

Online master's degrees may alter higher ed

By Tamar Lewin, New York Times

Next January, the Georgia Institute of Technology plans to offer a master's degree in computer science through massive open online courses for a fraction of the on-campus cost, a first for an elite institution. If it even approaches its goal of drawing thousands of students, it could signal a change to the landscape of higher education.

From their start two years ago, when a free artificial intelligence course from Stanford enrolled 170,000 students, free massive open online courses, or MOOCs, have drawn millions and yielded results like the perfect scores of Battushig, a 15-year-old Mongolian boy, in a tough electronics course offered by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

But the courses have not yet produced profound change, partly because they offer no credit and do not lead to a degree. The disruption may be approaching, though, as Georgia Tech, which has one of the country's top computer science programs, plans to offer a MOOC-based online master's degree in computer science for \$6,600 – far less than the \$45,000 on-campus price.

Zvi Galil, the dean of the university's College of Computing, expects that in the coming years, the program could attract up to 10,000 students annually, many from outside the United States and some who would not complete the full master's degree. "Online, there's no visa problem," he said.

The program rests on an unusual partnership forged by Galil and Sebastian Thrun, a founder of Udacity, a Silicon Valley provider of the open online courses.

Read the whole story

Developers have eyes on Old Jackson Highway area

By Tony Bizjak, Sacramento Bee

Old Jackson Highway has had many personalities. Once a lazy path to the foothills past strawberry and hop fields, the east Sacramento County road today is a busy commute and truck route flanked by pit mines, rural ranchettes, small industry and encroaching suburbs.

Now, Sacramento-area leaders are in talks with Caltrans to take control of the road, also known as Highway 16 and Jackson Road, so they can prep it for the biggest remake yet.

Officials in Sacramento County, the city of Sacramento and Rancho Cordova want to turn 11 miles of the two-lane highway into an urban street to serve as the spine for massive development.

The Jackson Highway area is being promoted as one of the Sacramento region's potential urban growth areas for the next 20 to 30 years. Developers are drawing up plans for as many as 30,000 housing units between South Watt Avenue and Grant Line Road.

Read the whole story

Weather may adversely affect American Fire

The American Fire is at 14,765 acres.

The Robinson Flat Campground is closed. The Tahoe National Forest has issued a voluntary evacuation notice for Big Oak Flat located near the south end of the fire. Forest Road 43 (Robinson Flat Road) is closed at its intersection with Forest Road 96 (Mosquito Ridge Road). An emergency closure order is in place for portions of the Tahoe National Forest within and adjacent to the American Fire.

The National Weather Service has issued a Red Flag Warning beginning for today through Wednesday evening. Changing weather will likely affect fire behavior and where the smoke blows. The North Shore-Truckee-Reno areas have been the most impacted by smoke, though on Sunday it was noticeable on the South Shore.

The cause of the fire that started Aug. 10 is still under investigation. It is at 49 percent containment.

The public is invited to an American Fire update meeting at the Foresthill Veteran's Memorial Hall at 24601 Harrison St. in Foresthill at 7pm Monday.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Barton on cutting edge with

surgeries

No longer are multiple incisions necessary for hysterectomies or gall bladder removal.

Barton Memorial Hospital last week performed its first single-site hysterectomies. This means it is the first hospital in Northern California and Northern Nevada to offer the single-site surgery for both procedures. It has been doing gall bladders for more than a year.

Gynecologist John Missanelli and members of Barton's da Vinci surgical team on Aug. 15 performed the specialized surgery through the belly button.

This means one scar for women. Until now, hysterectomies often left multiple, visible scars.

"Our physicians are among a very small group of surgeons in the region who have received training to perform this type of advanced surgery," Clint Purvance, Barton's chief medical officer, said in a statement.

Purvance told *Lake Tahoe News* only the da Vinci allows for this single-site surgery for these two procedures – no other medical device can do so. Surgeons enter the body via the bellybutton.

In addition to fewer scars, this technique may reduce pain, involves less loss of blood, allows for a faster recovery and shorter hospital stay.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Recyclers opposing plastic bag bans

By Laura Moss, Mother Nature Network

From Los Angeles to Nantucket, Mass., plastic and paper bag bans are on the rise across the nation.

Some ordinances prohibit single-use carryout bags, while others attach a fee to such bags, but an unlikely group is fighting against such bans: recyclers.

On Aug. 5, the Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries, a trade group that represents scrap recyclers, came out against bag bans and fees. The organization announced a new policy that will “promote a market-based system for the trade of recyclable materials without restrictions or interference.”

