THE DAILY CLIPS

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ECU given Freedom Award for support of military

Posted: 7:03 a.m. today

East Carolina University received the Defense Department's top award honoring employers for their support of staff members who are part of the military.

ECU Chancellor Steve Ballard accepted the 2010 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award at a ceremony in Washington, D.C., Thursday night.

"These great young men and women – if you will, the greatest generation that we have today – cannot do what they do in service in the National Guard and Reserve without the support of their employers," Assistant Secretary of Defense Dennis McCarthy said.

ECU was among 15 employers chosen from nearly 2,500 nominations for the award. The university was nominated by its director of general surgery residency.

Ballard met with Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Vice President Joe Biden to receive their congratulations and thanks.

"ECU, a top military friendly school, has a strong veterans preference program, exceptional support for deployed employees and also (has) created an acclaimed family readiness program to ease the strains of deployment," Leon Harris, the master of ceremonies, said when presenting the award Thursday.

ECU was named a “2010 Military-Friendly School” by GI Jobs Magazine. The university has an office at Fort Bragg to advise service members about their academic opportunities.

ECU was also praised for its efforts to send care packages to deployed soldiers and to check on their families left behind. The university's Essential Life Skills for Military Families program offers a series of one-day workshops to help military families cope with deployments.

The university has previously been the recipient of several Defense Department Patriot Awards and the state-level Pro Patria Award for its support of the military

YouTube video: ECU receives 2010 Freedom Award

Web Editor: Anne Johnson

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BYUNG LEE and his student, Malachi Benyameen, 6, give a Tae Kwon Do demonstration during the third annual Inclusive Community Breakfast at ECU’s Murphy Center on Thursday morning.

Annual breakfast focuses on area’s diversity

BY KATHRYN KENNEDY
The Daily Reflector

The signs posted at the entrances to Greenville tell visitors and remind residents that the city is working toward building an all-inclusive community.

It’s the less tangible signs that mean more.

Mayor Pat Dunn said she’s seen much evidence of the progress made by individuals and agencies espousing inclusivity, and it parallels the city’s increased diversity.

“Many projects bring people together from different backgrounds because they’re working with a common purpose,” Dunn said. The Boys & Girls Club, Habitat for Humanity and the Greenville Community Shelter were a few examples she provided.

When Dunn moved to Greenville in 1971 there was no synagogue, no mosque, no Hindu Temple, she said. Now all the world’s major religions exist together in the city. And together, through private funds, they will be welcomed to Pitt County Memorial Hospital’s new Interfaith Chapel.

A celebration of accomplishments like these and encouragement to continue and do more was provided Thursday morning at the City of Greenville’s third annual Inclusive Community Breakfast.

Organizer Cassandra Daniels said that each year she tries to invite new people from a cross-section of the community.

See BREAKFAST, A7

DR. PAUL CUNNINGHAM gives the keynote address during the breakfast.
BREAKFAST
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city: Elected officials, educators, businessmen, clergy, residents both young and old.

The more than 100 guests in attendance Thursday at East Carolina University’s Murphy Center were “a good representation of that,” she said.

The entertainers were also culturally varied.

Human Relations Council member Byung Lee brought students from his King Tiger Tae Kwon Do school to demonstrate strength and flexibility. The performance included Malachi Benyahmeen, 6, and Bill Vandiver, 85.

“He can do it,” Lee quipped. “Why can’t you?”

ECU graduate student Mauro Hines confidently delivered an operatic spiritual. He and keynote speaker Dr. Paul Cunningham, dean of ECU’s Brody School of Medicine, both touched on the theme “Inclusive Journeys: Everyone Has a Story.”

Cunningham is a native of Jamaica — another melting pot nation, he said.

The first African-American dean of the medical school, he mentioned a lack of minority representation in health care careers. That was followed by a reminder that the Declaration of Independence states that all men are created equal and endowed with rights.

“This is powerful stuff for this early in the morning,” Cunningham said.

