ECU holding its fall graduation this weekend

The Daily Reflector

Wednesday, December 16, 2009

East Carolina University will hold its fall commencement ceremonies this weekend.

The ceremony for all students will be at 9:30 a.m. Friday in Williams Arena at Minges Coliseum. The event begins with a band concert and the commencement program is slated to start at 10 a.m.

ECU will award nearly 3,200 degrees to fall graduates. About 2,092 are undergraduate degrees, 1,062 are graduate/professional degrees and eight are doctorate degrees in biomedical sciences. The ceremony includes students who completed graduation requirements in the summer. Individual unit recognition ceremonies will be held Friday and Saturday.

Derek Alderman, East Carolina University associate professor of geography and president of the Southeastern Division of the Association of American Geographers, will deliver the keynote address at the ceremony.

Alderman is the 2009 winner of the UNC Board of Governors Award for Excellence in Teaching, the highest teaching award given at the university, and a 2008 winner of the research award for outstanding research and scholarly achievement for the Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences.


He has published numerous book chapters and journal articles reflecting his research interests in civil rights, geography, street naming, memorials, representations of space and Martin Luther King Jr.

Friday

Minges
2 p.m. - College of Business
5 p.m. - College of Human Ecology
9 p.m. - College of Education
Wright Auditorium
2 p.m. - School of Communication
5 p.m. - Psychology
8 p.m. - College of Nursing
Hendrix Theater
2 p.m.: Economics
5 p.m. - Biology
Fletcher Hall
2 p.m. - Sociology
Willis Building
2 p.m. - Geography
5 p.m. - Political Science
Mendenhall Great Rooms
2 p.m. - History
5 p.m. - English
McGinnis Theatre
2 p.m. - School of Theatre and Dance
Saturday
Minges Coliseum
9 a.m. - College of Health and Human Performance
Wright Auditorium
9 a.m. - College of Technology and Computer Science
Jenkins Speight Auditorium
11 a.m. - School of Art & Design

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Survey: Pot use is rising among teens

BY GINGER LIVINGSTON
The Daily Reflector

The percentage of Pitt County teens using pot and alcohol is higher than the national average, according to a recently released national study and a local survey of youth risk behavior. Both studies also show that smoking marijuana is increasing in popularity among teens.

POLL: Have you ever smoked marijuana? Vote online at reflector.com.

The University of Michigan earlier this week released the results of its annual nationwide survey on drug, alcohol and tobacco use called Monitoring the Future. It found that out of 47,097 students surveyed 20.6 percent of 12th graders used pot in the 30 days prior, compared with 19.4 percent in 2008 and 18.3 percent in 2006.

East Carolina University's Department of Family Medicine conducts a similar study every two years for the Pitt County Substance Abuse Coalition. Its most recent data was collected earlier this spring.

See YOUTH, A9

YOUTH
Continued from A1

That data showed 32 percent of Pitt County 12th graders had used marijuana within the 30 days prior to the survey, said Lauren M. Whetstone, clinical associate professor with the Department of Family Medicine. In 2007 nearly 28 percent of Pitt seniors used pot during the previous 30 days.

The increase in teens smoking pot is partly because the national debate over medical use of marijuana can make the drugs seem safer to teenagers, researchers said in a story reported by The Associated Press. In addition to marijuana, fewer teens also view prescription drugs and Ecstasy as dangerous, which often means more could use them in the future, said White House drug czar Gil Kerlikowske.

The "continued erosion in youth attitudes and behavior toward substance abuse should give pause to all parents and policymakers," said Kerlikowske, director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, during a Monday speech at the National Press Club in Washington.

"These latest data confirm that we must redouble our efforts to implement a comprehensive, evidence-based approach to preventing and treating drug use," he said.

Whetstone of ECU said one finding by both the local data and the national survey that stood out to her is that fewer teenagers think their parents would disapprove of teen alcohol and marijuana usage.

