THE DAILY CLIPS

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Wider net
Broadband project serves public's interest

A $40 million project that stands to improve broadband Internet access in the state's rural corners represents the type of long-term thinking that North Carolina and the nation need during this time of economic turmoil and rising unemployment. The investment stands to create jobs as well as bolster a key area of infrastructure needed in communities across the East and West of the state.

Many projects funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act have faced deserved ridicule for failing to serve the broad public interest. However, this project is an excellent example of how to use stimulus funds to invest in the future of education and commerce.

Gov. Beverly Perdue announced last week that the non-profit technology firm MCNC was the recipient of federal funding to expand its broadband infrastructure in eastern and western North Carolina. Pitt is one of 37 counties that should see improved Internet access in the coming years, progress needed in light of record unemployment and virtually non-existent job growth.

Started in 1980, MCNC operates the North Carolina Research and Education Network, which connects institutions to facilitate education, research, innovation and economic development in the areas it serves. East Carolina University and the Brody School of Medicine, Pitt County Memorial Hospital and Pitt County Schools are all part of the work and have access to its Internet services, but the expansion of the infrastructure will allow for that circle to include Pitt Community College and 29 other community colleges.

That promises to provide a tremendous benefit to the counties served. The governor's office stated the network could serve more than 1,500 anchor institutions, 180,000 businesses and more than 300,000 under-served families when completed. The immediate impact for education and commerce could prove enormous, and the potential long-term rewards are incalculable.

Additionally, the funding for this project will be through a partnership of private and public dollars. The $28.2 million in federal stimulus funds will be complemented by $11.7 million from MCNC and its partners, including $4 million from the organization's endowment. That means taxpayers alone will not foot the bill, but the federal money will instead act as a foundation on which to build.

Expanding access to the Internet represents a sound investment in infrastructure that serves education, business and government. Residents of eastern and western North Carolina may be the designated beneficiaries, but the whole state should view this project with favor.
New Pirates head coach welcomed

Congratulations to Ruf-fin McNeill on being named the head coach of the East Carolina University Pirates. All hands on deck with our new skipper to the big water toward a national championship. Go Pirates! Arrrrgh!

LEN TOZER
Greenville

Texas Tech fans congratulate ECU, McNeill

As a lifelong Texas Tech Red Raider fan, I congratulate East Carolina on naming Ruffin McNeill as head coach of the Pirates football team. McNeill is not only a great coach, he is a gentleman and a true class act. We in Lubbock will miss him greatly. During his 10 years on the Red Raider staff, McNeill became one of the most popular people in our city.

I know I speak for many of my fellow Lubbockites in saying you could not have picked a better man for the job. My husband and I have not followed the Pirates in seasons past, but you can count on us being fans — albeit from a distance — from now on.

RUTH ZEECK
Lubbock, Texas
McNeill hires two assistants

Wiley, Mitchell join ECU staff

New East Carolina football coach Ruffin McNeill has added two assistants to his staff.

School officials said Monday that John Wiley will be McNeill’s associate head football coach and Brian Mitchell will serve as defensive coordinator.

Wiley also will coach the Pirates’ linebackers, and Mitchell will coach the defensive backs.


Mitchell coached four seasons at Texas Tech with McNeill and had been hired as cornerbacks coach at Memphis on Jan. 18.

Ruffin McNeill hits the road on recruiting trip

Newly appointed East Carolina head football coach Ruffin McNeill hit the road as promised Monday in attempt to meet with every one of the Pirates’ verbal commitments in time for next Wednesday’s national signing day.

ECU sources said Monday all of the athletes who previously committed to coach Skip Holtz are still on board, but McNeill is on a mission this week to make sure the Pirates can come as close as possible to their targeted 25-man signing class.

Mid-year ECU recruit Dominique Davis, a quarterback who previously played at Boston College before transferring to Fort Scott Community College in Kansas, is not in school this spring. But ECU hopes Davis will enroll in the summer and be in camp with the Pirates in August.

Holtz announced he was leaving ECU Jan. 14 to become South Florida’s new coach, and McNeill was hired as his replacement Thursday.

Read more on Page B1
McNeill hits road to keep recruiting class intact

By Nathan Summers
The Daily Reflector

Monday, January 25, 2016

Although Ruffin McNeill has a brand new office waiting for him at East Carolina, the Pirates’ new head football coach won’t be seeing much of it during the next week.

As promised, McNeill was pounding the pavement and airport hopping Monday, trying to make sure ECU is in the best position possible for next Wednesday’s national signing day. That means trying to meet every one of the team’s current recruits within the next week.

