



West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission

Higher Education
News Clippings

Week of July 26, 2009

July 27, 2009

WVU health chancellor finalist to visit Aug. 3

The Associated Press

MORGANTOWN, W.Va. (AP) - Two finalists for the chancellor of health sciences at West Virginia University will visit next week.

Christopher Colenda, dean of medicine at Texas A&M, will attend two public forums Aug. 3 at the Health Sciences auditorium and the Erickson Alumni Center.

WVU has scheduled two other finalists for Aug. 5 and Aug. 10, but search committee chairman Curtis "Hank" Barnette has not yet identified those candidates.

Colenda is vice president for clinical affairs at the Texas A&M Health Science Center.

He has degrees from Wittenburg University, The Medical College of Virginia at Virginia Commonwealth University, and Johns Hopkins University.

Colenda is licensed to practice medicine in Texas, Michigan, North Carolina, Maryland, Georgia and Virginia.



July 30, 2009

WVU names second HSC chancellor candidate Two forums set for next week on campus

Staff reports

WVU identified the second of three finalists for the university's chancellor of health sciences position Wednesday.

Dr. Peter S. Amenta, dean of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey's (UMDNJ) Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, will visit campus next week on Tuesday and Wednesday, according to a WVU press release.

Open forums are set for Wednesday. Amenta will meet with the health sciences community at noon in the Robert C. Byrd Health Sciences Center's Patteson Auditorium. A forum for the main campus and Morgantown community is scheduled for 4 p.m. at the Erickson Alumni Center.

Amenta will follow Dr. Christopher C. Colenda, the Jean and Thomas McMullin dean of medicine and vice president for clinical affairs at Texas A&M Health Science Center, to Morgantown.

Colenda was identified as a finalist for the job earlier this week. He will visit on Sunday and Monday, participating in forums with the same constituency groups as Amenta on his second day in town.

"They look very qualified," Bruce McClymonds, president and CEO of WVU Hospitals, said of the two candidates Wednesday. "I don't know either of them. I'm looking forward to meeting them."

A position description posted online indicates the chancellor will oversee the Health Sciences Center (HSC) and report directly to WVU President James P. Clements. Forums for one additional candidate are scheduled for Aug. 10, but the remaining finalist has not been identified.

Comments on each finalist will be solicited via paper and online forms, as well as direct e-mail from individuals who participate in the search process by interviewing candidates, attending forums and/or reviewing the candidates' credentials. Officials have said Clements will make the final decision as to who gets the job.

A full curriculum vitae for Amenta and Colenda is posted online. Amenta has been dean at UMDNJ since October 2008 and interim dean since April 2006. He is also professor and chairman of the Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine and a member of the Cancer Institute of New Jersey.

His background also includes serving as senior vice president of medical affairs and chief of staff at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital and assistant Professor for the Department of Pathology at Hahnemann University.

Amenta earned a bachelor's degree from Trinity College. He earned a physician's assistant degree, master of science and doctorate in anatomy from Hahnemann University in Philadelphia.

The chancellor position was created to fill a vacancy for vice president of health sciences. When the job was announced in January, search committee chairman Curtis "Hank" Barnette said the title was changed to "better reflect the scope and authority" of the position.

Dr. Fred Butcher has served as the interim vice president for health sciences since April 2007, when longtime vice president Dr. Robert D'Alessandri left WVU to become president and founding dean of the Commonwealth Medical College in Scranton, Pa.

Butcher said Wednesday that he's been out of town and hasn't had time to review either candidate's credentials in-depth, but he'll learn more when he meets with them next week. He said WVU needs a leader with experience at a complex health enterprise for chancellor, as well as someone with a personality that fits the university.

"It really boils down to issues of personality, leadership skills, the ability to inspire people, those types of things," Butcher said.

The chancellor's duties will also include realigning the HSC mission and resources, planning for future growth and expanding research. Butcher and other health sciences officials developed a plan to streamline the university's clinical operations earlier this year, but physicians for University Health Associates — WVU's clinical practice arm for School of Medicine faculty — failed to approve the proposal by a two-thirds majority as required by UHA bylaws.

July 29, 2009

Boost for WVU research

MORGANTOWN – West Virginia University research efforts received another boost through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) with nearly \$628,000 in funding awarded through the National Science Foundation (NSF).

WVU officials were notified this week that NSF has chosen two additional projects from the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences Department of Physics to be funded under the ARRA.

In July, WVU announced that eight faculty members will share in more than \$3 million in economic stimulus support over the next two years for a wide range of research activity.

“Basic research is a building block in the creation of new knowledge, technology, and, ultimately, jobs,” said Dr. Curt Peterson, vice president of Research and Economic Development. “The National Science Foundation has chosen to invest in outstanding research being undertaken in our physics department, which is achieving a great reputation and continues to have an impact on long-range innovation.”

The projects to be funded in the most recent announcement of ARRA awards are

\$267,983 for a “New Census of Globular Cluster Pulsars” by Assistant Professor Duncan Lorimer; \$360,000 for “The Theory of Magnetic Reconnection Onset: Three Dimensional and Diamagnetic Effects,” by Assistant Professor Paul Cassak.

Lorimer’s work will center on analyzing dense stellar environments that serve as astrophysical laboratories in which scientists can probe stellar evolution and the dynamics of star systems. Much of the research will be built around work done at the NSF-funded Green Bank Telescope in West Virginia where scientists have discovered a majority of known radio pulsars that help researchers learn more about the clusters.

