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DUKE PANEL TO LOOK AT FINANCIAL CRISIS

Even as lawmakers and policymakers continue to debate the details of a proposed bailout of the nation's financial system, experts at Duke University will offer their take on the situation today in Durham.

The panel, "The Financial Crisis: What Happened, and What's Next?" will include Duke President Richard Brodhead; Craig Burnside, professor of economics; James D. Cox, Brainerd Currie professor of law; Cam Harvey, J. Paul Sticht professor of international business; David Rohde, Ernestine Friedl professor of political science; and Katherine Schipper, Thomas F. Keller professor of accounting.

The discussion is scheduled for 3:30 p.m. in the Bryan Center's Griffith Theater, on Duke's main campus in Durham.

AUTO SALES LIKELY TO BE DOWN AGAIN

U.S. auto sales probably posted their 11th straight monthly decline, the longest slide in 17 years, as the credit crunch sapped consumer confidence and forced lenders to toughen loan standards.

While figures for September released today aren't expected to be as low as in July, when gas prices hit their highs, credit has become a larger concern. "We've gotten to the point now where only those with unblemished, flawless credit are getting approved for auto loans," said Joe Barker, senior manager of North American vehicle sales forecasting for CSM Worldwide in Northville, Mich.

The woes on Wall Street are stalling car sales as tougher credit requirements remove buyers from the market. Even industry executives such as Chrysler Vice Chairman Jim Press predicted September would be another tough month. Analysts surveyed by Thomson/IFR call for sales to

resume a downward trend after lower gas prices and General Motors' offer of employee pricing for the masses aided sales in August.

"Tighter credit will play a role in sales for the rest of this year and into next year," said Haig Stoddard, a forecaster in Troy, Mich., for consulting firm Global Insight Inc. "We don't think sales will rebound until next year."

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