Sources say the Pirates will try to sign a 25-man class and that no recruits have backed out since Skip Holtz announced he was leaving ECU to become the new head coach at South Florida Jan. 14.

McNeill, named the Pirates’ 20th head coach last Thursday, will be on a non-stop recruiting mission through Saturday, as Sunday is a non-recruiting day.

Adding some cushion to this year’s signing class are seven signees who are already enrolled and on campus. McNeill’s first class at ECU, if it stays intact, will consist of a blend of in-state talent and players from South Carolina, Georgia, Virginia, Florida, Mississippi, Missouri, Kansas and Maryland.

The current list of verbal commitments is heavy on offensive and defensive linemen, but caters to many needs at many positions for the Pirates.

With wide receivers coach/recruiting coordinator Donnie Kirkpatrick reportedly being retained by McNeill, the short-notice time frame between McNeill’s hire and signing day should not be a major factor.

Former Boston College transfer quarterback Dominique Davis is not in school this spring, but ECU’s coaches are hopeful Davis can enroll in the summer and be in camp in August. By not being in school, however, Davis (Lakeland, Fla./Fort Scott, Kan./Community College) is effectively back on the market.

Already in school for the spring semester at ECU are defensive end Maurice Falls (Belmont/South Point), offensive lineman Anthony Garrett (Prairie Village, Kan./Fort Scott C.C.), linebacker Jeremy Grove (Ijamsville, Md./Gov. Thomas Johnson), defensive back Bradley Jacobs (Long Beach, Miss./Miss. Gulf Coast C.C.), defensive end/linebacker Derrall Johnson (Baltimore, Md./The Cardinal Gibbons School), running back Alex Owah (Harrisonburg, Va./Hargrave Military) and offensive lineman Diavalo Simpson (Moss Point, Miss./East Mississippi C.C.).

Also on target to become Pirates on Feb. 3 are defensive back Detric Allen (Norwood/South Stanly), QB/athlete Desi Brown (Webster Groves, Mo./Webster Groves), linebacker Jacob Geary (Hillsborough/Cedar Ridge), offensive lineman Drew Gentry (Tallahassee, Fla./North Florida Christian), defensive end Mack Helms (Tallahassee, Fla./Leon), offensive lineman Taylor Hudson (Greenville, S.C./Mauldin), wide receiver/defensive back Damon Magazu (Charlotte/Providence), defensive end Lee Pegues (Bennettsville, S.C./Marlboro County), wide receiver Torian Richardson (Duncan, S.C./Byrnes), defensive end Chrhson Rose (Forestville, Md./Bishop McNamara), defensive back Dontavis Sapp (Valdosta, Ga./Valdosta), tight end/defensive end Trevor Sawyer (Asheville/Asheville) and linebacker/defensive end Terry Williams (Loganville, Ga./Grayson).

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Login or register to post comments
ECU football coaching staff begins to take shape

The Daily Reflector

Monday, January 25, 2010

East Carolina's new football coaching staff continued to take shape Monday, as new head coach Ruffin McNeill filled two key defensive positions.

The Pirates named Brian Mitchell defensive coordinator and defensive backs coach, while John Wiley has been appointed associate head coach and linebackers coach on McNeill's new staff.

Mitchell had an 11-year tenure as a defensive assistant while at Brigham Young before joining McNeill on the staff at Texas Tech for four seasons as cornerbacks coach. Wiley, meanwhile, comes to Greenville after a long stint as Appalachian State's defensive coordinator.

The new arrivals join 26-year old offensive coordinator Lincoln Riley, who was hired by McNeill immediately after his own hire was confirmed.

As the new ECU staff comes together, much of the old staff appears gone.

Wide receivers coach and recruiting coordinator Donnie Kirkpatrick will remain in Greenville, but all the other remaining coaches from the staff of Skip Holtz have been let go by McNeill.

Offensive coordinator Todd Fitch, defensive ends and special teams coach Vernon Hargreaves and defensive backs and assistant head coach Rick Smith have joined Holtz, the new head coach at South Florida. It appears that offensive line coach Steve Shankweiler, who was in the running to replace Holtz, might be headed south as well.

Also gone are tight ends coach Phil Petty, running backs coach Junior Smith, interim defensive tackles coach John Gutekunst and offensive staff assistant Dwayne Leford.

Still around are director of high school relations Harold Robinson, director of strength and conditioning Mike Golden and defensive tackles coach Thomas "Rock" Roggeman, who was on a leave of absence while battling cancer when Holtz announced he was leaving on Jan. 14.

Mitchell was also previously announced as Memphis' new cornerbacks coach Jan. 18.

