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East Carolina University News Bureau
E-mail to durhamj@.ecu.edu  Web site at http://www.ecu.edu/news
252-328-6481 FAX: 252- 328-6300
BUDGET CUTS

ECU may lose 50 faculty positions

The General Assembly has proposed a 2 percent cut for the UNC system, and Gov. Beverly Perdue's budget calls for an additional 3.9 percent cut.

BY JOSH HUMPHRIES
The Daily Reflector

ECU spokesman John Durham said that the cuts will result in about 100 positions being eliminated, including 50 faculty jobs.

"So far we have been able to deal with the reductions largely by eliminating vacant positions," Durham said. "We are about out of vacant positions. The cuts that we have been taking have been more than 90 percent on the administrative side and we have picked all the low-hanging fruit so these cuts are going to get to the core of our mission."

ECU has faced state budget reductions of about $82 million since 2008. If the proposed budget is passed, it will bring that total to more than $90 million.

The UNC system accounts

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Cont'd.
Budget
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for 13 percent of the general fund appropriations from the state, but it has contributed 29 percent of the budget reversions imposed across state government this fiscal year, a total of $300 million across the system.

Philip Rogers, ECU's liaison to the General Assembly, said the proposed 5.9 percent cut will significantly affect the university's mission and damage its quality of instruction.

In a message on the university's website, Chancellor Steve Ballard echoes Rogers' sentiment.

"East Carolina cannot continue to bear a disproportionate share of the budget shortfall and at the same time maintain the academic quality of our institution," Ballard wrote. "If this happens, a major economic engine for the east will be permanently damaged."

Rogers said there is no way to avoid damage to the academic core at this point. The university has made significant administrative cuts, implemented cost-saving plans across the campus and cut many under-utilized programs.

"I think the bottom line is if budget cuts rise to the level that have been proposed, the UNC system, and especially ECU, will suffer significant damage to the quality of instruction that we can provide to our students," Rogers said.

State revenue projections are not positive, and Rogers believes this year will be a tougher financial year for the state than last year.

ECU's enrollment has increased at historic levels since the beginning of the economic downturn, and enrollment growth funding remains at the top of the list of state funding priorities, along with operating funds for the dental school opening in 2011 and funding for indigent care conducted through the health care programs administered by ECU.

The dental school will have to receive $11 million in recurring funding from the state this year in order to gain accreditation and open in the fall of 2011.

The only capital funding the university is requesting is about $15 million in planning funds for a new science and technology building on campus.

Contact Josh Humphries at jhumphries@reflector.com or (252) 329-9565.
East Carolina basketball coach Jeff Lebo believes he can return the team to the NCAA tournament.

ROBERT WILLET - rwillet@newsobserver.com
Former UNC guard has plan to revive Pirates basketball

BY ROBBI PICKERAL
STAFF WRITER

GREENVILLE

ew East Carolina basketball coach Jeff Lebo was eating lunch recently with one of his assistants when a longtime Tar Heels fan recognized him.

“He started to go into a game in 1987 when we lost to N.C. State, and I didn’t defend Vinny del Negro particularly well — and we ended up losing,” said a grinning Lebo, who played point guard for UNC from 1986-89. “He could remember everything.

“And that’s when I knew I was back in North Carolina — a state where basketball is important.”

Now he’s in a town where he hopes he can help make basketball important, too.

ECU’s long-suffering program — which ranks well below football and baseball in popularity for Pirates fans — hasn’t made the NCAA tournament since 1993. Its last winning record came in 1996-97, and the lack of success competing in the long ACC shadows cast in the state by Duke, UNC, N.C. State and Wake Forest has rubbed ECU athletic director Terry Holland the wrong way.

So the former Virginia coach turned to the 43-year-old Lebo, with his family ties to eastern North Carolina (his wife is from nearby Wil-

Jeff Lebo had a lot of success playing for Dean Smith at North Carolina in the 1980s.
1988 NEWS & OBSERVER FILE PHOTO

liamston, and his father-in-law played football for ECU) and his ACC roots as a four-year starter at

UNC, to spark a change.

Lebo’s six-year contract will pay him a reported $3.4 million, excluding performance incentives, according to The Associated Press.

The fact that Lebo was fired by Auburn in March after six seasons at the SEC school did not discourage Holland, who recalled how Lebo coached Tennessee Tech to back-to-back first-place finishes in the Ohio Valley Conference in 2000-01 and 2001-02, followed by two straight winning seasons at Chattanooga.

