

Florida colleges bursting at the seams

By Joni James
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Too many students. Too little room. No, it's not a rerun, just the higher education sequel.

Less than a month after Florida's public schools won \$2.7 billion in construction bonds to expand and renovate classrooms, public universities and community colleges are beginning to sound their own alarm.

Their spief: The booming student population forcing all that school construction soon will reach college age. And Florida's public universities and community colleges aren't ready for them. They say they need billions of additional dollars for construction if they're to serve the state's largest-ever high school graduation classes.

Despite construction on almost all campuses, colleges haven't added space at the same rate they've added students. At the University of Central Florida, for example, large classes meet in a rented movie theater across from campus. There aren't enough big

classrooms on campus. And though UCF is going through a building boom, it is also adding thousands more students annually.

"We have supported the K-12 effort and let that be a priority," Board of Regents Chairman Steve Uhfelder said. "Now the focus needs to be on higher education."

It's not the first time higher education has tried to persuade lawmakers to spend more on construction, which currently gets money through the state's utilities tax.

Numerous attempts, including one last year, to expand that tax to include more utilities—such as cable bills—fell flat.

Earlier this year, the Governor's Commission on Education resurrected a recurring proposal—to increase the amount of tax money going to higher education construction from 40 percent to 60 percent. Such proposals have been unpopular in the past because they would take money away from public-school construction. But higher-education advocates argue public schools have other ways to raise

construction money, including property taxes, that colleges and universities do not.

College and university leaders also have asked the state to let them use tuition revenue to back construction bonds. But the Legislature didn't go for that idea three years ago.

That any proposal can hold in Tallahassee this spring is doubtful. Many politicians say the thing isn't right. Not only are lawmakers road-weary from last month's special session on public school but both the state university system and the community colleges division may be without top leaders at the time.

Searches are under way to replace Chancellor Charlie Reed as well as Clark Maxwell, the community college executive director who will retire at the end of the year. Reed will become chancellor of California State University in March.

"It might be premature," said Rep. Lee Constantine, R-Altamonte Springs. "For us to shirk and tell a leaderless organization how they're going to build for the next decade may not be wise."

In the next dozen years, more than

200,000 additional students are expected to want to enroll in the state's 28 community colleges and 10 public universities. Officials estimate they'll need nearly \$3 billion just in the next five years to expand campuses, despite adding distance technology so students can learn from home or remote sites.

The utilities tax, however, is expected to provide only \$1.1 billion.

During last month's special session, the Legislature voted to let community colleges sell bonds backed by their \$1-per-credit-hour fee for capital improvements. But the fee, which raises just \$6.4 million annually, won't go far toward the \$1.5 billion community college leaders say they need.

"That bubble of students will go through K-12 but once," said Paul Gianini Jr., president of Valencia Community College. "But they're going to stay in our community colleges and university system forever because people need to come back for new training ... Right now, we don't have places to put them all."

Job market best in decade, survey finds

Unemployment is at 4.7 percent, the lowest in 24 years

CPS

More than 70 percent of employers surveyed said they planned on hiring more college graduates in 1998 than they did this year.

A booming economy, low inflation and a labor shortage will add up to lots of job opportunities and decent starting salaries for college graduates, said Camille Luckenbaugh, the NACE information director.

"The unemployment rate is 4.7 percent, the lowest in 24 years," said Luckenbaugh. Because of the low unemployment rate, employers are having a harder time filling their positions with experienced employees, she added.

"This has created a trickle-down effect," she said. "Employees can't find experienced employees so they're hiring new college graduates."

Overall, hiring will be up 19.1 percent for new grads, according to Job Outlook '98, the NACE's annual forecast released in November. For the report, 1,529 employers were asked to complete a survey about their hiring intentions, and 421, or 21 percent, did. Of those employers who responded, more than 25 percent said they expected to maintain current hiring levels. Only 3.1 percent of employers said they planned to hire fewer grads.

"This is the best job market in recent years," said Bradley Richardson, author of "JobSmarts: 50 Top Careers." "Companies are having a hard time finding quality employees, so they're offering more things, like benefits or other perks."

To snag qualified candidates, employers are traveling to campuses more to recruit new hires, according to the survey. More than half of the employers reported an increase in campus visits, and overall, campus visits are up 8.8 percent.

Luckenbaugh said that in the past, employers could take a "wait-and-see" approach to recruitment and often made job offers later in the recruitment season. This year, employers who wait risk coming up empty, she added.

