THE DAILY CLIPS

January 20, 2012

News, commentary, and opinion
compiled by East Carolina University News Services:

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The New York Times
The Wall Street Journal
USA Today
The Charlotte Observer
The Fayetteville Observer
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Newsweek
U.S. News & World Report
Business Week
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Students, guest artists to jazz up the stage

East Carolina University’s School of Theatre and Dance has been known to keep the public on its toes with its yearly productions. But nothing does that quite as literally as the school’s perennial production of ballet, tap, jazz and modern dance.

The ECU/Loessin Playhouse will present Dance 2012 at 8 p.m. Thursday-Jan. 31, except Jan. 29 when the show will be at 2 p.m., at McGinnis Theatre on the East Carolina University campus. The performance can be described as eclectic, eccentric and electric. Graceful ballet, electrifying modern, percussive tap and jazz dance styles are all represented in choreography by East Carolina University dance faculty and special guest artists.

This year’s guest artist, Jennifer Archibald, is the founder and artistic director of Arch Dance Company. A graduate of the Alvin Ailey School, she is at the forefront of today’s generation of emerging dance artists and choreographers. She draws on a variety of techniques and styles including modern, hip-hop, jazz, Latin, west African, and reggae.

She has staged various musicals including “Bring in Da Noise/Bring in Da Funk,” “Cats,” “Carousel,” “The Music Man,” “Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat” and “Pippin” for professional theater companies. She has also choreographed for the NBA New York Knicks City Dancers, worked with numerous outreach projects within the New York City Public School system, and was hired by Tommy Hilfiger as a guest artist to teach inner city youth.

She has worked with singers Ludacris and Shaggy as well as actors such as Audrey Tautou, who starred in “The DaVinci Code” and “Amelie,” as a movement specialist and choreographer.

Archibald is a graduate of the Maggie Flannigan Acting Conservatory specializing in the Meisner technique. Currently on faculty at Steps on Broadway and Dance New Amsterdam, she teaches contemporary jazz and hip-hop. She is also a longtime faculty member at the Bates Dance Festival and Florida Dance Festival.
New York Voices to sing at ECU

By Kelley Kirk, The Daily Reflector

New York Voices has been wowing audiences all over the world for more than 20 years.

The quartet of Darmon Meader, Kim Nazarian, Lauren Kinhan and Peter Eldridge will take the stage at 8 p.m. today at East Carolina University’s Wright Auditorium. The concert is part of the S. Rudolph Alexander Performing Arts Series.

With jazz, Brazilian and pop influences, the concert will be a variety of musical styles including a few a cappella pieces.

“It will be a real mix of styles, but in the spirit of jazz harmony,” Eldridge said. He and his New York Voices co-members arrived in Greenville Wednesday.

“We’re going to do some workshops with East Carolina students,” Eldridge said.
Also prior to the one-night concert a “Dinner and Discussion” will be held at 6:30 p.m. today in the Erwin Building. The dinner is a three-course meal catered by Village Point Market. Following the dinner, Meader will talk about the evening performance. Shuttle service is provided to take attendees from the dinner to Wright Auditorium. The same shuttle will return patrons to the parking lot post-performance. Doors for dinner open at 6 p.m., remarks will be given at 7:20 p.m. and shuttle service is at 7:30 p.m. Cost is $16 per person and does not include the concert ticket. Advanced registration is required.

New York Voices formed in 1987 from an Ithaca College alumni group with Meader, Eldridge and Nazarian. Kinhan joined the group 20 years ago.

The musicians have their own projects outside New York Voices. Eldridge, for example, was a member of Four Brothers, a concept group with Kurt Elling, Jon Hendricks and Mark Murphy.

“After everybody does their thing it makes us individually stronger,” Eldridge said. “We’re able to mix it up a little bit more.”

They released their first, self-titled album on GRP Records in 1989. They won a Grammy Award for their 1996 collaboration with the Count Basie Orchestra, “Count Basie Orchestra with New York Voices Live at Manchester Craftsmen’s Guild.”

The group has released seven studio albums, all of which blend classical, pop, R&B, Brazilian and American jazz music.

Eldridge said that a new release of a live performance with the WDR Big Band from Cologne, Germany, is slated for release in the spring and that the group will be putting the finishing touches on a Christmas album this year for release before the next holiday season.
Study lauds role of early ed

BY JANE STANCILL - jstancill@newsobserver.com

Poor children who get high-quality day care as early as infancy reap long-lasting benefits, including a better chance at a college degree and steady employment, according to a UNC-Chapel Hill study that followed participants from birth to age 30.

The latest findings, published this week in the online journal Developmental Psychology, are from one of the longest-running child care studies in the United States.