“He has proven he can turn programs around at other institutions,” said Holland, who made several recruiting trips to Carlisle, Pa., in his coaching days to watch Lebo play in high school.

Holland said he was even impressed by Lebo’s limited success with Auburn, which played early in his tenure under NCAA sanctions imposed for recruiting offenses by former coach Cliff Ellis’ staff. He compiled a modest 96-93 overall record there, but “to be able to win 24 games [on 2008-09] with where they came from — and all the problems they had with transfers and every-thing else — was truly a spectacular job of coaching and building a program,” Holland said.

“And I feel like he can do the same thing here.”

Lebo does, too, which is why he has spent his first weeks on the job

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in his car, juggling recruiting visits and the 18-hour round trip between his temporary campus apartment – which he shares with three assistant coaches – and his house in Alabama.

(His wife and three kids won’t move to Greenville until the school year ends in June.)

Sitting in his freshly painted office earlier this week, Lebo said he believes the passion that ECU fans have for their football and baseball teams can carry over easily to basketball – if he puts a team on the floor worthy of that passion.

One key, to that end, he said: bringing the Dean Smith-inspired “play hard, play smart, play together” mantra to Minges Coliseum, with his own twist.

“That philosophy will stay there, but how you do it and how you play, you’ve got to change to fit your personnel. I’m still learning about my team right now,” he said. “... But no matter our style right away – whether we can shoot 3-pointers, run, those sorts of things – the philosophy of how we play, we want to get across right away. We want accountability, dependability, reliability ... and we build off that.”

Another key could be the $4.5 million that Holland said ECU has already raised for a new basketball practice facility. The new building will be key, Lebo said, “just from the standpoint of getting better, your players, having access to a place all the time – and also from the recruiting standpoint. It shows the great commitment here to basketball.”

Lebo said it might not happen right away, but eventually, he would like his Pirates to be known as a fast-paced team that can score in the 80s and play multiple defenses.

In a state already known for basketball, he wants his new university to be known for basketball, too.

“There have been quite a few Tar Heel fans that I’ve run into already,” he said. “We’re going to work on getting some of those people over here to support the Pirates.”
ECU's Lebo ready for challenge

The former Auburn coach takes over a program that hasn't had a winning record since the 1996-97 season.

BY TONY CASTLEBERRY
The Daily Reflector

Greenville isn't quite home to Jeff Lebo yet, but East Carolina's men's basketball coach is getting closer to making it so with each passing day.

Lebo has been splitting time between Pitt County and Alabama since being named ECU's coach on March 23. The former Auburn coach and North Carolina player said in an interview on Wednesday that he and his family likely won't be permanently settled in Greenville until after his three children — daughters Addison

See LEBO, B3

ECU MEN'S BASKETBALL COACH JEFF LEBO speaks during an interview in his office in the Ward Sports Medicine Building on campus Wednesday.
LEBO

Continued from B1

and Mills and son Creigh-ton — finish the school
year, likely sometime this
summer.

But the work of trying
to turn the Pirates into
winners on the basketball
court has been under way
since Lebo took over for
Mack McCarthy and the
new coach said he's excited
about the challenges that
lie ahead.

"I'm as happy as I can
be," said Lebo, who was
fired by Auburn on March
12. "This has worked out
just tremendous for me.
I'm so excited to be back
(in N.C.)."

"There's challenges ev-
everywhere (and) this one is
no different from any of
the other places I've been."

That may prove to be
true, but leading ECU to
success will likely be Lebo's
biggest test thus far as a
program-turning coach.
The Pirates have not pro-
duced a winning record
since the 1996-97 season,
and haven't finished .500
since Bill Herrion's club
gew 14-14 in 2000-01.

McCarthy, who stepped
down from his head coach-
ing position on March 6 to
take a fundraising job with
ECU, went 10-21 last sea-
son, a campaign further
marred by off-court trou-
bles for a couple of players.

The losses, along with
Chris Turner getting
kicked off the team for
poor grades and Darrius
Morrow's arrest for mari-
juana possession during
the season, helped lead to
McCarthy's resignation
and leaves ECU fans again
wondering if the Pirates
can be successful on the
hardwood.

That anticipation has
Lebo licking his chops
about the prospect of
taking East Carolina to
heights it's only dreamed
of for quite some time.

