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Hagan introduces rural doctors bill

By Josh Humphries
The Daily Reflector

Thursday, August 13, 2009

The Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University may get federal help to extend its mission of educating doctors for rural areas.


Studies show a shortage of doctors affects the health of people living in rural communities, according to Hagan’s office. She is a member of the Senate Rural Health Caucus, where the bill originated.

"Physician shortages are widespread across the country, but especially in rural and underserved areas," Hagan said in a news release. "Only about 10 percent of physicians practice in rural areas, yet nearly a quarter of the population lives in these areas. This bill addresses this crisis by creating a specific medical track for students interested in practicing medicine in rural communities."

The bill will support the Brody School of Medicine and the Area Health Education Centers in North Carolina, which attract students into the field of rural medicine.

"This bill will help provide them with added support to continue this critical mission," Hagan said.

Dr. Thomas Irons, associate vice chancellor for regional health services at the Brody School of Medicine, has been working with Hagan's office on the bill. He said it is tailor-made for the mission of ECU's Brody School.

"It honestly looks like we wrote it, and it's a great fit," he said.

"Here at ECU and University Health Systems, we have been working for a long period on these rural physician challenges, and we are very excited about this opportunity."

Increasing the number of doctors in rural, under-served areas is the main mission of the Brody School of Medicine. Irons said he thinks the bill will get support from both Democrats and Republicans in Congress.

"I really think it will get traction," he said. "It's hard for me to see why this bill wouldn't get supported."

The bill is now in committee and there is no timeline for when it might reach the Senate floor for a vote.

"This is a real opportunity as it goes to committee to advise her (Hagan) and her staff as to what possible modifications might be appropriate for the bill," Irons said.

The bill would give schools resources to recruit students from rural areas who have an interest in practicing medicine in their communities and provide for additional training in pediatrics, emergency medicine, obstetrics and behavioral health.

It would also assist students in obtaining placement in residency programs that will further their rural medical education.

"As Congress takes up the health care debate, we must make sure that rural communities are included," Udall said in a release.

"Access to a doctor is fundamental. And our bill would help recruit medical students who want to practice in rural areas and enable them to get the kind of specialized training they need to ensure rural patients get the best care possible."

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Nelms says he wouldn't have joined NCCU without policy.
Harry Lynch, Staff photo by Harry Lynch

UNC Board of Governors Chairwoman Hannah Gage and system President Erskine Bowles listen to the chancellors.
Harry Lynch, Staff photos by Harry Lynch
UNC chancellors defend leave policy

'We do need a cushion,' one says

BY ERIC FERRERI, Staff Writer

CHAPEL HILL - A policy that guarantees administrators a one-year leave at full pay when they step down from their posts is a critical recruitment tool, the chancellors of five of North Carolina's public universities said Thursday.

The group, which included UNC-Chapel Hill's Holden Thorp and N.C. Central University's Charlie Nelms, defended the 4-year-old "retreat rights" policy Thursday at a workshop for members of the UNC system's Board of Governors. Still, the board will consider scaling back in the coming months.

The policy is one of two under scrutiny for doling out paid leaves to administrators returning to teaching. In the past five years, taxpayers have paid about $8 million to 117 administrators who either returned to the faculty or left the university. In 24 cases, the payouts were for $100,000 or more.

A News & Observer review published Sunday found that these agreements, along with other transitional payments, offered sizable sums of money with few or no strings attached, in at least three cases violated UNC system policies.

Nelms was a vice president in the Indiana University system before coming to NCCU two years ago at a starting salary of $258,000. He would not have made the move had the UNC system policy not existed, he said. He wanted the assurance that he'd have a faculty post and a year off to prepare for it once his chancellorship concluded, he said.

"Had that not been an option, Erskine, I would not have accepted your invitation," Nelms said, eyeing his boss, UNC system President Erskine Bowles.

The policy allows a university president or chancellor retiring after at least five years of service a one-year "retreat" at full administrative pay.

