Good morning. It’s good to see all of you here to launch another academic year at UNC Charlotte.

Lisa has joined me this morning as we start our third year back at UNC Charlotte. It certainly has gone by quickly, although I’ll admit that this year seemed a little longer at times than last year. As one of my fellow University presidents once told me, sometimes you feel like the javelin thrower who won the toss of the coin, but elected to receive.

If my remarks this morning are typical of years past, it will not be possible for me to touch upon all of the important issues that may be of interest to you. For that reason, we have scheduled a general question and answer session immediately after this morning’s proceedings. Our Faculty President, Kim Harris, will preside over that session after my remarks are completed.

For those of you who may be new to the faculty or staff, you may wish also to take a look at past recent editions of my fall and spring semester newsletters for reports on campus activities and initiatives. These can be found on the web in the Chancellor’s Outbox at http://www.administration.uncc.edu/chancellor/outbox.html.

As all of you know, UNC Charlotte’s first chancellor, Dean Colvard, passed away on June 28. Dean led UNC Charlotte from April, 1966 to December, 1978. He took over the reins of UNC Charlotte when his stock in higher education was at its highest, following his courageous and visionary leadership of Mississippi State University. He had many other opportunities at larger and more established universities, but he wanted to return to his home state and to build a university in its largest and fastest growing city.

And build a university he did. During his tenure, enrollment quintupled, from 1,700 students to more than 8,700. Undergraduate degree programs increased from 18 to 34, and he initiated our first ten graduate programs. The physical plant increased from 355,000 square feet in use or under construction to nearly 1.6 million square feet. And the number of full-time faculty grew from 99 to 378, with 85% holding doctoral degrees. The alumni grew to 13,000 in number. In short, Dean Colvard transformed Charlotte College into what has become UNC Charlotte.
How did he do it? He started by visiting emerging universities in this country’s leading urban areas. And he saw that these new universities were very different from the traditional land grant institutions in which he had spent his professional life. “This is a new and dynamic movement in higher education in this country,” he said. “It provides an exciting opportunity to relate the university to current developments in society.”

After looking at best practices, he set about the job of finding good people to build upon the base of outstanding and committed faculty and staff members who had been recruited by our Founder, Miss Bonnie Cone. He developed an organic and collaborative academic planning process, bringing in leaders from the faculty and staff, higher education, the business world, the media, and others to chart the course for a new type of university. He set up what one observer called “an almost ideal barrier-free communication experience, with the interchange of ideas and points of view between University administrators, faculty, visitors, and consultants….” He hired a major architectural firm to revise the campus master plan to prepare for the 20,000 students he expected eventually to attend here.

He enlisted private donors and community leaders in support of this new enterprise, and he established an official outreach arm, the Institute for Urban Studies and Community Service, which we know today as UNC Charlotte’s Urban Institute. He understood economic development, leading the development of the University Research Park. He understood the value of a high-quality intercollegiate athletics program, and was fortunate enough to have a successful basketball program, with a guy nicknamed “Cornbread” wearing the 49er green and white. Most of all, he sold people on his vision for a new American university, one that would “make life in the city one of enrichment and fulfillment.”

And he did it by having a great partner in Martha Lampkin Colvard. Every one of the four chancellors who has been privileged to lead this university could not have done the job the way it needed to be done without the talent, generosity, patience, and hard work of their partner. And Martha Colvard set the standard for UNC Charlotte. When Dean passed away, Martha had been at his side for nearly 68 years. Martha, thank you for your many contributions to UNC Charlotte.

With our Convocation today, we honor Dean’s memory while we marvel at his accomplishments. Although 29 years have passed since he left the Chancellor’s Office, many of the challenges and opportunities this institution has before it remain very similar to those faced by Chancellor Colvard.