“Brian's a very knowledgeable and experienced coach who has the ability to relate exceptionally well with his players," McNeill said. "He's been able to draw on his experiences as a player at BYU and in the NFL and bring those leadership qualities into the coaching profession.”

The Texas Tech pass defense ranked best in the Big 12 Conference in 2006 and 2007, limiting opponents to 188.4 yards per game in 2007 — the only Big 12 program to hold opponents below 200 yards per game.

Wiley was the architect of a Mountaineer unit that produced 87 All-Southern Conference performers and played an integral role in three Football Championship Subdivision National Championships.

Wiley closes out a 19-year tenure at ASU that included seven SoCon titles and 12 FCS postseason appearances.

“John has been around a lot of success and that's not by coincidence," McNeill said. "I was impressed with his manner and standing in the profession when we coached together, and his reputation has only continued to prosper from there. He's a great addition to our program, undoubtedly one of the people we need on our bus.”

Wiley's units topped the Southern Conference statistical standings in total defense during the 2000 and 2006 seasons, and recently wrapped up 2009 by tallying 18 interceptions on the way to an 11-3 record.

— ECU Media Relations

Login or register to post comments
Math school leader retiring

The leader of the N.C. School of Science and Mathematics announced his retirement Monday, following 10 years in which the Durham campus continued to grow but questions arose about the administrators he hired and the pay they received.

Chancellor Gerald Boarman said he wants to return to his home in Maryland to spend more time with his family, who had remained there.

The announcement surprised both the school's trustees and members of the UNC Board of Governors, who oversee the elite residential high school for academically gifted students. A spokeswoman for UNC President Erskine Bowles said that Boarman first broached the retirement with him shortly before Christmas.

Boarman, 62, told faculty and staff in an e-mail message Monday that his last day will be July 31. He said the details of his retirement have not been fully worked out and that he is considering several educational opportunities in Maryland.

"Please know that this has been a very difficult decision for me personally and professionally, but I look forward to hearing all that NCSSM has accomplished in the years to come and I know that I am leaving this fine institution in good hands," Boarman said in the message. He declined through a spokeswoman to be interviewed for this story.

Many kinds of growth

During Boarman's tenure, the school's population grew by roughly 20 percent, from 550 to 670 students. The school continued to attract many of the state's best and brightest, and it performed well in national academic competitions.

Boarman also drew controversy over some of the administrators he surrounded himself with. And he battled with faculty over the school's academic mission.

In October, The News & Observer reported that the school's administrative budget was growing faster, percentage wise, than its overall budget. In the past five years, the school's administrative costs had climbed nearly $1.1 million, or 46 percent, while the school's budget growth was 36 percent. Boarman has said the administrative costs over that period were not out of line, representing roughly 17 percent of the overall budget.

Much of the $1.1 million went toward pay raises for administrators, including several who had long-standing connections with Boarman or other school officials. Three administrators came from Eleanor Roosevelt High School in Maryland, where Boarman was a highly acclaimed principal before taking the Durham job.

Vocal praise, criticism

Bowles and members of the school's board and the Board of Governors continued to support Boarman. On Monday, several said they were sad to see him go.

"The students adore him, and he has made a lot of progress in the school from the time that he got here," said Shirley Frye, chairwoman of the school's trustee board. "We will miss his leadership and just hope we can get someone who can take the school from where he's taken it to even greater heights."

Henry Kuo, the board's vice chairman, said that during Boarman's tenure, the school had developed a reputation and model that other states try to emulate. Recently, Colorado educators came to the campus with hopes of building something similar in their state.

"He's been a good leader," Kuo said.

Others whom Boarman had tangled with weren't as complimentary when they heard of his planned exit.

"It's good to hear," said Jane Shlensky, a former English instructor at the school. "The system he's put in place will be more difficult to get rid of."

Frye declined to say when she got word of Boarman's exit. But other trustees and members of the Board of Governors said they only learned of it Monday.

Joni Worthington, a spokeswoman for the UNC president, said that Bowles had no role in Boarman's exit.

The trustee board will immediately begin looking for a successor. Among the challenges the new chancellor will face is garnering support for a major expansion expected to cost about $70 million.

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Colleges Market Easy, No-Fee Sell to Applicants

By JACQUES STEINBERG

RICHMOND, Va. — Over the last few years, the tiny College of Saint Rose in Albany has seen applications increase at least 25 percent annually, minority admissions rise and its standing in the U.S. News and World Report rankings climb more than 20 rungs.

Its secret? Lifting a page from the marketing playbook of credit card companies.

Last fall the college sent out 30,000 bright red “Exclusive Scholar Applications” to high school seniors that promised to waive the $40 application fee, invited them to skip the dreaded essay and assured a decision in three weeks. Because the application arrived with the students’ names and other information already filled in, applying required little more than a signature.