Conducted by the Frank Porter Graham Development Institute at UNC, the research is widely cited in a body of evidence that early childhood education can change the trajectory of young lives.

The findings may be cited in a court battle looming over state-funded pre-kindergarten for low-income children. For months, Democratic Gov. Bev Perdue and Republican leaders in the legislature have been at odds over funding for preschool for 4-year-olds.

The UNC study, known as the Abecedarian Project, began in 1972 with 111 babies from low-income families who were randomly assigned to two groups.

Half were enrolled in quality early childhood education from infancy to kindergarten; the other half, the control group, received whatever care their families arranged.

Researchers have followed the children since then. Along the way, the child care group posted better scores on reading and math tests in school.

They were more likely to pursue education beyond high school and less likely to become teenage parents.

College and beyond

The latest data from the participants, at age 30, show that those who received early education were four times more likely to earn a college degree - 23 percent graduated from a four-year college, compared with 6 percent in the control group.
There is little question that such early education can improve the odds for poor children, said Frances Campbell, a senior scientist at the institute and lead author of the study.

"That's the take-home message, that you must not ignore the early years," she said, "because what you do to enhance a child's development when he is very, very young has very long-term implications."

The children in the early-education group also were more likely to have consistent employment and less likely to have used public assistance. Seventy-five percent had worked full time for at least 16 of the past 24 months, compared with 53 percent of the control group.

The results were not allrosy, though. Researchers saw no real difference in criminal activity between the two groups.

And while the educated children's incomes were slightly better, the income difference was not statistically significant.

The scientists previously had calculated that the Abecedarian program was estimated to have saved $2.50 for every dollar spent.

Campbell said early intervention is less expensive than remediation when children fail in school later.

"It's a complex problem," she said.

"I'm not denying that it's expensive, but I don't think you can invest your money any more wisely."

Craig Ramey, a co-author and professor at the Virginia Tech Carilion Research Institute, said in a statement that the findings are encouraging.

"I believe the pattern of results over the first 30 years of life provides a clearer than ever scientific understanding of how early childhood education can be an important contributor to academic achievement and social competence in adulthood," Ramey said.

"The next major challenge is to provide high-quality early childhood education to all the children who need it and who can benefit from it."

**Leandro & budget cuts**

That prospect is expensive and at the heart of a long-running lawsuit known as Leandro, in which poor counties sued the state and won the right for all children in the state to receive a sound basic education.
The Republican-authored budget made cuts to the state's pre-kindergarten program, formerly called More at Four.

The cuts led to court hearings last summer in the Leandro case. Superior Court Judge Howard Manning Jr. ruled that North Carolina cannot impose a cap that limits pre-K for low-income 4-year-olds.

In response, Senate leader Phil Berger called Manning's ruling "judicial activism of the worst kind" and said it would create a massive new welfare program in North Carolina.

The state is appealing the judge's order, and both the Leandro plaintiffs and the state have requested that the case bypass the Court of Appeals and go directly to the State Supreme Court.

Perdue, meanwhile, directed her administration to come up with a plan to comply with Manning's order, which could open up state-funded pre-K to many more children.

In 2010, 32,000 4-year-olds were enrolled in the program at a cost of $161 million, but twice that many children could have qualified as "at risk."

Although the state dispute surrounds a program just for 4-year-olds, the Abecedarian Project provided services from birth to kindergarten.

That encompassed day care for infants and toddlers and preschool for older children. The program aimed to develop age-appropriate language, as well as cognitive, social and motor skills.

Stancill: 919-829-4559

**The Abecedarian**

The Abecedarian Project is named for a Latin word that means "one who learns the rudiments." (Abecedarian is formed from the first four letters of the alphabet: A-B-C-D.)

The project has followed low-income students for decades. Half of the students received quality early education from infancy through kindergarten. A control group of students did not.

The child care group got better test scores in school and were more likely to graduate from college. Now, at 30, the child care group members are more likely to have been consistently employed than the control group.
Black students: Duke study shows deeper problems

By MARTHA WAGGONER

RALEIGH, N.C.–An unpublished study by Duke University researchers that says black students are more likely to switch to less difficult majors has upset some students, who say the research is emblematic of more entrenched racial problems.

The study, which opponents of affirmative action are using in a case they want the U.S. Supreme Court to consider, concludes black students match the GPA of whites over time partially because they switch to majors that require less study time and have less stringent grading standards. Opponents of affirmative action cite the study in a case they want the U.S. Supreme Court to consider.

About three dozen students held a silent protest Sunday outside a speech by black political strategist Donna Brazile that was part of the school's annual Martin Luther King Jr. observance. And members of the Black Student Alliance have met with the provost to express their unhappiness with the study and other issues on campus.

"I don't know what needs to happen to make Duke wake up," said Nana Asante, a senior psychology major and president of the Black Student Alliance.

