IV. PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS FOR 2016-2021 INSTITUTIONAL PLAN

The goals and objectives of the Institutional Plan were developed within the context of understanding the general institutional, demographic, fiscal, and political conditions within which the University is likely to function during the Plan’s five-year life:

Institutional Conditions:

1. UNC Charlotte’s institutional mission as North Carolina’s urban research university with a special commitment to the needs of the Charlotte region provides the context for the selection of instructional and research programs; the commitment to access for a diverse student body; and the nature of our engagement with communities. This mission emphasizes a leadership role for the institution in collaborative, problem-driven research, and interdisciplinary programs of study.

2. UNC Charlotte will be expected to take appropriate steps to assist in the accomplishment of the UNC system goals and strategies. At the time of this Plan’s adoption, the UNC system plan is under revision, with a focus on five major themes: 1) Access; 2) Affordability and Efficiency; 3) Student Success; 4) Economic Impact; and 5) Excellent and Diverse Institutions.

3. UNC Charlotte has a responsibility to produce degree recipients who will contribute to the state of North Carolina as well-prepared, highly-skilled and productive citizens and lifelong learners able to function in a rapidly evolving global society. Students must be well-grounded in the fundamental competencies of communication, collaboration, creative and critical thinking, ethical decision-making, and must possess multiple forms of literacy: global, cultural, scientific, environmental, digital, and financial. We recognize the centrality of the arts, humanities, and sciences to achieving these goals, the value of an inter-disciplinary approach, and the importance of other experiences that can be embedded in a coherent collegiate experience, including international travel and study, internships and service-learning opportunities, and community service.

4. One of the goals of the UNC system has been to increase the proportion of adults in North Carolina with a bachelor’s degree or higher from the current level of 28.4% to 36.2% by 2025. Growth in the past five years has confirmed enrollment projections prepared by the UNC General Administration and suggests that UNC Charlotte will be expected to support the single largest number of additional students in the UNC system.

5. Demand for undergraduate education will continue to rise because of population growth in North Carolina and because of increases in the proportion of high school graduates who desire and qualify for postsecondary education and who increasingly make UNC Charlotte their first choice institution. North Carolina’s population is expected to grow by over 2 million people from 2010 to 2030. Charlotte is projected to be one of the fastest growing region in the United States in that same timeframe. All public institutions in North Carolina, but particularly UNC Charlotte, must be prepared for the increasing numbers of new traditional-aged undergraduates who seek access to higher
education as well as increased competition both within the state and nationally for those students with exceptional academic credentials.

6. Successful recruitment of a talented and diverse undergraduate student body is a function of many factors, including affordability, the range and perceived quality of academic programs, and a host of non-academic considerations such as the appearance of the physical campus, the quality and condition of facilities (including, most notably, student residences and recreation venues), and the availability of co-curricular activities and opportunities. Given our current stage of development and in light of investments already made, the most urgent needs at UNC Charlotte for ensuring our competitive posture are the replacement or renovation of our oldest classroom, laboratory, and office buildings (see Fiscal Conditions, items 2 and 3, below); renovation of the high rise residence halls; and the construction of a comprehensive health and wellness facility.

7. As the leading UNC system institution for the enrollment of transfer students, UNC Charlotte will continue to be an attractive institution for community college transfer students and other transfer students seeking to complete degrees in an urban environment. Finally, a movement in higher education toward competency-based education will place additional demands on our faculty to address new formats for instruction and assessment of student learning.

8. Internal institutional research completed in 2013 confirmed potential enrollment demand at UNC Charlotte of 35,000 students by 2020, or shortly thereafter. Prior to 2009, UNC Charlotte was growing at an average annual rate of 4%. Beginning in 2009, economic conditions forced the campus to moderately reduce the rate of growth and alter the mix of students (i.e., undergraduate vs. graduate; freshmen vs. transfers). Although the pace of enrollment growth will continue to depend upon state fiscal conditions and the continuing acquisition of enrollment-related funding, we believe that a long-term target of 35,000 students remains realistic and we should continue to plan for it. Some new construction will be required, as will targeted improvements in the use of online/hybrid instruction and more efficient classroom utilization.