Lorimer predicts that the research will help West Virginia teach astronomy courses and astronomical research by developing new laboratory components for undergraduate students and an inquiry-based, learning tool for high school science teachers. The work will also raise the international research profile of WVU and help increase the number of students studying science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Cassak’s work is seen as a critical topic in work under way to address sustainable energy and to understand more about space weather. The objective of the ARRA-funded project is to develop an understanding of magnetic reconnection – a fundamental physics process in which magnetic energy is converted into particle and flow energy like in solar flares or fusion devices.

The project will ultimately produce a range of outreach materials that will be used at WVU’s Tomchin Planetarium and for use in presentations to the general public and school groups to help recruit more young people to the field of study.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 is an economic stimulus package enacted by the 111th United States Congress and signed into law by President Barack Obama on February 17, 2009. All of the funds were awarded competitively, with proposals from WVU judged against those from research universities across the country.

July 28, 2009

WVU biology professor receives research grant from Army

Letha Sooter, an assistant professor of biology at West Virginia University's Eberly College of Arts and Sciences and a researcher at WVNano, has been awarded the University's first cooperative agreement with the Department of Defense.

She will receive more than \$409,000 from the U.S. Army Research Laboratory to work with molecular recognition elements (or MREs), in hopes of creating devices that will detect explosive, chemical and biological warfare.

MREs are bio-molecules that bind with specific targets. "And the targets can be absolutely anything," Sooter said.

She once worked with MREs that glowed and bound to cracks in airplanes. Other researchers are looking for MREs that bind with cancer cells.

She's searching for the bio-molecules that will detect chemical and biological danger for soldiers and civilians.

"Molecular recognition elements are such a powerful tool," Sooter said. "They're amazing little things. They do a wonderful job of being specific and having a high affinity for their target."

But finding them, she says, is a little like winning the lottery. Sooter has an extensive library of molecules – or lottery tickets – that she tests over time. But there's only one winner, and she has to keep searching until she locates it.

The cooperative agreement will give Sooter and her team of student researchers three years worth of funding to accomplish that goal. If they locate the correct bio-molecules, the Army will apply them to the sensing devices they are currently creating and soldiers will be able to use the technology in theater.

"The end goal is always the most exciting part for me," Sooter said. "If we can find this and create something that will really help the nation out – that would be great."

But getting there is an arduous process. Not only does the science have to be right, but the device has to work under a strict set of circumstances. While the Army is concerned about the device's portability and ease of use, Sooter has to worry about the bio-molecule functioning in any environment – ocean, desert and even subway station.

Because Sooter has been working with MREs for nearly a decade and conducted research at the Army Research Lab before coming to WVU in July 2008, she is optimistic that there will be more collaboration between the government and the University.

"Hopefully, this cooperative agreement is the first of many," she said.

The Daily Athenaeum

"Little good is accomplished without controversy, and no civic evil is ever defeated without publicity."

July 29, 2009

Enrollment down for the upcoming year

By Paul Kast, Staff Writer

Enrollment for the 2009-10 school year at West Virginia University is down, according to WVU officials.

The incoming freshmen class will be between 4,500 and 4,700 students, according to Brenda Thompson, associate vice president for Enrollment Management. In 2008, 5,000 freshmen were enrolled at WVU.

The smaller number of incoming freshmen is "intentional," according to Thompson, though she said it's too early to determine exact figures since more freshmen orientations are scheduled for the end of summer.

The freshmen class will consist of around 46 percent female students and 54 percent male students.

The male population at WVU has always been slightly higher, according to Thompson, and there is no substantial trend change in the population of minority or international students.

Overall attendance was "around 28,800 last year," Thompson said, but in 2009-10 attendance could be "500-600 lower."

Tuition cost will be an estimated \$5,304 for in-state students and \$16,402 for out-of-state students, Thompson said.

"People are trying to find less expensive ways to be in school," said Clifford Hawley, interim director of the Division of Economics and Finance.

Students are less likely to go out-of-state and choose in-state, he said, which "cuts both ways for WVU."

The raise in tuition may also affect incoming students, Hawley said, especially those "giving WVU a close look for the first time."

These raises in tuition are "elastic for juniors and seniors" already attending WVU, Hawley said.

Because of the economic situation, Hawley believes some people "close to the margin" nationally won't attend college immediately after high school.

Although WVU enrollment is down in 2009-2010, Hawley said "on the whole you will see undergraduate enrollment down" throughout the nation.

July 29, 2009

Engineering scholarship established

HUNTINGTON – The Massey Energy Scholarship for Engineering has been established by the Marshall University Foundation, Inc., and the first award is planned for the 2009-2010 academic year.

Massey Energy Company (NYSE: MEE), the fourth-largest coal company in the United States, based on produced coal revenue, will contribute \$20,000 a year for five years, for a total of \$100,000. Massey has operations in West Virginia, Kentucky and Virginia.

The scholarship recipients will be West Virginia residents who are full-time Marshall University sophomores with engineering majors in the College of Information Technology and Engineering (CITE) and minimum grade point averages (GPA) of 2.5.