He tempered that with suggestions to walk in the shoes of others, reflect on how you can be more inclusive to others in the community and then take action.

“I have experienced the very best inclusiveness first hand,” Cunningham said of his experience in Greenville.

Daniels hopes that many others will feel that way, too.

“Working to build an inclusive community will always be a journey,” she said.

“We are making progress but it’s going to take everybody. It’s not going to come overnight.”

Contact Kathryn Kennedy at kkenedy@reflector.com or (252) 329-9566.
Seminar offers topics for safe rental housing

BY MICHAEL ABRAMOWITZ
The Daily Reflector

People who rent their homes must become working partners with landlords and law enforcement officials to make and keep their neighborhoods safe, said experts who will host a two-day seminar on crime-free rental housing in Greenville today and Friday.

The event, being held at Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium, is hosted by the Greenville Police Department through a partnership with East Carolina University.

The project of establishing a crime-free rental housing program was brought to the attention of the City Council last year by Kathy Harrington, a Greenville rental property owner. The proposal was not approved by the council, but Greenville Police Chief William Anderson liked the idea and assigned Capt. Ted Sauls to design a program for the department to implement so it could address quality-of-life issues with property owners, managers, tenants and first responders, Anderson said in an interview this week that included Harrington and Sauls.

"When I purchased rental property in west Greenville, I noticed that some landlords were allowing drug dealing, prostitution and other illegal activities to occur in their properties," Harrington said. "I knew there would be crime and issues, but I just assumed I could call the police and they could come right there and shut it down, but that's not the way it works."

Harrington said she consulted with police to see what she could do and was frustrated to hear them tell her how difficult it can be to enforce laws without landlord and tenant cooperation.

Harrington searched the Internet for knowledge on how other communities are dealing with the same issues, she said.

"At the same time, I enrolled in Greenville's Citizens Police Academy to learn how to be a better partner with the police to deal with crime," she said.

Anderson said he always knew a program like this had the potential to be a good idea.

"When you start attaching fees, fines and enforcement actions, it becomes (politically) controversial," he said. "We felt this program could work, especially in a community that has as much rental housing as Greenville has, so we in the department started looking at some non-political things we could do, things that would be less politically controversial."

Research by Harrington and Sauls led to a program tailored to Greenville, Anderson said.

The first day of the seminar includes strategies for crime prevention and workshops on topics including effective criminal background checks, working with law enforcement to combat drug and gang activity, serving notices and evictions, and fair housing laws.

The second day of training will be for law enforcement agents and will include workshops on program administration, marketing the program, media relations and lessons on crime prevention through environmental design.

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SAFE
Continued from A4
Modern version of Greek legend retold at ECU

BY KELLEY KIRK
The Daily Reflector

What would you do to get back the love of your life? Would you be willing to travel to the underworld as Orpheus did to plead for Eurydice's return after she died from a snake bite in Ovid's Greek myth?

Tennessee Williams explored this concept and many of Ovid's themes in his play "Orpheus Descending."

The ECU/Loessin Playhouse will present "Orpheus Descending" at 8 p.m. Thursday-Oct. 5 except Oct. 3, when the show will be at 2 p.m.

"Orpheus Descending" was presented on Broadway in 1957. Williams was very successful with "The Glass Menagerie" but "Orpheus Descending" met with criticism and only had modest success and a brief run on Broadway.

Williams spent more than 17 years working on the play's earliest version called "Battle of Angels" since the 1940 play was widely criticized. He rewrote the "Battle of Angels" five times before completing the final version, "Orpheus Descending," in 1957. "Orpheus Descending" is a modern retelling of the Greek "Orpheus" legend.

Williams set his story in a small, repressed Southern town. When Val, a young charismatic musician, arrives and forms a relationship with a local woman (Lady Torrance), it ignites a fire in her that she lacks in her own marriage.

But it's about more than passion and desire.