More than 100 other colleges and universities paid the same marketing company to send out variations of these fast-track applications last fall, more than a five-fold jump since 2006. Some have spent upward of $1 million on their application campaigns, and many have seen their applicant pools double or even triple in the last two years.

Theirs is a roster that includes well-known institutions like Marquette (which promised a free baseball cap to the first 250 respondents to its “Advantage Application”); Rensselaer Polytechnic (the “Candidate’s Choice Application”) and the University of Minnesota (“the Golden Gopher Fast Application”). Others that have regional reputations — like the University of the Pacific in Stockton, Calif. (the “Distinctive Candidate Application”) — are hoping to raise their national profiles.

While some guidance counselors say they welcome the elimination of application fees — which can be as much as $50 per college — they worry that the express applications may be short-circuiting a storied process in which students search out the colleges that might be the best fit for them.

The counselors also fear that recipients of the applications are being lulled into thinking they have been pre-approved for admittance. In fact, Marquette, with a freshman class of about 1,950, sent out about 40,000 of its “Advantage” applications last year, and will reject about 40 percent of its applicants over all.

Asked about the proliferation of such mailings, Robert Bardwell, a college counselor at Monson High School in western Massachusetts, said: “It’s disheartening that schools have to resort to this. I think they’re dealing with teenagers who don’t know what they want. I worry that they are applying just because it’s free, rather than that they think this might be the school for them.”

It is no coincidence that these marketing campaigns are similar to those in the financial and political worlds. Royall & Company, which designed and sent out most of these application packets from its offices in Richmond, employs several veterans from the direct mail campaigns of long-distance phone providers and
banks.

And its founder, Bill Royall, is a former political strategist who played a lead role in a mailing sent to tens of thousands of donors to Bill Clinton’s presidential campaign, hours after he accepted the Democratic Party nomination in July 1992.

The rise in short-cut applications appears to have two main causes. One is the fractured economy, which has left some colleges scrambling just to fill their freshman classes and to identify applicants who can pay full tuition. But there is also U.S. News and World Report, which puts a premium on big jumps in applications, as well as in applicants’ standardized test scores, in assembling its annual rankings.

Royall helps each college identify potential applicants by buying lists of high school students’ names and addresses from the College Board, based on how they performed on the PSAT or SAT, or on information they provided on their high school class rank, interests or ethnicity.

To Royall and its clients, the subsequent outreach helps students who might not know that a particular college exists. Moreover, the company argues that it is saving applicants precious time at a hectic moment in their lives. (Some colleges’ fast-track applications, for example, encourage students to submit a graded high school paper in lieu of an original essay.)

“People might say this is too easy, it isn’t rigorous enough,” Mr. Royall said. “No one has ever told us that the people applying using these methods are less qualified.”

Mr. Royall said that no college had ever mentioned climbing the U.S. News rankings as a goal. Instead, he said, most engaged his firm because they hoped to increase the quality and diversity of their applicant pools. And the strategy appears to work.

Eduardo Garnica, 19, of Sacramento, said he had expected to attend the University of California, Davis, until he received a “Distinctive Candidate” application from the University of the Pacific, 50 miles away in Stockton.

“I hadn’t been that interested in going there,” he said. “But they made it easy.”

Mr. Garnica said he had been captivated immediately by the words “Waived application fee” and “No required essay!” on the bright orange envelope. Inside, a cover letter congratulated him for having “earned an opportunity that is reserved for only a select few high-priority students.” (In truth, he was one of 30,000 who got the letter.)

He said he was flattered enough to visit, liked what he saw and was later accepted. He enrolled as a freshman this past fall.

Mr. Garnica said he was enjoying the university so much that he was willing to forgive a white lie in its marketing campaign — there is no application fee for anyone applying to Pacific, and thus no fee to waive.

Similarly, Matthew Buck, a 17-year-old high school senior at Monson High School in Massachusetts, whose counselor is Mr. Bardwell, said he had applied this year to York College in Pennsylvania, Wells College in New York, and Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Massachusetts, largely because they sent him fast-track
applications.

"It was free," Mr. Buck said. "I had nothing to lose." He added, "If they're willing to consider me, then I'll definitely consider them."

Mary Grondahl, vice president of enrollment management at the College of Saint Rose, said she started working with Royall several years ago at least partly to broaden the college's reach beyond the state's capitol region and to encourage more young men to apply.

Last year, it paid Royall about $120,000, or $4 per application.

The college credits the company, in large part, for helping increase the percentage of men in last year's entering freshman class to 35 percent, from 28 percent less than a decade ago.