The reaction from black students has surprised one of the researchers, who said he wanted to show the need to find ways to keep minorities in difficult majors such as the natural sciences, economics and engineering.

Peter Arcidiacono, an economics professor at Duke, wrote the paper in May 2011 along with a graduate student and Ken Spenner, a sociology professor. Spenner and Arcidiacono are white. It's been under review since June at the Journal of Public Economics.

The statistics would likely reflect trends at other schools, Arcidiacono said. The study notes that national science organizations have spent millions to increase the ranks of black science students.

"It's not just a Duke issue. It's a national issue," he said.

The researchers analyzed data from surveys of more than 1,500 Duke students before college and during the first, second and fourth college years.
Blacks and whites initially expressed a similar interest in tougher fields of study such as science and engineering, but 68 percent of blacks ultimately choose humanities and social science majors, compared with less than 55 percent of whites. The research found similar trends for legacy students - those whose parents are alumni.

The study's claim that majors such as natural sciences required more study time was based on students' responses to survey questions about how many hours they spent each week on studying and homework. The study found that those fields required 50 percent more study time than social sciences and humanities courses.

"I view the lack of (minority) representation in the sciences to be a problem, and I include my own field of economics," Arcidiacono said. "I'd like to see programs that are successful in increasing that representation."

Black students at Duke haven't taken that impression from the study, which came to light when the Chronicle of Higher Education wrote about it earlier this month. Affirmative action opponents cite the study in briefs involving a challenge of the undergraduate admissions policy at the University of Texas at Austin.

"What kind of image does this present not only of the academic undertakings of black students at Duke, but also of the merit and legitimacy of our degrees?" Asante asked. "And then, of course, it's calling into question ... the legitimacy of how we even got to Duke in the first place."

Duke, a private university, has about 6,500 undergraduate students, about 47 percent of them white and 10 percent black. The largest group of minorities is Asian-American at 21 percent. Duke has no set formula for admitting students, school spokesman Mike Schoenfeld said. Instead, the admissions process takes into account many factors, including race, ethnicity and legacy status. The school selects about 1,700 students each year from more than 31,000 applicants.

"The experience of black students, and indeed of all students, at Duke is of deep and ongoing interest to the university, and we take very seriously the issues that have been raised," Schoenfeld said.

The study is the latest issue to trouble black students at Duke, Asante said. She said administrators have not responded to questions about plans to renovate the Mary Lou Williams Center for Black Culture and have not given support for the black student group's recruitment weekend.
Schoenfeld said the Williams Center is a gem and officials are working with students to find a new, visible location for it. And he said the recruitment weekend is more important than ever because Duke received a record number of black student applications this year.

But a letter to the editor of the student newspaper, signed by the provost and other administrators, failed to address concerns about those issues and the racial climate, Asante said.

"In failing to do that, it reaffirmed its own ignorance in terms of the necessity of acknowledging, accepting and working to change that climate," Asante said.
Hard questions about hard courses

BY RICK MARTINEZ - Correspondent

After reading a provocative, yet-to-be-published study about race and achievement by a Duke economics professor, an economics grad student and a colleague in sociology, I was left pondering this question: Are affirmative action admission policies at our nation's universities inadvertently narrowing the employment pool for engineering, economics and natural sciences?

I say yes, based on the case made by Professor Peter Arcidiacono and grad student Esteban M. Aucejo (both in economics) and sociology Professor Kenneth I. Spenner in "What Happens After Enrollment? An Analysis of the Time Path of Racial Differences in GPA and Major Choice."

The study, based on analysis of Duke student data, found that minority students enter Duke academically behind their white counterparts but that much of the gap is erased by the fourth year. Terrific, until you get to the details. Much of the academic gain is achieved, the authors say, when minority students switch from academically rigorous majors to easier majors in the humanities and social sciences.

Arcidiacono, Aucejo and Spenner back up their claim about differences in degree difficulty with data showing that economics, engineering and natural science courses require more study and have little leeway when it comes to grading. Their research also showed that the SAT scores of science, engineering and economics majors were, on average, 50 points higher than those in the humanities and social sciences.

They found that as freshmen, black and white Duke students were equally likely to major in economics, engineering and natural science. But 54 percent of black male students who expressed an initial interest in these fields made the switch to humanities or social sciences, compared to less than 8 percent of white male students. For black females, 51 percent switched to the less rigorous fields of study while 33 percent of white women did so.

These findings could have more impact than being an interesting academic talking point. The study has been cited in an affirmative action challenge that's being appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. The court could decide as
soon as this week if it will hear the case, Fisher v. the University of Texas at Austin.