"Those who have traditionally hired from the campus are elbow to elbow with those who are turning to inexperienced candidates to round out their workforces," Luckenbaugh said.

Stiff competition isn't the only worry employers face. Preliminary data from NACE's most recent student survey show that 60 percent of 764 students responding said they would renege on a job offer if a better one came along.

Most in demand are graduates with computer skills, said Luckenbaugh. Entry-level computer science and computer engineering grads can expect to collect paychecks that are 6.3 percent higher than last year. Computer science majors will earn an average of \$38,475 annually, while computer engineers will pull down an average starting rate of \$39,593.

However, the biggest anticipated increase in starting salaries is expected to be for liberal arts majors, who will see their starting pay increase an average of 6.5 percent. While the \$28,875 starting

salary of the average liberal arts major lags considerably behind "in-demand" disciplines such as engineering and computer science, the size of the increase "shows just how strong demand is [for new hires] across all industries," said Luckenbaugh. Job opportunities for liberal arts majors are most plentiful with insurance and merchandising firms, she added.

Business grads can anticipate a starting salary of \$29,784, a 5.5 percent increase from last year's salary. These grads, like many liberal arts students, will find job openings in insurance and merchandise companies.

The salary increases for 1998 are in sharp contrast to 1992, the year in which the NACE recorded the worst job market of the decade. Then, 41 percent of the majors surveyed showed a decrease in starting salaries, said Luckenbaugh.

Whether employers are looking for computer programmers, accountants or retail managers, most say they are interested in hiring candidates who have integrity, are motivated and who are good communicators. Employers also said they don't have time to spoon-feed new employees.

"Employers said they want someone who has honesty, motivation, teamwork and interpersonal skills. They also want someone who has done research on the company and is able to ask intelligent questions about it during an interview," Luckenbaugh said.

Even though 1998 promises to be a job-seeker's market, Richardson advised students to remain flexible with their job choice.

"Don't pigeonhole yourself; don't limit yourself," he said. "You're not locked into any industry if you remember that there are common positions in a multitude of industries."

Other findings from the NACE survey include:

- Despite the strong demand from employers for graduates with computer science training, statistics from the U.S. Department of Education show the number of graduates earning computer science degrees has dropped 43 percent from 1986. At the same time, the Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts a 70 percent growth in computer and data processing jobs by 2005.

- The South leads all other regions in job market growth. Employers there said they will hire 27.3 more new graduates than they did last year. The West came in second, with employers reporting a 22.8 percent increase in new hires. Midwest employers plan to hire 16.2 percent more grads. Although the Northeast lags behind all other regions, employers still anticipate hiring 10 percent more new grads than in 1996-97.

- The market also is strong for two-year graduates. Fifty-four percent of respondents indicated that they hire two-year degree graduates. The most hotly recruited students are engineering technology and computer science students.

- The Internet is growing in popularity as a recruitment tool among employers. This year more employers ranked Internet job postings above newspaper advertising in a list of their favorite recruiting tools.

Critics fear court decision could have chilling effect on student press

By Christine Tatum
CPS

A federal judge in Kentucky has ruled that college administrators are "entitled to exercise reasonable control" over the content of some campus publications.

While the decision only directly impacts colleges and universities in the U.S. District Court circuit covering eastern Kentucky, critics fear it could lead to a crackdown on other campus publications by

school officials nationwide.

"This is going to have an effect on student media around the country," said Mark Goodman, executive director of the Student Press Law Center. "There's no way legitimate news coverage won't fall victim to this."

The recent decision violates students' First Amendment rights, Goodman said.

"[The judge] completely ignored that the Supreme Court has also

said that colleges and universities are unique places where free

"...It was reasonable for the administration to want the yearbook to focus mainly on K.S.U."

Judge Joseph M. Hood

expression should be protected," he said.

Students at Kentucky State University made similar arguments after school officials refused to distribute their yearbook. Officials said they disliked the book because it didn't include the school's colors or captions under several photographs, and failed to focus on university activities.

"If you allow school officials to use colors and captions as justification for taking books off the shelf, think of how easy it'll be for them to censor whatever they want for whatever reasons they want," Goodman said. "If they want nothing more than a public relations sheet for the school, then they should be producing the yearbook and not pretending it's a student publication."

But Judge Joseph M. Hood said the university has a right to review the annual publication. In his decision, he cited the U.S. Supreme Court's 1988 ruling in Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier, which states school officials have the right to censor articles in the student newspaper that are deemed contrary to the school's educational mission. Generally referred to today as "Hazelwood," the case and the ruling remain at the center of debate over student expression in secondary schools.