Locally, 89 percent of students surveyed in 2009 thought their parents would disapprove of marijuana use; 81 percent thought they would disapprove of alcohol use. In 2005, those numbers were 91 percent and 84 percent, respectively.

Whetstone said she would conduct a study of parental attitudes toward teen marijuana and alcohol usage to see if adult attitudes match the perception of teenagers.

In both the national and local surveys, alcohol is the most widely used substance among teens. Nationally, 43.5 percent of 12th graders reported taking a drink within the last month; in Pitt County 51 percent reported using alcohol.

"It's a concern that there is that percentage of kids that don't perceive (underage drinking) as a great risk."

Lauren M. Whetstone
clinical associate professor with the ECU Department of Family Medicine

Even though alcohol use has dangerous outcomes — drunk driving accidents, alcohol poisoning or liver damage — those dangers don't worry young users the same way tobacco use does, Whetstone said.

National and local statistics show campaigns to end underage smoking have markedly reduced tobacco usage through a variety of educational programs, taxes and sales restrictions.

Nationally, 36.5 percent of 12th graders reported using tobacco in 1997; by 2009 the number dropped to 20 percent.

While the available local data didn't extend to 1997, the local survey found between 23 percent to 25.6 percent of senior used tobacco within the previous 30 days, according to data collected in 2005, 2007 and 2009.

Contact Ginger Livingston at glivingston@reflector.com or (252) 329-9570.
# SURVEY STATISTICS

The following is a wrap-up of Pitt County's 2009 Student Risk Behavior Survey.

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Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium's end zone makeover begins

By Nathan Summers
The Daily Reflector

Wednesday, December 16, 2009

Piece by piece, construction crews lifted away part of the face of East Carolina's football stadium Wednesday morning.

It was a fitting activity in a time and place where a much larger facelift has begun on the university's athletic facilities.

In the chill of a clear morning, a steady hum inside Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium — where two weeks ago the ECU football team made the racket by stunning No. 18 Houston in the Conference USA championship football game — was created by a backhoe and a couple of lifts that pecked away at the entire east end zone.

Workers from T.A. Loving construction company first removed the "East Carolina" and then the "Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium" panels from the back of the scoreboard, which has stood for more than a decade.

"We're right on schedule with the start of construction of the end zone expansion," ECU executive associate athletic director Nick Floyd said Wednesday of the school's latest construction project, which is more about deconstruction at the moment. "The site will basically be wiped clean."

The scoreboard demolition, which could take as long as two weeks to complete, is just part of ECU's plan to change the face of its sports facilities, including football.

The entire end zone area will soon be covered by a 7,000-seat addition which will close in the stadium's east end and include additional rest rooms and concession stands.

When all of the current plans for the stadium are complete, there will be a new press box, additional club seating and an upper deck on the south side. With that, seating capacity will approach 60,000, some 15,000 more seats than the current set-up.

The end zone project, which according to associate athletic director for administrative affairs J.J. McLamb also includes the removal of the end zone's old exterior brick walls, is targeted to be finished July 15, 2010.

McLamb said he expects tower cranes to be in place and construction on the end zone addition to begin by Jan. 1.

The project, according to Floyd, is the most economically sound approach to stadium expansion.

He said previous planning on the subject included an idea of adding suites in the end zone.

"Given the current economy and the environment we're all operating in, and also the demand for our tickets, we came to the conclusion that it would be best to go ahead and maximize the number of seats we could put in the end zone," Floyd said.

Also under construction is ECU's new softball stadium, which is slated for completion this summer, and is part of a three-phase project.

The second phase will be demolishing the existing softball field to make way for a new track and field complex.
In the third phase, the current track will be removed to create space for a new soccer complex and team support buildings that would house coaches' offices, locker rooms and equipment.

Floyd and McLamb estimated all of the projects would be completed within three years.

Contact Nathan Summers at nsummers@reflector.com or (252) 329-9595.