The authors write about a particular finding that could be used by affirmative action opponents. They cite a $1 billion effort by the National Science Foundation and a $675 million campaign by the National Institutes of Health to encourage more minorities in the sciences. But the Duke researchers conclude that affirmative action policies may negate these substantial governmental efforts.

They wrote: "Attempts to increase representation at elite universities through the use of affirmative action may come at a cost of perpetuating underrepresentation of blacks in the natural sciences and engineering. Namely, the difference in course difficulty and grading standards between the natural sciences, engineering, and economics and their humanities and social sciences counterparts naturally leads the least prepared students away from the sciences."

It is significant the authors refer to "least prepared students." Their reasoning tells me that if preferences were eliminated, minority students accepted by Duke would be academically better prepared to take on more challenging course work in economics, engineering and the natural sciences instead of finding refuge in the humanities and social sciences.

As expected, black Duke students and alumni are offended by the study, even though 68 percent of blacks at Duke choose humanities and social sciences as majors. I suggest the offended scholars and scholars in training replace their outrage with constructive questions for the study's authors.

Such as: is the problem with affirmative action or with Duke's application of the preference? Should Duke mentor all students who express interest in rigorous degree programs, instead of letting them migrate to less academically challenging fields?

What is not in dispute is that minority students must come to universities better prepared academically.

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Many factors figure in majors
BY WILLIAM WITTELS
DURHAM – Q: How does a humanities major say "hello"?
A: Would you like fries with that?

Humanities majors are often stereotyped as unskilled and unprepared for the job market, having spent their college years getting easy A's in sham classes. Now, according to a recently released, unpublished working paper by three Duke scholars, African-Americans are also more likely to become these burger-flippers because they are academically unprepared for the rigors of a major in the hard sciences.

The paper finds that 30 percent of first-year students at Duke who switch out of these "difficult" majors do so because of a weak academic background. The assumption is that students who get admitted to Duke because of affirmative action or legacy admissions - rather than academic preparedness - are more likely to flee the hard sciences because they are not cut out for tough majors.

These students make their first foray into physics or biochemistry, get overwhelmed by an onslaught of harshly graded tests and problem-sets, and then switch to majors such as English literature or sociology. Since high grades are much easier to come by in the humanities and social sciences, the authors conclude that the academic "catching-up" of affirmative action students is actually a product of their choosing easier majors.

Grades are a terrible way to measure the value of an education in the humanities and social sciences. They are an even worse way to judge affirmative action. But they do reveal fundamental flaws in the way elite universities structure their majors, and they point to some fundamental changes that ought to be made at Duke and elsewhere.

It is not my purpose to debate the wisdom of affirmative action. I am a firm believer in the importance and pursuit of a diverse campus and equal opportunity in education, but I am not well-versed in the official use of affirmative action in admissions at Duke or elsewhere.

(Asked if Duke has affirmative action in admissions, Michael Schoenfeld, vice president for public affairs and government relations, said that in
creating "a talented and diverse community ... we take into account a number of factors, among them race and ethnicity. There is no 'formula' for admission to Duke, and every one of the 31,000 applicants [is] reviewed individually to select an entering class of 1,700 students that is diverse in many different ways.")

Rather, as a humanist in a social science department, I feel obligated to offer a few considerations when interpreting these results:

1) The intro-level courses in the hard sciences are designed to weed out supposedly weak students, while those of the social sciences and humanities are not. The faculty who design majors in the hard sciences want to get rid of their weak freshmen. Some students, they would likely argue, are just not cut out for a major in biology or electrical engineering. It makes plenty of sense that students who are less prepared for college are more likely to leave majors in the hard sciences because it happens by design.

That kind of weeding does not occur in the humanities and social sciences, which should be applauded for trying to help all of their students succeed rather than pushing out those who struggle.

2) Students do not select majors only on the basis of difficulty. Seventy-percent of those reporting a switch in majors in their first year did so for reasons unrelated to the difficulty of the major. In the case of students who benefit from affirmative action, courses in the social sciences and humanities may speak to the experience of disadvantage and discrimination in a way that hard sciences cannot. Moreover, students who go to elite prep-schools often benefit from diverse curricula. Serious students who have been warehoused in failing schools, on the other hand, have likely spent their lives learning "to the test" and may relish the opportunity to study something that broadens the way they learn, as only the humanities and social sciences can do.

3) The humanities and social sciences are guilty of their own academic sins. They need to rein-in grade inflation. The faculty who structure their curricula are right to encourage all comers and challenge students as members of a community, not just as repositories for information, but are wrong to award merely average work with a B+. Doing so creates a culture of inflated expectations that benefits no one.

The university's mission is to challenge students on intellectual, social and moral levels. The hard sciences, on the one hand, and the humanities and social sciences, on the other, both strive to accomplish that mission, but fail
to do so because of the flaws in the way they structure their majors. Grades do not only reflect on students; they reflect on instructors as well.