"I think the (fans), in
talking to them, I mean,
they're waiting to erupt,"
Lebo, who signed a six-
year, $3.375-million con-
tract with the Pirates, said.
"It's like a volcano. It's bub-
bling, and if it ever can get
over the top of the edges
here, it'll just overflow
with excitement.

"If we can ever get it
going, they will come,
and they will come out in
droves."

Lebo said he expects all
10 of ECU's returners who
are on scholarship to be
back next season, which he
admitted is rare following
a coaching change.

One of the three schol-
arships available for the
Pirates has been taken by
former J.H. Rose stand-
out Tony Smith, a 6-foot-
5 guard who spent two
seasons at Seward County
(Kan.) Community Col-
lege before signing with
ECU in late April. Lebo
said he and his assistants
will spend most of July on
the road recruiting to fill
the other two vacancies.

For now, getting his
message across to East
Carolina's players is job
one.

"When you come into
these situations, I think
that, one, you want the kids
to buy into what you're do-
ing," Lebo said. "We want
them to buy into not only
the stuff that we're going to
do on the court but ... off
the court as well. We think
about the total program,
not just the athletic part.

"Those things don't just
tie into practice or weight-
lifting, they tie into every
part of their life. Once we
can establish a work habit
and trust in each other,
then the kids have to get
some confidence. I think
one thing that they prob-
ably lack a little bit is the
winning feeling, that they
can do it consistently."

Contact Tony Castleber-
ry at tcastleberry@reflector.
com or (252) 329-9591.
ECU gears up for graduation

The Daily Reflector

Thursday, May 6, 2010

About 3,400 East Carolina students are expected to graduate this week in ceremonies Friday and Saturday. Erskine Bowles, president of the University of North Carolina system, will be the featured speaker at the 101st spring commencement at 10 a.m. Friday at Dowdy Ficklen Stadium.

A band concert will begin at 9:30 a.m. on the field and participants in the ceremony are expected to be in place by 9:30 as well. The university also will award an honorary doctor of letters degree to Dorothy Spruill Radford, the retired director of the Somerset Place State Historic Site in Creswell.

Bowles, who announced in February that he will retire at the end of this year or when his successor is chosen, became the leader of the UNC system on Jan. 1, 2006. He is known for his non-stop work ethic, and is widely applauded for bringing increased focus and efficiency to the system.

He was a White House chief of staff in the Clinton administration, and he has been selected by President Obama to co-chair a bi-partisan National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform charged with proposing long-term strategies for reducing the federal budget deficit and restoring the nation’s fiscal health.

In addition to the university-wide ceremony, many colleges, schools and departments will hold recognition ceremonies on May 8 and 9. Guidelines for students and guests and more information is available at www.ecu.edu/commencement. Here is a list of the departmental ceremonies:

FRIDAY

Minges Coliseum
2 p.m. College of Education
5 p.m. College of Business
8 p.m. Allied Health

Wright Auditorium
2 p.m. School of Communication
5 p.m. Biology
8 p.m. College of Nursing

Hendrix
2 p.m. English
5 p.m. Political Science
8 p.m. Economics

Fletcher
2 p.m. Sociology
5 p.m. Geography

Mendenhall Great Rooms
2 p.m. History

Howell Science B103
3 p.m. Physics

Willis Building
1:30 p.m. International Studies

McGinnis Theater
3 p.m. School of Theatre and Dance

SATURDAY

Minges Coliseum
9 a.m. Human Ecology
12 noon Health and Human Performance
3 p.m. College of Technology and Computer Science

Wright Auditorium
9 a.m. Psychology
12 noon Brody

Hendrix Theater
9 a.m. School of Art & Design
12 noon College of Music

Login or register to post comments

COMMENTS
Violations pile up for UNC facility

BY MARK SCHULTZ
STAFF WRITER

CHAPEL HILL — State regulators have issued UNC-Chapel Hill a third violation notice over its animal research facility in rural Orange County.

The April 28 notice cites the university for filling in part of a wetland on the property.

It also cites the university for laying an irrigation line and riprap in a stream without state approval and for including wetland in an area where treated wastewater is sprayed.

In an e-mail message to neighbors, Dwayne Pinkney, assistant to the chancellor for state and local relations, said UNC-Ch discovered the problems during current work at the site and reported them to the state. The problems appear to be related to construction there in 2008.

"The University was already working on a plan for amelioration before the [notice of violation] arrived," he said.