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ECU pleased with Holtz

RALEIGH -- As Cincinnati hired a football coach other than Skip Holtz, East Carolina athletic director Terry Holland announced the news from the Pirates' perspective Wednesday at the Raleigh Sports Club's weekly luncheon.

"We kept our coach," Holland said in the gym at the Highland United Methodist Church, where he was guest speaker. "Thank goodness."

Holtz, the fifth-year coach who has led the Pirates to back-to-back Conference USA championships, was identified in published reports as a candidate for jobs at Kansas and Cincinnati in recent weeks.

Kansas hired Turner Gill. Cincinnati announced Wednesday that it had hired Butch Jones of Central Michigan. Holland said that Holtz did not get to the point of talking about a contract with Cincinnati.

Three years ago, Holtz also was a candidate at Cincinnati. The Bearcats hired Brian Kelly, who led them to the Orange Bowl last season and a 12-0 record and a Sugar Bowl appearance this season.

"Think about this," Holland said. "Three years ago, Cincinnati offered [Holtz] that job. He turned it down. That means since then he gave up a chance to play in two BCS bowls and helped us build a championship program at East Carolina."

East Carolina (9-4) will meet Arkansas (7-5) in the Liberty Bowl on Jan. 2 in Memphis.

Holland said he shows his loyalty to Holtz by telling the coach that he wants him at East Carolina only if he feels it's the right place for him. Holland said he allows Holtz to explore other opportunities, and then asks what the school can do to make East Carolina a better place for Holtz and his family.

"That way we know that when he comes back this year, he's going to be happy he's back," Holland said. "He knows what he's gotten into."

Holtz is 38-26 at East Carolina after inheriting a team that was 2-9 in 2004. In September 2008 the school announced that it approved a six-year contract worth a guaranteed total of $4.07 million with incentives up to about $9.5 million to keep Holtz through 2013.

Holland said Wednesday that the school can't offer Holtz more money in his total package but has discussed raising his base salary so that more money would be guaranteed. Holland also said that because Holtz gets a percentage of football season-ticket revenues, his pay could increase after a planned renovation of Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium adds 7,000 seats.

In addition to more money, a big incentive for Holtz to coach elsewhere would be to join a conference that has an automatic Bowl Championship Series tie. Conference USA does not have one.

"The BCS has kind of clouded everybody's thinking," Holland said. "I can tell you this. If you had a chance to see that [Conference USA title] game we played against Houston in the rain and the cold, and
those fans sitting there making the kind of noise they did, and the happiness that came from winning that championship, maybe you would say the BCS is overblown."

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UNC-CH student dies of H1N1

Submitted by eleniel on 12/17/2009 - 09:16
Tags: Campus Notes | H1N1 | Lilian Chason | UNC Chapel Hill | UNC Hospitals

A UNC-Chapel Hill student has died from complications related to the H1N1 flu.

Lilian Chason, a freshman from Rhode Island, died Wednesday afternoon at UNC Hospitals, according to a post from her father, Eric, on Facebook.

"I'm sorry to have to tell everyone that Lilian died this afternoon at 5:20 PM," the post reads in part. "As you all know, she put up an incredible fight and if there was anyway she could have overcome this disease, she would have."

Chason's friends and family had set up the Facebook page as a way of giving regular updates. It chronicled the young woman's ups and downs after contracting the virus in November.

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Expert: 'Too early' to say if H1N1 pandemic is over

By Rob Stein
Washington Post Staff Writer
Thursday, December 17, 2009; 8:41 AM

With swine flu cases continuing to mount in many countries, it remains far too early to declare the H1N1 pandemic over, a World Health Organization official said Thursday.

"We are now eight months into the pandemic and one of the common questions coming to us is: 'Is the pandemic over? Is it time to call it?' " said Keiji Fukuda, special adviser to the WHO director-general on pandemic influenza. "The answer is, really, it's too early to make the call."