“It is my hope that these scholarships give some of our best and brightest young people the opportunity to gain the skills and education they need to help all of West Virginia grow economically,” said Don Blankenship, Chairman and CEO of Massey Energy. “To ensure that our state has a bright future, we need to do our part to keep and grow high-skill and high-wage jobs. These scholarships are a part of making that larger goal a reality.”

First preference will be given to students who are from the southern West Virginia counties of Boone, Fayette, Kanawha, Logan, Mingo, Nicholas, Raleigh and Wyoming.

July 28, 2009

Concord's business incubator starting to see results

By Rachel Lucas

Concord University's business incubator can provide tourism and economic development as well as create jobs for the region.

The business incubator at Concord is reaching new heights. The service for fledging businesses is also providing Concord Students with real world situations that can enhance their education.

Ron Basini, executive director of Concord's business incubators says 90% of new businesses fail in the first three years because of poor planning and little experience.

He says the incubator provides a jump-start to businesses while giving free financial advice.

"An incubation period is probably a very smart thing," Basini said. "Businesses are surrounded with support services with advice, with people who are doing the same thing, just like little chicks in the incubator."

The first step in the incubation process is to formulate a business plan.

New businesses also have the opportunity to take advantage of virtual or physical office space for up to one year free.

Concord University hopes to bring new opportunity to the region by providing this important service to new businesses.

The incubator focuses on the eleven counties in Southern West Virginia, but serves any company, local or not.

The idea is to enhance economic development in the area, something customers would benefit from as well.

There are 10 other incubators in the state but Basini says Concord's emphasis on virtual presentations and animations gives a unique edge. The facility also has the capability to produce commercials using the same software as Hollywood.

"We can actually take a mineshaft, and turn it into an animation," Basini said.

"We can show men and women walking through that mine, or driving a vehicle in that mine, just the way you see on television or in the movies. That can be done right here. That has value."

However, businesses are not the only ones receiving the benefits. Students at Concord are getting hands-on experience from assisting these companies.

"We are teaching our students how to use that software by working on the projects of the companies that come here," Basini said.

"Our students are getting valuable training for nothing. The companies are getting valuable work, for nothing."

The incubator serves as an educational tool for students in the entrepreneur program who are interested in starting their own business. This program includes students from all majors of study at Concord.

Currently one of the incubators largest companies is the Three Rivers Travel Council, a tourism company.

Jerry Berry is the president of the Three Rivers Council. Berry says his company has the potential to boost the local economy by encouraging tourism to the New River Gorge area.

His hope is to make sightseeing and vacationing easier for people visiting the region by pinpointing GPS navigation.

Berry says that without assistance from the incubator, their company could never have happened.

"We would have had many barriers and hurdles to overcome," Berry said.

The company is nearly two years old, and is a one year veteran of the incubators service. Receiving assistance from the incubator at an early stage seems to be paying off.

Berry says success for this company is looking more realistic every day.

"I think this initiative needs to be better utilized by the business community," Berry said. "They need to understand what you have there and that is available to start a business opportunity."

The incubator is structured to manage up to four companies at one time.

"The way I have structured it, it's nice to have numbers, but I rather have successes than numbers," Basini said.

July 30, 2009

WLU Officials Celebrate Highlands Center

By JOSELYN KING

West Liberty University officials Larry Williams, left, and John McCullough, right, stand in front of the new building located at The Highlands in Ohio County.

They've been together at what is now West Liberty University for nearly 40 years, and for the last decade they pushed to give the school more visibility.

They say their dream is now about to become reality as the new West Liberty University Highlands Center is set to open in August.

Larry Williams, director of the current Warwood Center at WLU, and John McCullough, WLU's executive vice president, both started their careers at WLU on the same day - July 1, 1971. Over the years, the two became good friends

McCullough went on to become dean of the School of Business Administration, provost and academic dean before becoming executive vice president. He would also serve two terms as interim president.

Williams began as media director and moved on to become director of extended education to develop classes throughout the Northern Panhandle for WLU. In 1987, Williams also assumed the position of alumni director. He was named director of the Warwood Center in 1996.

The two met frequently to discuss school matters. And in the late 1990s, they began to discuss the subject of creating a new branch at what was then the Fort Henry Complex at Dallas Pike. The location would later come to be known as The Highlands.

"At that time, we thought it was going to be an inside mall," Williams said.

They envisioned the site as a place for graduate classes - assuming then that West Liberty State College would become a university - and for an accelerated business degree program.

They began talks with Ohio County officials, who suggested they instead lease space from the county rather than build at The Highlands.

Williams admitted that sometimes he had doubts the project ever would come to fruition, but during those down periods McCullough would offer encouraging words.

"I gave up a couple of times, but he never did," Williams noted.

In about 10 days, he said he will be moving out of his office at the Warwood Center to a smaller one at The Highlands. It will also mean a longer drive for him from his home in Warwood.

"Yes, but it's not about me," Williams said. "It's about the university I love. I think this is one of the better things we've done, and it will be a success."

The Warwood Center facility has been purchased from WLU by Wheeling attorney Jake Robinson. The future of other offerings there - such as the SMART Center and the Warwood YMCA - have yet to be determined, Williams said.

The new West Liberty facility at The Highlands will have 20,000 square feet of space and is expected to involve an initial \$1.2 million investment by WLU. The West Virginia Legislature appropriated \$800,000 in taxpayer dollars to the project last year.

