect to post further statistics providing context online and give instructors data on how their grading compares with their colleagues’.

“It’s going to be modest and nowhere near enough to correct the problems,” Mr. Perrin said. “But it’s our judgment that it’s the best we can do now.”

With college grades creeping ever higher, a few universities have taken direct action against grade inflation. Most notably, Princeton adopted guidelines in 2004 providing that no more than 35 percent of undergraduate grades should be A’s, a policy that remains controversial on campus.

Others have taken a less direct approach, leaving instructors free to award whatever grades they like but expanding their transcripts to include information giving graduate schools and employers a fuller picture of what the grades mean.

Dartmouth transcripts include median grades, along with the number of courses in which the student exceeded, equaled or came in lower than those medians. Columbia transcripts show the percentage of students in the course who earned an A.

At Reed College, transcripts are accompanied by an explanatory card. Last year’s graduating class had an average G.P.A. of 3.20, it says, and only 10 percent of the class graduated with a G.P.A. of 3.67 or higher.

“We also tell them that in 26 years, only 10 students have graduated with a perfect 4.0 average — and three of them were transfers who didn’t get all those grades at Reed,” said Nora McLaughlin, the registrar at Reed. “We wanted to put the grades at Reed in context to be sure that graduate schools, particularly professional schools where G.P.A. is very much an important factor, understand how capable our students are.”

Especially in hard economic times, students worry that professors who are stingy with the A’s will leave them at a disadvantage in graduate school admissions and employment.
wonder, then, that many students visit Web sites like RateMyProfessors.com when registering, perhaps to help them avoid tough graders.

Cornell’s experience shows the impact — and the unintended consequences — that grading information can bring. In 1996, Cornell’s faculty adopted a “truth in grading” policy, and median grades were posted online starting in 1998. The policy called for median grades to be shown on transcripts as soon as student-records technology made that possible, but that did not happen until a full decade later.

And while the median grades were available only online, a study by three Cornell economists found a large increase in enrollment in courses with a median grade of A — further driving grade inflation.

“At least when the grades were only online, the main users of the information seemed to be students shopping around for easier classes,” said Talia Bar, one of the three economists.

Ms. Bar said there is no consensus on the right way to grade. “I might see a course of 200 people with a median grade of A as not right, but others might see it as good,” she said.

But at least in the realm of theory, there is widespread agreement that providing extra context on transcripts is a good thing. “It’s generally recognized that an A by itself is not very meaningful,” said Barmak Nassirian, associate executive director of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers. “Giving statistical context to assist recipients of a transcript in understanding the grades is definitely helpful.”

But as a practical matter, it is not so easy.

“It’s complicated, it’s controversial, and it runs into campus political opposition from all sorts of directions you might not anticipate,” Mr. Nassirian said, adding that transcripts with too much extra information can become unwieldy.

Studies of grade inflation have found that private universities generally give higher grades than public ones, and that humanities courses award higher grades than science and math classes.

Mr. Perrin’s concern with grading standards began 15 years ago, when he was a teaching assistant at the University of California, Berkeley. “I would grade papers, run the grades by the professor and then give them out, and long lines of students would appear outside my office to say I graded too hard,” Mr. Perrin said. Now, at North Carolina, Mr. Perrin is convinced that grading problems are pervasive.

“Anything that uses G.P.A is unfair, because a given student can be penalized or rewarded in grading just because of the mix of professors or the strength of the schedule,”
Mr. Perrin said. “Some instructors grade harder than others. Some courses are harder than others, and some departments are harder than others.”

The pending changes at North Carolina are the university’s latest effort to improve its grading system.

Since 1967, when the average G.P.A. was 2.49, grade inflation at the university has been well-documented. In 2000, the faculty council heard a proposal to adopt a target average G.P.A. of 2.6 to 2.7, but the idea was dropped. A few years later, the faculty narrowly voted down an ambitious proposal for an adjusted G.P.A., called the “Achievement Index,” that would reflect not only the students’ performance in their courses, but also the rigor of those courses.