Although the second wave of infections has peaked in the United States and some other countries in the Northern Hemisphere, the level of flu activity remains high elsewhere, including parts of Europe, such as Switzerland and the Czech Republic, and parts of Central Asia, such as Kazakhstan, Fukuda told reporters during a briefing.

"The pandemic is a global event. It is not simply a regional event," Fukuda said.

Fukuda noted that the virus is likely to continue to spread through the Northern Hemisphere's winter and that another wave is possible in the late winter or early spring.

"We cannot predict whether we will see another upsurge of significant activity," he said.

Because of the uncertainties, the WHO is moving forward with plans to distribute at least 180 million doses of vaccine that six companies and 12 countries have pledged to donate to 95 poor countries. The first countries will be Afghanistan, Mongolia and Azerbaijan, he said.

Although the WHO has documented only about 10,000 deaths from the pandemic worldwide, Fukuda said it also remained far too early to know whether this pandemic will turn out to be the mildest on record.

"This is likely to be quite an underestimate," he said.
H1N1 shots arrive as demand dies down

Here's a riddle: What do Beanie Babies and H1N1 flu vaccine have in common?

They were both desperately sought after when they were scarce, only to be given the shrug as supplies improved.

In recent weeks, the H1N1 vaccine has finally begun rolling off production lines at a good pace, enabling doctors, clinics, pharmacies and even employers to expand availability to everyone who wants a shot or nasal mist.

But the pipeline opened right as infection rates in North Carolina and across the United States began dropping.

As a result, what was a must-have inoculation is now threatening to hit the pharmaceutical equivalent of the bargain box.

"This is something that we as a society do now and again - get into a frenzy over things," said Larry Chavis, an economist at the Kenan-Flagler Business School at UNC-Chapel Hill who has studied the effects of product shortages on demand. "Even I'm guilty of it. In the fall, I was asking when I might get a vaccination. I think I can get one easily this week, but I haven't even tried."

The phenomenon adds yet another frustrating wrinkle to the pandemic vaccine's rollout.

The H1N1 virus emerged in Mexico last spring, too late to be targeted in seasonal flu vaccines already in production. Instead, manufacturers rushed to make a separate batch of H1N1 vaccine, which meant a separate shot. Given the haste, some questioned the vaccine's safety. Then production problems slowed delivery, and supplies were rationed during the height of a fall flu outbreak.

Dr. Megan Davies, state epidemiologist, said such glitches are to be expected when dealing with an unpredictable foe such as flu.

"Just the dimensions of the whole response are huge," Davies said, referring to the scope of the world-wide drive to identify, produce and deliver a vaccine for a novel virus within months.

And the current lull in infections may be deceptive, Davies said. A third wave of sickness is widely expected to hit in February and March, when seasonal flu typically peaks. She urged people to get their vaccinations now - while there are no lines.

State health leaders estimate one in six people have been hit with H1N1 flu infections, leaving the vast majority of the state's 9 million residents vulnerable as the virus continues to circulate.

2 million and counting

About 2 million doses of H1N1 vaccine have been shipped to the state so far, Davies said, with recent
weekly shipments hitting 300,000 doses. North Carolina is on tap to get 5 million doses from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which is leading the pandemic response.

While initially limited to people at high risk of complications from H1N1 flu, the vaccine supply expanded for the first time last week to all comers at clinics and pharmacies. Local employers also began offering H1N1 vaccine clinics, including Quintiles Transnational Corp. in Research Triangle Park.

The company had enough doses on hand Wednesday to inoculate more than 500 people, including employees and their family members.

Dr. Oren Cohen, Quintiles' chief medical officer, said he was pleased with the turnout, particularly because absentee rates at the global clinical research company are still higher than a year ago.

"Public perceptions and receptivity to the vaccine have varied all over the world," Cohen said, noting that the company has operations in 59 countries. "I've been mostly dismayed in general by the negativity, or the unwillingness to be vaccinated on a global scale."

Chavis, the UNC-CH economist, said it might be tempting to raise demand by tightening supply, but it's different when the commodity is health.