He or she would then return to the faculty and earn 60 percent of that salary.
One comparison: If Nelms had stayed at Indiana and returned to the faculty there, his salary would have been 83 percent of his administrative pay, he noted.

Rosemary DePaolo, in her seventh year as chancellor at UNC-Wilmington, said the retreat rights policy, while difficult for those outside academia to digest, is a critical piece of the compensation package for people considering a leadership post at a public university. The jobs are stressful, and potential chancellors want to know they'll be taken care of, she said.

"We do need a cushion upon which to fall back, because falling back is all too likely," said DePaolo, who is the second longest-tenured chancellor in the UNC system, behind only John Bardo, Western Carolina's leader since 1995. "These are high-risk jobs with high turnover. You might not like them philosophically, but this is a business and we have to compete."

So did William Funk, a consultant who advises universities on executive searches. The UNC system policy, he said, was similar to those around the country. Funk was invited by UNC system leaders to speak at the Thursday workshop.

'Times have changed'

The universities have retreat rights policies in place to help administrators, who often haven't taught in several years, retool for the classroom. The policies are under review, in part because of recent publicity about such agreements at N.C. State University, but also because of a tight state budget. Legislators recently cut programs and raised taxes to close a revenue gap of more than $4 billion.

State Rep. Nelson Dollar, a Cary Republican, said the policy should be scrapped entirely.

"Nobody should be paid for work they are not doing," he said Thursday. "Especially when it's the taxpayers who are paying it."

Though created just four years ago, the policy was drafted with the university in a different mindset. Money flowed freely. Campuses were in the midst of a construction boom and enrollment was swelling. Now, with the economy in tatters, questions are arising about this use of taxpayer money.

"We are a public system, and we have begun to lose some of the public's confidence," said Hannah Gage, the board's chairwoman. "Our current policy was passed in a time of great prosperity. ... Times have changed."

Bowles is recommending the policy be scaled back to just six months of leave at commensurate faculty salary along with an agreement about work expectations during that time off. Under the current policy, former chancellors or presidents on this paid leave never have to report to a supervisor or produce any work.

"The package we offer today is slightly more generous than it needs to be," Bowles said. "I do not think it contains enough accountability."

Thorp, a tenured chemistry professor at UNC-CH who 13 months ago became chancellor there, said that while the retreat rights policy wasn't as much a factor in his decision to take that job as it was for some of his counterparts around the UNC system, it does provide him comfort.

"It's very important to me that I have the ability to be a faculty member again if y'all decide you want someone else to be chancellor at UNC-Chapel Hill," Thorp said.

The board will discuss the issue again next month.

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Barbara Thomas Stone "Bunnie"

Barbara T. Stone Mrs. Barbara "Bunnie" Thomas Stone, 72, died Tuesday, August 11, 2009, at Pitt County Memorial Hospital following a brief illness. A memorial service will be held at 2 p.m. Sunday at First Presbyterian Church. Interment of Ashes will be held at a later date at Greenlawn Cemetery in Spartanburg, S.C. She was born in Spartanburg, S.C. on Nov. 29, 1936, to Vonette and Elmore Thomas. Mrs. Stone graduated from Spartanburg High School and received a BA in Chemistry from Converse College. After moving to Greenville from Lawrence, Kan., she was a Research Technician in the Brody School of Medicine at ECU in the Department of Microbiology and Immunology and in the Genetics Division of the Department of Pediatrics. Having been an active member of First Presbyterian Church, she was a Deacon, Elder, member of Empty Nester Home Church, and very involved with the May Fest event. She was preceded in death by her husband, Dr. Henry O. Stone Jr.; and her sister, Claudia Thomas Lipscomb. Mrs. Stone is survived by her son, Michael and wife, Bonnie; brother, Bud Thomas; sister, Elizabeth McCants; three nieces; and four nephews. The family will receive friends following the memorial service at the church. In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to memorials may be made to: Henry O. Stone Jr. Memorial Scholarship Fund, ECU Medical Foundation, 525 Moye Blvd., Greenville, NC 27858, First Presbyterian Church, 1400 S. Elm Street, Greenville, NC 27858, and Humane Society of Eastern Carolina, 3520 Tupper Drive, Greenville, NC 27834.