The Bingham Facility on Clover Garden Church Road in Bingham Township has been housing about 85 dogs used in medical research.

UNC-Ch recently won $14.5 million in federal stimulus money for two new buildings to house dogs and hogs for the study of hemophilia, heart disease and muscular dystrophy. The university plans to find $5 million to $8 million to complete a third building for research.

But the site has had multiple problems in its wastewater treatment system, which is shut down as the university seeks a lasting fix.

A March 3 notice of violation came after broken pipes spilled 1,800 gallons of treated wastewater onto the ground in late February.

It followed a notice and possible fine for a December spill of an unknown amount of treated wastewater into Collins Creek, a tributary to the Haw River and Jordan Lake. In that case, the wastewater leaked from a holding pond, where treated wastewater was stored before being sprayed onto fields.

Pinkney said he doesn't know if UNC-Ch will have to pay a fine for the December spill.

Efforts to reach officials at the state Division of Water Quality on Wednesday were unsuccessful.

The wetlands violations are subject to a possible $25,000 fine per day for each violation.

mark.schultz@newsobserver.com
or 919-932-2003
The teens and the veil

RALEIGH -- In a room at the Islamic Association of Raleigh, teenage Muslim girls sitting around a table rattle off the questions they field daily about their religious head covering:

"Are you bald?"

"It's like a hundred degrees out. Aren't you hot?"

"Do you wear it when you're sleeping?"

"Do you wear it in the shower?"

"Is that a towel on your head?"

"Do you have cancer?"

Fellow teens can be insensitive, even cruel. So when two Duke University undergraduates studying Islam asked Muslim girls what they wanted to talk about, they were more than eager to clear up misconceptions about the veil.

"It's a big part of their life, and they don't get a chance to share it," said Betsy Bourassa, a junior at Duke who spent several weekends interviewing the teens, shopping for clothes with them and videotaping them participating in sporting events.

Fifteen Duke students - all members of an "Islam and the Media" class - produced eight multimedia projects about the life of teens active at the Islamic Association of Raleigh. The idea was to investigate how others saw the Muslim teens and how they viewed themselves.

While some of the projects focused on teen boys, the appeal of rap music and their views on traveling abroad, Bourassa and senior Stephanie Shyu dealt with how teenage girls negotiated their religious leaders' recommendation that they cover their hair and dress modestly.

The holy book, the Quran, requires women to "guard their modesty," but just what that means has been interpreted differently in various Muslim societies. In Saudi Arabia, a law requires women to be cloaked, and many reveal only their eyes. In Turkey, veils are banned from schools, and civil servants cannot wear them.

The Islamic Association of Raleigh takes a middle-of-the-road approach. Women are required to cover their heads, arms and legs during worship. Girls at the private Al-Iman school next to the mosque must also wear the hijab, the term used to describe the headscarf and modest dress.

But not all women who pray at the mosque cover their heads in their daily lives, and among the girls who attend public schools, there's a range of practices.
It's a choice

The biggest misconception the Muslim girls wanted to dispel is that they're forced to veil.

Actually, it's a deeply personal choice, one that many teens take years to make.

"I was not forced into wearing the scarf," wrote Nida Allam, 16, a junior at Broughton High School who started wearing a headscarf halfway through eighth grade after a pilgrimage to the Muslim holy city of Mecca.

Veiling was certainly something her Pakistani mother and Indian father wanted her to eventually take on, she said, but the decision was hers to make. "My mom and dad encouraged me to wait," she said. "They thought I was too young."

Like many of the teens, Nida said she hopes the hijab says something about her relationship to God, her willingness to be modest and her desire that boys respect her choices.

A Sunday school teacher for the younger children at the mosque, Nida still finds a way to make her appearance uniquely her own. She wears black eyeliner and a nose ring.

The decision to wear the hijab is supposed to be a life-long one, but many of the teens acknowledge that they struggle with it.

"Sometimes I think that I'll be able to wear it and I won't take it off, but then other times, I'm not so sure," wrote Shajuti Hossain, 16, a junior at Enloe High School. "I know it's something I have to do, though I just don't know when I'll be ready."

In the meantime, Shajuti said she wears modest clothing and covers up when she goes to the mosque.

But still in style

But as Duke students Bourassa and Shyu learned after accompanying the girls on a shopping trip to Crabtree Valley Mall, the girls don't eschew fashion.