"You want people to feel the need," he said, "but you don't want it to be too hard to get."

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December 17, 2009

At Many Colleges, Early Applications Rise

By JACQUES STEINBERG

This was the year when the frenzy to gain early admission to the nation’s most selective colleges seemed likely to subside, at least in part because a student admitted under a binding early program cannot seek competing financial aid offers as leverage to negotiate a better package.

But for many admissions offices, there appears to have been no letup.

Duke, Northwestern, Brown, Cornell, Columbia, Johns Hopkins and Dartmouth, among other highly selective colleges, received substantially more applications for their early decision programs this year than they did last.

Other colleges, including Wesleyan, Emory, Pomona and Grinnell, drew about as many early applications this fall as they did last fall, a time when the economic downturn was only just beginning. Each of those programs requires students to withdraw all other applications and attend if admitted.

“The fear of not getting in is a trump card,” said Jon Reider, director of college counseling at San Francisco University High School, a private school, and a former admissions officer at Stanford. “That fear is more powerful than any piece of factual information, such as, ‘Gee, colleges are having a hard time with financial aid, maybe we should cast our net fairly widely and not jump the gun and throw our eggs all in one basket.’”

Not all colleges held their ground, however. Yale and Williams saw a drop in early applications.

For the colleges themselves, which sent notifications to early-admission applicants this week, the calculus appears to have been more complicated. While early decision candidates are some of the savviest, most talented — and, yes, financially flush students — the increase in early decision applications did not necessarily translate into a surge of offers of admission.

Cornell, for example, received an additional 136 applications for its binding early decision program this fall, when compared to last, but accepted 103 fewer students than last year.

While nearly 40 percent of the seats in next year’s freshman class at Cornell are now reserved, the university has still allowed itself much flexibility for the main round of admission, when most students will apply. Moreover, colleges like Cornell are committed to assembling the most diverse classes possible — including racially and socio-economically diverse classes — and many of those who apply early tend to be white and of some means.

Johns Hopkins and Brown also received more early applications this fall, but accepted fewer students.

“ Colleges are hesitant to go beyond a certain line when it comes to the percentage of the incoming class that
they obtain through early decision,” said David Hawkins, director of public policy and research for the National Association for College Admission Counseling. “They’re aware of the research, and the potential inequities they might produce if they cross that line.”

Still, it is difficult to find a clear theme in all the colleges’ application figures for this fall. Williams, which has a binding early admission program, received 73 fewer applications this fall, a drop of 13.5 percent. And Yale — which has a non-binding early program, but which requires that its early applicants apply to no other early programs — received nearly 300 fewer applications, a drop of 5 percent.

And yet, Stanford, which has a program similar to Yale’s, got 183 more applications than last fall, an increase of 4 percent. And early applications to M.I.T., another non-binding program, surged by 13 percent, the university said Wednesday night.

In the case of Stanford and M.I.T., early applicants had little to lose, for they have until May to decide whether they wish to attend, a period in which they can consider other colleges’ offers.

In response to criticisms of early programs in recent years as the province of the elite (and the plugged-in), Harvard and the University of Virginia are among a handful of schools that have discontinued their early programs.

Some college counselors — including Bill McClintick, a counselor at Mercersburg Academy in Pennsylvania, and a former president of the National Association for College Admission Counseling — said some students at his school had specifically bypassed any binding early programs this fall, in favor of non-binding, to preserve their financial options.

Mr. Reider said several of his students had made similar decisions to bypass early decision entirely for the main round.

“I have to write a lot of recommendation letters now,” he said.
Teachers educated in WNC get better results

*Ashley Wilson and Jordan Schrader*

If you want high school students to improve their English and math skills, pay attention to where their teachers went to college.

Teachers from Western Carolina University outperform their peers in preparing high school English students, and teachers educated at UNC Asheville excel at preparing math students, a study reports.

