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ECU skips college ranking

By Jackie Drake

State schools in Kiplinger’s 2012 list of the 100 public institutions offering the most value. East Carolina did not participate.

East Carolina University opted out of a recent national ranking of affordable colleges but plans to participate next year, officials say.

ECU was not ranked in Kiplinger’s 2012 list of the 100 public institutions offering the most value released online today. UNC Chapel Hill was ranked No. 1, and several other state schools also were ranked.


ECU also declined to participate in Kiplinger’s 2011 listing, saying it could not participate in the survey due to the workload.

“Our intent is to participate in future years, and we are making preparations for that,” spokeswoman Mary Schulken said Wednesday.

In April, ECU convened a College Guide Working Group to develop guidelines for university participation in college guides, surveys and ranking publications, according to Schulken. The group identified 10 surveys, rankings and publications for new or continued participation, including those from U.S. News, Forbes, College Board, Princeton and Kiplinger.

ECU participated in the 2011 U.S. News best college rankings, where it placed in the top 200 out of 1,600 institutions.

“We feel the key is being proactive,” Schulken said. “Those outlets were chosen because they had specific, identified value. They either provide an opportunity to enhance ECU’s public profile or target strategic markets.”

To determine which colleges and universities offered the best education for the lowest cost for its 2012 list, Kiplinger looked at academics, tuition and financial aid. The list also considered retention and graduation rates, SAT scores, student-faculty ratios and student debt upon graduation.

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill was ranked No. 1 for the 11th year in a row. It also was ranked the No. 1 value for out-of-state students.
Each college was ranked separately on its value to both in-state and out-of-state students.

Several other UNC system schools made the list. UNC Wilmington ranked 15th, and North Carolina State came in 19th for in-state students. Other UNC campuses on the list are Appalachian State at 33rd, the N.C. School of the Arts at 41st, and UNC Asheville at 45th.

For more information, visit http://www.kiplinger.com/reports/best-college-values/

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48 Virgin Islanders were victims of homicides in 2011

By DANIEL SHEA (Daily News Staff)

Coming off two consecutive years marking the highest murder rates in the territory's history, the Virgin Islands saw the number of violent deaths drop by almost 30 percent in 2011.

The 48 homicides last year, of which three were vehicular homicides, brought the Virgin Islands back to the levels of 2007 and 2008.

Police said the decrease from the all-time high of 66 homicides in 2010 was evidence of the community's newfound respect and trust in the V.I. Police Department and an increased effectiveness in solving and prosecuting the criminals responsible for the heightened levels of bloodshed.

Elevated levels of arrests for violent crimes coupled with a prolonged drop in the number of serious crimes reported have made police officials confident that their strategies are beginning to show results.

While the number of homicides in 2011 has decreased from last year, so has the rate of homicides solved by police - falling from about 70 percent in 2010 to less than 20 percent of homicides solved in the first three quarters of 2011.
Experts say the numbers seen in the Virgin Islands are indicative of problems that are serious in origin and complicated to solve.

Not only is the Virgin Islands the most violent and deadly place in the United States on a per capita basis, but the territory has maintained a homicide rate during the last decade that makes it one of the most deadly places in the world, with about 42 homicides per 100,000 residents from 2004 to 2009. It is more aptly comparable with South and Central American nations or its Caribbean counterparts than anywhere in the United States, where the average is less than five homicides per 100,000 people.

One distinction of homicides in the Virgin Islands is that many appear to be carried out in personal retaliation for other crimes, police officials said. In other areas of the Americas coping with high homicide rates, the control of lucrative drug routes or political affiliations tend to be behind the killings, according to reports from international organizations.

The number of gangs and the level of drug-trafficking has surged in the territory, but the homicides are less connected to gang affiliation as they are to personal animosity and revenge, said V.I. Assistant Police Commissioner Raymond Hyndman.

"We see most of it is personal retaliation, even though the individual could possibly be a member of a specific gang," he said.

For this reason, the homicides tend to affect young men from poor areas most acutely, officials have said.

The trend is typical of many places, said Patrice Morris, an assistant professor of criminal justice at East Carolina University and native of Jamaica who has studied crime and homicide in the Caribbean.

"It's not evenly dispersed throughout a country," she said, adding that it often comes in clusters and affects young, uneducated men from poor areas.

Morris said her research in Jamaica also dispelled a commonly held belief that smaller, close-knit communities tend to be less violent.

"The more socially cohesive a community is here, the higher the homicide rate," she said. The higher rates result from communal fear and a breakdown in community principles that helps establish social responsibility and societal controls, she said.

Without societal checks, the violence continues to move cyclically.