Meanwhile, the number of enrolled students who hailed from outside the Albany region has increased to 63 percent, a 10-percentage-point gain from just a few years earlier, while the percentage of students who identified themselves as African-American, Asian or Hispanic, rose to 18 percent, from 7 percent, Ms. Grondahl said. Over all, applications climbed to more than 4,000 for the class of about 600 that enrolled in September.

Asked to fix a value on the campaign, Ms. Grondahl said, "It was almost like the MasterCard ad says: priceless."
'The Ivory Tower'—Who Does He Play For?

College sports bring millions of dollars into university coffers and are increasingly dominating campus life

By Mark Bauclein

A few weeks ago, on a brisk January night in Knoxville, hundreds of University of Tennessee students raced out of their dorm rooms in fury, lighting small fires, defacing campus landmarks and blocking traffic, all because the school had dropped U.S. history from the general-education requirements.

Just kidding—sort of. The Tennessee students did go on a rampage, but what incensed them was the departure of football coach Lane Kiffin for the University of Southern California Trojans after just one year at the helm of the Volunteers. Some students tried to enter the university’s press conference, one of them telling a local reporter: "We just really wanted to see Lane Kiffin and tell him how we feel." Another said: "Pretty much he just completely betrayed us."

However sophomoric the display, the students were right to be distressed, and the reasons go well beyond undergraduate emotion. As Mark Yost, a regular contributor to The Wall Street Journal, recounts in "Varsity Green," a disturbing ramble through the business of NCAA sports, the arrival or departure of a coach can affect a university far beyond the confines of the football stadium or basketball arena, from admissions to laboratories to the endowment.

Consider Mr. Yost’s first example, the hiring of basketball coach Bob Huggins by Kansas State University in 2006. Mr. Huggins had spent 18 years at University of Cincinnati compiling a superb record that was rewarded with 14 NCAA tournament appearances and a trip to the Final Four in 1992. But he also acted like a lout (including a 2004 drunk-driving conviction) and recruited "street thugs" (Mr. Yost’s term) with no interest in academics. Worse, the graduation rate of his players held steady at 0%. In 2005, Cincinnati’s president fired him and nobody complained.

Nevertheless, the following year Kansas State gave Mr. Huggins a five-year contract for $1 million per year, hoping, one might assume, that the coach would eventually turn the K-State Wildcats from a middling team to an Elite Eight perennial. But the deal also paid immediate dividends: Season-ticket sales leapt to $2.7 million from $1.2 million. Sales of apparel sporting the Wildcat logo rose by 30%. TV coverage increased, the royalties from one game alone delivering $135,000. Just a few weeks into the season, Mr. Huggins reeled in a $10 million contract with Nike to supply every varsity athlete with gear.

So when the itinerant Mr. Huggins left a year later for West Virginia University, Mr. Yost concludes, the coach didn’t betray Kansas State or ruin its investment. The school had been repaid many times over. As one higher-up in the K-State athletic department put it: "Bob Huggins is, himself, a national brand. And in many ways he made us a national brand, too."

Mr. Huggins carried embarrassing baggage, but rare is the college president who could turn down the benefits the coach offers. That’s the lesson of "Varsity Green"—not the book’s diagnosis of what’s wrong, for everybody knows that money corrupts college sports, but rather Mr. Yost’s illustration of why nobody can do anything about it. He moves casually from one topic to another, covering 19th-century violations of academic rules in one section, football-bowl payouts in another, the donations of T. Boone Pickens ($270 million to Oklahoma State athletics), Phil Knight of Nike ($100 million to University of Oregon athletics) and other billionaire boosters in another. The sections don’t add up to an exposé, and the chapters contain repetitions and vagaries characteristic of a book spliced together from shorter pieces written over the years. But Mr. Yost effectively describes actions and consequences that show how intractable the problem has become.

For instance: When tiny Adrian College in Michigan began building a $6.5 million stadium in 2005, observers might have wondered how that sum might improve education if it were devoted to academics instead. But 18 months later, freshman applications more than doubled, thus raising the selectivity of the student body and the intellectual caliber of every classroom.

Also: People are appalled at the million-dollar-plus salaries of big-time coaches, but in fact only a small portion is paid by the college. Football coach Tommy Tuberville earns more than $2 million at Auburn University, but the school covers only $235,000 of it. The rest comes mostly from media and marketing rights with ISP Sports.
Roy Williams, the basketball coach for the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, makes $1.6 million annually, but Nike provides $500,000 of the salary, and radio and TV bring $350,000 more. A booster club pays most of the rest.

