Good morning. It is good to be with you today as we kick off another academic year at UNC Charlotte.

Traditionally, the Convocation has been an annual opportunity for the Chancellor to report on the “state of the University,” reviewing accomplishments of the previous year but also outlining challenges and opportunities of the year ahead.

I will not depart entirely from that tradition today, but I do want to focus more on the future than on the past. For those of you new to UNC Charlotte and who may not have been here to receive my newsletter issued at the end of the fall and spring semesters, you can find those documents on the web in the Chancellor’s Outbox at the following address:  http://www.administration.uncc.edu/chancellor/outbox.html. And, of course, I had an opportunity at my Installation this past February to talk with you about how the remarkable history and development of UNC Charlotte has influenced our approach to the future. The Installation Address (and a fascinating video of that powerful speech!) are also available in the Chancellor’s Outbox.

I am sure that I will not touch upon all of the important topics or issues that may be of interest to you, so I hope that you will stay around for the question and answer session that Faculty President Meg Morgan will preside over after my remarks are completed.

So, as I begin, permit me to take you back to February to the time of my Installation as the fourth Chancellor of UNC Charlotte. I know that many of you sat down after the Installation with yellow highlighter pens to identify specific actions or initiatives that might be anticipated. What is this guy up to anyway? Well, I know I did! And I found, to my shock and awe, that I had identified 55 specific issues that I believe need to be addressed in the years ahead.
Of course, it is impossible for any institution to do 55 things at once. So, in consultation with our Board of Trustees and my Cabinet, I’ve identified the “top ten” that we ought to be concerned with over the coming year. We may not fully complete all ten of these items, but we’re going to make a good start.

The context for the selection of these “top ten” priorities was established over this past year—the first year of my service as Chancellor. So, let me take just a moment to point to some highlights of the past year and how those accomplishments frame our work for this coming year.

First, as might have been expected, the local press and media were interested in the appointment of a new chancellor. I think it is clear that pretty much everything anyone would want to know has now been written about Phil and Lisa, their three children, Wyo the Wonder Dog, and the specialty martinis served at Bissell House.

But, more importantly, we also saw a considerable amount of community interest in the University with requests for presentations and invitations for memberships on community boards. We scheduled conversations with elected officials at all levels of government and the region’s business, civic, and cultural leadership. And we received sincere expressions of interest from UNC Charlotte faculty and staff to assist in building local and regional awareness of this institution’s capacity to be engaged as a full partner in the economic, social, and cultural growth of the greater Charlotte region.

To capitalize on these expressions of interest, I reorganized the senior administration to create a new Division of University Relations and Community Affairs, headed by Vice Chancellor David Dunn. I’ll return to the work of this new Division in a few minutes when talking about our “top ten” agenda for this coming year and how we can create even higher levels of community involvement and support.

In addition to cultivating regional interest and involvement, we worked to establish UNC Charlotte as a key member of the University City neighborhood. Conversations about the future development of light rail in the northeast corridor, the construction of a mixed use University Village, and the improvement of the greenway through campus have progressed nicely. We worked closely with the Charlotte Observer to develop a paid advertising University City insert each week and enhanced news coverage of the good work going on each day at UNC Charlotte, both in the University City insert and the citywide edition.

We also established our place as a future resident of the neighborhood that is known as Center City Charlotte. With skilled leadership from members of the Mecklenburg County delegation in the General Assembly and armed with expressions of support from groups like the Charlotte Chamber, Center City Partners, and the Charlotte Regional Partnership, we secured approval from University President Erskine Bowles, the University’s Board of Governors, Governor Easley, and the General Assembly to build our $45.8 million classroom and office facility at the corner of 9th and Brevard in the Center City.
And our friends in the media, particularly the Charlotte Observer, paid close attention to the linkage between our thinking about University City and our thinking about Center City by issuing strategically important editorial endorsements for construction of our Center City building and the development of light rail in the northeast corridor. We thank them for that.

With the arrival in January of our new University President, Erskine Bowles, we were presented with new opportunities to discuss the unique role that UNC Charlotte plays as the only public research university in a region that is a critical component of the economic vitality of the entire state of North Carolina. Under the leadership of President Bowles, we see a strong willingness to re-examine old assumptions about the funding of the constituent institutions, to look at new approaches that will ensure the access and affordability of the University of North Carolina, and to take positive steps to assure the General Assembly and the public that the General Administration and the individual campuses are operating as efficiently and effectively as possible.

We saw the early results of the Bowles era at the University with an outstanding budget that fully funded enrollment growth and need-based student financial aid, increased faculty and staff salaries (by 6% and 5.5%, respectively), addressed critical capital construction needs (including our Center City facility), allocated more than $102 million for building repairs and renovations (including $4.8 million for UNC Charlotte), and made an initial investment in the Kannapolis Research Campus that will evolve in parallel with UNC Charlotte’s initiative in bioinformatics.