Williams wrote, "On the surface it was and still is the tale of a wild-spirited boy who wanders into a conventional community of the South and creates the commotion of a fox in a chicken coop. But beneath that now familiar surface it is a play about unanswered questions that haunt the hearts of people and the difference between continuing to ask them, ... and the acceptance of prescribed answers that are not answers at all."

Lady Torrance's tragic past has forged a woman of great strength.

"I only hope to be that strong," said Daniela Hart, who plays Lady in the ECU production.

The Texas native said she was drawn to the role...
GRAYSON SANFORD playing the part of Val Xavier, left, performs a scene with Daniela Hart as Lady Torrance during rehearsal of ECU’s production of Tennessee Williams’ “Orpheus Descending.”

because of its strength.

“As soon as I read it, I was first interested in the other role, but once I got more into the role of Lady, it really stuck out,” she said. “Plus, I love the Italian.”

Hart’s father’s side of the family is from the Dominican Republic.

“T’ve found the cultures to be similar,” she said.

Hart specifically referred to how the patriarch of the family is in charge. Hart, 21, is an ECU senior working toward a double major in professional acting and musical theater. She’ll turn 22 during the show’s run.

She jokingly tells people that she found ECU through a Google search.

“I typed in musical theater and it was one of the schools that came up,” she said.

Her home state only had one school offering a bachelor of arts in musical theater at the time she was entering college.

“This seemed to be the one that fit me best, but the thing that brought me here was the professors.”

IF YOU GO!

What: “Orpheus Descending”

When: 8 p.m. Thursday-Oct. 5, except Oct. 3 when the show will be held at 2 p.m.

Where: McGinnis Theatre

Cost: $12 for adults, $10 for students

Call: 328-6829

Visit: www.ecuarts.com

Kelley Kirk can be reached at kkir@reflector.com or 329-9596.
Tutor too close to athletes
Chancellor tells UNC trustees

BY ROBBI PICKERAL
AND ERIC FERRERI
STAFF WRITERS

CHAPEL HILL — The undergraduate tutor linked to North Carolina's investigation of possible academic misconduct in the football program did not have her contract renewed in summer 2009 because "there was too much of a friendship between her and the players," UNC Chancellor Holden Thorp told the university Board of Trustees on Thursday.

"They're only supposed to do their work inside the [academic] support center," Thorp said in an interview during a break in the trustees' meeting. "If they're getting together outside the academic support center, then the chances are they're doing academic work outside the center."

The school announced on Aug. 26 that it was looking into possible academic improprieties involving a tutor who worked for both the school and head football coach Butch Davis.

Athletic director Dick Baddour said then that a player interviewed during the NCAA's investigation into possible improprieties involving sports agents shared information about the academic situation, prompting a separate branch of the investigation.

Baddour also said last month that the improprieties existed outside the classroom but gave no further explanation on what that meant. A university source familiar with the investigation said the problems involved inappropriate help on papers that football players were required to write for classes.

This morning at the trustees' meeting, Baddour said that the role of a tutor is well-defined, as are the rules for how they may interact with players.

"They are to interact in the academic support center — working on time management, note-taking, study skills. We're not looking to establish any other kind of relationship [between the tutor and athletes]," Baddour said.

SEE UNC, PAGE 14A
UNC athletic director Dick Baddour, left, and UNC Chancellor Holden Thorp, center, seen here at an Aug. 26 news conference, appeared before the UNC-Chapel Hill Board of Trustees on Thursday.

ROBERT WILLET - r-willet@newsobserver.com

UNC CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1A

"... When you're using undergraduates to tutor and mentor, it's important that things be done in the right context. I really can't point to anything to say anyone thought it [the relationship between the tutor and players] was improper, you just have to work to be certain the relationships stay as a tutor and a student."

At UNC, tutors and academic mentors (who work with small groups of athletes) receive four hours of training before they are hired, including instruction on NCAA compliance. At the beginning of each semester, they are required to sign a form agreeing to follow academic honesty policies.

At the end of each semester, they are asked to sign another form stating they have neither witnessed, nor committed, any academic fraud or violations.