First, we are in a period of rapid and sustained growth, with literally hundreds of new students every year seeking to achieve their goal of earning an undergraduate or graduate degree at UNC Charlotte. Our final numbers are not in, but we think we have about eight hundred more students here today than we did last year at this time. Our total enrollment should easily exceed 22,000 this fall.
Second, although our students are, for the most part, well prepared academically, they face challenges to their persistence and graduation as a result of rising costs, inadequate financial aid, and the need to work their way through school. Our research tells us that 43% of the students who work in the fall semester of their freshman year will not return for the spring semester. And of those working who do not return, 95% have been working in off-campus jobs.

Third, we continue to hire exceptional faculty to provide the personalized instruction and meaningful research experiences that have been the hallmark of a UNC Charlotte education, even while our total compensation packages lag behind our competitive peer institutions. We expect 99 new full-time faculty members to join us this fall.

Fourth, we are blessed with patient, talented, and dedicated staff members who provide essential student support and administrative services and care for the campus’ buildings and grounds. But we often lack enough staff and we have failed to provide the staff we have with either the training or the time to reflect upon the effectiveness or efficiency of their work.

Fifth, thanks to Higher Education Bond Measure passed by the voters of North Carolina in 2000, we have added a huge amount of academic and administrative space in the last several years, with new homes constructed for the College of Education, the College of Health and Human Services, a good part of the College of Engineering, and the College of Computing and Informatics, among others. Yet, even with this impressive building program, we were adding thousands of new students and hundreds of faculty and staff at the same time. In fact, our net academic space per student today is almost precisely what it was before all this new construction began!

Sixth, we’re located in the largest and most dynamic metropolitan region of the Carolinas which, more than ever, depends upon the economic punch provided by the presence of a major research institution and for assistance in addressing its most pressing educational, social, and cultural needs, even if sometimes its citizens don’t always know we’re here or where we’re located.

Finally, we are fortunate to work at an institution which, by virtue of its history, institutional culture, and spirit has always been enlivened and emboldened by new challenges rather than discouraged. Just look around this campus and you have to say: “Wow—these folks have really gotten it done!”

Well, here’s news. We’re not done. We have much yet to do if we are to build the research university needed in this dynamic metropolitan area to serve as a source of affordable and accessible higher education, and as a major contributor to the intellectual and social capital of Charlotte and the region. Permit me a few minutes to address each of these challenges and opportunities in turn.
As Dean Colvard understood so well, it’s hard to know where you’re going without a map or a plan. In the past year, we have completed important planning studies that we will need to chart our future. Provost Joan Lorden led a campus group that has concluded that the growth in the Charlotte region’s population and employment base will result in enrollment demand at the University for at least 35,000 students by the year 2020. That sounds like a lot, until you realize that persistent growth over the next thirteen years at the rate of the last seven would produce a campus enrollment of nearly 38,000!

We know that we cannot accept these new students without the human and physical infrastructure necessary to ensure high quality classroom instruction, a memorable co-curricular experience for students, and a supportive environment for our faculty’s research, creative activities, and public service.

So this year we have launched a number of additional planning studies that address those very issues, including our future needs with respect to student housing, parking and transportation, faculty and administrative staff, and academic and instructional space. Those studies, all of which are either completed or near completion, will provide important foundational material for the revision of our campus land use and facilities plan (called the Campus Master Plan). With the selection of a consulting team this fall and formal kick-off of the Master Plan revision beginning in January, 2008, we hope to have a new Campus Master Plan suitable for an institution of at least 35,000 students completed by the end of June, 2009.

On the second issue, we have taken tangible steps to address student retention and graduation rates, with the adoption of new targets and goals, the development of a formal plan (www.provost.uncc.edu/SpecialProjEvents/ImprovingRetentionandGradRates.pdf) and the launching of important new initiatives, such as the creation of the University College and a new advising center for undeclared students. We are hopeful that new sources of financial aid proposed by the Governor and authorized by the General Assembly will help reduce financial pressures felt by our students and reduce their reliance upon having to work an excessive number of hours. We have made need-based financial aid a priority for our campuswide and college-based private fundraising efforts. We have asked all of our administrative and academic units to do what they can to increase on-campus employment which, as our research confirms, is more supportive of retention and graduation than off-campus employment.