*William Wittels is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Political Science at Duke.*
CHAPEL HILL—When news breaks of an NCAA investigation, it's hardly a surprise (at least to those who follow this sort of thing) to hear that a sports agent is somewhere in the mix. Though the names change and the settings move like the Angel of Death from one college town to another, the basic plot hardly varies.

Act One: Sports agent woos student-athlete with payments or perks.
Act Two: NCAA investigates. Agent makes hasty exit. Athlete goes pro.
Act Three: University remains behind to deal with fallout and sanctions

With recent outbreaks at South Carolina, Alabama, LSU, Georgia Tech, Florida and now UNC-Chapel Hill, two things are certain: the agent epidemic isn't abating and no university with premier players is immune.

Realistically speaking, there is no instant cure for this systemic affliction. But with a little vision there is a way to affordably and substantially reduce the threat. And with a little chutzpah, there's even a way for the state of North Carolina to turn its misfortune into a high-profile opportunity.

**Becoming a sports agent is relatively easy. Succeeding at it, on the other hand, is anything but.** The difficulty is finding, signing and keeping clients
in a viciously competitive marketplace overrun with agents and their emissaries.

According to ProSportsGroup.com, 25,000 people in the U.S. call themselves sports agents, of which 4,000 are certified by one or more professional players unions. Yet in any given year roughly 3,900 athletes compete in the big four moneymakers - namely the NFL, MLB, NHL and NBA. With an astounding 5:1 ratio of professed agents to pro athletes, it doesn't take an economist to conclude there are too many agents chasing too few prospective clients.

No doubt there are good law-abiding agents, but in this pressure-cooker environment plenty are willing to bend or break the rules to gain an edge. And they do it with little fear of punishment and no apparent concern for the repercussions.

Unfortunately, when agent misdeeds involve student-athletes, the universities are usually left holding the bag. For starters, the NCAA can impose a range of sanctions including fines, scholarships reductions, postseason disqualifications, win forfeitures and even program eliminations. And sanctions aren't even the worst of it, as one scandal can spoil the reputation of an entire institution.

It's not for lack of laws that rogue agents go unpunished. Forty states, including North Carolina, have adopted the Uniform Athletes Age Act that, among other things, gives states the right to both sue and prosecute bad agents. If aggressively investigated and pursued in all jurisdictions, the current epidemic would be checked. The problem is, these laws are rarely enforced in some states and inconsistently enforced in others.

Why? States are strapped for funds and being forced to make hard choices as to where and how to allocate resources. Understandably, there are bigger fish to fry.

Of course, deterrence works only if the deteree perceives a reasonable risk of being caught and held accountable. As currently funded and configured, the existing system and cast of stakeholders can't solve the problem: the NCAA has no jurisdiction over agents; professional players associations have no genuine interest in policing agent interactions with student-athletes; universities have little to gain and too much to lose by suing agents; and states (when acting autonomously) lack adequate financial resources to do the job.
There are solutions, however, and one that hasn't yet been floated doesn't depend on substantial or long-term public funding. Moreover, it even offers North Carolina an interesting economic development kicker.

The plan has three elements:

-- First, the lead state, presumably North Carolina, would solicit other resource-constrained states to join in forming a multi-state consortium to regulate sports agents. A good starting point might be states in the Atlantic Coast Conference footprint.

-- Second, consortium members would support the formation of a nonprofit entity similar to a mandatory state bar association, only its raison d'être would be the regulation of sports agents. Agents operating in any consortium member state would be required by law to be association members.

-- Third, the newly created association would assume responsibility for a range of activities, including those currently performed by state agencies such as agent registration, investigations and imposition of sanctions. Of course, consortium states would retain the right to pursue rogue agents on their own with civil actions or criminal charges if they so choose.

A multi-state consortium will have greater negotiating clout with professional leagues and players associations. This will be particularly important when pushing for cooperation on important matters such as enforcement of agent sanctions.

Also, the association should be self-sustaining and cover its own costs with dues paid by its membership. This would be impossible with a single-state approach but achievable with an expanded multi-state membership base.

With demonstrated success, the association could draw other cash-strapped states into the consortium and, eventually, become the pre-eminent voice and self-regulator of the sports agent business.

Logically, the state that grabs the lead stands to host the show. For North Carolina, it's also an opportunity to turn a bad situation into a nice lemonade.

David Magee is a business adviser and freelance writer who recently returned to North Carolina after seven years in Park City, Utah. He can be reached at david.magee@lucidpaladin.com.
U-Va. president brings real world into the classroom

By Jenna Johnson

CHARLOTTESVILLE — The syllabus calls the University of Virginia class the “Sociology of Work,” but it might as well have been called “Everything You Need to Know About the Real World That’s Not Usually Taught in College.”