“ISRI members that recycle paper and plastic bags are quite concerned that policymakers are banning bags and creating fees without considering the real impact on the recycling industry,” ISRI President Robin Wiener said in a statement.

“Rather than bans and fees that take away jobs and increase costs to consumers, policy makers should take advantage of the great economic and environmental opportunities associated with responsibly recycling these bags,” she said.

Read the whole story

American Fire growing, but at slower rate

The American Fire is spreading at a much slower rate. It has grown to 12,950 acres and remains at 45 percent containment.

This fire is burning in the area of the 2008 Westville Fire north of the Foresthill Divide Road into the Whisky Hill area. However, it is also burning in steep and hazardous terrain as well as timber fuels that have not burned in several decades, according to officials. Consumption of heavy fuels continues to contribute to the heavy smoke in the surrounding areas.

An emergency closure order is in place for portions of the Tahoe National Forest within and adjacent to the American Fire.

The cause of the fire that started Aug. 10 remains unknown.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Placer County expected to pass budget 3 months late

The \$715.2 million budget for 2013-14 that the Placer County Board of Supervisors are expected to approve Sept. 24 is 2.1 percent less than last year's budget.

Supervisors were updated Aug. 15 on what the next fiscal year looks like during a budget workshop. A public hearing on the budget is scheduled for Sept. 10, with adoption two weeks later.

In June, the board approved an interim budget of \$690.5 million since the 2013-14 fiscal year began July 1.

Supervisors postponed making a decision Thursday on how to allocate more than \$8 million in unallocated one-time funds, a total that includes almost \$5.8 million in the general fund and \$2.3 million in the public safety fund. That decision could be made at the Aug. 20 board meeting.

Staff is recommending the bulk of the funds be used to help return county reserve and contingency funds to pre-recession levels.

"We have some reasons for optimism," Chief Assistant County Executive Officer Holly Heinzen told the board. "At the same time, we have some reasons for caution."

Key reasons for optimism include the county's improving revenue picture and past board actions that have helped keep costs pressures under control.

Reasons to be cautious include the expense of employee benefits, state and federal actions that affect counties and the need to open and operate Placer County's new jail in Roseville.

During the workshop departments made presentations to the board.

Priority-based budgeting is an approach that seeks to increase transparency in the budget process while helping ensure county resources are allocated based on board and public priorities.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Body of Lake Tahoe drowning victim recovered

Updated Aug. 17 12:50pm:

The body of the 17-year-old who drowned at Emerald Bay was recovered this morning.

Javon Lamar Green of Southern California had been swimming from the boat his family had rented to Fannette Island when he went under and never resurfaced. The distance between the boat and island is estimated to be 25 yards.

The drowning occurred about 3:10pm Aug. 16. He was found about 72 feet below the surface.

The cause of death is under investigation.

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Updated Aug. 17 6:35am:

El Dorado County sheriff's dive team will return to Emerald Bay this morning in hopes of recovering the body of the youth who drowned on Aug. 16.

Deputy Greg Almos told *Lake Tahoe News* the boy was swimming from Fannette Island to a boat off the south side of island when he went into distress for an unknown reason and subsequently drowned.

Other children were in the water at the same time.

At this time the name, age and hometown of the child are not being released.

American Fire at 45% containment

Firefighters have the American Fire that is burning in the Tahoe National Forest 45 percent contained.

In seven days the fire has charred 11,950 acres near Foresthill. The majority of the fire area is within the North Fork of the Middle Fork of the American River.

Lightning predicted for as early as Sunday afternoon may bring additional complexity and increase the potential for new starts, fire officials warn.

Smoke continues to an issue east of the fire.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

SLTPD seek potential witness to clerk's death

A second person of interest is being sought in the Aug. 6 murder of a gas station clerk in South Lake Tahoe.



The man pictured here was one of the last customers to interact with the clerk prior to him being shot to death. Police say there is nothing to indicate the man is a suspect, but hope he may have seen something that would lead to the capture of the

assailant.

The unidentified patron appears to be Caucasian, with a couple days beard growth, tattoos on both forearms, Spitfire flat bill ball cap, Metal Mulisha T-shirt, and black pants. The man was driving a dark colored early 1990 Ford single cab pickup, and the cab has a rear sliding window.

El Dorado County sheriff's deputies and the FBI are assisting in the investigation.

Anyone with information is asked to call the South Lake Tahoe Police Department at (530) 542.6100 or Secret Witness at (530) 541.6800.