The third issue has been addressed, at least in part, with support from the Governor and the General Assembly again this year. The budget includes 4% for faculty and EPA staff raises and an additional 1% to help in the retention of our tenure track faculty. We remain hopeful that, over time, we will be able to achieve the Board of Governors’ goal of offering salaries at the 80th percentile of our peer institutions. However, we are at least $10 million short in our salary pool of achieving that goal today. On the other hand, the attractiveness of UNC Charlotte to prospective faculty has meant that we have been very successful in hiring new faculty at all ranks, and we took full
advantage by getting more than our fair share of the $5 million faculty recruitment and retention fund secured by President Bowles in the 2006 legislative session.

Our staff will also receive very welcome salary increases of 4%, and these dollars come on top of the more than $1 million we allocated this spring to ensure that nearly all of our staff are paid no less than the minimum of the career banded market-reference ranges of their positions and that non-banded employees are within 10% of their salary range midpoints.

We have also made some tangible progress in providing help for our overburdened staff. As a result of the comprehensive budget re-examination exercise that we completed last fall, we have also allocated more than $4.0 million for new staff positions across the campus and nearly $4.2 million to bolster the operating budgets of colleges, departments, and central administrative offices.

Our staff has also truly “stepped up to the plate” when it has come to finding new ways to do our administrative business more effectively and efficiently. Many of you know that President Erskine Bowles last year set in motion a comprehensive systemwide review of administrative costs and efficiency. UNC Charlotte took a strong leadership role on many of the working groups established under the umbrella of the President’s Advisory Committee on Administrative Efficiency and Effectiveness (PACE). But even before PACE was established, we had moved to start more than a dozen major business efficiency projects, including a comprehensive review of our accounts payable process, a re-assessment of how we manage over 600 computer servers in 40 physical locations, and reform of the process we use for determining residency for tuition purposes, among others.

We will want to continue those efforts this year, with additional attention to training our staff to be skilled in business process review as we undertake new business efficiency projects. Our staff runs these business processes. They understand where the roadblocks and speed bumps are located, and they are as frustrated as anyone when things don’t work the way they should. The solutions are not simple and they don’t happen quickly, but finding solutions starts with giving members of our staff the training necessary to see the interrelationships that exist in every business process, to understand the consequences of change, and to empower them to change things for the better.

No final decision has been made on which new business effectiveness projects we might begin next year, and I am certainly open to suggestions from any source. But let me mention one possibility for your consideration.

We are struggling to manage the growing volume of telephone and email traffic that we get from students, parents, and from prospective students (and their parents). The questions run the breadth of the student experience--from admissions to advising, from financial aid to the status of student accounts, from transcripts to transfer credits.
We’ve made some really good progress in many areas to reduce telephone traffic. Many of our offices have improved the availability of information on the web and made self-service a realistic option that didn’t exist before. But a certain amount of telephone traffic is inescapable and we still too often either fail to answer the phone or email, or pass along inquiring students and parents from one office to the next in search of an answer. Unfortunately, the public doesn’t really want to experience our organizational chart! So, in my view, we need a new philosophy and a new model. I’m not sure whether it’s “one call, that’s all” or “1-800-WEFIXIT” but surely we can figure this out.

It is difficult to boil down an administrative philosophy into a motto, but one that comes close to what I hope we can achieve is summed up in a short tag line that Sherrie High, our campus budget director, attaches to her emails. It turns out that Sherrie picked this up from Vice Chancellor Beth Hardin and modified it a little for her own use. It’s very easy to remember: “Do things better, do better things, and do the right thing.”