July 28, 2009

WJU gets EPA grant to test coalfield environmental concerns

Appalachian communities in West Virginia and Kentucky will benefit from environmental testing grant

By Keri Brown

The EPA has just awarded Wheeling Jesuit University a new grant that will help address environmental mining concerns in several Southern West Virginia and Eastern Kentucky communities.

The university is working on projects such as the Coal Impoundment Web site to make Appalachian mining communities safer.

Wheeling Jesuit University is receiving a federal CARE grant, or Community Action for a Renewed Environment, for more than \$269,000.

This is the second CARE grant awarded to WJU. The first one allowed the university to conduct an assessment of Southern West Virginia communities which helped local groups identify 140 environmental concerns. Researcher and Biology Professor Ben Stout said the number one concern for residents is safe drinking water.

“Drinking water is definitely the top concern and top priority because it is such a critical issue to those communities and their health. It is a big concern because we have what could be the best water supply anywhere in the world and it is gradually eroding and becoming one of the worst water supplies in the world.”

The environmental testing and research is focusing on six Southern West Virginia areas: Mud River, Prenter, Cabin Creek, Anstead, Logan and Varney.

Wheeling Jesuit has been studying the impacts of mining and coal slurry on communities for the past eight years.

According to Davitt McAteer, CEO of Wheeling Jesuit University's Center for Educational Technologies and the National Technology Transfer Center at WJU, the grant gives people the power to address environmental issues at a local level.

“If it is determined that the water quality has deteriorated in a particular community, a number of steps can be taken. One is testing; the second is developing an alternative to that water system to provide water immediately for a clean healthy water source and to look at the science of how we might mitigate the damage that is going on. So the notion is to get the community involved for renewed environmental protection and bring the science to bear to achieve that,” said McAteer.

The Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston is also helping fund environmental research in the Southern region. The goal of the project is to bring together communities and experts in the field.

“We will hire a community organizer to bring people out, hear their concerns and prioritize them. We will do investigations, sample people’s water supplies and bring in

science advisors from surrounding universities, Marshall, Virginia Tech, WVU and Eastern Kentucky University. We are also going to host a scientific conference that will bring together everybody at every university in the region that is conducting some type of environmental research,” said Stout.

The environmental science conference is being planned for next summer.

The research project will take place over the next two years.

July 28, 2009

Students from around the U.S. to present summer research projects at WVU

More than 70 undergraduate students from around the United States have spent the past two months honing their research skills at West Virginia University. The students will present their research projects on Thursday (July 30).

Participants in the WVNano Summer Undergraduate Research Experience (SURE) and Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU) programs, the WVU SURE program and the WVU Department of Biology REU program will present their research at the Summer Undergraduate Research Symposium. The symposium will be held in the Mountainlair ballrooms beginning at 10:50 a.m.

The poster session will begin at 12:30 p.m. and awards for the research will be presented at 3:30 p.m. The event is free and open to the public beginning at 12:30 p.m.

WVU President James P. Clements plans to attend the symposium and view the students work.

“These unique programs provide talented students with opportunities to gain real-world research experience working alongside some of WVU’s top faculty members. They are conducting research on ways to save the environment, looking at the health and nutrition of animals, studying the science of nanotechnology education, exploring health care expenditures and more,” said WVU President James P. Clements. “This work is not only beneficial to the science community, but is helping train the next generation of scholars, professors and researchers.”

Undergraduate college students majoring in complex science fields – such as computer engineering, physics, chemical engineering, chemistry and aerospace engineering, among others – were selected to participate in the SURE and REU programs following a rigorous academic competition. The students were then teamed up with a WVU faculty member to work on high-level laboratory research for eight to 10 weeks.

The student’s projects fall under four categories – biological sciences, agricultural/environmental sciences, physical sciences/engineering and nano sciences.

“It’s exciting for the students to learn from top-notch West Virginia University faculty who have expertise in a variety of scientific fields and exciting for our educators to be paired with young minds who bring fresh ideas and opinions to their research projects. Along with opening new doors for individuals within a collaborative academic setting, these research projects might also be developed into discoveries and solutions that will improve the quality of life for all humans,” said Curt Peterson, vice president for research at WVU and president of the WVU Research Corporation.

Students participating in the program attend WVU, Shepherd University, Grove City College, Alabama A & M, West Virginia Wesleyan College, Carnegie Mellon University, Fairmont State University, University of Maryland – Baltimore County, New Jersey Institute of Technology, Virginia Tech, Allegheny College, Syracuse University and Marshall University, among others.

The WVU SURE program, which is administered by the WVU Honors College and Dean Keith Garbutt, is funded by the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission; the WVU Department of Biology REU program, which is administered by Professor Richard Thomas, and WVNano SURE and REU programs, which are administered by Professor David Lederman and Assistant Professor Michelle Richards-Babb, are funded through the support of the National Science Foundation.

All West Virginia high schools are required to provide students with access to AP classes

Story by Ann Ali

CHARLESTON -- Every high school in West Virginia is mandated to provide Advanced Placement courses, and the West Virginia Center for Professional Development provides fee waivers to make sure each student who wants to enroll in the rigorous courses can.

"We work with the schools to cover fees for the cost of AP exams for low-income students because of a grant through the U.S. Department of Education," Christy Day, director of communications for the WVCPD, said.