They can't type athletes' papers, and university tutors are not allowed to communicate with athletes over e-mail or work with them anywhere outside the Academic Support Center. They are given handbooks to remind them of the procedures.

The regulations don't specifically extend to the realm of Facebook — UNC's handbooks don't expressly forbid tutors or mentors from friending athletes on social media websites — but "our training spells out that you're not to be personal friends," UNC associate athletic director John Blanchard said last month. "You're not to hang out. It's a professional relationship, and we want to keep it professional."

In addition, tutors and mentors submit a daily report after meeting with athletes.

The tutor linked to the current investigation — who has not been named by the school — was both a tutor and a mentor.

Thorp told trustees Thursday that "some" UNC student-athletes are involved in both the agent and academic investigations.

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Triangle hospitals raising pay

Dr. William L. Roper, CEO of the UNC Health Care System, will get no raise.

BY ALAN M. WOLF - STAFF WRITER
Tags: local | news

After freezing salaries during the recession, the Triangle's largest hospitals are reinstating pay raises to retain and attract employees.

The extra pay will increase incomes for more than 30,000 local workers and provide some boost for the region's economy, giving families more money to spend as the holidays approach.

It's another sign that the worst of the economic downturn, which prompted many employers to cut jobs, wages and benefits, is easing.

But the raises come as the federal health overhaul puts more pressure on the medical industry to reduce expenses, and could offer more ammunition to critics who blame health providers for soaring costs.

On Monday, the board of the UNC Health Care System approved bonuses and raises for its 8,000 workers in Chapel Hill. The amounts vary by position, but will total about $22.4 million. The raises will average about 3 percent.

"I believe it is a priority to reward our employees for continually providing the best care and service to our patients," said Bill Roper, CEO of the UNC Health system. "We must remain competitive with the market."
for nurses and other employees.

WakeMed, which employs more than 7,000 people across Wake County, gave 3 percent raises to clinical staff in July. Managers and nonclinical staff will get similar increases next month.

Rex, the Raleigh hospital owned by UNC Health, also will give average raises of 3 percent to its 4,600 workers in January.

Duke doesn't discuss details of wages, spokesman Doug Stokke said. However, he said, the health system's 12,000 employees, including at Duke Raleigh Hospital, will receive "a market-based pay increase in October."

The raises reaffirm the relative health of the medical industry, a foundation of the Triangle's economy. The technology sector also is hiring and fighting to attract top talent.

But other local titans of the health-care industry are tightening their belts.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina, the state's largest health insurer, has said it plans to slash administrative costs as much as 20 percent by 2014, and is planning layoffs. GlaxoSmithKline, which employs about 5,000 people in the Triangle, has eliminated hundreds of local jobs to reduce costs.

State workers left out

UNC Health hasn't had raises since July 2008. Officials carefully considered reinstating them because of the state's financial crunch and the fact that many state workers aren't getting any, Roper said.

State lawmakers cut funding for UNC Health this year, to help offset budget woes. The system will receive about $36 million from the state this year, down from $44 million last year. That money helps cover the more than $280 million in charity care UNC Health provides each year.

The raises will come from UNC Health's operating income, Roper said. Last year, the system reported operating revenue of $995.9 million, up nearly 7 percent from a year earlier. Operating income rose to $56.1 million, a 30 percent improvement.

Roper recently met with about a dozen lawmakers to explain the pay raises, and was told to expect some backlash from other state workers, he said.

Roper also explained that he asked the UNC Health board not to give him a pay raise. He remains one of the health system's top-paid employees, with an annual salary of $717,600.

Duke health system CEO Victor Dzau also will not receive a raise this year, Stokke said.

Roper supplements his income by serving as a director at two publicly traded companies: Medco Health Solutions, the nation's largest pharmacy benefits manager, and DaVita, which runs more than 1,500 dialysis clinics. For that work, Roper earned nearly $640,000 last year in cash, fees and stock, according to filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission.