Finally, in recognition that no public university today can fully perform its mission by depending upon state funds or tuition alone, we took important strides to build our financial capacity. Our faculty submitted an all-time high of 616 proposals for extramural funding, resulting in grants from federal, state, and industrial sources of more than $33.4 million. Our Vice Chancellor for Research, Steve Mosier, continued his excellent but quiet work behind the scenes to secure targeted federal and industrial appropriations that support research activity at UNC Charlotte.

Our efforts to raise private funds by seeking gifts and contributions also realized success. In the first year following completion of the “It Takes a Gift Campaign,” we secured more than $18M in pledges and gifts, a testament to the hard work of our Development staff led by Laura Simic and our college deans and development officers. We engaged our volunteer base in the UNC Charlotte Foundation by completely restructuring the Foundation Board to better position it as an active and engaged fundraising organization. When we re-convene the Foundation Board in the fall under the leadership of its new chair, Smoky Bissell, and our new Vice Chancellor for Development and Alumni Affairs (and Foundation President), Niles Sorensen, we will have a committed set of community volunteers ready to go to work, including the largest number of alumni members in the history of the Foundation. And we will look to Niles and his colleagues in the Alumni Association, including interim Director Nick McEntire, and Alumni Association board chair Bill Whittaker, to continue the process we began last
So, with that background, what lies ahead for UNC Charlotte in 2006-07? What are the “top ten” things we want to get done?

First, as I mentioned in my Installation Address, it is a good time for us to step back and take a good hard look at the statements of our institutional vision and mission. Although these statements have been modified slightly in response to the biennial reporting requirements of the Board of Governors, the truth is that they are fundamentally the same statements written as part of the first Academic Plan more than a decade ago. As the Board of Governors launches its own re-examination of the respective missions of the constituent institutions, it is timely that we have a clear sense for ourselves of where we are headed and the unique role that we play in the system. It is becoming increasingly clear to me that we need to find a way to describe our aspirations as a research institution in a fashion that is distinct from the classification system used by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Second, although the University has nine specific goals stated in its own institutional plan, the specific objectives articulated are too general to be of much value in setting an annual program of work or allocating resources to achieve them. We’ll work over the next year to sharpen our thinking about how to get from here to there.

Third, and this work is already underway, we need to take a hard look at the long-term enrollment capacity of UNC Charlotte, including the relative mix of undergraduate and graduate education, the role of distance learning and off-campus sites, and programmatic demand in a region that is expected to grow well past 2.5 million residents by 2020. Our enrollment this fall will bring us close to being within 3,000 students of the 25,000 enrollment goal contemplated by the existing Master Plan for campus development. We will be slightly over 6,000 students away from the Board of Governors’ long-term enrollment target for UNC Charlotte to enroll 28,000 students by the year 2012. We need to look well beyond that horizon to the year 2020 and beyond. I have asked Provost Lorden to chair that group which includes representatives of the administration, faculty, staff and students.

Once the work of the Long-Range Enrollment Planning Task Force is complete, we will be prepared to move forward with our fourth task—the revision of the Campus Master Plan, a document which governs the identification of priorities for new construction, building renovations, land use, campus circulation, and defines our interfaces with the external community.

We won’t wait for the completion of the Campus Master Plan to address the issue of campus safety, but we have come to recognize that campus security can only be addressed by taking a holistic neighborhood view. Of course, there are things we can and will do to improve safety conditions on campus, including the allocation of $312,500 this past year to address lighting and other physical facility issues that affect the reality and
perception of a safe campus. But events over the last year have reminded us that we are not an island but are, in fact, at the center of a large neighborhood. I have asked our new campus police chief and director of public safety, Marlene Hall, to take that perspective as she develops and unveils new initiatives this fall to ensure that every member of the campus community feels safe and is safe as they enter and leave our campus. We will also be hiring some professional real estate help to advise us on how the University and community together can address the deteriorating condition of some of the rental properties that line our borders.

As we deal with the opportunities of growth, we also have to be self-conscious about its consequences, particularly those that might threaten the quality of our undergraduate experience. So a fifth task for this year is to develop a set of “dashboard indicators” that chart our development as an institution along a number of important measures of institutional progress, including growth in programs and degrees awarded, research and technology transfer, community engagement, institutional diversity, administrative effectiveness/efficiency, and the like. But we want to be equally concerned that we monitor the condition of the core mission that has defined UNC Charlotte from the beginning—high quality undergraduate education—including the engagement of students with our faculty and the presence of a supportive educational and co-curricular environment.

A sixth big job this year is to move forward with the diversity-related initiatives I announced in February, including the re-establishment of the Council on University Community and the hiring of a full-time administrative position to assist the Council with developing, implementing, and monitoring the effectiveness of a comprehensive diversity plan. That work is already well underway. The Council, consisting of the members of my Cabinet and chaired by the Provost, has already been appointed and met with me to discuss the work ahead. A job description for an administrative assistant is under development. Funding for that position, and for the $100,000 diversity challenge fund that I spoke about in the Installation, has been allocated. And the Council has received and will begin work on refining an excellent draft of a comprehensive diversity plan prepared by a dedicated group of faculty and staff.