Advanced Placement courses are college-level courses taught to high school students and approved by the College Board — the same company that administers the SAT exam, according to Karen Linville, AP program director for the WVCPD.

"An AP course here in West Virginia is probably on the same level as anywhere else in the United States because they have gone through that same approval process," Linville said.

The WVCPD, which is under the West Virginia Department of Education and the Arts, offers training support for instructors who teach Advanced Placement courses.

"We are still working on getting all those spots filled," Linville said. "This is a more rigorous course, and the teachers who actually teach the courses are better served if they do attend our professional development because we have College Board-certified instructors who help them through the week.

"Most of the instructors we use are actual exam readers ... who can really help our teachers to know what are the pitfalls of the exams so they can best serve our students."

Day said College Board stipulates only that a student enrolled in AP courses be in grades nine through 12 and the student earns a grade from his or her high school for the course. When a student takes the AP exam, a passing score is rewarded with college credit at many colleges and universities.

West Virginia began requiring that each school offer at least one AP course in each core content area last July, but Day said several AP courses are available within each content category — 37 courses in 22 subject areas.

Linville said the state school board policy that requires every high school offer AP courses will provide more equity for students throughout West Virginia.

“I tell the teachers, and the College Board recommends, that any student interested in taking on the responsibility of an AP course should be able to do so,” she said, “because the class, as a whole, is a good experience for that student to be exposed to college-level work.”

Linville said West Virginia had the highest percentage increase in the total number of exams taken last year among all states — a 26 percent increase.

“I think we’ve been working with the teachers and administrators to understand that there should be an open-access policy for students willing to take on the challenge of AP,” Linville said. “I think we’re starting to see that’s taking effect.”

EDITORIAL

Tech park: Don't waste potential

Two Northern Panhandle mills, Wheeling Pittsburgh Steel and Weirton Steel, once had more than 20,000 workers. Now they employ only 1,300, a Public Broadcasting report noted. This sad decline follows other blue-collar shrinkage.

Two Northern Panhandle mills, Wheeling Pittsburgh Steel and Weirton Steel, once had more than 20,000 workers. Now they employ only 1,300, a Public Broadcasting report noted. This sad decline follows other blue-collar shrinkage.

West Virginia had 125,000 coal miners just after World War II, but now just 15,000 produce more coal, using machines. Similarly, Kanawha Valley chemical plants shrank from 14,000 workers to under 4,000 as automation prevailed. Ravenswood's huge aluminum plant is closing, wiping out hundreds of jobs.

The message is clear: Less-educated manual labor is vanishing. Well-educated, high-tech, high-skill careers are today's bright prospect. West Virginia must do everything possible to expand "mind jobs" in the snowballing Information Age.

That's why it's frustrating that Dow Chemical's superb South Charleston Technology Park - a potential gold mine for research and industrial innovation - mostly is floundering in stagnation. Business Editor Eric Eyre reported Sunday that top chemists worry that many of the park's high-quality laboratories may be scrapped. Two buildings already have been razed. Dow wants to give away the hilltop facility, but there are no takers.

Two years ago, Dow generously gave West Virginia University a large building and 58 acres of land for a "Charleston Research Campus." It was to become a teeming science center that would develop industrial breakthroughs and spawn Kanawha Valley manufacturing. Gov. Manchin predicted that West Virginia would "see great things happen." But WVU backed out, claiming it couldn't insure the research facility properly.

Earlier, WVU-Tech envisioned using the South Charleston park to train electronics and computer engineers. But that hope fizzled after hometown boosters howled against moving any operations away from Montgomery.

This year, Kanawha Valley groups asked President Obama to include \$100 million in his stimulus plan to turn the Tech Park into a beehive of industrial research. But their effort failed.

"There are \$200 million in facilities up here we can take advantage of," Keith Pauley of the Mid-Atlantic Technology Research and Innovation Center (MATRIC) told Eyre. "Dow is essentially trying to give the buildings away."

Kevin DiGregorio of the Chemical Alliance Zone added: "It was arguably the top research and development facility in the chemical industry."

About 150 former Union Carbide and Dow researchers work for MATRIC at the Tech Park, developing various chemical products. That's great. But it's only a fraction of the science beehive that might be created there.

The South Charleston Tech Park is much too valuable to go to waste. Its potential to spur new Kanawha Valley industries mustn't be lost. Poet John Greenleaf Whittier wrote that the saddest words are "it might have been." That fate shouldn't befall the Dow jewel.

July 31, 2009

Rent, Read and Return

By **Stephanie Lee**

Students frequently rent DVDs to watch in their dorm rooms, but soon they may start checking out something much heavier and pricier: textbooks.

Saying they offer an alternative to the textbook industry's bloated prices, a growing number of companies are renting new and used titles at reduced prices. Among them are Chegg, BookRenter and the Follett Higher Education Group, which will test drive a rental service at campus bookstores this fall. They join a number of colleges that have already started their own on-campus programs.

With all of them, the concept is essentially to pay to check out textbooks as if they're out of a library -- only there are more copies and titles, and they can be used for longer periods of time. Through Chegg, for instance, a student searches for a book and rents it for up to a certain number of days, such as up to a quarter or a semester. Users are promised discounts of 65 to 85 percent off the list price, but if they don't return a book on time, they are charged full price. The same punishment applies to doodling in the margins, since the books are meant for reuse. As a disclaimer on Chegg warns: "Highlighting in the textbook is OK -- to a certain extent. Writing in the book is not accepted."

