

# Quicker degrees deflate costs, new study finds

## Emphasizes need to stay on track

BY ERIC JOHNSON  
ASSISTANT STATE & NATIONAL EDITOR

With higher education becoming increasingly important and expensive, a new study suggests that one of the best ways to reduce college costs is to make sure a four-year degree takes only four years to earn.

The study, funded by the Lumina Foundation for Education, involved a series of focus-group discussions with college administrators and parents from around the country.

"The longer they stay, the more they have to pay," said Marty McGough, vice president of research and polling for Widmeyer Communications, the firm hired to conduct the focus groups.

"If there could be measures that could reduce the time to (achieve a) degree, that would have a major positive benefit."

Parents and college administrators participating in the focus-group sessions — held in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago and Los Angeles — agreed that accumulating debt often becomes an issue for students spending more than four years to earn a degree.

Gretchen Bataille, UNC-system senior vice president for academic affairs, said four-year graduation plans are preferable, but not vital.

"It's in students' best interest to be able to go four years and graduate, and it's in the taxpayers' best interest to have students go four years and graduate," she said. "But we recognize that's not always how it happens."

The university system, she said, often analyzes the six-year graduation rate to account for students who don't take on a full-time schedule for four consecutive years.

"Students who begin and go full time for four years do graduate at a very high rate," she said. "We know that some students just take longer to graduate because they don't go full time."

Many students choose to take semesters off in order to work or study abroad, and others simply don't have a clear plan of action.

"Students don't always know what they want to do," Bataille said. "That's why advising is so important. There are a lot of things that can minimize that risk."

The most critical factor in getting students on track to earn a degree in four years is to make sure they're ready for a rigorous college curriculum, McGough said.

There was agreement among the focus groups that college-bound students should be strongly encouraged to take advanced-level classes in high school and to complete any remedial courses before enrolling at a university.

"It'd be really great if we had these students more prepared when they went to college," McGough said. "Let's get them the remedial work they need before they get there."

The report found that closer cooperation among universities, high schools and community colleges could help to standardize credit hours and provide students with more options for completing necessary coursework.

Another significant finding of the Lumina report is the need to publicize more aggressively scholarship and financial aid opportunities.

The focus groups that Widmeyer conducted involved parents of college-age students with family incomes of less than \$30,000 per year, McGough said.

The results clearly point to a need for a public information campaign on scholarships and financial aid, he said.

"Someone has to step up to the plate and educate low-income parents and their kids about the opportunities available to them," he said. "There's really a low awareness of it."

Contact the State & National Editor at [stntdesk@unc.edu](mailto:stntdesk@unc.edu).

# Zipcars aid transport crunch

## Prices stay down despite expenses

BY KATHRYN BALES  
STAFF WRITER

With gas prices at an all-time high, UNC students, faculty and staff continue to look toward alternative transportation where they will pay zip for maintenance, insurance and costly fuel.

Zipcar Inc. has been an option on UNC's campus since Jan. 2004, but it took a while to catch on, said Randy Young, spokesman for the UNC Department of Public Safety.

"I think more and more people are becoming aware not only of the program itself but of the benefits of the program," he said. "It certainly makes sense between the current demand for fuel and parking."

Young said 346 separate entities are registered with Zipcar through

the University, including 37 departments.

Registration for the program has increased by more than 100 percent since last September, Young said.

"People are learning that the University is very accessible to those who do not drive single-occupancy vehicles," he said.

The registration fee is \$20 for individuals and University departments, said Christine Laurence, business development manager with the Zipcar office in Washington, D.C., but it is basically given back in the form of four hours of driving credit valued at \$5 per hour.

Young said the cost of using a Zipcar will not increase for those who are signed on, even with the gas shortage and price hikes.

"I don't think you can underplay the importance of a program like this right now," she said.

Laurence said increasing membership will increase the likelihood

that prices will not rise.

"Nothing's happened yet," she said. "We can insulate members from the price of (gas). The more people we sign up means that we don't have to raise our prices."