In many cases, athletics deals spill over into academic support. When TCF Financial spent a headline-making $35 million on naming rights for a new University of Minnesota football stadium—the TCF Bank Stadium opened in the fall—the company also donated $10 million for academic scholarships. Notre Dame has an exclusive contract with NBC for its football games, but the school earmarks the bulk of the proceeds for need-based scholarships, doctoral fellowships and minority fellowships. Of every dollar that UNC-Chapel Hill makes on sales of trademarked apparel, 75 cents go to academic scholarships and financial aid. The bounty from college athletics fosters learning and access at the schools, and it also makes academic budgets ever more dependent upon playing field performance.

Why not hire that expensive celebrity coach, then, if competing schools are also eyeing him? Why not renovate the arena if it will spark more freshman applications (a key variable in the U.S. News & World Report college rankings)? Why not expand sports marketing if some of the resulting revenue can be siphoned into classrooms? Surrounded by television networks, shoe companies and wealthy alumni throwing money at the athletic department, and noting the rate of high-school seniors who apply only to colleges with a good football team, university leaders are trapped in a spiraling system. They recognize the compromises they’re making but can’t stop.

There is another group, though, that doesn’t understand the system so well: the thousands of high-school athletes who watch ESPN for hours and dream of glory, girls and cash. They spend afternoons working on their game like madmen, believing that they have a shot at the pros even though, to take basketball as an example, only 3% of them ever play in college, much less the NBA. What would happen if these deluded adolescents spent half their court time studying algebra and DNA, reading literature and history, following politics and learning a foreign language? Say that to kids, though, and they’ll just roll their eyes. As long as they watch nightly highlights of three-pointers and QB sacks, and hear tales of plush locker rooms and hot cheerleaders, the show-time side of “varsity green” is more meaningful and more real than anything in a textbook or a test tube.

—Mr. Bauerlein, the author of “The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future,” teaches at Emory University.
Editorial

Colleges' gender gap

Women now outnumber men in both applying to schools and earning degrees.

January 25, 2010

Who's smarter, men or women? It's a topic of common -- and often comic -- musings, but it has also become a serious policy issue for colleges and this nation's students.

After 17 years of concentrated effort to raise the academic achievement of girls, who in previous decades had often received less attention in the classroom and been steered away from college-prep courses, the nation can brag that female students have progressed tremendously. Though still underrepresented in calculus and other advanced-level science and math courses in high school, women now outnumber men applying to and graduating from college -- so much so that it appears some colleges are giving male applicants an admissions boost. As a result, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is examining whether colleges are engaging in widespread discrimination against women in an effort to balance their male and female populations.

Consider some of the numbers at leading schools: At Vassar College in New York State, a formerly all-women's college that is still 60% female, more than two-thirds of the applicants last year were women. The college accepted 35% of the men who applied, compared with 20% of the women. Locally, elite Pomona College accepted 21% of male applicants for this year's freshman class, but only 13% of female applicants. At Virginia's College of William & Mary, 7,652 women applied for this year's freshman class, compared with 4,457 male applicants. Yet the numbers of each who gained admittance were nearly the same. That's because the college accepted 45% of the men and only 27% of the women.

A 2007 analysis by U.S. News & World Report, based on the data sent by colleges for the magazine's annual rankings, found that the admissions rate for women averaged 13 percentage points lower than that for men. But percentages don't tell the whole story. It could be that the men were stronger candidates, or they might have applied in areas of engineering and science where women's numbers are still lower. But such justifications, even if true, are unlikely to fully explain these numbers. At
schools such as the University of California, where admissions rely overwhelmingly on statistical measures of academic achievement such as grades and test scores, the disparities don't appear. Far more women than men applied to UCLA -- the UC's most selective campus -- last year. The university accepted about the same percentage of each, with a slight edge to the women. As a result, the freshman class has close to 800 more women than men.

In recent years, several college leaders have admitted that their institutions give a boost to male applicants to maintain gender balance on campus. Most students of either sex, they point out, prefer such balance. If Vassar accepted equal percentages of each sex, women would outnumber men by more than 2 to 1.

The dean of admissions at Kenyon College in Ohio, a formerly all-male school, brought the matter to broad public attention in 2006 with an Op-Ed article for the New York Times describing the dilemma of her admissions office. "What messages are we sending young women that they must ... be even more accomplished than men to gain admission to the nation's top colleges?" Jennifer Delahunty Britz wrote.

This page has long favored allowing colleges to use race as an admissions factor in order to diversify student populations. Exposure to people of different backgrounds and viewpoints better educates all students -- not just those given a leg up. We are not in favor of accepting underqualified or clearly inferior students for the sake of diversity. But most colleges are inundated with applications from students who more than meet their standards; the differences among many of them are slight. It makes sense for colleges to pick a balanced population from within this group. At the same time, admissions officers should avoid rigid notions of what constitutes enough men on campus. It's not harming UCLA, or destroying college social life, to admit somewhat more women than men.