With a selection of more than 2 million titles, Chegg.com is one of the largest book-rental services on the Web. It grew out of CheggPost, a Craigslist-like site for college students founded in 2003 by Aayush Phumbhra and Osman Rashid. It didn't work out, but the then-Iowa State University students saw that their peers were buying, selling and trading textbooks more than any other item. That discovery prompted them to focus exclusively on books, launching Chegg in fall 2007. (The name refers to the cyclical "chicken-and-egg" dilemma; that is, you can't get a job without a college education, but can't get an education without a textbook.)

Since then, the site has gone on to make \$10 million in revenue last year and more than that amount this past January alone, according to company officials.

Chegg also plants a tree for every book rented. A spokeswoman, Tina Couch, cites that environmental impact, plus the convenience of renting, as the main draws for students to use Chegg rather than, say, buy a used copy online for the same price. "Even if you look at the cost of buying a new book or a used book, renting is still less expensive, it's convenient and you don't have to worry," she said. "If you buy a used book, you can't go back and sell it for more money."

At least one publisher has noticed Chegg. In an arrangement that will go live in August, McGraw-Hill Companies will provide the site with new books and share an undisclosed portion of the revenue, according to Couch. Users will also be able to read electronic versions of McGraw-Hill books until their physical copies arrive, at which time they can continue that viewing option for a fee. Until now, Chegg has been purchasing books on its own and through affiliate programs.

Rental companies are banking on the premise that professors and students will want to use the same book for several semesters. That demand will remain even if new editions are published, says Laura Sneddon, marketing manager for BookRenter.com, which, like Chegg, offers about 2 million titles and began in 2007. "Even though some of the time those books can be updated very often, it doesn't mean that every school nationwide is switching to a new version," she said.

But that logic may not apply to science titles, since much of their information quickly goes out-of-date, said Elio DiStaola, a spokesman for the Follett Higher Education Group. In contrast, books in the humanities and social sciences will probably have a longer shelf life. "Would any student want a book in medicine or technology that's two years old?" he said.

This fall, Follett will begin a pilot rental program of its own at a dozen institutions, including Grand Rapids Community College, the University of Texas at Arlington and the State University of New York at Buffalo. New or used copies of one-fifth of the texts used in classes will be available for rental at 42.5 percent of the retail price. If a student doesn't return a book at the end of the term, he or she will be charged the full price, plus a penalty fee.

Follett, which manages about 860 stores in North America, is hoping to keep students' dollars in campus bookstores. "We feel in this climate that not only is it really competitive, but it has seen a trend of less and less students buying any of the required course material, whether it's through other channels or peer-to-peer sharing of texts or checking something out of a library," DiStaola said.

Barnes & Noble College Booksellers, which operates more than 600 campus bookstores nationwide, did not return multiple requests for comment.

Studies have shown that textbook prices are rising faster than the rate of inflation, but not as much as tuition and other higher education costs. Last year's Higher Education Opportunity Act mandated that institutions report annually how much they spend on essentially reducing the costs of textbooks and other instructional fees. It also required textbook publishers to expand the information they provide about pricing and changes from past editions. Most significantly for companies like Follett and Chegg, a bill outlining the U.S. Education Department's budget, crafted in February, mandated that \$10 million be reserved for a "new college textbook rental initiative" to "provide competitive grants to colleges to expand opportunities for students to rent college course materials."

But rental is not part of the solution, cautions Eunice Clark, executive director of the Used Textbook Association, a group of higher education booksellers who advocate for used titles to be sold in campus bookstores. Outside companies take revenue away from the university stores where students would otherwise shop, she said, and on-campus renting severely limits professors' choices. "The reality is they adopt a book and they find out it's not what it all was, so they want to change for next semester," she said. "Rental for [all of] higher education is not a workable thing."

Charles Schmidt, a spokesman for the National Association of College Stores, said that 2 percent of the group's stores offer some kind of rental service and more are likely to come. He, too, warned that the savings touted by companies may not be as great as

they seem. If a student rents a book at a discounted price, the savings would be minimal, he said, considering he or she could have sold a bought-new copy back to the bookstore to make up the difference. Plus, he said, there is some value in keeping a book well past the semester's end: "A book such as [organic] chemistry is the type of book that a student is probably going to want to keep in their education, and possibly in their professional life or graduate student life."

"Buyer -- or renter, in this case -- beware," he said.

A Portrait of STEM Majors

By Doug Lederman

From new federal grant programs to angst-ridden reports to Congressional scrutiny, concern has accelerated without pause in recent years about whether the United States is drawing enough young people to study science and technology fields in college. Policy makers have paid comparatively little attention, however, to how the students who enter those disciplines fare, and whether they stay in those fields once they enter them.

A new federal study aims to remedy that. The report, "Students Who Study Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) in Postsecondary Education," from the Education Department's National Center for Education Statistics, examines three federal databases to follow students who enter those high-demand fields through the higher education pipeline.

In addition to largely reaffirming the demographic profile of the 23 percent of students who chose to major in science and technology fields during their undergraduate careers -- disproportionately male, Asian and of foreign descent, and more likely to be of traditional age than older -- the study puts the outcomes of those students side by side with their peers who do not major in science fields, and finds that they compare favorably.