9. Steady increase in the demand for higher education will require us to continually review and revise our undergraduate and graduate programs, with the most significant program additions occurring at the graduate levels. Our eventual goal is to achieve a headcount mix of 75 percent undergraduate students and 25 percent graduate/professional students. Undergraduate enrollment demand will make that goal difficult to achieve without the addition of new graduate programs or targeted efforts to grow enrollment in graduate programs where there is capacity to grow. Graduate education, particularly at the doctoral level, is central to our continuing development as a research university because of the positive impact that graduate programs have upon the recruitment and retention of faculty and the acquisition of externally-funded grants to support research, scholarship, and creative activity.
10. Significant and continuing dynamic trends already visible in fields like energy, healthcare, biotechnology, sustainability, finance, data science, analytics, informatics, and education can be expected to drive related changes in the nature of the employment market, private investment strategies, and University and industry research and innovation. By partnering with industry, business, entrepreneurs, and community and educational leaders, UNC Charlotte will position itself as the region’s preferred provider of talent, knowledge, and innovation. As the demand for professional programs grows and concern about postgraduate outcomes increases, there will be an increased demand for career services and preparation in all areas of study, including the liberal arts and sciences.

11. Economic disruptions, such as those accompanying the recent economic recession, often send dislocated workers to educational institutions to acquire the additional education, skills, and certifications needed to speed their re-entry into the workforce. The same can be said of individuals seeking to upgrade their educational background to support advancement within their careers. In seeking to serve these students, we will see increased competition from for-profit and traditional educational institutions (including some in the UNC system) delivering cost-competitive programs in our market. Therefore, we will need to be more flexible in where, when, and how we offer certificates and degree programs to these students who have an increased array of educational institutions from which to choose.

12. Technology will have an increasing impact on teaching, learning, research, and business processes. Students and parents alike will expect technology-based interactions with the University equal to their experience with other world-class service providers. Given the ubiquity of smartphones, tablets, and other devices, the demand for mobile access to information and processes will increase. As a result, technology planning must be fully integrated into institutional planning. Issues such as organizational structure, equipment renewal, appropriate levels of user support, analytical tools, and convergence of distance education and online learning with on-campus instruction must be addressed during the planning period. Effective application of technology will present a continuing challenge for members of the faculty and support staff because of the rapid pace of technological change. Professional development programs that build technical knowledge, skills, and abilities of faculty and staff will be essential, including appropriate attention to information security awareness and training.

13. The opening of the PORTAL building adjacent to engineering research facilities offers new opportunities for the University to take a leadership role in entrepreneurship and to support the growth of technology-driven business in the community. The biotechnology hub at the North Carolina Research Campus in Kannapolis will continue to develop, although the pace of that development will be slower than expected due to reduced state appropriations.

14. In a time of fiscal austerity (see below), recruiting and retaining high-quality faculty
and staff will place a greater premium on maintaining a collaborative and collegial working environment, robust and transparent communications, flexibility and support for a healthy work-life balance, support for professional development, and additional forms of recognition and reward.

Demographic Conditions:

1. The population of North Carolina, the greater Charlotte area, and UNC Charlotte will become increasingly diverse with respect to a wide variety of personal characteristics, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, actual or perceived gender identity, age, national origin, physical or mental disability, and veteran status, among others. Increasing diversity will influence the offering of academic and non-academic programs to create and maintain a campus environment that values and supports diversity and inclusion.

2. Extending educational opportunity to minority, low income, and first-generation students will remain a central commitment of the institution. Efforts to enroll, retain, and graduate minority, low-income, and first-generation college students, all of whom have varying levels of academic and social support, will require that we develop innovative recruitment programs, broader need-based financial assistance options, and strong advising and mentoring programs.

3. Increased diversity at UNC Charlotte will also be a product of an increasingly international presence of companies and individuals in the Charlotte region, as well as increased enrollment of international students, particularly in academic programs at the doctoral level. UNC Charlotte’s fall 2015 enrollment of international students ranked it second in the UNC system and third in the state among all public and private higher education institutions.

4. The continuing enrollment of military veterans provides UNC Charlotte with the opportunity to re-connect to its original mission of providing higher education to these non-traditional students who often require integrated support services to address their academic and social needs.

5. As our graduates find success across our region, state and the world, the ever-growing national and international alumni population will increase the reach of UNC Charlotte’s reputation beyond the region and will provide both new recruitment markets for prospective students, as well as new opportunities for internships, engagement, and research.