UNC's fleet of Zipcars, comprised of four Volkswagen bugs, occupies choice parking on campus and is open to faculty, staff and students who are at least 21 in age and need a short-term set of wheels.

Members can use the cars up to four days in a row — sometimes longer — with manager approval, Laurence said.

Young said purchasing more Zipcars is an option, but they will monitor their current use before expanding.

Zipcar's incorporation into the University was not intended to be a capitalist venture, Young said, but to make things easier by relieving the strain caused by parking scarcity.

"This program was never initi-

ated in order to make money for the University," he said. "That was not the primary goal. This is seen as an initiative to curb the need for single-occupancy vehicles."

There are many advantages to incorporating Zipcar on college campuses, including decreased emissions, Laurence said.

"It will definitely help with congestion," she said. "If someone joins and gives up their car that'll be one more private car off the road."

Zipcar at UNC has been particularly helpful for faculty and staff in departments registered with the program, she said.

Laurence said she hopes Carolina's Zipcar program will grow by leaps and bounds.

"We look forward to a long relationship and one that continues to develop."

Contact the University Editor at [udesk@unc.edu](mailto:udesk@unc.edu).

# YDs slow to start, still seek local impact

BY ERIN ZUREICK  
STAFF WRITER

Long after the shouts from the fall's contentious elections died down, Young Democrats quietly are gearing up for another round.

And though UNC students might not find themselves bombarded at every corner by eager campaigners touting colorful banners, group officials say they still plan to impact this fall's municipal elections.

Members of the organization held a general interest meeting Monday night in an attempt to generate interest in November's local elections, garner new members and raise funds for Hurricane Katrina relief.

Members said they had hoped to recruit a high-profile speaker to highlight their first meeting — a tradition for campus political groups — but plans failed to materialize in time.

Last year Erskine Bowles, a former candidate for the U.S. Senate, spoke at the group's first meeting.

"We worked for about two months trying to get someone for this meeting, but we couldn't get anyone to commit," said Dustin Ingalls, the group's public relations director, who noted John Edwards,

former vice presidential candidate, as a speaker they targeted.

But senior Nadav Ariel, a member of Young Democrats' executive board, said the large turnout indicated that students still want to help out even though there is no national election this fall.

"I think a lot of people are interested in supporting our organization," he said.

A crowd of close to 200 students gathered Monday night on Polk Place and listened to N.C. Sen. Ellie Kinnaird, D-Orange, who emphasized the importance of activism in local politics.

"You may not feel like (local elections) have a whole lot to do with you all ... but the local government really does have an effect on you," said Kinnaird, a former Carrboro mayor.

Despite the narrower scope of elections this fall, organization leaders said they are striving to increase student interest in town politics.

"Our focus is on local elections," said Blakely Whilden, co-president of the group. "We want to get students involved and educated."

Voter registration efforts will take place up until the Oct. 14 deadline, she said.

Even though local elections tend to generate less interest than national campaigns, members said they still hope to register a large



DTH/ISAAC SANDLIN  
Blakely Whilden, left, of the UNC Young Democrats, speaks to freshman Samuel Lau, right, while collecting donations for Hurricane Katrina victims.

number of students.

Last fall, members registered close to 3,000 voters, said organization Co-president Kris Gould.

"If we could do half of that I would consider it a success" Gould said.

Garnering a higher voter turnout will require educating students about

their stake in the election, he said.

Ingalls said the group currently is not endorsing any candidates in the Chapel Hill Town Council election.

Whilden said the main focus this fall will be voter turnout.

"In general, it is important to raise awareness and emphasize the importance to vote locally," she said.

While the organization might seem less visible this year, it's only in comparison to the widespread interest the national campaigns garnered last fall, Gould said.

"We're obviously not as active as we were last year," he said. "I don't think it's feasible for us to be as active."

In the coming weeks, members hope to confirm a more high-profile speaker.

N.C. Rep. Grier Martin, D-Wake, and U.S. Rep. David Price, D-N.C., are scheduled to speak Sept. 12 and Sept. 19, respectively.

Contact the University Editor at [udesk@unc.edu](mailto:udesk@unc.edu).

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