Educators point to more time in the classroom, strong connections between departments, solid undergraduate programs, quality professors and a focus on particular subject areas as reasons behind the higher gains.

"We wanted to trace all the way from students who were receiving certification from our schools of education in the state into the classrooms of North Carolina," said Gary Henry, a UNC Chapel Hill public policy professor and one of the study's authors.

Henry and Charles Thompson, an East Carolina University professor, aimed to assess the education programs at state universities by examining student achievement.

They compared UNC system-trained teachers with their peers from out-of-state and private colleges, focusing on teachers with 10 or fewer years of experience.

**Time in the classroom**

More training time in the classroom may explain the success of WCU-trained English teachers. Their students showed higher gains from year to year on standardized tests.

Every English education student there fulfills an internship in a school classroom before undertaking the required semester of student teaching. That doesn't happen at all universities or for education students in other subject areas at WCU.

"Research tells us the more times these teacher candidates spend in the classroom during college, the more effective they are as teachers, especially in the first few years they get out of college," Henry said.

Deborah Aldridge, an English teacher at North Buncombe High School, said the professors at Western had the biggest effect on her teaching.

"Some of them were just really excellent and made you think and just practice these ideas you hadn't thought of yourself," she said.

**UNCA and math**

For the past few years, UNCA has boosted its emphasis on producing quality math teachers.
The math department and education department work closely together on grants and professional development opportunities. Every year the two departments put on a math literacy summit to promote excellence in math education.

"I really think it falls back into our vision as educators in the education department and math department that we're here to work together and provide the best experiences for our students," said Nancy Ruppert, math licensure coordinator for UNCA.

The liberal arts education students at UNCA get could also be a reason behind their teachers' success. UNCA teachers point to the positive impact the well-rounded education they received has on their teaching. They also mentioned the education department's focus on constantly analyzing your teaching methods.

"You're always going to run into the, 'Am I ever going to use this?' question," said Loren Hord, a math teacher at Roberson High. "From all the humanities classes, I had lots of different sources to draw from when teaching a math lesson and relating it back to something."

**Gains not seen overall**

While WNC-educated teachers excel at high school math and English, in other subject areas and other educational levels they do neither better nor worse than teachers educated elsewhere.

Across the state, students whose teachers had UNC system undergraduate degrees did slightly better than others on high school and elementary standardized tests, but about the same on middle-school tests.

Authors of the study say that points to fundamental problems with the state's middle-school curriculum.

"There are very negligible gains (in middle school)," Henry said. "In fact, many students lose ground moving from the fifth grade to the sixth grade. Part of what we haven't decided is if middle schools are like elementary schools for adolescents or if they are like high schools for preadolescents."

The study also found that students at all levels whose teachers had UNC master's degrees in teaching tested neither better nor worse.

Rep. Rick Glazier, D-Cumberland, said the study doesn't show enough improvement from a master's degree considering the money the state spends to encourage teachers to further their education. A teacher with a master's degree receives a 10 percent raise.

Now that the information is out, the UNC system will put it to work in improving teacher education. The study has been presented on each university's campus. The report was presented to state lawmakers last week.

Practices seeing success at one school could be expanded to other schools, Henry said.

The question, Glazier said, is "whether we have the political will in this body to act on the research."
Sam Ashaolu, who nearly died in Duquesne basketball shootings in 2006, to graduate Thursday

ALAN ROBINSON
AP Sports Writer
3:44 PM PST, December 16, 2009

PITTSBURGH (AP) — Fittingly, Sam Ashaolu was standing on the court at a pregame shootaround, wearing his Duquesne University basketball sweats, when he received the best news of his life.

The former player who has inspired a college campus with his determination to graduate despite being the most seriously wounded of the five Duquesne basketball players shot in September 2006 will receive his college diploma on Thursday.

Ashaolu nearly died of head wounds in the horrific shootings that followed a dance, rocking an urban campus that had just been chosen as one of the nation's safest.