6. UNC Charlotte will continue to experience significant retirements among faculty and staff who served in important roles during the institution’s expansion and evolution as a doctoral-granting research university. Due attention must be paid to the orientation of new employees to the institution’s history and values, as well as the development of standardized written policies and procedures to ensure the continuing smooth functioning of the institution’s academic and administrative activities.
7. The Charlotte metropolitan region, defined as Mecklenburg County and the fifteen additional counties that comprise the Charlotte Regional Partnership, is expected to continue the following major trends from the past two decades:

- continued changes to the region's manufacturing and industrial base, including an increase in advanced manufacturing to make the percentage of manufacturing in the Charlotte region more similar to the national average after decades of manufacturing sectors exceeding the national average;

- continued development of the region as a major center for trade and distribution (e.g. the multi-modal center at Charlotte’s airport is an example of the continued development of the region as a major center for trade and distribution.);

- continued importance as a provider of healthcare-related services and gradual emergence as a resource for health-related research;

- continued prominence of Charlotte as one of the nation's largest centers for financial services with an emerging concentration on high-tech financial services;

- continued prominence of the region's reputation as a national leader in motorsports-related business, notwithstanding recent recession-induced contractions in that industry;

- emergence as a major national center for industries related to the generation and distribution of electricity;

- continued growth and interest in the creative and performing arts— to support culturally diversity communities, and to attract new business, working young professionals, and visitors to the region;

- increased presence of foreign-owned businesses and industries and growth of businesses in the region with international markets;

- continued growth and urbanization of the region and the resulting impact on the environment, economic development, crime, transportation, metropolitan infrastructure, and the delivery of public services, including K-12 education, healthcare and social services;

- attraction of a more highly educated workforce with a need for access to graduate, continuing and executive education; and

- continuing diversification of the regional economy, increasing the demand for innovative and responsive programs of research and instruction at all levels.
8. Center City Charlotte will further evolve as a hub to attract business, mixed-use residential development, and entertainment and cultural venues. Center City’s many amenities contribute to Charlotte’s ability to attract young, highly educated professional workers. The demand for high-quality cultural and intellectual events will continue to grow, giving UNC Charlotte faculty and students greater opportunity for impact through outreach and performance. Spurred by the completion of the light rail extension in 2017, the University City region surrounding the main campus will continue to grow, and with that growth will come challenges: parking, pedestrian traffic, quality and affordable housing, quality new restaurant and entertainment venues, jobs for students, the need for the area to become less suburban and more urban in nature with urban-village development plans, and crime control.

9. The rapid regional and state growth of our aging population will produce a far greater demand for educational and cultural programs to serve the demand of that population for life-long learning opportunities.

10. Healthcare will continue to be a significant issue in the region, statewide, and nationally, particularly with an aging population. Higher education institutions will continue to be the primary providers of a well-trained health care workforce and applied research to better understand factors that contribute to the delivery of affordable, efficient, and effective care. Demand for medical education will continue to be an issue of regional importance. A major academic medical facility can play a vital role in providing access to advanced treatment options, attracting physicians with interests in academic medicine, and supporting the development of externally funded biomedical research programs. Changes in healthcare as a consequence of the implementation of the Affordable Care Act will increase the emphasis on community-based public health, behavioral health, health informatics, health literacy, and health humanities as tools for managing costs and improving outcomes.

Fiscal Conditions:

1. State resources to support the operating needs of the University are still severely constrained. The ability of the state to provide adequate funding for degree production to support the enrollments demands of the state’s population remains uncertain. Notwithstanding continued enrollment growth and funding, the campus experienced significant reductions in its operating budgets through FY 2012, although increases in tuition offset some of the University’s mandated reductions.

2. Since 2005, the state’s investment in new capital facilities at UNC Charlotte has been limited to two buildings: UNC Charlotte—Center City ($50M) and the Energy Production and Infrastructure Center ($77M). With the passage of the Connect NC Bond referendum, the state will fund a $90M Science Building on the UNC Charlotte main campus. This building is anticipated to be completed by the beginning of the 2020-21 academic year and will be key to UNC Charlotte’s ability to reach its projected enrollment of 35,000 students.
3. Required resources for the repair and renovation (R&R) of existing facilities will continue to be underfunded on an annual basis by the state, requiring prudent application of the institution’s authority to use annual “carry forward” funding and the establishment of clear priorities for the use of limited non-state resources to address major R & R needs. Given the age and condition of office and classroom spaces constructed prior to 1990, institutional attention needs to become focused on the refurbishment of these facilities.

4. As the University strengthens its position as a research university, we will experience more demanding requirements for physical infrastructure, equipment, library resources, start-up funds, and administrative systems and processes necessary to support significant levels of research. The list of significant new administrative burdens is significant, including compliance with governmental regulations, due attention to environmental health and safety concerns, and the like.