Sometimes the suspect in one murder turns up as the victim in the next, Hyndman said.
"We think a lot of these homicides are somehow connected to each other, and obviously, retaliation is still a big issue," said St. Croix Police Chief Christopher Howell. "But how you contend against that is another thing."

Dennis Kenney, a professor with a specialty in policing at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, said the key to stemming the flow of violence is a strong, positive bond between the police and the community.

"The most effective way to deal with this sort of thing is for the police to build a relationship with the community, so that the community realizes this is bad for them," Kenney said. "Nothing is worse for tourism than a high homicide rate."

Improving community relations is an issue the Police Department has been working on since 2010, when it began implementing a number of community policing initiatives meant to place officers on the streets, in neighborhoods and housing communities to interact and build trust within the community, officials have said.

Without the public's help to solve the crimes, the police will have a hard time establishing faith that the criminal justice system in the territory works, Kenney said.

"What really matters is the extent to which the police convince the community to engage with them and tell them when there is something going on," he said. "You wouldn't have this high of a homicide rate if they were."

Hyndman and St. Thomas Deputy Police Chief Dwayne DeGraff each said, however, that the community has come forward much more willingly with information lately.

"The community has put the word out. They're fed up. They're sick of this foolishness," DeGraff said. At the same time, "we are being a little more professional - more sensitive to people's needs - and they're feeling more willing to come forward with information."

The public involvement is reflected in the arrest rates, police said.

While most major crime continued to decrease in 2011 - by 9 percent territorially - the number of arrests for major crimes has risen by 8 percent, Hyndman said.

"Even though crime is down, arrests are up," he said.

Kenney and Morris both were wary of overly aggressive policing, however, saying that merely increasing arrests and detaining residents sometimes can create animosity within the community.
"That sort of an approach can sometimes do more harm than good," Kenney said. "For every bad guy you pick up, then you have 10 that are innocent that you have isolated."

One exception to the increase in arrests was for the murders. While the Police Department maintained a very high rate of solving murders in 2010 - at nearly 70 percent - that rate has dropped significantly in 2010. Through August, only 17 percent of cases had resulted in arrests, according to data from the department.

Hyndman did not have the final figure for the 2011 clearance rate available for The Daily News. He said that many of the 2010 cases resulted in quick arrests, while cases from 2011 have required more protracted investigations. "I know the investigators are working feverishly on these cases," Hyndman said. "I am confident that in due time arrests will be made in both districts."

In addition, convictions are important, officials said.

V.I. Attorney General Vincent Frazer said earlier in the year that his office has maintained a conviction rate over 80 percent on St. Thomas during the last three years.

"We are targeting certain individuals who we believe are responsible for committing, as a matter of fact, maybe even more than one murder," Hyndman said. "With the Attorney General's Office, we were able to convict a lot of key players who we felt were responsible for these crimes."

The key is to have a criminal justice system in place that can be trusted, Kenney said. Places where there is communal trust in law enforcement authorities and the law tend to see lower rates of all crimes.


"There is a relationship between higher levels of armed violence and fragile institutional capacities, and there is a strong association between insecurity and underdevelopment," the report said. "Countries with higher respect for the law - including effective criminal justice systems - also broadly show lower levels of violence."

The report also indicated that certain regions are hot spots for violence, including the Caribbean and Central and South America - regions adversely affected by the flow of illegal drugs into the United States and political turmoil. Of the top 10 countries experiencing high rates of violent death in the world between 2004 and 2009, six are from those regions.
Averaging 42 homicides per 100,000 people throughout that same timeframe, the Virgin Islands would rank eighth - just behind Guatemala - if it were an independent country.

The Virgin Islands can be viewed as a product of the Caribbean, which has seen high levels of violence spreading from Trinidad and Tobago up the Lesser Antilles. Many of the small, financially strapped governments are struggling to respond to the levels of violence on their islands.

By comparison, the average across the United States is now fewer than five homicides per 100,000, according to the FBI. The rate can vary wildly depending on location. While New Orleans had a 2010 homicide rate of 30 per 100,000, very few jurisdictions even come close to 10 per 100,000.

The other U.S. territory in the region also has a high homicide rate, though it is nowhere near that of the Virgin Islands. In 2010, Puerto Rico had a rate of 25 homicides per 100,000.

The USVI suffers from a number of societal issues that lie at the heart of the high homicide rate, Morris said, echoing the report's findings.

Many social factors, such as education levels, job availability and poverty factor into the equation, she said.

"It's important to understand the social factors of homicide. Homicides can be more common in a place where people have a lot of free time and where people have no respect for the law and take law into their own hands," Morris said. "Everywhere young men are in trouble. They are in need of money to survive. Their job prospects are low. They come from low-income neighborhoods. Their legitimate means to success are low. They have a lot of leisure time because they're not employed."