For two weeks this month, 17 students gathered to discuss the jobs market, employable majors, standing out in an interview, building a social network outside of Facebook, navigating workplace politics and raising a family while working.

Many of them signed up for the class not knowing what to expect, and some admit that they were just looking to fulfill a class requirement before graduation. But they were all intrigued by the professor listed for the course: U-Va. President Teresa A. Sullivan.

“I figured it would be a good way to meet her,” said Priscilla Chong, 20, a fourth-year student from Lynchburg who is studying elementary education.
“I don’t even know what I expected. But when she came into class and started lecturing, I didn’t fall asleep.”

For four hours a day, class members gathered in Sullivan’s conference room with their laptops and coffee cups. As she introduced the class to her staff and folded personal stories into her lectures, the students got a rare window into how their university runs.

Although the demands of leading a university continue to grow, several presidents in the region still carve out time to teach. It seems almost gimmicky: The university’s top executive standing before a class of students, leading by example and learning from doing. Sullivan’s syllabus says the course “reflects my conviction that teaching and research are closely related.” But it’s also an opportunity to indulge in what got school officials into higher education in the first place.

Shenandoah University requires all of its senior administrators to teach. Catholic University President John Garvey, a former law school dean, teaches a constitutional law class twice a week. The University of Richmond’s Ed Ayers, an American history scholar, teaches a freshman course. St. Mary’s College of Maryland President Joseph Urgo, a Faulkner scholar, leads a weekly literary seminar. And each fall, Georgetown University President John J. DeGioia, who has a PhD in philosophy, teaches a freshman seminar about globalization.

“Last year was the first year that I hadn’t taught since I came into the academy,” said Sullivan, who became president in August 2010. “I missed it.”

One morning last week, the class discussed juggling work and family. Sullivan, who has a PhD in sociology, told them that when she was pregnant with her first child, she took her department chair out for lunch: “I said, ‘Bill, I’m pregnant.’ And he choked on his hamburger. I thought we would have to do the Heimlich,” Sullivan said, with a laugh. At the time, she was one of two women in her department, and no one was sure how to handle maternity leave.

That was decades ago, long before many of these students were born. So Sullivan had one of her senior assistants, Sean K. Jenkins, stop by the class and talk about his 1-year-old son, Coleman.

“So, tell us about how life with Coleman has changed life on the job,” Sullivan said.
Jenkins told the students about how he and his wife went into parenting having heard about “the joys and the magic of it.” They were surprised by their son’s exhausting feeding schedule, the stress of relatives wanting to visit too often and the fierce negotiation required to snag a quality nanny.

“The first few months of parenthood are very, very difficult,” he said. “When you hear that you don’t sleep, that means you don’t sleep at all. . . . It’s cruel and unusual punishment.”

It’s important for 20- and 30-somethings to think carefully about who they marry, Jenkins said, because they have to make joint decisions about their careers, child care and parenting. And it’s important to have an employer who values the responsibilities of both parents.

“It was a very simple conversation here. They said, ‘Take all the time you need,’ ” Jenkins said. When he returned, Sullivan’s chief of staff recommended that he take a day off each week until he fully got used to his new life. “It made a huge difference.”

Sullivan also walked the students through laws regarding maternity leave and how some companies now offer flexible scheduling and child care.

When the class broke for a three-hour break, Sullivan caught up on meetings and phone calls — including one to her husband, Douglas Laycock, a U-Va. law professor who had just learned that he won a case he had argued before the Supreme Court.

“It’s a big day on the home front,” she said.

In the afternoon, the class discussed how Google and other companies pose creative thinking problems in interviews, sexual harassment and building social networks that are diverse. There was a quiz, and Sullivan reminded them about dinner at her house on Friday, the last day of class.

“I can’t believe it,” she said. “I feel like I hardly know you guys. We just got started.”
Common App 4.0

By JACQUES STEINBERG

FOR the current crop of high school sophomores as well as those bobbing behind them in middle school, the technical process of applying to college using the Common Application is likely to be more streamlined (and less frustrating) than it was for their older brothers and sisters, to say nothing of their parents.

The Common App, the all-purpose form accepted by 456 colleges and universities, is getting a digital makeover, down to the most fundamental swatches of code, with the end result intended to be a smoother, faster, more intuitive application. (The application itself will still be a rigorous exercise, complete with 250- to 500-word essays.)

The new electronic form, now on the drawing board, is scheduled to make its debut in 2013. Estimated to cost $7 million to $8 million, the overhaul will replace a computer system put in place six years ago — in the days before iPhones and iPads, and when dial-up modems weren’t as outdated as rotary-dial phones.