At U.N.C., the average G.P.A was 3.21 in the fall of 2008, up from 2.99 in 1995. A’s have become the most frequent grade, and together, A’s and B’s accounted for 82 percent of the 2008 grades. Last spring, the faculty called for the creation of Mr. Perrin’s committee to help the registrar give context to undergraduate grades by providing statistics on what percentage of students got each letter grade, what percentage are majors in the department and what percentage are seniors, juniors, sophomores and freshmen.

“We seem to have a pretty good consensus here now,” said Holden Thorp, the chancellor. “What I like about this approach is that it allows faculty who have a certain philosophy of grading to stick with it, as long as they’re O.K. with having it be shown. If somebody gets an A in a class with a lot of A’s and that’s put out there, that’s good. If the chemists are willing to tell everybody that they grade harshly, that’s good too.”
Students in Poor Counties Get Creative Opportunities

By REEVE HAMILTON
Published: December 23, 2010

Next summer, when Cristina Vela goes to Michigan — the same long trip from the small South Texas border town of Hidalgo that she has made every year with her migrant family — it will not be to work in the fields. When an admissions officer from Michigan State University visited her high school earlier this month and saw Ms. Vela’s transcript, she was accepted on the spot.

Ms. Vela, the first in her family to go out of state to school, said she was not concerned about the academic challenges of college — she has been taking college courses since her sophomore year. By the time she graduates in the spring, she will have accumulated 30 college credit hours. Some of her classmates have double that.

Ms. Vela’s achievement is part of an initiative involving dual-credit courses that allows students to merge high school with college-level education to an unprecedented extent. Hidalgo’s school — once ranked among the worst performing in the state — is now one of the most successful.

An exceptional level of collaboration between local leaders in public and higher education has permeated Hidalgo for the last five years and is taking hold elsewhere in the Rio Grande Valley, which boasts some of the United States’ poorest counties, providing students with new opportunities.

In the 1980s, when Texas’ education-accountability systems were put into place, Hidalgo’s high school was ranked in the bottom 10 percent of the state’s schools in academic performance. The student population is 99 percent Hispanic, 89 percent of students are economically disadvantaged and 70 percent are considered “at risk” by the standards of the Texas Education Agency.

Today, Hidalgo students graduate at higher rates than the state average, and 98 percent — compared with 81 percent statewide — complete a recommended or distinguished curriculum as defined by the state. At most high schools in Texas, students are permitted to enroll in dual-credit courses only after they have entered their junior year. Even then, they can enroll in only up to two at a time.

But such limits do not exist at schools in the Early College High School Initiative, a national program started in 2002 by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The foundation’s idea was to finance small schools that, in partnership with local colleges, would provide an early introduction to the concept and rigor of higher education to up to 400 low-income high school students, 100 per grade.
In Texas, there are currently 49 such schools, financed jointly by the Communities Foundation of Texas and the Texas Education Agency.

But Hidalgo has taken that notion even further. Daniel P. King was the Hidalgo Independent School District superintendent in 2005 when the local early college effort began. Mr. King liked the idea but thought it could be improved.

“Early college high schools were already outside the box,” he said. “We wanted to go outside their box.”

Many of the early college high schools were on college campuses, which was limiting. Hidalgo’s public high school serves more than 800 students, and Mr. King was not interested in reaching only half of them. Instead, he proposed leveraging two grants to convert his entire school to the early college model. He created the first “early college district” in the country, according to Joel Vargas, a vice president at Jobs for the Future, the Boston-based organization that coordinates the nationwide initiative.

Hidalgo’s first partner was the University of Texas-Pan American, a four-year university in Edinburg, 15 miles to the north. Later, Hidalgo joined with South Texas College, a community college in nearby McAllen, and Texas State Technical College.

Robert Nelson, president of U.T.-Pan American, said a side effect of the collaboration had been a need to increase the rigor of his school’s college courses to account for students’ increased preparedness.

Similarly, middle schools have increased their standards to prepare students for early college high school. At Jaime Escalante Middle School in nearby Pharr, Maria Valencia, a sixth grader, recently chose St. Edward’s University in Austin as her top college pick.

Her next project is preparing to take the PSATs. The middle school is in the 32,000-student Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District, where Mr. King now serves as superintendent. He is trying to replicate the success of the Hidalgo model in a district 10 times the size, and he is quick to leverage any sources he can to reach as many students as possible.