It is important to focus on youth development, family support, community mentoring and the education system, she said.

"To fully understand a high homicide rate in the Virgin Islands, research is crucial," she said. "Empirical research informs policy."

Hyndman said the department has been bolstered with some of the results it has seen.

"I think what is working for us - we need to continue that. And we need to continue to ask for public support," he said. "We've got to be sure we do everything possible to make these communities safe and to make sure the residents and visitors who come here feel secure when they are here."

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Local jobless rate dips to 8.1%

BY JOHN MURAWSKI - jmurawski@newsobserver.com

The Triangle jobless rate fell in November as the region added a modest number of jobs, providing the local economy with a much-needed boost.

The area posted an 8.1 percent jobless rate in November, down from 8.7 percent in October, according to data issued Wednesday by the N.C. Division of Employment Security. It's one of several measures that suggest the regional and national economy made gains at the end of 2011, said Wells Fargo economist Mark Vitner, who seasonally adjusts the data for The News & Observer.

The Triangle jobless rate remains below the national average of 8.6 percent and the statewide average of 10 percent. The Triangle - which includes Raleigh, Cary, Durham, Apex and Chapel Hill, among other metro areas - boasts one of the state's strongest regional economies.

Economists expect modest improvements this year as part of a drawn-out, multi-year economic recovery. But much of the region's economic health depends on the national economic picture.

Businesses are still reluctant to take risks on expanding and hiring, said East Carolina University economist James Kleckley. One of the factors gumming up the economy, he said, is the polarized political climate in Washington, making it unclear how the nation will pay off its $15 trillion debt.

"The politics are really playing more of a dominant role now than they have in the past," Kleckley said. "It's really causing business to hold off on making key decisions until there's more certainty."

The Triangle added 1,900 nonfarm jobs in November, mostly in education, health services, professional services and retail trade. Vitner noted that many of the new jobs were not the high-paying positions that would signify a healthy economy.

In the first 11 months of 2011, the Triangle added 8,600 nonfarm jobs. December's figures won't be known for several weeks, but it's clear that the region is nowhere near normal job growth. In a typical year, the Triangle would add about 20,000 jobs.
Vitner noted that the region would have to add about 45,000 nonfarm jobs in one year to bring the jobless rate down to about 5 percent. Adding that many jobs in the Triangle will require many years; it's the amount the entire state is projected to create this year.

Triangle job growth fluctuated throughout 2011 but has averaged about 800 a month through November.

The region gained about 10,500 nonfarm jobs in the first three months of 2011, then lost jobs for four consecutive months. The biggest single-month gain was 5,400 jobs added in October.

Vitner predicted a year ago that the Triangle would add about 12,000 nonfarm jobs in 2011. That could still happen if December makes a strong showing, he said.

The prognosis for 2012 is better than 2011. Vitner predicts the Triangle will gain 14,000 jobs this year. Economists expect the state, which has gained about 21,000 jobs through November 2011, to gain between 40,000 and 50,000 jobs in 2012.

The jobs and unemployment numbers come from surveys that sample a small percentage of the state businesses. In February, more complete data will be released that will reflect the total number of jobs in the state, based on tax rolls, not on survey samples.

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Animal Studies Cross Campus to Lecture Hall

By JAMES GORMAN

Once, animals at the university were the province of science. Rats ran through mazes in the psychology lab, cows mooed in the veterinary barns, the monkeys of neuroscience chattered in their cages. And on the dissecting tables of undergraduates, preserved frogs kept a deathly silence.

On the other side of campus, in the seminar rooms and lecture halls of the liberal arts and social sciences, where monkey chow is never served and all the mazes are made of words, the attention of scholars was firmly fixed on humans.

No longer.

This spring, freshmen at Harvard can take “Human, Animals and Cyborgs.” Last year Dartmouth offered “Animals and Women in Western Literature: Nags, Bitches and Shrews.” New York University offers “Animals, People and Those in Between.”

The courses are part of the growing, but still undefined, field of animal studies. So far, according to Marc Bekoff, an emeritus professor of ecology and evolutionary biology at the University of Colorado, the field includes “anything that has to do with the way humans and animals interact.” Art,
literature, sociology, anthropology, film, theater, philosophy, religion — there are animals in all of them.

The field builds partly on a long history of scientific research that has blurred the once-sharp distinction between humans and other animals. Other species have been shown to have aspects of language, tool use, even the roots of morality. It also grows out of a field called cultural studies, in which the academy has turned its attention over the years to ignored and marginalized humans.