Students who entered college in 1995-96 and majored in a STEM field some time between then and 2001 earned a degree or certificate at a rate of 54.9 percent, compared to 50.6 percent for students who did not choose a science or technology major. Within science fields, the rates were highest for those in the physical sciences (68.4 percent), natural sciences (63.5), and mathematics (61.4 percent), and lowest for those in computer or information sciences (46.4). Fifty-three percent of engineering students earned a credential, but they were least likely among their STEM peers to earn a bachelor's degree (as opposed to an associate degree or certificate).

But while the general outcomes of science and technology students were stronger than their peers, the degrees they earned were not necessarily in STEM fields. Of the 1995-96 entering students who majored in a STEM field at some point during their undergraduate careers, 40.7 percent got a degree or certificate in a science, math or technology field and another 12 percent were still enrolled in one of those fields, but 20.6 percent had left STEM disciplines entirely and 26.7 percent had left postsecondary education.

White students in STEM majors were likelier than their peers of other races to have earned a degree (43.9 percent vs. 39.9 percent for Asian, 33.1 percent for Hispanic, and 31.7 percent for black), and those whose parents had at least a bachelor's degree were far likelier than STEM majors whose parents had less education to get a degree.

July 27, 2009

Nursing Schools Should Warn Students About Grueling Hours, Article Says

By Katherine Mangan

Nursing schools should do a better job preparing students for the grueling hours, often unrealistic expectations, and lack of respect that await them when they enter the work force, says an article scheduled for publication today in the July/August issue of Nursing Outlook.

The article describes the results of a study, paid for by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, that drew responses from 612 new nurses from 34 states and the District of Columbia. The study comes at a time when about 18 percent of newly licensed registered nurses leave their first nursing job within the first year, and about 26 percent are gone within two years, the article says. Meanwhile, the American health-care system is expected to face a shortfall of up to 260,000 full-time-equivalent nurses by 2025, the authors note.

The report, "What Newly Licensed Registered Nurses Have to Say About Their First Experiences," paints a grim picture of the disconnect many new nurses say they feel between the idealistic expectations they had when entering nursing school and the reality they find on the job.

"Nurses today are intellectually, emotionally, and physically drained," says the study's lead author, Linda Honan Pellico, an assistant professor at the Yale School of Nursing. The school teaches relaxation techniques like meditation and deep breathing, and encourages students to keep reflective journals. "Until you take care of yourself, you can't take care of someone else," she says.

The report recommends changes to improve working conditions for nurses, but also describes what nursing schools can do to reduce the number of disillusioned and burned-out nurses leaving the profession.

The survey respondents recommended that nursing schools give students a more realistic idea of the pressures and workload they are likely to face in their first jobs. Rather than working four- or six-hour shifts, student nurses should be scheduled for eight-hour shifts and be given responsibility for more patients, the respondents said. When they get out of school, they are likely to face 12-hour shifts juggling four or more patients with complex medical conditions, the study noted.

The students also said they would have benefited from more practice on communications skills and conflict resolution so they could interact effectively with physicians, make proper notes in patients' charts, and handle shift changes. Many said doctors verbally abused them.

The study noted "a disconnect between what participants were taught in nursing school and had subsequently internalized about the power and prestige of the nursing profession versus personal experience in practice." It quoted an unnamed nursing

graduate from Maine saying, "Nursing is a profession, but we are not treated like professionals. We are used, manipulated, and disrespected."

On a more optimistic note, several nurses said that despite all the challenges, they loved their work. The researchers also noted that the respondents had all been employed for six to 18 months and that it can take at least that long for new nurses to feel confident and comfortable in their jobs.



July 31, 2009

Business Is Brisk for Teacher Training Alternatives

By Michael Alison Chandler, Washington Post Staff Writer

The high unemployment rate has provided an unexpected boon for the nation's public schools: legions of career-switchers eager to become teachers.

Across the country, interest in teacher preparation programs geared toward job-changers is rising sharply. Applications to a national retraining program based in 20 cities rose 30 percent this year. Enrollment in a career-switcher program for teachers at Virginia's community colleges increased by 20 percent. And a Prince George's County resident teacher program increased enrollment by 40 percent.

In many places, there are more converts to teaching than there are jobs, except in hard-to-fill posts in science, math and special education classes. But the wave of applicants might ease teacher shortages expected to develop as 1.7 million baby boomers retire from the public schools during the next decade.

The newcomers come with a host of unknowns, including how much training they will need before they can handle a classroom full of rowdy or reluctant students and whether they are likely to stay in a profession that is struggling with low retention rates.

About one-third of new teachers graduate from 600 so-called alternative certification programs developed to bring people with no education background into classrooms. The programs vary widely, including two-year graduate degrees and online courses. President Obama (D) is proposing to devote more than \$100 million in his 2010 budget to programs that recruit and train skilled mid-career professionals, particularly in poor schools and math and science classes.

Some alternative programs have proven to be "excellent recruitment engines," said Sharon Robinson, president of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. But training must continue to be retooled, she said, so new teachers are not put "in the deep end of the pool" right away. "It's not fair to them and certainly not fair to the students they encounter," she said.

Career-changers are considered desirable because they bring maturity and outside experiences into classrooms. They also help solve a perennial problem in public education, particularly in math and science: Too few teachers have a solid grasp of the subject they teach.