That type of work is "common practice" for university leaders, Roper said, adding that he learns a lot in those roles. He said that he would recuse himself from any discussions involving business between UNC Health and the companies.

Bonuses coming, too

UNC Health will give its employees bonuses for the fiscal year that ended June 30 because the organization met various
goals related to patient satisfaction, financial results and other factors.

That will average 2.5 percent of annual salaries for most employees, but about 250 managers will receive 8.8 percent. Workers will receive the payments next month.

UNC Health also approved average raises of 3 percent, although the amount will vary by position. The average annual salary for nurses at UNC Health is $59,084. The average for all hospital workers, excluding residents, is $54,384.

The increases still leave UNC Health at a disadvantage to rivals such as Duke and WakeMed, which are able to pay more as private nonprofit institutions, Roper said.

"We are trying to balance this with other needs," he added. "This is what I felt we could do."

All the local hospitals continue to hire as they expand and add new services. UNC Health expects to add about 365 employees during its current fiscal year.

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ROPER'S ROLE
Bill Roper, 62, has run the UNC Health Care System since 2004, and says he isn't going anywhere.

Roper is often mentioned among potential candidates for positions in the Obama administration. Roper previously served as director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and on the senior White House staff in 1989 and 1990.

But Roper said during an interview with editors and reporters of The News & Observer that he's happy to stay in this area.

He did say that he was a candidate to be president of the UNC system, the position that went to Davidson College president Tom Ross.

CEO salaries
Here are the latest available base salaries and total compensation (includes bonuses, deferred compensation and the value of benefits such as car allowance and health care) of the top executives at the Triangle's largest health systems:

Duke University Health System's Victor J. Dzau: $979,435, $2.2 million
WakeMed's William K. Adkinson: $767,477, $1.3 million
UNC Health Care System's William L. Roper: $717,600, $866,176

Source: IRS 990 filings, staff researcher Brooke Cain
For Atwater, life for killing Carson

BY JESSE JAMES DECONTO - STAFF WRITER

WINSTON-SALEM — Demario Atwater will spend the rest of his life in federal prison for killing Eve Carson, the UNC-Chapel Hill student body president, in 2008.

In federal District Court on Thursday, Atwater, 24, received a life sentence on a charge of kidnapping resulting in death and a 10-year sentence on a separate charge of discharging a firearm resulting in death, plus another life sentence and two 10-year sentences to run concurrently on federal carjacking and weapons charges.

Federal District Court Judge James Beatty also imposed restitution of more than $212,000 to be paid in $100 monthly installments if Atwater ever gets out of prison. Beatty noted statutes require him to set a payment schedule. "It's not likely the defendant under any circumstance will be on supervised release," he said.

Carson's parents sat quietly in the front row listening to the 30-minute hearing Thursday in Winston-Salem. They declined to speak to the court about Atwater's sentencing.

Atwater did speak, looking directly at the Carsons and apologizing. "I'm sorry for everything that's happened," he said. "No matter what the court did today it would be far from anything I should receive."

Atwater and his attorneys said they originally had prepared a statement on Atwater's life of hardship to persuade the judge to implement the least possible sentence. But they decided not to present the statement. "It wouldn't be nothing but a waste of time," Atwater said.

Lawyer Kim Stevens explained that Atwater asked the team of three attorneys not to present evidence of his life. "This day is not about him," Stevens said. "It's about his acceptance of responsibility, and it's about the Carson family."

The judge imposed intensive substance abuse treatment and psychological evaluation.

Facility not specified

In the spring, Atwater pleaded guilty to state murder charges and to federal carjacking, kidnapping and weapons charges. Orange County Superior Court Judge Allen Baddour sentenced Atwater to life in the N.C. Department of Correction without the possibility of parole. But Atwater will spend his life in federal prison. His state and federal plea arrangements spared him from the death penalty.

A spokeswoman for the Federal Bureau of Prisons said it won't release information about Atwater's whereabouts until he has been admitted to a federal prison facility. The bureau typically aims to place offenders within 500 miles of their families.