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Textbook Publisher to Rent to College Students

By TAMAR LEWIN

In the rapidly evolving college textbook market, one of the nation’s largest textbook publishers, Cengage Learning, announced Thursday that it would start renting books to students this year, at 40 percent to 70 percent of the sale price.

Students who choose Cengage’s rental option will get immediate access to the first chapter of the book electronically, in e-book format, and will have a choice of shipping options for the printed book. When the rental term — 60, 90 or 130 days — is over, students can either return the textbook or buy it.

With the growing competition from online used-book sales, digital texts and new Internet textbook-rental businesses like Chegg and BookRenter, other publishers and college bookstores are also edging toward rentals.

Follett Higher Education Group, which manages more than 850 college bookstores, is starting a pilot rental program this fall at about a dozen stores, including those at the State University at Buffalo, Grand Rapids Community College in Michigan, and California State University at Sacramento. The stores will offer about 20 percent of their titles for rent, charging 42.5 percent of the purchase price.

With college textbooks often costing more than $100 apiece, students spend an average of $700 to $1,100 a year, representing one of their biggest expenses after tuition and room and board. Many students try to save by buying used books or ordering books from overseas, where they can often cost half the domestic price. Many students also resell textbooks at the end of the academic year, feeding the used-book market.

Besides giving students a new option, rentals give both publishers and textbook authors a way to continue earning money from their books after the first sale, something they do not get from the sale of used textbooks.

“Our authors will get royalties on second and third rentals, just as they would on a first sale,” said Ronald G. Dunn, president and chief executive of Cengage, formerly Thomson Learning. “There’s a tremendous amount of activity around rentals now, but we’re the first higher-education publisher to move in this direction.”

Cengage’s rental business will begin with several hundred titles this year, and then expand, Mr. Dunn said.

“The Internet has really changed everything in terms of our abilities to reach customers in different ways,” he said. “Our strategy has been to offer as many choices as we can, in terms of price points and different kinds of products. So if they choose not to buy the printed book, they can rent it, just as we already offer them the choice to buy an e-book, or a chapter.”

McGraw-Hill is taking a different route into rentals, through a partnership with Chegg, a fast-growing online textbook-rental business. Under an agreement that is to be announced soon, McGraw-Hill will supply 25 of its
books to Chegg, in return for a portion of the rental revenue.

Ed Stanford, the president of McGraw-Hill Higher Education, would not disclose what share of each Chegg rental his company would get.

“It’s an opportunity to explore a different model that we think has some real promise,” Mr. Stanford said. “We’re not a retailer of our textbooks, so we’re not trying to play the retail role. But we are also talking to large college bookstores who are interested in rentals as an option. It’s of great interest to us as a way that we could begin to share the revenues after the first sale.”

A few college bookstores have been offering rentals for years, and many more are moving in that direction.

“There’s a changing climate in the industry, with all the pressures on the costs of higher education,” said Elio Distaola, of Follett. “The reason we’re doing the rental pilot is just to see the viability of the program.”

Barnes & Noble College Booksellers, too, is starting a pilot rental program at three of its 624 college bookstores this fall.

“I think it could very well end up being a standard offering,” said Patrick Maloney, the executive vice president. “We’re renting books at 35 percent of the list price, and it’s only for hardcover texts, because paperbacks would get beaten up too fast. The schools assist us with collecting the books at the end, as they do with library books. The other option, taking the student’s credit card and billing it if the book wasn’t returned, didn’t seem very user-friendly.”

Mr. Maloney said the rental program would have been offered at more colleges and universities, if more faculty members had been willing to commit to using the same textbook for at least two years.

“We had a lot of discussions with schools, but in one case, they wanted to get 10 faculty members to sign on, and they couldn’t get any,” Mr. Maloney said.

Since a federal report four years ago found that textbook prices nearly tripled from 1986 to 2004 — rising an average of 6 percent a year, twice the inflation rate — Congress and state legislators have been working to contain textbook costs.