Sam Rigby, a scientist with three degrees, is among the latest recruits. The 36-year-old District native studied minerals in a Portland laboratory and scoured volcanic rocks on the Pacific Ocean floor as a research scientist. This summer, after a five-week intensive course, Rigby will reinvent himself as a physical science teacher at Charles Hart Middle School, a Congress Heights school undergoing a major overhaul because of chronic low performance and discipline problems.

The educational and economic disparities in the District "always gnawed at me," Rigby said. "I thought, 'What can I do to help?'"

His \$45,000 starting pay is a slight raise from his most recent job at a nonprofit agency and a bigger increase from unemployment checks he briefly received. Some of his colleagues have left much higher-paying jobs to teach.

The New Teacher Project, founded 12 years ago by Michelle A. Rhee, now the D.C. schools chancellor, oversees Teaching Fellows programs such as the one Rigby is in. The programs were established to eliminate the achievement gap by recruiting career-changers and college graduates to work in inner-city schools. Applications to the local program are up 80 percent over last year.

Like Teach for America, which places high-achieving college graduates in urban schools and had a 40 percent increase in applications this year, the Teaching Fellows program moves new teachers into classrooms quickly and provides mentors and training on the job.

Many reformers say a fast track is the best way to capture potential teachers. "If you get rid of the hoops and hurdles, you can get some fantastic people to come into teaching," said Michael J. Petrilli, vice president at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, a District-based education think tank.

Some initiatives seek to avoid traditional education school curricula completely. The American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence approves teachers in nine states through online training and tests. In the District and in Maryland, the New Teacher Project has authority to certify its teachers with a practical, year-long seminar series led by D.C. public school teachers.

Most states require education degrees for certification, but reformers say such degrees should not matter. Some studies have shown that students perform as well or better, on average, with a teacher from Teach for America or the Teaching Fellows program than they do with a traditional education school graduate.

Every minute counts for Rigby in his summer training institute, which will pay him a \$2,500 stipend when he finishes. In the mornings, he teaches lessons on mitosis and the water cycle to a dozen summer school students at Cardozo High School in Northwest Washington with another fellow and a mentor teacher. In the afternoons, he joins a dozen other science teachers downstairs to learn the fundamentals of pedagogy and practical teaching strategies, such as how to teach science to students who are behind in reading or math skills.

One July afternoon, the fellows took turns presenting a short lesson. Their instructor, a D.C. public schools veteran, reminded them to project their voices, to "check for understanding" and to "work the room" instead of standing frozen in place.

The other fellows played students, shrugging at questions, texting on cellphones, throwing paper balls in the air. Then they gave feedback on the new teachers' reaction. "It's a lot to think about," Rigby said. "All these different concepts and skills and buzzwords. . . . You are trying to develop instincts."

Linda Darling-Hammond, an education professor at Stanford University, said accelerated training programs that put teachers in charge of classes right away can lead to higher burnout rates because teachers become quickly overwhelmed. Her research shows that teachers with more comprehensive training are less likely to leave within a few years.

"To teach kids well, you need to diagnose how they learn" and then apply the right strategies to help them, Darling-Hammond said. "Done properly . . . it's a highly skilled occupation," she said.

One promising training model sets up schools that are similar to teaching hospitals so that student teachers can learn under a great teacher in the same classroom for a year and take coursework to help analyze what they see. Such programs, known as teacher residencies, have been established in Boston and Chicago.

Margot Berkey, director of Parents United for the D.C. Public Schools, said she would like to see such an intensive investment in D.C. teachers. The shorter-term training programs tend to have high turnover and "hit or miss" results, she said. Parents "don't want their kids experimented on," she said.

The New Teacher Project estimates, however, that its retention rates in the first four years are slightly above average for urban school districts. And the program has accomplished something that most traditional teacher preparation programs have failed to do: create intense competition for the toughest jobs.

Until a few years ago, many positions, particularly in urban schools, were filled by teachers with emergency credentials. The 2002 No Child Left Behind law outlawed the practice, and alternative programs sprouted up to give under-prepared teachers a clear path through state-required coursework.

The New York Teaching Fellows program began in 2000 and quickly grew. Fellows accounted for more than 30 percent of new hires four years later. Most work in the poorest schools. This year, the program received about 14,000 applications for what it anticipated would be 700 spots.

Down the block from a burned-down building and a U.S. Army career center, Herbert H. Lehman High School in the Bronx welcomes scores of teachers from alternative programs.

Barbara L. De Pesa, an assistant principal who oversaw the math department last year, said she had the luxury of picking applicants with the strongest math skills.

Two-thirds of her teachers were recruited through Teach for America, the New York Teaching Fellows and Math for America. Her staff consists of graduates from Yale, Tufts and Rutgers. They are former lawyers, derivatives traders and financial analysts.

She teaches them how to teach.

De Pesa pairs new teachers with more-experienced mentors, and the new teachers spend at least one period a day observing veterans teach a class they will be teaching a day or two later. Newcomers learn how to present material and pace the lesson and begin to anticipate questions that students might ask.

Paul Sweeney, 59, a former lawyer and a New York Teaching Fellow, is in his sixth year of teaching. With the extra support from his colleagues at Lehman, he said, he feels he is improving and wants to stick with it.

"As long as I can do a service for the kids, I'd love to do it," he said.

This report was compiled with assistance from the Hechinger Institute on Education and the Media at Columbia University.