These teens like skinny jeans and V-neck, empire waist camisoles as much as any other. They just make adjustments when wearing them in public. For example, they'll wear a knee-length dress over the jeans, and perhaps pair the cami with a cardigan.

Nor are all headscarves alike. While Nida wears a headscarf that tightly conceals her hair, ears and neck, Rida Fatima, 17, a senior at Broughton, wears her headscarf so that her neck is not concealed; even wisps of hair can be seen.

"I'm practicing right now," said Rida. "I'm still thinking about it."

A dance without boys

These girls are happy to socialize among themselves; many chose to skip their public school prom in favor of an all-women's dance held lastweek as a fundraiser for a nonprofit Muslim women's health clinic.

The event allowed them to wear the formal party dresses they might have worn to the prom, but to avoid
interacting with boys. As they dipped strawberries in a flowing chocolate fountain, the girls listened to music in English and Arabic and danced away the evening.

This peek into the life of teenage Muslim girls was far more complex than Shyu had anticipated.

"I didn't realize how nuanced it was," the public policy major said. "When I first started the project, I thought it would be easy - the hijab. It didn't occur to me there were so many aspects of Islamic dress."

vonat.shimron@newsobserver.com or 919-829-4891

Duke student Stephanie Shyu takes a photo of, from left, Rida Fatima, Nida Alam and Shajuli Hossain at the Islamic Association of Raleigh, as part of a project focusing on dress and cultural attitudes as it relates to perceptions of Islam in the media.
Eight U-Va. lacrosse players have been charged with alcohol-related offenses during their careers at the school

By Matt Bonesteel, Daniel de Vise and Meg Smith
Washington Post Staff Writers
Thursday, May 6, 2010; D01

Eight of the 41 players on the roster of the University of Virginia men's lacrosse team, including accused murderer George Huguely, have been charged with alcohol-related offenses during their careers at the school, according to court records.

The charges include underage alcohol possession, using a fake ID and driving while intoxicated, according to a review of records available online. Two players were found not guilty, while six were convicted or pleaded guilty. A ninth player was charged with underage possession of alcohol, but it is unclear whether he was attending U-Va. at the time. His case was dismissed.

Huguely's arrest Monday in the death of Yeardley Love, a classmate and fellow lacrosse player, has focused scrutiny on Huguely's earlier arrest for a drunken, violent confrontation with a police officer, and on his team's reputation among students for hard partying.

The fatal altercation between Huguely and Love early Monday in her Charlottesville apartment may not have been their first violent encounter. Two months before Love's death, two current and one former University of North Carolina lacrosse players intervened to separate Huguely from Love at a party on the U-Va. campus in Charlottesville, according to two sources with knowledge of the incident. The UNC players were in Charlottesville visiting with friends.

A reporter asked U-Va. President John T. Casteen III about the incident at a news conference Wednesday. Casteen said he knew nothing about it. Huguely's attorney did not immediately reply to a phone message and e-mail seeking comment.

Casteen also said that school officials were unaware of Huguely's prior arrest and that officials, coaches and trainers had no indication of violence on his part. But Casteen acknowledged that "there are a number of gaps in this system that concern me." He said the school would begin to screen students against public records before each semester.

U-Va. Athletic Director Craig Littlepage, asked about the alcohol-related arrests at the news conference, said, "I'm sure those incidents that have been brought into the pipeline were handled in a manner that was consistent with what our longstanding policies have been."

Huguely told police he shook Love during a violent argument before her death, hitting her head repeatedly against a wall, according to affidavits filed by police in support of a search warrant. The pair, both 22, had dated for at least a year, but Love broke off the relationship in recent weeks, according to
people close to them.

Hugely's attorney has said Love's death was a tragic accident.

In November 2008, Hugely pleaded guilty to resisting arrest, public swearing and public intoxication after a drunken scuffle with a female police officer during a visit to Lexington, Va. The officer said Hugely told her, "I'll kill you. I'll kill all of y'all. I'm not going to jail," in a diatribe laced with racial, sexual and other vulgar terms. She used a Taser to subdue him.

Hugely received a 60-day suspended sentence, six months' supervised probation and a fine, according to court records. He was ordered to complete 50 hours of community service and 20 hours of substance abuse education, which he finished in July, the records show.

His lacrosse team has a strict alcohol policy. In 1999, Coach Dom Starsia adopted a rule that allowed players to drink only one night a week, usually Saturdays. A player who broke the rule a single time would be suspended indefinitely. A second offense would result in dismissal from the team.