When the Texas Legislature passed a bill in 2007 granting money for high school students up to age 26, Mr. King opened a new school for older high school dropouts in a matter of weeks. That school, the College, Career & Technology Academy, also collaborates with South Texas College as part of a districtwide strategy to steer students toward jobs that meet the region’s needs. Since opening, the academy has graduated more than 700 students who had previously given up on high school.

Shirley A. Reed, the president of South Texas College, believes the key to a successful partnership is leaders who are willing to get together and speak candidly. Luzelma Canales, the interim associated dean of community engagement and workforce
development at the college, believes there is a simple reason such collaborations have flourished, to such an exceptional extent, in the Rio Grande Valley: it is a community with something to prove.

“No one else is going to get away with saying, ‘You can’t find educated people in our region,’ ” Ms. Canales said. “Other people have this perception that if you live along the border region, you must not be really smart. If we don’t dismiss those myths, nobody else is going to.”

Of course, it is much easier to do when there is money available. “There is definitely a cost,” said Ed Blaha, superintendent of the Hidalgo school district and former principal of Hidalgo Early College High School, who now finds himself with tough decisions regarding his district’s future.

Hidalgo has cycled through the grant that initially established the early college high school, and the state is facing a budget deficit that could put education financing in a vise for every district.

Mr. King said he hoped legislators realized that whatever the cost of fully financing public education was, “it costs less than having a lot of dropouts.” Mr. Blaha said Hidalgo would work through tough budgetary times as necessary. “We’ve come this far,” he said. “We can’t go back.”

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For a generation, medical schools in the Caribbean have attracted thousands of American students to their tiny island havens by promising that during their third and fourth years, the students would get crucial training in United States hospitals, especially in New York State.

But in a fierce turf battle rooted in the growing pressures on the medical profession and academia, New York State’s 16 medical schools are attacking their foreign competitors. They have begun an aggressive campaign to persuade the State Board of Regents to make it harder, if not impossible, for foreign schools to use New York hospitals as extensions of their own campuses.

The changes, if approved, could put at least some of the Caribbean schools in jeopardy, their deans said, because their small islands lack the hospitals to provide the hands-on training that a doctor needs to be licensed in the United States.

The dispute also has far-reaching implications for medical education and the licensing of physicians across the country. More than 42,000 students apply to medical schools in the United States every year, and only about 18,600 matriculate, leaving some of those who are rejected to look to foreign schools. Graduates of foreign medical schools in the Caribbean and elsewhere constitute more than a quarter of the residents in United States hospitals.

With experts predicting a shortage of 90,000 doctors in the United States by 2020, the defenders of these schools say that they fill a need because their graduates are more likely than their American-trained peers to go into primary and family care, rather than into higher-paying specialties like surgery.
New York has been particularly affected by the influx because it trains more medical students and residents — fledgling doctors who have just graduated from medical school — than any other state. The New York medical school deans say that they want to expand their own enrollment to fill the looming shortage, but that their ability to do so is impeded by competition with the Caribbean schools for clinical training slots in New York hospitals.

Their argument is one that has been lobbed at Caribbean schools for decades: that those schools turn out poorly trained students who undercut the quality of training for their New York peers learning alongside them at the same hospitals.

And they complain that the biggest Caribbean schools, which are profit-making institutions, are essentially bribing New York hospitals by paying them millions of dollars to take their students. The American medical schools traditionally pay nothing, because hospitals like the prestige of being associated with universities.

“These are designed to be for-profit education mills to train students to pass the boards, which is all they need to get a license,” said Dr. Michael J. Reichgott, a professor at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in the Bronx.

Charles Modica, chancellor of St. George’s University in Grenada, whose first class started studying in 1977, making it one of the oldest in the Caribbean, said the New York deans were simply afraid of competition.

“It’s basically a situation where the New York State deans just can’t hold their noses high enough up in the air, and I think it’s disgraceful,” said Mr. Modica, who founded St. George’s after he was rejected from medical school and went on to law school. Most Americans had never heard of the school until 1983, when President Reagan sent troops into Grenada, partly, he said, to rescue St. George’s American students from unrest.