Of course, if we are going to “do things better” and “do better things,” we also need to continue to work on making sure that our faculty, staff, students have adequate physical space. Some near-term relief for our space crunch is on the way, with an additional 632,000 square feet either in design or under construction. The new Bioinformatics Building will be open by August, 2009. The Center City facility should open in the spring of 2010. Our proposed Energy Production Infrastructure Center (EPIC), which will house the departments of Electrical Engineering and Civil Engineering, was funded for planning and site development work in the recently concluded legislative session. We hope to secure full funding for construction of this $76.2 million building in the 2009 session, with completion by the summer of 2011.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding these additions to our inventory of academic space, it is likely that we will need to continue to convert classrooms to accommodate the growth of our faculty and administrative staff, necessitating a more efficient use of the spaces that we retain for classroom use. This means an expanded use of the instructional day, and renewed attention to the use of Fridays and possibly Saturdays for regularly scheduled classes. And, over time, we expect to expand summer session course availability and to expand our on-line offerings, both in the form of hybrid courses and fully on-line courses and programs. Our goal is to add 10-15 courses of this type each year.

Our students will enjoy significant new space in the years ahead, but the challenges are many there as well. We have opened Greek Village this month as a new home for many of our sororities and fraternities. The new Student Health Center should open by October. And we have moved a lot of dirt already for the new Student Union, scheduled for completion in the summer of 2009.

But we face significant challenges in planning and funding new student housing. Our recently completed housing study suggests that we may need to expend over $300 million on student housing over the next decade, not just to accommodate growth but to repair or replace existing housing that no longer meets the needs of our students. We are
currently evaluating this assessment and developing alternative scenarios to determine how best to respond to it. It is important to note here that our student housing is not subsidized with state dollars, so every dollar we need to spend will come from the pockets of our students. Finding a way to provide modern and safe but affordable housing will be at the very top of our list of things to worry about.

Earlier I mentioned that part of our sixth set of challenges had to do with helping Charlotte area citizens to know what a tremendous resource this institution represents for addressing the many economic, social, educational, environmental, and cultural needs of this dynamic region. As I mentioned in my Installation speech in February of last year (http://www.administration.uncc.edu/chancellor/installation/), we must “distinguish ourselves in the higher education marketplace with an identity that is recognizable and respected. Such an identity is critical to student recruitment, the development of student internship and job placement opportunities, private fundraising, and the formation of university-private sector research partnerships.”

Our new Division of University and Community Relations has created a community relations plan and is gradually implementing the major initiatives outlined therein to strengthen the University’s relationships with governmental and business officials, community organizations, the media, and the public at large.

This fall, we will conclude a major study of integrated marketing and brand awareness that has been completed for us by a national higher education marketing firm. We will begin to implement their recommendations, including a host of ideas related to the design, content, and management of our institutional web site. The web is one of our most powerful external marketing tools, yet we have allowed its management to become too decentralized and its content too internally focused to achieve its potential. We will count on all of you to help us put in place the kind of design and content templates required to make our web site among the best in the nation.

There are many other topics and issues that I could cover today, but our time is short. We have new academic program and student support initiatives under way that Provost Lorden shared with you this morning, including the work of the Council on University Community. We expect the Football Feasibility Committee to report its findings and recommendations around the end of the calendar year. We will continue work on our assessment of how we might create a mixed use University Village on campus, how to strengthen our connections to University City, and how light rail can relieve our traffic and parking problems and strengthen our connectivity to Center City Charlotte. In the meantime, we are continuing to work on how to ease the campus parking crunch and to encourage people to use the new shuttle system.

In a few weeks, I expect to announce a process by which this campus will develop a comprehensive Safety and Security Plan to complement our excellent existing Emergency Response Plan. Although this remains a very safe campus, we have seen some increases in crime on campus, but most especially in the adjacent neighborhoods. A comprehensive plan that addresses a host of prevention-related activities is needed,
including safety education, threat assessment, and training for our security personnel and our faculty and staff. Such a plan would also deal more completely with our physical environment, whether we are talking about lighting and blue emergency phones or on-campus emergency communication.

In sum, I’ll close with a quick bit of math. At the time of my Installation in February of 2006, I identified 55 items that I thought our campus would need to address in the years ahead as we continue our development as a research institution. As of today (just 18 months later), 35% of those items have been completed and another 55% are either in progress or continuing. This will be another productive year to work on this agenda. To quote my favorite authority on University administration, Larry the Cable Guy, let’s “get ‘er done!”

Thank you very much.