He needed multiple operations to save his life, endured seizures and recurring hospital stays and, months after his recovery was underway, was told he couldn't play again because it was too risky to remove bullet fragments lodged in his brain.

"At any given moment, I was told, I could go to sleep and not wake up," Ashaolu said Wednesday.

Many athletes might have become angry, given up, quit school and begun their adult life with a grudge that would last a lifetime. Instead, Ashaolu told Duquesne athletic director Greg Amodio and coach Ron Everhart he wanted to stay with the team in any role and return to as normal a college life as possible.

Then, remarkably, he did exactly that.
"If somebody would have told you while he was in that hospital bed, battling for his life, that he would have a college degree in three years, most people would have said that's not possible, that's unbelievable, that can't happen," Everhart said. "It's a modern-day miracle."

Another player who was seriously wounded, Stuard Baldonado, left school without playing. Two others, Shawn James and Kojo Mensah, turned pro before their senior seasons in 2008-09 and didn't graduate. Ashaolu and Aaron Jackson, who received a minor wound, became close friends and helped turn around a Duquesne program that was 3-24 in 2005-06.

Jackson did it on the court as an all-Atlantic 10 guard who led the Dukes to a 21-13 record last season, the A-10 championship game and the NIT, where he scored 46 points during a double-overtime loss at Virginia Tech.

Ashaolu did it off the court, serving as a team manager, a teammate in pickup games and a role model for every college player who has experienced adversity.

"I overcame a lot," said Ashaolu, a 6-foot-7 power forward who played at Lake Region State College in North Dakota before transferring to Duquesne. "I hope it inspires some other kids who go through the same thing I went through to keep fighting."

Everhart and Amodio said every new Duquesne student quickly learned about Ashaolu's relentless commitment to graduate. He went to school in the fall, spring and summer, rarely missed class, worked daily with speech therapists and at the school's learning lab, and nearly became like a son to assistant director of student services Kevin Deitrick.

"He's so resilient, so determined," Everhart said.

Jackson, now playing in Turkey's top pro league, said Ashaolu's perseverance made him realize the minor problems in his own life were exactly that — minor.

"It's remarkable seeing the things he does, seeing him wake up and take his medicine and go to class, come back, take his medicine and then go to night class," Jackson said. "It makes you want to pray to God, Thank you for giving this man another chance and everyone another chance. It's going to be truly remarkable to see him walk across that stage and get that degree. It's going to be a lot of tears, a special day."

Now, that day is Thursday.

Deitrick and Amodio gave Ashaolu big hugs upon delivering the news at about 3 p.m. EST Wednesday that he had passed his final class and could take part in Duquesne's winter commencement 24 hours later.

Ashaolu and his family sued the university 15 months ago in a still-unresolved case, saying better security should have been offered to prevent the shootings, yet he never considered transferring. And Duquesne never took him off scholarship.

"You talk about somebody who's overcome the ultimate obstacle," Amodio said. "A little over three years ago, we didn't know what the future held for Sam."
That future could be in — yes, basketball. Ashaolu, whose older brother, John, is the director of basketball operations at East Carolina, wants to stay in the sport and work with youngsters. He will travel to his Toronto home for the holidays — he turns 27 on Christmas — but will return to Pittsburgh after Jan. 1 to begin searching for a job and to follow the Dukes.

"I'm close to a lot of the guys," Ashaolu said.

Those Dukes players — and their coach — look to Ashaolu as a source of motivation.

"It's the biggest win of my basketball career," Everhart said. "I can't think of many things in my life that have been a whole lot more special than Sam handling the adversity that he's had to handle through the shooting, and putting himself in a position now to graduate. I think that's about as good as it gets."

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Campus shooting shows Va. Tech lessons are being learned

By Robert McCartney
Thursday, December 17, 2009; B01

When the U.S. history class in Room 312 heard the two gunshots in the room directly above it, followed shortly by a student shouting at the door to call 911 because "there's a shooter," professor Bill Rhatican knew what steps to take. He had the class lock the door, turn out the lights and put down the blinds.