Job seven is completion and implementation of a comprehensive Community Relations Plan. With leadership principally from Vice Chancellor David Dunn, the first draft of that Plan will be presented to the Board of Trustees in September, with subsequent refinement in consultation with some of the leading community affairs professionals found in this region. It will include attention to the full range of our community relations efforts, including institutional marketing and branding, governmental and corporate relationships, public relations and Channel 22, service to the community, and the expansion of educational programming to the community at large.

An eighth significant task for this year is the launching of significant capital construction projects, including the Bioinformatics Building, the Student Union and the Center City building. All are large and complex projects. The Student Union, funded through student fees, is the largest capital project in the history of UNC Charlotte. The
Center City facility is smaller in size, but equally if not more challenging given the issues that attend its construction as the first major urban building of the University of North Carolina system. Now that we have secured authorization from the General Assembly for that facility, all eyes are upon us to deliver what we have promised—a major and significant presence in the Center City. We have been working all of this year with a team of architects to prepare the general program plans of that building and to understand both the challenges and opportunities of our site at 9th and Brevard. But now we must accelerate discussions already begun with city and county officials to resolve the host of real estate, transportation, parking, and related issues that accompany our presence there. We must complete consultations with developers in the Center City and community representatives who have an intense interest in the aesthetic quality of what we build. At this point, even the most optimistic timetable we can imagine, including review by state-level construction and insurance officials, will not see the UNC Charlotte building open for business until the early part of 2009. Our challenge is to see whether we can beat—or at least tie—the odds makers!

With the arrival of significant new funding for UNC Charlotte this year, this is a good time to re-examine our budget from the ground up. That is task number nine. Our new funding includes both continuing and one-time dollars—$9.8M in enrollment increase funding, the second $5M in our equity funding adjustment, and $4.8 million in one-time repair and renovation funds. This is good news. The bad news is that we know we have a large number of continuing and one-time funding needs, including faculty lines, college and departmental operating support, information technology, our business and research infrastructure, diversity-related initiatives, and university relations.

Under the leadership of Vice Chancellor Beth Hardin, we want to look at the variety of revenue sources at our disposal and how those dollars are being spent. We will benchmark our expenditure patterns against other UNC institutions using, among other things, data collected by the President’s Advisory Committee on Efficiency and Effectiveness (PACE). Although some of our new funding will be pushed out to the campus right away to deal with our enrollment growth, we also expect to hold a good deal of our funding back to deal with a variety of immediate one-time needs. We will ask the Faculty Council, the Staff Organization, and the Student Government Association to sit with us at the table for this important study.

Finally, as I mentioned at the Installation, it is time for us to begin to examine the capacity of our administrative procedures and business operations to deal with our growth as a research institution. This is our tenth big task. Undoubtedly, we will find that some of the challenges we face are the natural result of not having been properly funded for administrative support. But we also know that any process can be improved by breaking it down and putting it back together.

After having discussed this with my Cabinet, we have agreed that we will take some time this year to re-examine the process by which we pay our bills. It is a process affected by actions taken at every level of the organization, from individual units that purchase goods and services to those who issue the checks. And it is a process that has a
lot to do with how we are perceived by the outside world in terms of how faithfully we meet our financial obligations.

This is an ambitious agenda for change, but that is nothing new for UNC Charlotte. As in the past, I hope that we will work hard together to maintain the atmosphere of collegiality and community that has always characterized this institution. There will be many challenges to that atmosphere. Change itself is disrupting to some. We have an opportunity to address some internal funding needs, but the needs will far outstrip the available dollars. We will have differences of opinion about priorities. We will complete some buildings (e.g., Health and Human Services, Harris Alumni Center, Student Health Center, Greek Village) and will need to move people and programs to new locations. We’ll break ground for the construction of others, including the largest and most expensive building ever built on this campus, the $60M Student Union. Parking will continue to be a problem in some areas, may be further disrupted by construction, and we will launch an experimental new shuttle system that undoubtedly will require changes as we gain experience with its operation.

In all of this, we ask only that criticism be civil and constructive. You have my commitment that we in the administration will do our best to listen to your concerns and communicate openly to you about what is happening. You may remember the famous words of the captain of the Titanic: “Don’t worry folks. We’re just stopping for ice.” I promise you that our communications will be significantly more direct and forthcoming.

I’ll close by asking for your continuing support for the struggle of Ed Seamon, a member of our Electrical Shop staff, who was critically injured in the campus explosion on April 13.

Ed’s fighting against the odds has been heroic, as has been the constant presence of his wife, Brenda, by his side from the very first day. Brenda has had to make choices that none of us would ever want to have to make. I know that your cards, letters, and phone calls mean a great deal to her.

I appreciate your attention this morning. Thank you very much.