"...It was reasonable for the administration to want the yearbook to focus mainly on K.S.U.," Hood wrote.

Student journalists at North Alabama University say they already fear their school's administrators will use Hood's decision to justify prior review of the campus newspaper.

"They want our faculty advisor to look at all copy before it goes out the door," said Tyler Greer, managing editor of the "Flor-Ala." "The potential for our advisor to receive pressure from people above her to take things out of the paper or make unnecessary changes is definitely there, and this case just makes their argument stronger."

School officials, however, said they do not plan on using the recent ruling as justification for censorship of the campus paper. Instead, the adviser says she reviews the paper before it goes to press for grammar and spelling errors only. "No one here would stand for that," said Mary Jennings, faculty adviser for the "Flor-Ala."

Affirmative action critic draws protest at University of North Carolina

By Taylor Batten
The Charlotte Observer
Knight-Ridder/Tribune News Service

CHAPEL HILL, N.C.—As hundreds of angry and determined students protested, the nation's leading critic of affirmative action took center stage at UNC Chapel Hill Tuesday and denounced racial preferences as undercutting America's quest for equality.

Ward Connerly, the University of California regent who almost single-handedly ended affirmative action in California last year, entered the fray at UNC just as the university system considers abolishing long-standing race-based policies.

"Once the public understands the way in which race is used, the extent of the use of race ... then I think the handwriting is on the wall for the doom of affirmative action as we know it," said Connerly, who is black.

The spotlight, though, was less on Connerly and more on the 250 students, black, white and other colors, who filled the student union and re-created a scene from the civil rights battles of the 1960s.

Fists pumping, feet stomping, they chanted. Some were angry. Some were smiling in the cohesiveness of their message. Leaders took turns shouting into their megaphone and waiting for the thunderous response.

"What do we want?"
"ACCESS!"
"When do we want it?"
"NOW!"
Then:
"No University Without Diversity!
No University Without Diversity!"
They came not only to denounce Connerly, but to send a message to university system President Molly

Broad. Broad, responding to at least three court decisions across the nation striking down racial preferences, has ordered university system leaders to examine all race-based admissions policies and scholarships. Those of questionable legal ground will be changed or abolished.

"The law of the Supreme Court of the United States is that race can be a factor," junior Ali Fischer yelled to the throng of students. "(Broad) is obligated as a representative of this university to follow that law!"

A handful of students seeking to end affirmative action milled about.

"More highly qualified people are being turned down for the sake of racial diversity," said Nathan Stowe, a junior from Wadesboro who is vice chairman of the conservative student group Common Sense. "Affirmative action deflects attention away from the major problem: Our public education system is in shambles."

Connerly was expected to speak to a mostly sympathetic crowd of about 500. But organizers allowed more than 100 protesters in right before the speech, fueling a hostile reception.

They hissed while Connerly was introduced. Cheers and boos collided as he took the stage, and later during a question-and-answer session.

Connerly, 58, has emerged as the country's most vocal and influential enemy of affirmative action. In 1995, he persuaded California's regents to end all race-based hiring and admissions at public universities. The next year, he led the campaign for Proposition 209, which banned racial preferences in state government.

At the heart of the polarized groups squaring off at UNC Tuesday is a confounding issue being played out across the nation: Do blacks and other

minorities need special treatment to overcome past and maybe current discrimination? Or do such preferences breed resentment, and insult the very groups they aim to help?

Connerly has a vision for America, one in which race doesn't matter. The civil rights legislation of the 1960s, he said, aimed to eliminate race as a factor in American life. Somewhere along the way, it re-entered.

The language in Proposition 209, which bars discrimination or preferences based on race, is strikingly similar to the Voting Rights Act of 1964, he said.

"In the 1960s, I think there would have been a parade in my honor if I tried to get my nation to embrace this policy," Connerly said.

Minorities may still face discrimination, Connerly said.

"But practicing it and institutionalizing it on the part of one group to (help) another is not the way, I will submit to you, that we're going to get there," he said.

Connerly became visibly irked during a 30-minute question-and-answer session as he was challenged again and again.

One woman repeatedly demanded to know why Connerly didn't oppose admissions preferences for athletes or students whose parents attended a given school.

"I can't give you a response because your cheering squad keeps jumping in," a frustrated Connerly said.

Connerly, saying blacks still mainly interact with blacks and whites with whites, said diversity on today's campus is shallow.

When diversity is achieved without preferences, he said, "It will be much sweeter, and much more enduring."