Lovette case pending

Laurence Alvin Lovette, 19, of Durham, also is accused of murder, kidnapping and robbery in Carson's death. His case is pending in Orange County. District Attorney Jim Woodall has said Lovette's DNA was found in Carson's Toyota Highlander.
A medical examiner's autopsy report showed that Carson was shot five times, with the first four shots from a small-caliber handgun. Atwater has admitted firing the fifth and fatal shot from a sawed-off shotgun.

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WHAT'S NEXT?

Demecko Atwater's court proceedings in the Eve Carson murder case are now complete. Laurence Alvin Lovette, accused of being Atwater's accomplice, still faces murder, kidnapping and robbery charges. Lovette's next court date has not been set.

Lovette also is accused of murder in the death of Abhijit Mahato, a Duke University graduate student. That trial also is pending.

IMAGES

Atwater offers an apology

JOHN ROTTET

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E..I..V-00
NCSU tapped for climate study hub

By Jay Price
Staff Writer

RALEIGH — N.C. State University has been picked as the home of a federal hub for climate change research in the Southeast, the U.S. Department of Interior announced Thursday.

The Climate Science Center, which will be on Centennial Campus, will be just the second of eight planned across the nation. They’re part of a broad effort by the Department of Interior to deal with the effects of climate change on U.S. land, water, ocean, fish, wildlife and cultural resources.

NCSU won the center because of the wide range of knowledge and skills it offers, an Interior Department spokeswoman said. “N.C. State University brings major expertise in biology, climate change and applied conservation and management to deal with the threat of rising sea levels and increased stress on freshwater resources in the Southeast,” Joan Moody said. “The university has connections to farmers, resource managers, business people and citizens across the Southeast.”

The center comes with $1.5 million in initial funding. Also, as many as a dozen

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NCSU
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en federal employees will move to the area to staff the center, most of them scientists with doctorates. They are expected to begin arriving within weeks.

NCSU Chancellor Randy Woodson said that being picked for the center was a coup, particularly because it will give the university’s scientists access to as much as $7.5 million a year in research funding that will flow through the center.

Damian Shea, head of NCSU’s biology department, will be the university’s director of the center. He said great climate-related research already is under way across the campus and the new center will provide an extraordinary opportunity to unify that research across all the disciplines involved.

“As the climate of the Southeastern United States changes, many challenges requiring a central network of researchers, data and communication will arise,” Shea said.

Valuable training

Six of the university’s 10 colleges will be involved with the center, Shea said. NCSU has researchers, for example, who are among the best in the world at the elaborate computer modeling required for climate study.

The research funded through the center is expected to create jobs for more researchers and support staff and provide terrific opportunities for NCSU students, including a new climate-change curriculum.

“We’ll be training the next generation of climate scientists,” Shea said.

The sites of three of the Department of Interior’s eight centers have been announced. The first, at University of Alaska-Fairbanks in Anchorage, opened Sept. 1. The third, which will be operated by a consortium of universities in Idaho, Washington State and Oregon, also was announced Thursday.

The NCSU center is a coup not just for the university, but for the technology-oriented, public-private Centennial Campus, which has been on a roll for the past few days.

Last week, a major new building for the engineering school opened there. Two days later Woodson announced that he was creating an “innovation hub” to help university researchers start spinoff companies and market technology they create.

More welcome news

And this week the multinational power transmission equipment maker ABB, which has its U.S. headquarters in Cary, announced it would expand its facilities at Centennial to include a technology center devoted to smart grid technology. It plans an initial investment of $10 million in the technology center.

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The Washington Post

American University, now home to the 'American Wonk'

By Jenna Johnson
Washington Post Staff Writer
Friday, September 24, 2010; 1:53 AM

New York has financiers. Las Vegas has gamblers, and Austin has slackers.

Washington? Washington has wonks.

That's the inspiration behind a new American University effort to distinguish itself among a crowd of local colleges competing for attention by branding the campus as the home of the "American Wonk."