"Alcohol and lacrosse have gone hand-in-hand since my days at Brown [University] in the 1970s," Starsia told The Washington Post at the time. "Whether it is post-game celebrations or just in general, there was something about the sport and alcohol, and Virginia was no different. I always thought alcohol was an issue here, and it is something we talked about before the season began."

In 2004, Starsia suspended several players for violating the policy.

Asked to weigh the significance of the more recent U-Va. arrests, Paul Haagen, senior associate dean for academic affairs at Duke University law school, said that "if that many people are getting themselves in trouble, then there is a problem. The question is exactly what the problem is. Is it male students or athletes or the lacrosse team, or is it U-Va. students in general?"

"Unless I know what the comparison numbers are, I'm not in a very good position to tell what's going on. On their face, those seem to me like very high numbers," said Haagen, himself a former collegiate lacrosse player.

In contrast to U-Va., only one current player on Georgetown University's men's lacrosse team has been charged with an offense of any kind, according to public court records. The University of Maryland has two players who have faced criminal charges since they started at College Park.

Lexington police never notified administrators at U-Va. of their 2008 arrest of Hugely, Chief Al Thomas said Wednesday. He said most colleges require their students to report run-ins with the law, but he was unaware whether Hugely had done so.

When the university learns of an athlete's arrest, each case is treated individually, according to Carol Wood, a university spokeswoman. Some are referred to a student-run Judiciary Committee, which can recommend an array of actions as harsh as expulsion. In alcohol cases that involve dependent students, university officials notify parents.

More details emerged Wednesday about Hugely's erstwhile relationship with Love. A member of the Love family, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Love had portrayed Hugely as "aggressive" when he asked her about the relationship in a March conversation. "But she said nothing more," he said. "I didn't think anything of it."
Police filed court documents Wednesday showing they had recovered a University of Virginia lacrosse T-shirt, stained red, from Huguely's apartment, according to an account on the Web site of the Charlottesville Daily Progress. The search also yielded a letter from Huguely addressed to Love, along with two white Apple laptops, a green spiral notebook, two white socks, a bathroom rug, a shower curtain, an entryway rug and a pair of blue cargo shorts. Investigators attempted to lift DNA samples from a bathtub, the kitchen, a trash can and the front door, according to the account.

Charlottesville Police Chief Tim Longo said an autopsy had been completed Tuesday, but written findings were weeks away.

At the Love family home in suburban Baltimore, Kathy Solomon, Yeardley's aunt, said she would remember her niece as a hard working young woman, raised with good values.

"She worked during the summer. She babysat," Solomon said. "She earned her own spending money all the way through school."

The Love family will hold a wake Friday at Ruck Towson Funeral Home, with a funeral mass Saturday at Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Baltimore, followed by a private burial.

In an evening candlelight vigil at the Charlottesville campus, an a cappella group in black sun dresses sang "Stand By Me" as students lit their candles. Flickers of flame spread through the large crowd.

Casteen addressed the group, his voice thick with emotion. He urged students to speak out if they suffer or witness abuse.

"Come talk to me," he said. "Seek support that belongs to you, because you belong to us."

Staff writers Zach Berman, Mary Pat Flaherty, Jenna Johnson, Mark Viera, Steve Yanda and special correspondent Christian Swezey contributed to this report.

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On Formspring, an E-Vite to Teenage Insults

By TAMAR LEWIN

It is the online version of the bathroom wall in school, the place to scrawl raw, anonymous gossip.

Formspring.me, a relatively new social networking site, has become a magnet for comments, many of them nasty and sexual, among the Facebook generation.

While Formspring is still under the radar of many parents and guidance counselors, over the last two months it has become an obsession for thousands of teenagers nationwide, a place to trade comments and questions like: Are you still friends with julia? Why wasn’t sam invited to lauren’s party? You’re not as hot as u think u are. Do you wear a d cup? You talk too much. You look stupid when you laugh.

By setting up a free Formspring account and linking it to their Tumblr or Twitter or Facebook accounts, young people invite their hundreds of online friends to ask questions or post comments, without having to identify themselves.

In part, Formspring is just the latest place to hang out and exchange gossip, as teenagers have always done. But because of the anonymity, the banter is unvarnished.

Comments and questions go into a private mailbox, where the user can ignore, delete or answer them. Only the answered ones are posted publicly — leading parents and guidance counselors to wonder why so many young people make public so many nasty comments about their looks, friends and sexual habits.