Some scholars now ask: Why stop there? Why honor the uncertain boundary that separates one species from all others? Is it time for a Shakespearean stage direction: Exit the humanities, pursued by a bear? Not quite yet, although some scholars have suggested it is time to move on to the post-humanities.

The Animals and Society Institute, itself only six years old, lists more than 100 courses in American colleges and universities that fit under the broad banner of animal studies. Institutes, book series and conferences have proliferated. Formal academic programs have appeared.

Wesleyan University, together with the Animals and Society Institute, began a summer fellowship program this year. A program at Michigan State allows doctoral and master’s students in different fields to concentrate their work in animal studies. At least two institutions offer undergraduate majors in the field. And just this fall, New York University started an animal studies initiative, allowing undergraduates to minor in the field.

Dale Jamieson, director of that program, said that activity in animal studies had been “somewhat inchoate” up to now, but that he hoped N.Y.U. could help “to make it a more cohesive and rigorous scholarly field.”

Animals have never been ignored by scholars, of course. Thinkers and writers of all ages have grappled with what separates humans from the other animals and how we should treat our distant and not-so-distant cousins. The current burst of interest is new, however, and scholars see several reasons for the growth of the field.

Kari Weil, a philosophy professor at Wesleyan whose book “Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?” will be published in the spring, said that behavioral and environmental science had laid a foundation by giving humans “the sense that we are a species among other species” — that we, like other animals, are “subject to the forces of nature.”
Think of the effect Jane Goodall had when she first showed the world a social and emotional side of chimpanzees that made it almost impossible to keep them on the other side of the divide. Or watch the popular YouTube video of a New Caledonian crow bending a wire into a tool to fish food out of a container, and ask yourself how old a child would have to be to figure out the problem.

The most direct influence may have come from philosophy. Peter Singer’s 1975 book “Animal Liberation” was a landmark in arguing against killing, eating and experimenting on animals. He questioned how humans could exclude animals from moral consideration, how they could justify causing animals pain.

Lori Gruen, head of the philosophy department at Wesleyan and coordinator of the summer fellowship program in animal studies there, said one of the major questions in philosophy was “Who should we direct our moral interest to?” Thirty years ago, she said, animals were at the margins of philosophical discussions of ethics; now “the animal question is right in the center of ethical discussion.”

And of public interest.

Jane Desmond of the University of Illinois, a cultural anthropologist who organized a series of talks there about animals, says that what goes on in the public arena, beyond the university, has had a role in prompting new attention to animals. There are worries about the safety of the food chain, along with popular books about refusing to kill and eat animals.

Animals as food are a major subject of academic interest, Dr. Gruen said, adding, “Given that the way most people interact with animals is when they’re dead and eaten, that becomes a big question.”

The animals humans live with and love are also a major subject.

Another strain of philosophy, exemplified by the French writer Jacques Derrida, has had an equally strong influence. He considered the way we think of animals, and why we distance ourselves from them. His writing is almost impossible to capture in a quotation, since it constantly circles around on itself, building intensity as he toys with the very language he is using to write about what he is trying to understand. His approach has been adapted in a lot of academic work.

In “The Animal That Therefore I Am,” for example, he discusses at length not only what he thinks of his cat, but what his cat thinks of him. In a fairly
simple sentence — and thought — for him, he writes about his cat: “An animal looks at me. What should I think of this sentence?”

What animals think — in fact, what animals have to say — is something scholars now take quite seriously, recognizing of course that there are limits to that approach. As Dr. Weil of Wesleyan said, referring to the gulf between animals and previous outsiders (“others”), like women or African-Americans, “Unlike the other others, these others can’t speak back or write back in language that the academy recognizes.”

The academy does, it seems, recognize and understand Derrida and, sometimes, follow in his word tracks. Consider, for instance, “Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics as Extension or Becoming? The Case of Becoming-Plant” in a recent issue of The Journal for Critical Animal Studies. Other writing is quite approachable. The moral arguments about eating animals are clear. And there are studies that any urban dweller could profit from, like “How Pigeons Became Rats: The Cultural-Spatial Logic of Problem Animals.”

The great variety of subjects, methods, interests and assumptions in animal studies does raise questions about how it holds together. Law schools, for instance, routinely have courses in animals and the law. Veterinary schools have courses about the human connection to animals. Some people group courses in how to use animals in therapy as part of animal studies.

None of this variety diminishes the energy or importance of what is going on, but at least some people who work on subjects that would be included under the animal studies rubric, like Dr. Jamieson at N.Y.U. and Dr. Desmond at Illinois, think the scholarly ferment has a way to go before it can clearly see itself as an academic field.

Dr. Desmond says it is “not yet a field.” It is, she says, “an emergent scholarly community.” One thing it does not lack is energy.