The school has handed out 3,500 free T-shirts imprinted with 18 slogans, including "Legal Wonk" and "Arts Wonk." Ads have begun appearing at Metro stops and in local newspapers. And during alumni weekend in October, there will be a "Wonk of Fame" exhibit.

"We looked at what the word was doing in its current use," said Teresa Flannery, executive director of university communications and marketing, "and we decided this is what we are."

"Branding" has become a popular buzzword in higher education as universities compete to attract top students and faculty members and also maximize revenue from tuition, research and donors.

Instead of selling the stereotypical college experience, with images of students studying under a tree with a laptop, schools try to capture what makes them distinct.

Universities with dozens of programs and thousands of students often struggle to sum themselves up in just a few sentences or an image. But, as branding and advertising wonks point out, prospective students and their parents have no trouble doing it when commenting in online admissions forums or debating the merits of schools on long college trips.

"Every school in this country already has a brand - whether they like it or not," said Darryl Gilli, the chief creative officer at 160over90, a branding agency that works with clothing retailer American Eagle Outfitters and several colleges, including Michigan State University and Loyola University Maryland. "It has to be honest and genuine. You can never become something you're not."

Teenagers are savvy consumers, and a college education is one of the largest purchases they will ever make, Gilli said, so universities have to sell themselves.

George Washington University decided to capitalize on images of the first president during a 2002 re-branding campaign. Catholic University has found that its name alone is the ultimate brand, but it occasionally freshens up the tag line. The current one was written by a student who won a $1,000 prize for it: "Reason. Faith. Service."
The University of Maryland at College Park, meanwhile, has sought to spread the word about changes happening on campus. In 2003, the university started its "Fear the Turtle" campaign, featuring a roaring terrapin that touts the school's Pulitzer Prize-winning faculty members, steady climb in the rankings and increasingly accomplished freshman classes. The phrase was borrowed from fans of the school's basketball team, so the campaign felt natural to the campus, said Brian Ullmann, the executive director of marketing.

"There's a gap in the perception of the university and the reality of the university," he said. "The branding campaigns are important because they help people understand the change."

Yet some campaigns can backfire. Drake University in Des Moines unveiled an admissions campaign this semester around the idea of the "Drake Advantage." For an illustration, Drake used a giant blue D+ on its Web site. The school has since modified the image so it looks less like a near-failing grade.

The $675,000 branding effort at American began two years ago, when the university hired a marketing strategy firm to survey students, parents, faculty and alumni about their perceptions of the university.

"Students tell someone they are going to American University or they are applying to American University . . . and a lot of the time, people say, 'Where?' " Flannery said.

That initial round of research identified three potential messages: active citizenship, learning from leaders and Washington as a powerful lab for learning.

Campus staffers then had to come up with a way to creatively convey those messages. At one meeting, they discussed a cartoon that Nate Beeler, a 2002 graduate and now a Washington Examiner cartoonist, drew for the cover of the alumni magazine. It shows a row of guys in suits sitting on a D.C. telephone wire like pigeons and saying, "Wonk! Wonk! Wonk!"

"It was 'Oh!' and then 'Noooo.' But 24 hours later, we were all still talking about it," Flannery said.

The choice has sparked as much consternation as enthusiasm among American's 12,000 students, not all of whom aspire to a lifetime of wonkery. Many have questioned it - and a few have openly mocked it - in Facebook updates, tweets and the comments section of the campus newspaper.

"I don't have any positive associations with this word," said Erin Lockwood, a senior majoring in international studies and economics. "It's a silly word. It doesn't have any intellectual gravitas."

But university leaders are confident that "wonk" - which they define as "an intellectually curious person" or "a knowledgeable Washington insider" - captures something essential about American. The whiff of nerdiness perceived by some students and alumni, officials said, was less important than the word's distinctiveness.

Josh Kaplan, a "green wonk" and senior environmental studies major, said: "Initially, I thought it was a little strange. But that's kind of what I like about it now. . . . It's pretty uniquely a Washington word."

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