

## N.C. gets an 'F' in college tuition

National report fears for education

**Jane Stancill and Tim Simmons, Staff Writers**

Despite a reputation for bargain universities, North Carolina's college affordability is deteriorating, according to a new national report on higher education.

The report gives the state good marks for students' preparation, participation and college degree completion. But North Carolina's public and private colleges get an "F" for affordability along with those in 42 other states, according to figures released today by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, a nonpartisan policy research group based in California.

The consequences for those states could be devastating, higher education advocates say, arguing that the United States will lose its edge in the global economy.

In this country, the likelihood of a ninth grader's enrolling in college four years later is less than 40 percent, according to the report. Extending higher education to more Americans, particularly low-income and minority families, is no longer an issue of charity, they argue. It's a matter of national competitiveness.

The educational power of the United States is concentrated in its baby boomer population, not in young people, in contrast to other nations around the world, said Pat Callan, president of the center.

For the first time in our nation's history, Callan said, the next generation may be less educated



Junior Josh Wilkes is grateful for the Carolina Covenant.

### 2006 REPORT CARD: NC COLLEGES

**OVERALL:** Despite above-average marks in most areas, North Carolina is going backward when it comes to making college more affordable, according to the report by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. Here are the grades the report gives the UNC system.

**B+ IN PREPARATION:** The percentage of high school students taking upper-level math courses has increased sharply in the past 12 years.

**B- IN PARTICIPATION:** Although a smaller percentage of students are completing high school, those who do are more likely to attend college.

**F IN AFFORDABILITY:** Typical college costs for low- and middle-income families now represent about one-third of the average family income.

than its parents.

"We're in a world that relentlessly punishes communities, states and countries with undereducated populations," Callan said.

### Rich and poor

The findings indicate that the share of family income required for a year of college has grown for all but the richest Americans and there are big gaps in college participation between rich and poor students.

Financial aid has not paced tuition increases, and college costs are rising faster than inflation, family income and even health care, Callan said. At the same time, immigrant and minority populations, which are disproportionately low-income, are increasing.

It's a scenario that has people worried.

Next week, UNC-Chapel Hill will put the issue at the forefront when it hosts a national conference, "The Politics of Inclusion: Higher Education at a Crossroads."

The conference, from Sept. 10 to 13, is expected to attract 150 policymakers, economists, researchers, and foundation and business leaders. It will showcase UNC-CH's Carolina Covenant program, which provides debt-free education to poor students.

The initiative, which now serves 949 freshmen, sophomores and juniors, has received accolades nationally. More than 20 universities have started similar programs, including N.C. State University, which this year kicked off its Pack Promise program that will serve about 400 freshmen each year.

Josh Wilkes, 21, of Clarkton, a UNC-CH junior, isn't sure he would be in college without the Carolina Covenant. He works for a lab on campus as part of the pact and will graduate

**B+ IN COMPLETION:** Compared to national averages, a high percentage of freshmen return for their second year, and those in certificate programs are likely to complete the work.

**B IN BENEFITS:** The percentage of adults with at least a bachelor's degree has increased to 27 percent, combined personal income is up and charitable giving remains high.

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In-state costs for tuition and fees, which the universities control, have increased sharply at Triangle universities in the past decade. Additional costs for room, board, books and other expenses now can add another \$10,000 annually.

SCHOOL	TUITION/FEES ('96-'97)	TUITION/FEES ('06-'07)
N.C. Central University	\$1,596	\$3,958
N.C. State University	\$2,220	\$4,783
UNC-Chapel Hill	\$2,110	\$5,033

UNC SYSTEM, INDIVIDUAL CAMPUSES. FIGURES ARE NOT ADJUSTED FOR INFLATION

with no debt.

The budding psychologist is saving the loans for graduate school. "I've got a long educational road ahead of me," he said.

UNC-CH Chancellor James Moeser said he hoped next week's conference influences national policy and practice.

"We've got to see this as a competitiveness issue," Moeser said. "It is a matter of social justice and equity, but it's also a matter of national interest."

Moeser praised the legislature for creating a statewide need-based financial aid program in recent years, even while it cut the state budget. His biggest fear, he said, is a major change in federal loans that could jeopardize programs such as the Carolina Covenant.

### **'Expensive as possible'**

While innovative financial aid programs have garnered praise, universities here and elsewhere have been criticized for raising tuition and not containing costs.

In North Carolina, the state constitution guarantees a free education "as far as practicable." But last month, the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research in Raleigh warned that the UNC system risks a lawsuit because tuition has increased 71 percent for North Carolinians from 1999 to 2004.

"We've gone from as free as practicable to as expensive as possible as a philosophy," said Sam Watts, a policy analyst for the independent, nonpartisan research center.

### **Taken by surprise**

One factor that blunts public response to annual tuition increases is the fact that many parents don't bother to track college costs until their children hit high school.

"I saved over the years, and I knew it would be expensive, but I didn't really know what it would cost until this summer," said Darriel Barrow of New Bern, whose son Darrius is a freshman at UNC-CH. "When I went to the parent orientation in July, I was still trying to get someone to give me a total cost so I could figure out how much to borrow."

Barrow, who retired in April after 26 years in the Navy, eventually chose to take out a federal Parent Plus Loan for \$9,700 because he doesn't want his son to worry about paying off college debt.

Instead, Barrow plans to return to work and hopes his son will continue to receive an annual grant of \$5,000 from the university.

Even though college isn't the kind of thing that sneaks up on a family, many parents are surprised when they get the final bill.

"In the back of my mind, I was thinking it would cost about \$8,000 to \$10,000 a year," said Tony Wilson of Wilmington, whose son Jordan is a freshman at UNC-CH. "I was obviously wrong, but it's my fault I didn't know."

Over the years, Wilson, director of planning and parks for Wrightsville Beach, had heard the nearly constant message from educators that a lack of money shouldn't keep qualified students from attending college. Like many middle-class parents, he assumed some of that money was for his qualified child.

Instead, he has come to the realization that his son probably will borrow about \$50,000 before he graduates.

"It's not that I think it's a bad value," Wilson said. "I guess I was just blind to the cost."

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