Even if the civil rights commission finds pervasive gender discrimination in admissions, there's little it could do about the situation. Such discrimination -- though not racial discrimination -- is legal for undergraduate admissions at private, nonprofit colleges, even those that receive federal funding. It is illegal at public colleges as well as graduate and professional schools. Commission documents on the inquiry suggest that colleges could find more "gender-neutral" ways of balancing their student numbers, perhaps by offering programs and extracurricular activities that attract men.

Those might work for some schools, but won't change the overall scenario. Not with college populations composed of 57% women nationwide. The issue we'd like the Commission on Civil Rights to investigate is: What's happening with the education of U.S. boys? Why are so few of them applying to and graduating from college?

Theories and arguments abound. Some say that boys are more active and thus less able to sit still for long periods -- and as a result, more likely to be categorized as having attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder or needing special education. A 2008 study by researchers at Northwestern University found that when girls are involved in a language-related task -- such as reading -- they show more activity in areas of the brain involved in encoding language. Boys use more sensory information to do linguistic tasks. The study suggests boys might do better if they were taught language arts in different ways. Race is a factor as well. The gender gap is starker among African American and Latino students.

There may be no one reason -- or solution. But figuring out ways to help boys achieve in school is a better response to the gender gap than making it easier for them to get into college later.
Cancer care boom makes N.C. a beacon for patients

His oncologist was out of ideas, and Duane Wait was low on hope.

So the South Carolinian looked 240 miles north, where the Duke Comprehensive Cancer Center, and a new clinical trial, beckoned.

Now, Wait drives more than four hours to Durham once a month for prostate cancer treatment and testing.

"I've had good treatment here [in Greenville, S.C.], but they just can't compete with Duke," said Wait, a 71-year-old retired Procter & Gamble manager. "It's critical for someone with cancer to have a positive attitude and think there is something hopeful. Going to Duke helps me stay positive and look at the future and not just say, well, you know, life is done."

Wait zeroed in on a place where cancer treatment is expanding. North Carolina's three largest academic medical centers, at Duke, UNC-Chapel Hill and Wake Forest University, are investing a collective $700 million to upgrade cancer facilities.

The latest: Duke Medicine's plan for a $261 million expansion to its cancer center, a seven-floor project that will bring all its clinical services into one place.

It follows the recent opening of UNC-CH's $207 million cancer hospital and comes as Wake Forest University, 100 miles west of Raleigh in Winston-Salem, is in the middle of a $152 million, five-story expansion of its cancer center.

But does North Carolina really need all this cancer care?

Experts say there's more than enough disease to go around. State health officials project a 14 percent increase in new cancer cases in North Carolina from 2006 to 2011 and a 21 percent jump in new cancer cases in the Triangle during that same time. Nationally, cancer cases across the nation are expected to grow 45 percent from 2010 to 2030, in large part because people are living longer.

"The medical care infrastructure in North Carolina has always been trying to catch up with demand," said Tom Ricketts, editor of the N.C. Medical Journal and a professor of health policy and management at UNC-CH.

If you've got cancer, North Carolina is a good place to look for help. It is one of just four states - California, New York and Pennsylvania are the others - with at least three "comprehensive cancer centers," a label the National Cancer Institute gives to cancer hospitals where research, treatment and clinical trials meet. These centers draw top medical talent and tend to offer the broadest treatments.

The next closest is Johns Hopkins in Baltimore. There are none in Virginia or South Carolina.

The existence of three such centers is a result of North Carolina's historic emphasis on higher education,
a growing and diverse population, and a traditional political willingness to fund cancer initiatives, cancer experts say.

The state's population is a particularly valuable tool for cancer researchers conducting clinical trials. The state's smokers have long provided a study group for lung-cancer researchers; as have African-Americans, who traditionally have shouldered a disproportionate share of North Carolina's cancer cases, according to a 2008 report, "Cancer in North Carolina," produced by the N.C. Cancer Partnership, a consortium of medical providers across the state.

"There's been a fertile environment for people to support community-based cancer studies and fairly arcane laboratory work," Ricketts said. If you're going to have clinical trials, you need the proper populations. North Carolina has a fairly diverse population, which allows people to be involved."

Translation: The people of North Carolina are a working laboratory for cancer research.

That's fine with Wait, the South Carolina man. Without further treatment, he might be dead in a year or two; with Duke's clinical trial, he hopes to extend his life a few more years.