“I’d never heard of Formspring until yesterday, but when I started asking kids, every seventh and eighth grader I asked said they used it,” said Christine Ruth, a middle school counselor in Linwood, N.J. “In seventh grade, especially, it’s a lot of ‘Everyone knows you’re a slut,’ or
‘You’re ugly.’ It seems like even when it’s inappropriate and vicious, the kids want the attention, so they post it. And who knows what they’re getting that’s so devastating that they don’t post it?”

Users can choose not to accept anonymous questions, but most young people seem to ignore that option. And some Formspring users say it is precisely the negative comments that interest them.

“Nice stuff is not why you get it,” said Ariane Barrie-Stern, a freshman at Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School in New York City. “I think it’s interesting to find out what people really think that they don’t have the guts to say to you. If it’s hurtful, you have to remind yourself that it doesn’t really mean anything.”

Ariane, who has more than 100 posts on her site, said she had not been terribly bothered by anything she has read so far, but she acknowledged that after one comment about a certain pair of leggings, she stopped wearing them.

Her father, Larry Stern, who like most other parents interviewed had never heard of Formspring until a reporter’s call, was aghast.

“It’s just shocking that kids have access to all these things on the Internet and we don’t even know about it,” Mr. Stern said. “And it’s disturbing that what goes on there will influence how somebody behaves. How do you block it? How do you monitor it?”

Even teenagers who do not set up Formspring accounts can peruse their friends’ accounts to see if they are mentioned.

Many families on Long Island became aware of Formspring after the March suicide of Alexis Pilkington, a 17-year-old West Islip soccer player who had received many nasty messages.

Since it began in late November, Formspring has caught on rapidly. More than 28 million people visit the site each month, 14 million of them in the United States, according to Quantcast, a service that analyzes Web traffic.

The company, started in Indianapolis by John Wechsler and Ade Olonoh, recently raised $2.5 million from a group of Silicon Valley investors and moved to San Francisco.

According to Formspring, more than three million questions have been asked and answered on the site. Mr. Olonoh said in an e-mail message that the company did not know what percentage of users were teenagers.

Formspring is not the first site to allow anonymous comments. Some schools say students
have been demoralized by comments on Honesty Box, a Facebook add-on. And Juicy Campus, a college gossip site, caused so much grief that some colleges blocked it, and some state attorneys general began consumer-protection investigations. The site shut down last year.

Formspring is one of many question-and-answer Internet sites that are widely used to find, say, the calorie count of avocados. But Formspring spread like wildfire among young people, who used it to for more intimate topics — or flat-out cyberbullying.

Many schools say they have seen students crushed by criticism of their breasts, their body odor or their behavior at the last party.

“There’s nothing positive on there, absolutely nothing, but the kids don’t seem to be able to stop reading, even if people are saying terrible things about them,” said Maggie Dock, a middle school counselor in Kinnelon, N.J. “I asked one girl, ‘If someone was throwing rocks at you, what would you do?’ She said she’d run, she’d move away. But she won’t stop reading what people say about her.”

In some schools, the Formspring craze may already be burning out.

“We all got Formspring about two months ago, when it began showing in people’s Facebook status,” said a 14-year-old from a New York City private school. “It’s actually gone down a little bit in the past few weeks, at least in my grade, because a lot of people realized it wasn’t a good thing, that people were getting hurt, or posting awful comments.”

Some young Formspring users say they strive for a light touch in answering questions about their relationships (hookups, that is, or “hu” in online parlance). Several said they admired friends’ skills at deflecting the often-asked question about how far they had gone, with answers like, “I’ve been to Morocco.”

One mother in Westchester County, N.Y., discovered Formspring when her daughter came to her, sobbing, after reading putdowns of her breasts and her teeth.

“She was very, very upset,” the woman said. “She’s always been self-conscious, and in a way this just flushed out what people might been thinking all along. She worked very hard on figuring out how to answer. But there’s a kind of obsessiveness to it. She still wants to read everything.”

Unknown to her daughter, the woman has learned her password, and occasionally checks her Facebook and Formspring accounts.

“The comments are all gross and sexual,” the mother said. “And yet, of course, this is coming
from her friends. I wish I could just erase it, but all of her friends are online, and so much of their social interaction is online that I don’t think I could just take away her Internet access. But I do think this whole online social media thing is a huge experiment on our children.”