“This isn’t going in and performing surgery,” Rob Killion, executive director of Common Application Inc., a nonprofit association, told me. “This is thanking the current system for its work, giving it a gold watch and sending it on its way.”

For applicants who have struggled with the quirks of the form — like when the short essay answers or key details are inadvertently cut off during submission — such changes may seem long overdue.

But the truth is that even the current Common App is a technological marvel, considering the strain put on it. In the application season beginning
to wind down this month, an estimated 750,000 students will have submitted three million online applications. That represents an increase of about 25 percent in only the last year. Meanwhile, teachers, counselors and school administrators are expected to submit 10 million transcripts, recommendations and other school forms through the Common Application’s electronic pipeline this year.

For that matter, it has only been in the last decade that most students began to apply to college by pushing the “send” button instead of walking their applications to the post office. The Common App itself — which made it possible, for the first time, for a student to type up one form and photocopy it for multiple submissions — is only 36 years old. But it has not kept up with lightning-fast changes in computing. For example, the application displays all the questions in a particular section on a student’s computer screen — as many as several dozen at some points — but only a fraction may be relevant to the student.

In Common App 4.0, as the forthcoming upgrade is known behind the scenes, one likely change is that only one question at a time (or at most a handful) will be visible, and the particular answers to each will determine which subsequent questions will be asked. “That is now best practice,” Mr. Killion said.

Another change being contemplated: within the application, students could pose a substantive question (opposed to a technical one, which is possible now) to a rotating team of college counselors — say, how to determine whether to check more than one box regarding ethnicity or race.

And then there’s the vexing issue known within the college application world as “truncation,” in which information that appears on the screen is cut off in the PDF an admissions officer will see. Now a box appears to warn applicants to preview their work before filing.

The quirk has also cropped up when students use too many words, or even letters, to describe a parental occupation or extracurricular activity. The current solution is to cut some words, or at least use shorter words. Mr. Killion assures that a more elegant remedy is at hand.

Acknowledging the millions of tablets now in use, a new incarnation might also make it easier for students to use their iPads.

While it’s possible to fill out basic information right now with the touch keyboard of an iPad, essays present a problem. The form requires files be
uploaded, which isn’t possible directly from an iPad. Determined tablet users can e-mail the file to themselves, and upload from their computer.

It would be far less cumbersome for iPad users if they could type in an essay directly or copy and paste it — the better also, Mr. Killion said, to enforce the 500-word limit. But the advisory board has yet to approve such a change.

For now, as Jeff Durso-Finley, director of college counseling at the Lawrenceville School in New Jersey, advises his students, avoid tablets. “I tell them go sit down and use your laptop,” he said. “It’s a lot smoother.”

And considering that no less than one’s education is at stake, Mr. Killion doubts students will be able to tap out essays on devices as small as their Android phones. But then as now, they can check the status of their application materials using their phones, and even add institutions to their list of where they want their application sent.

The number of applications filed through the Common Application portal by the end of this decade could exceed 10 million — and the number of schools accepting it could grow to 1,000 or more. That workload is well beyond what the latest Common Application is built to withstand.

“If we stick with the architecture of the current system through the end of the decade, with the growth we’re seeing, there would be delays during peak periods, for students and for our member colleges getting applications,” Mr. Killion said. “This will all soon be groaning if we don’t do something now.”

*Jacques Steinberg oversees The Choice. To post and read comments about the Common App, visit nytimes.com/thechoice.*
Program is her "rock": UCLA student Eileen Gnehm hugs Justin Zeigler. Gnehm is a former foster youth who attends UCLA and is in the Bruin Guardian Scholars program.

Programs help foster youth achieve college success

By Mary Beth Marklein, USA TODAY

LOS ANGELES – It's just another Friday meeting of UCLA's Bruin Guardian Scholars. Yet the hugs, laughter and cheerful chatter among the 40 or so students gathered in a drab study room on this rainy afternoon make it feel more like a family reunion.

They're not related by blood but they share a common bond: Everyone here has spent part of their youth in foster care. Which means everyone here has built a support system from scratch.

"It's why we all take the job of creating family and community seriously," says senior Eileen Gnehm, 33, an Afro-American studies major who calls the Bruin Guardian Scholars "my rock."

UCLA is one of a growing number of colleges and universities across the USA that are offering more services to students who grew up in foster care. The University of Alaska is piloting a program that provides academic and
social support for 18 students. Buena Vista University in Storm Lake, Iowa, this year is providing full scholarships, year-round housing and summer jobs to three foster care students and is seeking donors to support more. Colorado State University-Fort Collins recently sent gloves, cough drops and macaroni and cheese to 28 students as part of its Fostering Success program launched in 2010.