Still, he struggles with the knowledge that the end will come.

"What concerns me is the actual process of dying of prostate cancer," he said. "I know it's an anguishing last few months and I hate the thought of going through that, though at some point I suppose I will."

Competition is natural

In expanding their facilities, staffs and reach, these academic medical centers hope to raise their profiles and to compete nationally and internationally for patients and the best doctors. Duke's cancer expansion is just one piece of a $700 million facilities explosion on that campus that will include a new bed tower. It may seem like a lot of money, but across the country other health centers are doing the same.

Experts say competition is natural.

"It's a pretty typical scenario for an academic medical center," said Debbie Draper, a former hospital administrator and a senior fellow with the Center for Studying Health System Change, a Washington D.C.-based health policy research organization. "They tend to draw nationally or internationally. We're seeing this across the country, hospitals expanding to try to protect their market share." They're looking at trying to remain competitive with other academic medical centers across the country.

Cancer care is a boon to a hospital's bottom line. It has grown more complex and patient-specific, which is both more costly and more effective, said Walter Shepherd, who directs the N.C. Comprehensive Cancer Program, a strategic planning initiative within the state's Department of Health and Human Services.

An example: A decade or two ago, 10 breast cancer patients would likely receive the same treatment; today, they might get 10 different treatment plans, each tailored to the woman's age, condition, tumor size and location and other factors.

"It's more personalized treatment," Shepherd said. "And more expensive."

UNC and Duke officials each say the two cancer centers have complementary missions and don't need to
compete for patients because there's plenty of business to go around. And each has specialty areas.

Duke's brain tumor center, where U.S. Sen. Ted Kennedy received treatment before his death in August, has an international profile thanks in large part to the work of its lead surgeon, Allan Friedman. And at UNC, gastrointestinal cancer specialist Richard Goldberg has built such a well-regarded program that more than half his patients fly to North Carolina for treatment, he said.

"For many years, our ambition was to serve the state," said Goldberg, the physician-in-chief of the N.C. Cancer Hospital at UNC. "[Now] we want to serve the state very well, as well as serve the entire country. We aspire to be right up there."

One way is to broaden their reach beyond campus. Rex Healthcare, which is owned by UNC, recently announced plans to build a $54 million cancer hospital in Raleigh, a facility that would be closely linked with the new UNC cancer hospital in Chapel Hill. And Duke is also planning to expand cancer services at Duke Raleigh Hospital.

Patients, doctors drawn

The state's investment in cancer care, and the presence of the three comprehensive cancer centers, makes North Carolina an attractive destination for both patients and doctors, said Chris Viehbacher, CEO of sanofi-aventis, a Paris-based drug manufacturer with a U.S. headquarters in New Jersey.

Viehbacher's firm, which recently donated $2 million to UNC-CH's new cancer hospital, said as medicine becomes more personalized and specific, private industry will need to partner even more with academic medical centers.

"Research and development is very sophisticated," he said. "Everybody brings certain strengths to the party."

Local relationships

Shepherd, who directs the N.C. Comprehensive Cancer Program, said the state's three comprehensive cancer centers have forged relationships with smaller hospitals and clinics to bring quality care to the state's farthest reaches.

"It's great to have all the bells and whistles of UNC or Duke," he said. "But it's another thing if you live somewhere rural and can go five miles to a hospital with virtually the same level of care."

In expanding their cancer centers, all three universities are shifting a long-held paradigm. For decades, cancer centers - and hospitals in general - have been vast, confusing and intimidating.

Frank Torti, director of the cancer center at Wake Forest, paints this scenario: Traditionally, a breast cancer patient at Wake Forest sees a surgeon, gets a mammogram and a biopsy, meets a radiation specialist, a chemotherapy specialist, and perhaps a plastic surgeon and genetic counselor. Think all those specialists are in the same building? No chance. Often they're nowhere near each other, forcing an ill patient to navigate parking lots, buildings, hallways and waiting rooms.

"By that time, the patient is either ready to shoot us, or is in tears," Torti said. "That has been the traditional, doctor-centric way of doing things."
It's not just about convenience, said Daniel George, a prostate cancer specialist at Duke. When those services are scattered around the medical campus there is a great chance of errors - in billing, blood testing, drug dosing or in other ways, George said.

"It changes the culture for us as clinicians because we'll be elbow to elbow," he said. "If you don't come together physically, it's hard to develop an understanding of disease."

At UNC-CH, the new hospital, gleaming and massive, is a quantum leap from the former facility, which was originally a tuberculosis sanitarium.

"The first thing that struck me was that this hospital was designed by patients," said Shepherd, the cancer program director. "That's the way it should be."

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