Some scared students huddled in a corner amid nervous comments about past school killings at Virginia Tech and Columbine, but Rhatican put the group at ease.

"The teacher calmed everyone down. He really took control," said student Kevin Rogers, 19, of Manassas.

Rhatican said he did nothing special. He was just following procedures outlined in an e-mail to faculty earlier this year. "The college had put together an emergency plan, and this was what we were supposed to do," he said.

His poise was one of several examples of effective preparation and response by the college and police in last week's shooting on the Woodbridge campus of Northern Virginia Community College. Swarms of Prince William County police began arriving within two to three minutes of the shots. An emergency response team at the school's office in Annandale, 20 miles away, coordinated via phone and Internet while staff in Woodbridge were stuck in an extended lockdown in their offices.

There were some hiccups, and authorities don't get credit for the fact that nobody was hurt. The 20-year-old suspect missed when he allegedly fired at a math teacher who'd given him a poor grade. Then his rifle jammed, and he waited to be arrested.

Nevertheless, the reaction to the Dec. 8 incident suggests that there's been progress in handling so-called active shooter situations that are a worry on every campus and schoolyard. It encourages me to believe that next time, when the shooter's weapon functions properly, chances will be better of avoiding, or at least minimizing, death and injury.

Some of the lessons drawn from the 2007 Virginia Tech shootings led directly to the performance last week. The response plan was developed after NVCC created the job of director of emergency planning a few months after the Blacksburg killings. Since then the school has intensified training of faculty and staff, added emergency notification equipment and stepped up cooperation with local police.
"Since Virginia Tech, the police department has been training constantly with local jurisdictions," said Cheryl Creed, NVCC's acting police chief. Two days before the incident, the school's police team had gone through a mandatory, eight-hour training session where they practiced a scenario in which a student shot a teacher. One of the participants was the campus officer whose quick radio call triggered the rapid response.

"Everything that was done on Tuesday, we had practiced on Sunday," Creed said.

The county and campus police continued the lockdown for about three hours even after the arrest of the suspect, in case there were others. Virginia Tech didn't order a shutdown and delayed notifying the campus after the first two people were shot, arousing criticism afterward that earlier action might have prevented 30 additional people from being killed in a different building more than two hours later.

"We erred on the side of caution and kept the lockdown until we could complete the search and evacuation," Prince William Police Chief Charlie T. Deane said.

Admittedly, it didn't all go according to plan. Either because they didn't know the drill or forgot it in the crisis, crowds rushed out of the building almost immediately after the shots. It appears that most of the approximately 800 people in the building remained, but the ones who fled could have been vulnerable if a shooter had been in the halls.

A sociology teacher in Room 355 had his class evacuate, said student Michelle Wittkoff, 43, of Woodbridge. She and much of the class returned to the room when told by another faculty member and, later, a police officer to stay.

Wittkoff and others were also frustrated that it took more than half an hour before an announcement was made over classroom speakers telling people there had been an emergency and to shelter in place. "We had no idea what was really going on," Wittkoff said.

That delay occurred even though the emergency team in Annandale was doing its utmost to get out the message via multiple methods.

Steven G. Sachs, vice president for instructional and information technology, sent notices that popped up on school computers, video screens posted around campus and cellphones signed up for the school's emergency text-message system.

Those didn't reach some people, especially ones locked down in classrooms. Some learned details first, albeit unofficially, from students who fled the class where the shooting occurred. "We got text messages from our friends before we got anything from NOVA," student Rogers said.

The glitches suggest there's more to learn. Still, it's gratifying that the tragedy at Virginia Tech has pushed forward our understanding of how to deal with such horrors.

I discuss local issues at 8:51 a.m. Friday on WAMU (88.5 FM). E-mail me at mccartneyr@washpost.com.
Campus shooting shows Va. Tech lessons are being learned

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