The Higher Education Opportunity Act, passed last year, included $10 million for grants to support textbook rental pilot programs; according to Charles Schmidt of the National Association of College Stores, more than 20 college bookstores have applied for grants.
Small cuts felt deeply by elders

Changes in the budget find winners and losers among the state's aged population.

BY THOMAS GOLDSMITH, Staff Writer

Raleigh retiree Dorothy Burchall said she was shocked to learn recently that state legislators had taken away a longstanding tuition benefit for people like her.

And what really bothered Burchall, 73, was that the relatively small perk for seniors -- costing about $300,000 annually -- bit the dust in the name of a balanced budget just as she learned about the millions paid to high-level University of North Carolina officials for leaves and final payouts.

The state budget passed last week cuts a 34-year-old program of tuition waivers for people over 65 at state universities, part of a larger package of spending cuts at UNC institutions. Burchall, 73, said the news that she'd have to pay $684 for an Italian language course at N.C. State meant that she decided to put the continuing education on hold.

"Several of my close friends are in the same position, and since all of us are unable or unwilling to pay this cost, we must forego something that has been a source of learning, enjoyment and social contact for many years," said Burchall, a retired nurse who has lived in Raleigh since 1970 and has taken classes at State for more than 15 years. "We are deeply disappointed that the legislature has found it necessary to take this step."

Cuts to this piece of the multibillion-dollar state budget came alongside several other provisions affecting older North Carolinians, resulting in losers and winners across the state. Budget changes range from a $100 million, two-year cut in state payments for in-home personal care for people who need help with daily activities to modest continuing support for the statewide Senior Games program.

But in a budget conceived in the depths of a major recession, some advocates said, North Carolina's seniors did not fare too badly.

"Generally, I think we dodged the bullet," said Joan Pellettier, director of the Triangle J Area Agency on Aging, an umbrella agency for senior issues in seven midstate counties. "Clearly, we are not keeping up with the growth in need, but I think everybody understands it was a bad year."

The popular Senior Games managed to preserve its funding for another two years, as did the Western North Carolina-based Project Care effort, which helps relatives of people with dementia catch an occasional bit of respite.

"It was a success and it was well supported," Dennis Streets, the director of the state Division of Aging and Adult Services, said of Project Care. "We were very glad to see the state support continue."
A breakdown of funding gains and losses for some key aging programs follows, starting with two big-picture programs that will sustain cuts:

- The $100 million cut in personal care help will affect some of the 50,000 low-income and disabled people who have been getting help with at least two essential daily activities, such as bathing or eating. The legislation sets stiffer guidelines for receiving such care.

Sen. Doug Berger, a Franklin County Democrat who was among the move’s supporters, noted that $200 million remains in the program and maintained that budget cutters were able to preserve hospice benefits because of the cuts.

- Payments to adult-care homes such as assisted-living centers got a $5.5 million, two-year reduction based on the rate the state Medicaid office pays for older and disabled people’s care. The budget takes back three-quarters of an increase that legislators had put in place in January.

"It's going to kill us," said Lou Wilson, an adult-care home industry lobbyist. "We already have quality problems and we are going to see them get worse."

A large state-federal program likely will maintain a status quo.

The roughly $60 million in local, state and federal funds that North Carolina counties spent last year on services such as Meals on Wheels and adult day care will likely remain about the same, with the aid of about $2.8 million in senior nutrition help from the federal recovery package. However, a statewide survey earlier this year showed that between 13,000 and 16,000 older people were on waiting lists for such services.

Two smaller programs won fights to keep their funding:

- Project Care will get $1 million over the next two years that will keep it running and preserve related federal funding. However, the respite care and information referral service will remain only in the 20 or so counties that have it now, not expand as advocates had hoped.

- The 60,000 or so older North Carolinians who stay active with the help of the Senior Games will continue to see state support to the tune of $175,000. Its statewide constituency and relatively low cost likely helped it remain in the budget after it had initially been listed as a possible cut.

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