The debate is so fraught that officials of Ross University, on the island of Dominica, were at first reluctant to talk about it, fearing students would be scared away from offshore schools.

“If the domestic schools felt we were taking opportunities away from their students, if they can specifically tell us what location we were taking them away from — that question was never answered,” said Dr. Nancy Perri, Ross’s chief academic officer.

The New York schools want the state to adopt the position of the American Medical Association, that “the core clinical curriculum of a foreign medical school should be provided by that school and that U.S. hospitals should not provide substitute core clinical experience.”

Under their proposal, the foreign schools could send students to New York only for electives, in their fourth year, not for core training, in their third. Short of that, the domestic schools want to stop any more foreign schools from sending students to New York for long-term clinical training while the state studies how it approves the schools.
The foreign schools do not go through the same accreditation process as the United States schools. So the state has its own process for approving foreign schools, but the New York schools contend it is not as thorough as the national accreditation process, and it should be.

The Regents are struggling to compare the academic and professional performance of students from the domestic and foreign schools. The Government Accountability Office, a federal agency, tried to do so in a report aimed at determining whether the foreign schools should continue to qualify for federal loans.

The report, issued in June, found that on average, foreign-trained students lagged behind their American-trained peers in passing the medical licensing exams. But over the last decade, they had narrowed the gap, especially in the clinical knowledge portion of the exams, which 75 percent of foreign-educated Americans passed on the first try in 2008, up from 57 percent in 1998. For students in American and Canadian schools, which are subject to the same accreditation process, the rate was 94 percent in 2008, about the same as 10 years earlier.

The report found few differences in the rates of disciplinary actions or malpractice payments between physicians educated abroad and in the United States. A memorandum submitted to the Regents this month by Frank Muñoz, a deputy state education commissioner, suggested that the top Caribbean schools, like St. George’s, American University of the Caribbean and Ross, have been successful at establishing their academic merit.

“There is evidence,” Mr. Muñoz said, that the more mature Caribbean schools “admit students with very competitive backgrounds. It appears that many of these students were not granted admission to domestic schools because of the limited number of available seats.”

The New York schools say they now send about 4,400 of their students to New York hospitals for clinical training in their third and fourth years, and would need to expand that by 15 to 30 percent to help solve the doctor shortage.

Foreign schools send about 2,200 students, more than 90 percent of them from the Caribbean, according to the state. St. George’s alone sends about 1,000 students, many through a 10-year, $100 million contract with the New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation, which runs public hospitals. (A high-ranking St. George’s official, who also sat on the board of the city hospitals corporation, was fined for a conflict of interest for his role in soliciting clinical training slots for the school.)

City hospital officials have defended the contract with St. George’s as a way of getting students into hospitals in poor neighborhoods that have been shunned by New York schools. Once they have done their clinical training in those hospitals, the students often return as residents and then as full-fledged attending physicians, officials said.
But New York deans say the hospitals are taking too many students. “There are realistic limits to the number of students that can be placed in any one clinical environment and have a high-quality education take place,” said Dr. Lawrence G. Smith, dean of the Hofstra North Shore-LIJ School of Medicine, which will accept its first class of 40 students next fall.

The issue, which was reported this month in the Chronicle of Higher Education, is so charged that the city’s hospital trade group, the Greater New York Hospital Association, has declined to take a position. State officials say it is unclear just how many clinical trainees New York hospitals could reasonably accommodate, and they are surveying the hospitals to try to determine that.

Meanwhile, St. George’s continues to turn out doctors like Janine Reinhardt, 27, who grew up in Massapequa, N.Y., had a 3.97 grade-point average as a biology major at Cornell, but scored 27 on the MCAT. She said she probably needed a score of 30 to get into an American school.

Dr. Reinhardt graduated from St. George’s this year, and is now a resident in emergency medicine at Stony Brook University Medical Center, which was her first choice. She said her underdog status as a St. George’s student had made her work harder. “At St. George’s, we’re rejected from the U.S. schools and then we feel we have something to prove, as opposed to the sense of entitlement that some U.S. medical students might feel,” Dr. Reinhardt said.