5. Federal support for research, enhanced facilities, and curriculum development are vitally important as UNC Charlotte matures as a research institution. Congressionally designated “earmarks” have essentially disappeared, and federal research expenditures and cost reimbursements are not expected to increase. Despite these conditions, we should continue to seek funding for biosciences, defense, education, energy, and national security that align well with UNC Charlotte’s professional schools and applied science programs. In addition, research funding in health promotion, health informatics, behavioral health, health literacy, and health humanities will present opportunities for interdisciplinary work among various health, behavioral science, and social science disciplines. Interdisciplinary and applied research which stimulates economic development will continue to receive considerable attention from funding agencies. Fiscal constraints and increased competition from other institutions will make partnerships with other educational institutions more attractive as a means to offer important but expensive programs. Constraints on federal funding will increase the need for support for faculty to increase the number and competitiveness of applications and to identify new sources of funding beyond NSF and NIH.

6. U.S. industry is likely to continue concentrating its internal research and development expenditures on product development, relying heavily upon University research to solve basic and applied problems in manufacturing, materials, and new technologies that enable new products. Universities that demonstrate an ability to work closely with industry and to produce students who meet their workforce needs are more likely to receive increased industry funding for sponsored research, educational support, and institutional development. Upward economic mobility will also be a by-product of the University’s efforts to work closely with industry to meet work-force related needs.

7. In a challenging financial environment, we must increase our emphasis on private fundraising, community partnerships, and other forms of external support to maintain our delivery of high quality instructional, research, and public service programs. The global reach of traditional corporate partners and competition from other institutions will challenge our historic reliance on local funding sources of philanthropy.
8. There will be an expectation for increased centralization of services and business processes within the UNC system to avoid duplication of efforts, realize cost-savings, leverage the size and scope of the University’s purchasing power, and take advantage of the opportunities provided by technology.

9. An important component for UNC Charlotte to accomplish its goals and objectives will be to gain legislative and UNC system support for additional flexibility in the management of our faculty and staff resources to acquire and retain the best talent in competitive local, state, and national markets. The same can be said for gaining more flexibility to deploy existing resources to address repair and renovation needs costing $1 million or less.

Political Conditions:

1. The national movement toward performance funding in public higher education has shifted attention from enrollment to outcomes. Notwithstanding the reduction of state support, elected officials, members of the public, and accrediting agencies will continue to expect us to improve cost effectiveness and accountability of our University operations, including documented improvements in student learning, retention and graduation rates, and time to degree. These metrics are likely to be part of performance-based funding. We will need ongoing faculty and staff development and support to ensure that learning outcomes can be defined, achieved, and documented and to guarantee that the steep and ever-growing ethics and compliance requirements are being addressed across the institution.

2. Demand will increase from elected officials and employers that college graduates emerge with their degrees prepared to serve as productive and engaged citizens, as agile life-long learners, and as functioning members of the workforce possessing essential “soft skills,” including those relating to oral and written communication, critical thinking, and teamwork.

3. Elected officials and the general public will increase their expectation that universities do more to strengthen the preparation of new teachers, provide continuing professional development and support for teachers and school administrators, and address teacher shortages when they occur. Creative approaches to offering options for graduate education for teachers will be required as a result of legislative policy changes that remove financial incentives for teachers to obtain advanced degrees.

4. Traditional lines of separation that have distinguished K-12, the community colleges, and colleges and universities will blur as a result of changing political expectations and financial realities. State policy-makers will look for those involved in any level of the educational continuum to cooperate and collaborate more effectively, particularly in the establishment of clear expectations for high school graduation and entry into postsecondary educational institutions, as well as seamless transfer from North Carolina community colleges.
Like other major metropolitan regions, Charlotte will need to address public concerns of community sustainability, including reducing carbon footprints, developing a renewable energy portfolio, maintaining air and water quality, creating healthy and livable neighborhoods, preserving green space, and developing alternatives in transportation. The University will be seen both as a model and as a resource to assist the community in addressing these issues.

Demand will continue from government and industry for University-based research discoveries and innovations to be extended into the commercial marketplace through licenses, patents, and entrepreneurial business start-ups.

Legal, regulatory, and compliance requirements will continue to change at all levels of government. We have already seen increased compliance obligations in numerous areas, including environmental, disability services, financial responsibility and integrity, institutional governance (e.g., open meetings and public records), athletics, employment, safety, health, export control, privacy and information security, and the like. Issues related to Title IX compliance with respect to appropriate campus response to allegations of sexual assault are likely to become more significant, both in terms of the number and the severity of such allegations. Compliance-related responsibilities will continue to grow, almost always without commensurate increases in resources to address them.

A well planned and executed internal and external communications strategy will be required to ensure that all stakeholders, community members, and financial supporters understand and appreciate the past accomplishments and future potential for UNC Charlotte to improve the quality of life in the region and the state. Delivery of all externally-focused communications must be consistent with prescribed standards with respect to institutional messaging and branding to ensure the most accurate and effective transmission of information to stakeholders and the larger public.