California, home to about a quarter of all foster care youth, is at the forefront of the trend. The first such program was founded in 1998 at California State University-Fullerton. Today, about 79 campuses offer a program for former foster care youth, up from 31 in 2008.

Spurring much of the recent activity is a 2008 federal law that makes it less costly for states to extend foster care beyond age 18. That's becoming increasingly critical because, even as the number of children in foster care has declined, the proportion who leave care without an adoptive family has increased, from 7.1% in 2001 to more than 11% in 2010.

Since the federal law passed, at least 18 states, including Oregon, Michigan and California, and the District of Columbia have enacted or strengthened state policies or are considering legislation to extend care up to age 21. Proposals are pending in several states.

Advocates hope the extended support will enable more foster care youth to complete college. Research shows that 70% of youth who are aging out of foster care plan to attend college — but between 3% and 11% complete a bachelor's degree, says data compiled by Casey Family Programs, a Seattle-based non-profit that focuses on foster care issues.

"When youth have their basic needs met like food, clothing and a stable living situation then they can focus on their education," says Amanda Metivier, coordinator of Facing Foster Youth in Alaska, a non-profit created by former foster youth. "They aren't making the transition out of care and starting college all at once."

On campus, support generally falls into two types. Some schools, including Cal State Fullerton, offer full scholarships, mentors and other support to a select group of students — 38 this year. Others, like UCLA's 3-year-old program, have created an office that connects former foster youth to existing resources, including each other.

Of 250 UCLA students who have identified themselves as former foster youth, about 50 participate regularly in events, says director Paolo Velasco, who helps students navigate campus bureaucracy. About 20 stayed in
campus dorms over the winter break. On this afternoon, Velasco updates students on a new enrollment benefit and breaks them into smaller groups, where they’re asked to swap advice on choosing courses that will count toward their major.

At one table, participants congratulate a new father — a first-year student who laments that his accounting exam was harder than he had expected. That leads to a discussion about "weed-out classes." Senior sociology major Ashley Williams, a co-founder of the Bruin Guardian Scholars, urges him to check out a lesser-known office on campus where students can access exams that professors have used in the past. It's the kind of tip an older sibling might pass along.

Their personal stories vary widely. Williams, conceived through rape, doesn't know her father. Her mother, a drug addict, physically and verbally abused both her and her twin brother. Kaleef Starks, 18, was in foster care at a young age, then bounced around between his mother, father and group homes.

"As a former foster youth, you have to remain strong … to have tough skin," Starks says. The UCLA program "has provided me with a community that I can always rely on."

A college education, they hope, will offer new opportunities.

"We are angry about our past, of what our families have done to us and the situation we came from, yet we are happy about our future and what we have become, through our difficult circumstances," says Williams, who plans to pursue a law career focusing on child advocacy. "We're actually angry, happy people walking around," she says.
The Choking Game: 1 in 7 College Students Has Tried It, Texas Study Finds

The potentially lethal Choking Game, which involves cutting off the blood supply to the brain, appears to be popular with some college students who think it's not as dangerous as using illicit drugs.

By Bonnie Rochman | @brochman |

College students aren’t necessarily renowned for their good judgment, and a new study reinforces that, finding that nearly one in seven co-eds has played the Choking Game, which is every bit as dangerous as it sounds.

Also called the Fainting Game, Pass Out, or Space Monkey, the Choking Game can be played individually or in groups. It consists of manually choking yourself or others, sticking a plastic bag over the head, tying a string around the neck or hyperventilating, all in search of a few seconds of euphoria.

Researchers at The Crime Victims’ Institute at Sam Houston State University surveyed 837 students at a Texas university and found that the behavior, which works by cutting off blood flow to the brain in order to induce a high, was frighteningly commonplace:
-- 16% of students said they’d played the game, and three-quarters more than once
-- On average, students first played the game at age 14
-- Males were more likely to have played than females
-- 90% of students who had played the game learned about it from friends, and most students said they first played in a group

Why in the world would kids engage in this potentially deadly behavior? In a word, curiosity. They may also not realize it has the potential to be just as deadly as illegal drugs. The good news is that learning that a number of teens and college students have suffocated to death from playing the Choking Game helped deter students from playing. Parents, talk to your kids. And schools can play a role too: related research found that 90% of parents think that including information about the dangers of the game in school health and drug prevention classes is a smart idea.

As the study notes:

“This ‘game,’ as it is often called, does not require obtaining any drugs or alcohol, is free, and can go undetected by many parents, teachers, physicians, and other authority figures. Most importantly, many of those who engage in this activity, do not understand that the practice can be just as deadly as the illegal substances youth have been warned against.”

Bonnie Rochman is a reporter at TIME. Find her on Twitter at @brochman. You can also continue the discussion on TIME’s Facebook page and on Twitter at @TIME.